

Side Story 01: It's All About the Bird

Transcriber: vesta

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Opening Narration / Recap

[[“Side Story”](#) by Jack de Quidt begins playing]

[song ends]

Introduction

Austin: What’s good, Internet? It is April 1st, 2025, but this is not an April Fool's Joke. It's Side Story, a podcast about games and the stories we tell about them, presented by [Friends at the Table](#), and supported by our patrons—maybe you—at [friendsatthetable.cash](#). I am joined today by Jack de Quidt and Janine Hawkins, as we kick off this brand new show. How's it going?

Jack: It's exciting.

Janine: Alright.

Austin: It is?

Janine: Yeah! I think we've all been very excited about this. [chuckles]

Austin: We've been planning this now for a li— we've been— it's been a loose plan for six months, let's say? Maybe a little longer than that. I think I said to both of you in the middle of our Palisade finale era that I was like, “I really want to start talking about video games again, I think, what if we need a video game podcast?”

Janine: Yeah...

Austin: And then, well-timed for today as the IGF Awards just were announced last night, I was an IGF juror last year and I was like, damn, I miss playing and thinking hard about video games. [**Janine** chuckles] And so here we are, a new video game podcast.

For people who've never listened to us at all ever, welcome. For people who've listened to us on Friends at the Table, check it out, we're talking about video games right away, right in the front of us now, instead of as a weird diversion? We will not stop doing weird diversions, there's a reason why this podcast is called Side Story, it's because we are fans of the diversion. And if you were— if you happened to be someone who like listen to me at Giant Bomb, or on the Beastcast, or at Waypoint, or guesting on Remap, or if you come from A More Civilized Age, or Shelved by Genre, welcome.

Did you know I used to be—I mean, some of you obviously would—but I used to be a full-time video game critic and podcaster. And so I wanted to do it again. And I wanted to do it with some of my favorite people, the people I make Friends at the Table with— again, friendsatthetable.cash. This is not going to have its own special Patreon, we're not starting sidestory.patreon.net or whatever— that's not how those URLs work. [chuckles] [**Janine** chuckles] We're just doing the Friends at the Table one.

You know, I will say outright that like Friends at the Table has been the side project for my entire professional career, going back to when I was in grad school. It's never gotten to be the thing I'm putting most of my attention on to. And it felt like if I was going to go back to talking about video games on the internet professionally, that I should give it a shot here, which is like my hometown, so to speak? With people who I think are brilliant and are smart and funny and talk and make video games well. And so I wanted to bring people from Friends at the Table here. And I think it will be a rotating cast to some degree. I want to make sure everybody on Friends at the Table can come talk about the stuff that we've been playing and thinking about and talking about.

But today, we're kicking it off with Janine and Jack. For people who don't know y'all, who've not heard your wonderful play in our actual play podcast, Friends at the Table, or who haven't happened to stumble on to something else that you've been on— like Jack, you just did that Fallen London actual play, where should people— what should people know about you?

Jack: I'm Jack. I am a writer and a composer. I work for Friends at the Table. I write all the music for the show, as well as the music that you will have heard opening Side Story, it's available at notquitereal.bandcamp.com. You can find me on Bluesky @notquitereal. I have done sort of like games criticism in the past, as well as some games writing. I've worked with Failbetter Games on Fallen London, and I did some work back with Crows Crows Crows years and years ago. And then I had to immigrate to the United States, and they said to me, you cannot do *anything* other than what you

write in this document at the beginning of the year. And I said, oh, that makes freelancing very difficult, and they said, yes, it does. So I've recently been freed— freed from those awful restrictions, and I'm getting back, much like Austin, to thinking and talking about video games professionally, which is really exciting.

Austin: Yeah. How about you, Janine?

Janine: So I'm Janine Hawkins. I'm not really on a lot of social media anymore, but like, you know, in a social pinch—

Austin: Free.

Janine: Yeah. In a social pinch, I'm still @bleatingheart on X and also on Bluesky. I also, you know, did my time in press. I— I was a critic for a bit, wrote reviews for some assorted sites, always freelance because that was— that was very much the period when the salaried positions were all becoming just freelance contract stuff, [**Austin:** Uh huh.] sadly, tragically. But also before guides had fully taken over, so I never had to do that, thank god.

Austin: Or before you were writing for instance, Screen Rant, or one of the other places that recently— I think yesterday, [**Janine:** Right.] there was a news article about how bad that freelance pay is, which is kind of the—

Janine: Listen, it was pretty bad. [chuckles] It was still—

Austin: I mean, it was never good, but it has gotten— it has bottomed out. It has gotten so brutal as part of a campaign of particular destruction, like on purpose, so.

Janine: Yeah, yeah.

Austin: You know, not great.

Janine: Cool. Anyway, then I escaped. [**Austin** chuckles] I patched together a hot air balloon out of slip covers.

Austin: Mmm!

Jack: [chuckles] And then crashed it directly into—

Janine: Yeah. Then I started working— I started writing *for* games instead of about games. So I worked on Hitman 2 and 3. I worked on some unannounced stuff, [**Austin:** Ah.] and some stuff that's still coming out.

Austin: The experience of being—

Janine: By unannounced stuff I mean thing that's— I don't want to say— I don't want to say it's dead because it's not *dead* dead, [**Austin:** Yeah, uh huh.] but I don't— it seems like it's not for the foreseeable, you know?

Austin: You're at the The team has been laid off phase, [**Janine:** Kind of—] [**Janine** sighs] but theoretically some people still are shopping stuff around maybe?

Janine: Even that's a little bit— yeah, yeah.

Austin: Yeah. Ain't that the way?

Janine: Yeah. Some— working on other stuff that will come out eventually.

Austin: Yes, yeah. I think that that's— that is part of the cycle that we live in, I guess, at this point. Shout outs also, I guess, the day that we are recording this is a couple of days after CWA announced a industry-wide union, [**Jack:** Yeah!] [**Janine:** Mhm.] which is a pretty big swing at trying to take this on in a different direction. There's been a lot of folks trying to build unions inside of their studios for the last decade or so, a really concerted effort, I would say?

And now there is a— you know, on top of those efforts, there are— there is now this industry-wide union via CWA. I'll put a note in the episode notes— I'll put a link in the episode notes to find out more about that. It's not one of our big topics today, otherwise I would have prepped for it. Instead, I'm just going to say, hey, go read about this.

I think— I think probably worth saying up top, I don't want to get too deep in the weeds, but I do think it's fun to say that we tried out about a thousand different names for this podcast?

Janine: [chuckles]

Jack: Oh, yeah! I want to give a special shout out to Janine. There was a period when the two of you were in my house, [**Austin:** Yeah.] and we had this conversation that was, we should— we need to figure out what this thing is called. And over a few days, we started batting the ball between us, and then we all went outside, this was— my house.

Austin: We had one very doomed— you and I had a doomed drive to two different grocery stores in search of the proper groceries for a board game night. And the whole time was us just being like, is it this? Is it this? Is this the vibe? And then we came back fully in that conversational mode, that we were— and that was it. We were just in that mode then for the rest of that trip, basically.

Jack: And then Janine, in the Discord, was taken by a fey mood. [**Austin:** Yeah.] And by taken by a fey mood, I mean persevered with a degree of effort and grit, [**Austin:** Yeah.] to do maybe 500 name suggestions? There was a point at the end when they just started getting really like, loose and weird. Do you know like, when you zoom really far into like, [**Janine** chuckles] [**Austin:** Yeah, yeah.] the quantum molecular structure of a thing and things start behaving differently. Once you sort of reached your deep limit, Janine, there were— there were some really odd names in there. And then eventually you just said, “I *can't* do this anymore.” [chuckles]

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: Do you remember the— Janine, the thing that almost broke you? It was when we wra—

Janine: I don't, no.

Austin: [laughs] Yeah, that's good evidence of how much it almost broke you. There was a point at which we wrapped back around to something we dismissed like four weeks earlier. [chuckling] [**Janine:** Oh, right.] And we were like, well, what about this? And you were like, if we pick this after weeks of— you know?

Janine: It was like a thing I really liked at the time, too? [**Austin:** Yeah, uh huh.] And it hadn't been like— you know, [**Austin:** I'll just say it—] it's not like a devastating takedown of things. [**Austin:** No no no.] It's just like, no, that's not the right fit, and then you move on.

Austin: But you did use the word *fisticuffs* [**Jack** and **Janine** chuckle] to describe what your reaction would be if we went with it. [**Janine:** Oh my g—] Because it was to begin with— we were talking about— one of our early thoughts was like, oh well, we have Media Club Plus— if people don't know, the excellent Media Club Plus, also part of the Friends at the Table expanded universe— now, I don't like universe, is network better than universe?

Jack: No, network is also bad. [**Austin:** What's good?] Universe is also bad. We should do oeuvre, but we should say it like Alex Trebek, where he says, ooh-eh-vruh, every time for some reason.

Austin: [laughs] The Friends at the Table oeuvre has a podcast called Media Club Plus. Jack, you are on the current season of that, you're talking about Hunter x Hunter right now, the incredible shonen anime. You're in fact at the *height* of that show right now. So people should go listen to Media Club Plus. And so we were like, well, is there like

Game Club Plus, Game Show Plus? Well, we're not doing a game *club*, we're not like playing a game or something.

Janine: [chuckles] Or a game show.

Jack: [chuckles]

Austin: And we're not doing a game show— It's a show about games, but it's not a game *show*. So we can't really do that.

Janine: Every episode of the podcast, one of us asks a Family Feud question.

Austin: That w— I mean, you know, sometimes you got to find the thing that makes it work.

Janine: Janine Hawkins, come on down!

Austin: [chuckles] It's our Price is Right podcast. And then—

Janine: What animal, might you find in your garbage can?

Jack: Rat!

Austin: Raccoon.

Janine: See? This is now—

Austin: This is now— well, this is a little preview for Perpetua because the game we just did is actually a very well-established thing over in Perpetua. [**Jack** chuckles] People should go listen to that, which is out as this hits for sure. We're in Perpetua Prelude— for people don't know, we also do an actual play podcast where we play tabletop games. We are currently playing— I guess when this comes out, we'll probably be in the middle of wrapping up our Prelude series to the upcoming Fabula Ultima series we're going to do? Fabula Ultima is kind of a JRPG-inspired tabletop RPG, so if that sounds interesting, you should go listen to that at friendsattheable.net.

And in any case, we were like, what about Game Podcast Plus? And you were like, if we pick Plus after a month ago, me being like, it would be cool if we had Plus in the title again—

Jack: The problem is— that might not be clear, is that Media Club Plus has truly astonishing SEO. [**Austin:** Right.] And it's not like we were saying— [**Janine:** Yeah.] well, we have to go for good SEO, but we wouldn't like bad SEO.

Austin: That's right.

Jack: So Plus was interesting for a bit, and then we moved past it, and then it was very nearly fisticuffs time. But instead, we chose Side Story.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: And I'm really happy with this name.

Austin: Me too.

Jack: As is often the case of these things, the moment you decide on a name, it doesn't feel right. And then the longer you say it, the more and more right it feels.

Austin: Yeah. And now we've been saying it for a couple of weeks, we then got into a whole second big thing, which we'll talk about, I guess— let's talk about it right now, we basically redid the whole thing, except, me at my worst— and it's— me at my worst is not— that's not the right name— me at my worst is, that's not the game I want to play right now, actually. That's not the right fit for what I want to stream. [**Jack** and **Janine** chuckle] That's not, I'll just get into these— it's like the opposite of a fey mood?

Janine: Yeah, that's the Austin— yeah, I was gonna say that's the Austin Walker fey mood, which is just like, I have a hundred things in front of me and they're all a little bit wrong.

Austin: They're all a little bit wrong. Yeah, and I don't need to find the *perfect* one, but I do need to find the right one. I— and really, the perfect one is either something I already played or watched or read and I don't want to actually replay it or rewatch it or whatever, or it simply doesn't exist. I'm imagining a thing that should exist that doesn't exist, oh well. And the thing in this circumstance is a video game Let's Play— a game that's perfect for a Let's Play because for \$10 subscribers to our Patreon, friendsatthetable.cash, you will get access to an exclusive Let's Play of a video game. And we spent about a month figuring out what game that was— maybe not a month, maybe it was like three weeks, two weeks.

Janine: No, it feels like a couple of weeks.

Austin: Yeah. Yeah well, it's one of those years, these weeks just keep getting longer, so.

Janine: True.

Austin: For people who don't know, our Patreon has a bunch of stuff on it, including stuff that has nothing to do with tabletop actual play. So if that's not your thing, but you're like, I like these people, I like it when they talk about video games, I like it when they talk about anime. You can go to friendsatthetable.cash and for instance, go listen to the Media Club Plus crew, listen and talk about— or talk about anime. What have you covered at this point? Dragon Ball Z, some JoJo's Bizarre Adventure.

Jack: Yeah, we're going to do a bizarre non-canon Hunter x Hunter movie. [**Austin:** That's true.] I'm going to eventually make Keith J. Carberry watch Sailor Moon.

Austin: Thank god. He needs it.

Jack: I'm so excited.

Austin: Yeah. We also have a thing called The Clapcast, which is a monthly kind of cutting room floor material podcast, where we get distracted looking at yachts on the internet and talking about them, or— I don't know, what was a recent Clapcast conversation? I'm trying to remember what the most recent big one was.

Jack: You made us do a Winnie the Pooh quiz.

Austin: That's true.

Jack: Like a children's reading comprehension Winnie the Pooh quiz.

Austin: I did make you do that. That was different than the time I made you— Art and I made you try to guess every powerset at DC Universe Online, [**Jack:** Mhm.] without having ever played that game or really knowing too much about the DC Comics universe.

Jack: We do do other things than quizzes.

Austin: [laughs]

Janine: [laughs]

Austin: Prove it.

Jack: It was the time that Keith and Ali and I found that there are a bunch of places in the continental US called Peru, and planned a road trip on Maps between each of the various Perus.

Austin: That sounds great.

Jack: It was a good time.

Austin: Yeah. And there's also a newsletter that gives you the update on everything we have done in the last week that Janine puts together that's very funny and good. And there is a bunch of other stuff there too. We in fact do— if you are a tabletop person, we have a second campaign, we are currently running Realis, which if you have heard me on Nextlander, or if you have heard us on the main show, you know, we— it's a game I made. I made a game over the last year or two or four. It was four— [**Janine** chuckles] it was four years of slow development on it, a tabletop game, and we have a currently running campaign of that on our Patreon. And then we also have, you know, we link when we have done a stream, here's a VOD or we announce that there's a stream coming up.

And now for our \$10 tier, the new added bonus is a Let's Play. We are going to Let's Play the game Outward, which for people who don't know is— Jack, how would you— I would compare it to— comparisons are tough because it's immediately going to put something in someone's brain, right? And they're going to be like, oh, that's it. That's the one thing it is.

Jack: It is a very odd, [**Austin:** Particular, yeah.] very tactile fantasy RPG that is borrowing from things like— it predates some of these games.

Austin: That's right, it's not necessarily borrowing, but it's in line with.

Jack: It's in conversation with Morrowind. It's in conversation with Death Stranding. [**Austin:** Yeah.] It's in conversation with Kenshi. On the face of it, it is going to look a lot like an open world fantasy exploration game.

Austin: It's going to look like Elden Ring, but with Oblivion aesthetics.

Jack: Yeah. We're going to be schlepping gigantic backpacks around. There's a bit of Pathologic in there as well? [**Austin:** Oh there is.] Pathologic's like obscure architecture. We're going to be dealing with weird factions, weird cities.

Austin: Diseases.

Jack: It is going to be— it is going to be very odd.

Austin: Here's the— the thing that I'll say about that game, I almost don't want to spoil it. It's a fairly modern game. I think the definitive edition only came out a couple of years ago, which has all the DLC in it. I think it originally was 2018 or something like that, so it's a fairly recent game. We're not talking about— you know making the Morrowind comparison in terms of style and vibes and you know you're in a strange place and

you're learning all the factions and stuff. But you know, there are things about it mechanically that I do not want to spoil that I know about or that have happened to me. But I will simply say that the first time that I died in this game, which I died to like, you know, a giant mantis shrimp or something, I was like, alright, time to load my game. And I did not load my game. Instead, my character woke up in a prison mine being run by a bunch of bandits. And alright, just keep playing the game from here.

Janine: I thought you were going to say it was run by a bunch of shrimp?

Austin: It was run by a bunch of mantis shrimp— [**Jack** chuckles] I mean, listen, I've only been to one of the areas in the game.

Janine: That'd be really cool.

Austin: Which is the other thing, we are actually going to start this Let's Play with a particular goal in mind, because what if we hate it? There's always the chance that we're playing it, and it's just like— I've watched a lot of Let's Plays in my time, and one of the worst things that can happen is people are playing a thing, and they hate it, and they feel obliged to keep doing it, and like, it's just not fun. It's not even funny bad, it's just not fun to watch, no one has the energy for it anymore.

I don't expect that's going to happen with us, but just in case it does, I'm giving us a very particular goal, which is I want us to visit every major city in the game, or do a little road trip through the game. And I don't think it's possible to like— for two amateurs playing it, because it's a co-op game, it won't be— we can't just speed run that. I think we have to like, play the game to make that happen, you know?

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: So I'm excited to see how that treats us. Janine, you'll be there as our backseat guide, I think. So I'm very excited to start that up. That— the first episode of that should be available now. I think probably the first episode will be free, and then every couple of weeks, we'll put out a new one for patrons only.

Jack: Yeah, I'm so excited. And yeah, that's available right now. You can go and— we haven't recorded it yet, god.

Austin: No, I'm so excited.

Jack: You wanna make a prediction about something that's gonna happen?

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: Death by wolf.

Austin: Death by wolf is a great prediction.

Jack: Oh, death by wolf is a really good prediction. [chuckles]

Janine: That's the kind of prediction when you wanna just win some money, but you don't get a lot of money, [**Austin** laughs] because the odds are gonna be pretty low, pretty— the odds are too good.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: I'm gonna go in the opposite direction and go for a low odds thing and hope for a big payout. Mace that does weird magical damage.

Austin: Interesting. I'm gonna go for one that I have strong suspicions about. I bet one of our characters will get indigestion.

Jack: Cool. [chuckles]

Janine: [chuckles]

Soulframe [00:20:05]

Austin: Deal with that. You know? Speaking of video games where you're like, what do I even do here? Where am I going? I love how it feels, but where am I going? What am I doing? And then later you're like, ah, well, of course, you simply do X, Y, Z— I believe the three of us have all been playing Soulframe.

Janine and **Jack:** Yeah.

Austin: The latest game— oh boy, do I always get their? I always get the developer name— it's Digital Eclipse or is it— or is that the other one?

Jack: It is not.

Austin: Fuck. It's Digital Extreme.

Jack: I believe it is.

Austin: Digital Eclipse does the ports— does the really great remaste/ports, etc, is that correct?

Janine: Digital Extremes, plural.

Austin: Plural, plural. Apologies to Digital Extremes. Shout out to Digital Extremes for making Soulframe, which I believe is currently in— what are they calling their? What are they calling it?

Janine: Prelude? It's Prelude 8.

Austin: Oh my god, we— we stole Prelude for Perpetua.

Jack: No, no—

Janine: It's a word that exists.

Jack: I think Chopin invented preludes.

Austin: Oh, okay okay okay. Phew.

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: But well, yeah, all three of us have been playing it. There is no NDA on the Prelude, which is sort of like an open alpha of the game? I don't— I don't think it's in beta yet.

Jack: No.

Austin: They're kind of avoiding those terms, so maybe I should avoid those terms to some degree.

Janine: It's so loosey-goosey what those things mean as soon as it's out of—

Austin: It is.

Janine: You know, like, we've all worked in games enough to know that like, what you call an alpha internally and what you call an alpha externally is often pretty different, in that like, oh, there's textures, [chuckles] oh, there's lighting every, you know, that's—

Austin: Yeah. So what it is, is for people who have *no* idea what Soulframe is, Digital Extremes are the Warframe people, so you might know them from Warframe. Maybe like our very own Sylvi Bullet, you know them from Dark Sector. [chuckles] **Janine** chuckles] But it is an online third-person action game set in a fantasy world with some sci-fi elements— we're now talking about Soulframe, not Warframe, which is of course a third-person sci-fi action game with some fantasy elements in it, **Janine** chuckles] in which you're playing in a sort of mystical, ethereal— you know, this game has a map, but it sometimes feels like even in the overworld, things just seem to go. You know, you're just always over another hill, always seeing another little village.

And then on top of the kind of open area, there are procedurally generated dungeons, instanced dungeons that you go into. The combat is similar in many ways to the sort of Souls-style combat, which is— which is to say that it's very precise, it's very animation-priority-focused, it's very much like, things have weight and precision, and you are fighting people one on three, one on two. You're not really fighting— you're not Dynasty Warriors-ing out there.

Jack: Or Warframing, right?

Austin: Or Warframing, I guess.

Janine: No, that's the thing I'm excited to talk about, because I got into Warframe after Soulframe, [**Austin:** Yeah.] and I have thoughts.

Austin: I bet, yeah. Let's stay on Soulframe now, because people have probably played some Warframe. What do you both think of Soulframe? I guess— I guess Janine, you and I first started playing it on the same night, and then I got busy or was traveling or something, and then I came back, and you had figured it out, which was interesting, because—

Janine: [chuckling] I had played like, 30 hours or something.

Austin: Yeah, uh huh.

Janine: I had— I had gone all in. Yeah, because when we first started playing, the way that game unfolds itself to you is very weird. You get a very basic—

Austin: I mean, you get the wildest intro in the world, right?

Janine: Yeah, it's the thing of like, I almost don't want to spoil it. You know, you're picking some things very tangentially related to how your character is going to look.

Austin: [chuckles] Yes. It's like if you were playing The Sims, and instead of shopping for wallpaper for your— for your house, you were just walking through a Home Depot, and someone was like, well, what do you like? What type of paint do you like? Do you like furniture? What type of furniture do you like here in Ikea?

Janine: What kind of wallpaper did your mother have?

Austin: Right. Exactly— [chuckling] what type of wallpaper did you grow up around?

Janine: [chuckles] You're probably going to get something like that.

Austin: Then you get a character.

Janine: I think you can— I think they added a— you can change it now after the, after the fact. But—

Austin: That's because I don't like my hair. I want to change my hair.

Janine: I wonder if— [quieter] I wonder if there even are other hairs. Yeah, so it gives you very little in the way of instruction of like how to do anything. I want to say it like tells you how to run and like light and heavy attack and then—

Austin: Yeah. But you kind of wake up on a beach and there's some guys with silly helmets, big knights with silly helmets, [**Janine:** Big helmets.] big helmets. And it's kind of like here's how you attack. Okay. Here's how you summon a bird.

Janine: Also— those helmets, now that I've started playing Warframe, there's people in Warframe that have helmets that are very similar to that and I'm sitting here like, hmm. I— hmm.

Austin: I am so curious.

Janine: Somebody's going to do a video about this and I'm going to watch the hell out of it.

Austin: Yeah. Someone is going to come make the connections that I don't know enough about Warframe to make, you know?

Janine: Yeah, yeah. So, it's interesting. It's a heavier game in terms of like how it feels to control and play. It's very deliberate? I am not a person who likes— I like the idea of Souls-likes, and I've dabbled in Souls-likes, but I have a hard time sticking with them, even the core stuff. Just for so— it's— I can't really pin down why, I've tried so many of them at this point. Even things like Lies of P and stuff like that, where it's just like— it just doesn't quite work for me.

Something about Soulframe *does* work for me. I think it is probably just that it is a bit less punishing when you die, but you are still really squishy at first. You do still have the arc of, you level your shit up and then you are super, super powerful, and then you have to swap something out for level one and then you know, that's consistent with Warframe, for example.

Austin: Right, right. Which is similar to the Warframe arc. Right, yeah. Which is not like Elden Ring or Dark Souls.

Janine: No.

Austin: You know, those are games that, if you want to change your— first of all, it's hard to get really powerful in those games if you have never played one before? The second that you have played enough of one to fully understand what the loop is, you are like, oh yeah, I am just going to do blah, blah, blah. And then— that's like, it's completely obscure if you don't have resources to learn that stuff. Here—

Janine: I would say Soulframe is kind of close to, I've compared it to Cube World in terms of its progression. [**Austin:** Oh sure.] You know, for better or for worse, there's a— when you start out, it is really alienating and the world feels very strong and you feel very clumsy.

Austin: And also like nothing— places don't have legible names. [**Janine:** Yeah, yeah.] Everything has these runes that you can't read. And there's a system for slowly unlocking the runes for each location until you can know the name of them. And then when you get them all, you get a little stat bonus item that you can equip, for instance. Yeah, the entire— and it's a deeply brave maneuver, I think, to be as obscure as it is?

Janine: Yes, it's very confident.

Austin: Very confident. And also, all of the writing is very stylized in this kind of early modern English style, prose-wise, and the delivery is very much in that space. And sometimes people are rhyming, you know?

Janine: It's very much like working in the language of like, legend and fable kind of feeling things.

Austin: Yup. Yeah, speaking of fey moods, this is a fey mood-ass game. People are in the fey, you know? Pretty— pretty closely at least. But it's also a game that sometimes a spaceship shows up and you're like, *what is happening?*

Jack: Yeah, I was going to say, there's a bit of a distinction— I could understand people listening to us and thinking, well, so I mean, something like Elden Ring is a game that is also very vague about its world and its story, and kind of like lets you loose, gives you just a little bit of instruction. What's happening here in Soulframe is much more like, you know, when you're playing like Rogue, or a dungeon crawler or something and you are like deep in procedural territory for most of your time—I think about this with Case of Qud as well—and then you suddenly start feeling like you're right on the edge of something authored. That is the sensation that you get in Soulframe. You know you head out into the world and you're just like, well, I guess I'm just going to go over here.

Janine: They tell you!

Austin: I'm hitting the up button which summons a little bird and you follow the bird to a little thing.

Jack: Oh right, yeah!

Janine: But they tell you right at the beginning, like— and I wonder, a lot of this, I wonder how much of it is just Prelude, how much of it will actually carry through to the full release.

Jack: Yeah, this is something I'm curious about.

Janine: But when you first hop in, they're kind of just like, okay, go.

Austin: Yep.

Janine: Go on. It's very much like a parent has put you on a bicycle for the first time.

Austin: Right.

Janine: And they have pushed you a little bit, but then they immediately let go, and it's like, you're riding it now. Do it.

Austin: A really good example of this for me, Jack, the thing you're talking about brushing up against authored content, is there's a quest sort of early on where you end up in a new type of zone that you've never been in before. All of the kind of enemy types start to shift, and the sort of tiles, so to speak, that the game is made up of are fresh and new, it's a different type of weird forest. And then you go through some caves and you end up then— and all of that stuff is proc gen, right? They're pulling from a pool of potential rooms and enemy you know, encounters and stuff like that.

And you're fighting your way through that, maybe even do some puzzles. There's some fun stuff in this game where you like, throw your sword with a rope attached to it, to like attach to something and pull yourself across a cliff, or drop some barrels of water to like put out the fire so you can walk places. They're really quick and fun. Anyway, you end up emerging into like this new field you've never been in before. And a voice starts echoing in the clouds above, and it turns out that it is a sort of lightning knight who is going to come wreck your shit.

And that whole little encounter is authored and is kind of the climax of this series of kind of procedural pathways that you're going down. And the way that they drop that stuff in is so unexpected. [**Janine:** Yeah.] And then like the solution to that is really fun and really like— they swing big when they do the authored stuff, you know? You end up changing the weather so that you can beat this lightning knight in a way that's like

dramatic and bigger than everything you've been doing for the last like 90 minutes of play, you know? And that's the sort of structure they have.

Janine: And there is no like, well, I'm just going to focus on the main quest tonight, I'm going to advance the main story. That's not— you don't get to make that call.

Jack: Tell us about, the bird.

Austin: Oh, it's all about the bird.

Janine: You're either playing it or you're not playing it. And like, it will give you— it'll give you missions and stuff, but often it's just like, go here and kill the guys. [**Jack:** I love this so much.] Or like, you know— and then eventually it'll be like, oh, go get the thing. And then the thing will be this magical nonsense thing then that you bring back, and it's like a— involves some sort of like a rat lady who wants to dye your clothes and all kinds of shit.

Austin: She does do that, it's true.

Janine: She does, I love her.

Jack: Being told, you know, I have a task for you, and I need you to go to the shop and pick up some bread. [**Janine:** And the Green Knight is there—] And you know, five times you go to the shop—

Austin: Oh, the Green Knight is the vibe also, by the way.

Janine: [chuckles] Yes.

Jack: It's kind of the Green Knight. It's really interesting. The tone is very much like, every piece of sort of like European folklore firing at once. Whereas I think that the Green Knight is sort of like a bunch of very specific pieces. [**Austin:** A particular— yeah yeah yeah.] The Green Knight is a lot—I don't like this word—the Green Knight is a lot earthier and a lot darker? You know, there's a lot— [**Janine:** Loamy?] people are constantly nearly drowning— yeah, loamy. Men briefly turn into skeletons and stuff. And it's not that there's not really that in Soulframe.

It's odd. The tone sometimes works really well for me, especially when it starts blending the weird sci-fi, you know, very early on, you encounter a sort of like a huntswoman who has been sent from the evil faction, who it turns out, you know, had spent time in this sort of like, magical world beforehand. But her whole character design is this very odd blend of the sci-fi and the fantasy. And then, you know, you will have these— just these great old folkloric feelings of like sleeping kingdoms, things under the ground. And then

sometimes they'll just be like, here is a weird little turtle man with a non-specifically regional accent.

Austin: Yeah, that guy's a weirdo.

Jack: And you know, sometimes they put their thumb on the scale and it starts feeling more like Fable 2 than it does, you know, like the Green Knight. And I think it's—

Austin: Have you gotten to the whatever flag in yet? The oh my god, what is the name of the—

Jack: That sounds like it's a place from Fable 2, doesn't it?

Austin: Yeah. It is the Dripping Flagon, which is the tavern you can get like—

Jack: It's really strange.

Austin: The first social zone, you know?

Jack: Yeah, usually fantasy games that have characters speak in rhyme are just like deeply annoying. Just sort of like—

Austin: It's a different sort of rhyme in here though, isn't it?

Jack: Very often the rhyme is working pretty well here. And part of that is that the meter is consistent, which is something that people just fall down on all the time for no goddamn reason at all. [chuckles]

Janine: Yeah that's a hundred percent like— a lot of people fully— a lot of people, even writers, don't realize meter is even a thing they need to worry about, they're doing it like based on vibes. And so much of it is like, if you read it in your head one way, you can't guarantee the actor is going to read it in their head the same way? [**Austin:** Totally.] And also the actor is aware that they're rhyming. [**Jack** Yes.] Whereas like, often the character who's rhyming, [**Austin:** Ooh, yeah.] ideally they're not supposed to be aware they're rhyming? [chuckling] It's just the way they are, it's just what they're doing. And like, I think where they succeed is that the performances are— you know, their little guy is a funny goof cause he's a funny goof, but like, when people rhyme, they're often rhyming, they're often rhyming like, kind of tragically or like almost incidentally. Like it's— I don't know, it feels good in that way to me.

Jack: Yeah. There's a bit of that early modern stuff in there where like the early modern playwrights understood that a shift in meter indicated something about a character.

Austin: Something was happening, yeah.

Jack: When you are speaking in blank verse, you are sort of saying something different about the world than when you are not.

Janine: When you're counting your iambs.

Jack: Exactly, there's a bit of that going on here that I like quite a lot. I also like that very often you have no goddamn idea what anybody's saying. [chuckles] [**Janine** chuckles] There's like an inventive vocabulary going on at points that sometimes you're like, oh, well, clearly— *clearly* I understand what they're talking about. And then occasionally, they'll throw in a line or two and you're like, I don't know what that means. This is the second Caves of Qud—

Janine: “You smell like the Clegg that skinned my lovers”, for instance.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: Yeah, you're like, *damn— wow!* They do this in Qud and you just sort of have to—the writers on Caves of Qud talked about how they wanted it to feel like you were discovering an ancient text, like finding something in a— in a temple from 2,000 years ago or whatever. And there's a little bit of that going on here where the narrative joy comes from the sounds of the syllables, less sort of a meaning that you can grasp. But when it's the sounds of the syllables along with a like, spaceship shaped like a trumpet descending through the clouds, [**Austin:** Yeah.] you're like, goddamn, now we're into it.

Austin: Well, and then— and then you also— there's two things here. One is, I think in line with that, is just push through that. If you end up coming to the Prelude or if this drops somewhere playable for you this year, and you're like, I don't understand what they're saying to me, my advice for you is the same as people who are reading Book of the New Sun, which is like, don't slow down and open the wiki and go read what a Clegg is. It's okay that you don't know what a Clegg is.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Know that they skin.

Austin: Know that they skin. And that this person doesn't like you because you remind them of a Clegg— a particular Clegg, and like, that's all you kind of need to know. The experience of— you know, I said before that when you come to new places, you don't know the names of them originally, but over time, you unlock—

Jack: It's like in a script.

Austin: Yeah, it's in a weird— it's in a weird runic script, which maybe you could learn theoretically. Maybe you could over time actually internalize that. I have not done that. What you end up doing is finding these collectibles, maybe it's like once a day, you can go to the same place.

Janine: They also don't like fully spell that out, though.

Austin: They do not. Yeah, so I'm spelling out something that the game doesn't extremely spell out, I guess. But over time, you do learn the names of the places. And that's sort of the experience of learning what's up with the world and your ancestors and what the conflict you know, **that's** being focused on is about. And I would love for them to retain some of that stuff, [Janine: Yeah.] because my big fear is that it will get tutorial heavy and it will get less obscure in favor of a really strong on-ramp, which I get why that would happen? But I think that it's really special in keeping where it's at now. The second thing I was going to say is when that— when the UFO descends from the heavens through the clouds and it's this beautiful thing, and the lightning is striking, and it feels really cool to shoot an arrow of light at someone and have them explode into a sort of chromatic firework. It feels good.

Janine: Yeah, the particle effects in this game— ooh, they're so good! [**Austin:** Yeah, yeah.] Like just in general, the magic shit that happens is so— it's so like, deliciously rule of cool. Like it's so— they don't care about the fact that like, okay, this is your second arm or whatever, like maybe it shouldn't be super powerful— arms are your Warframes in this, basically.

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: And you know, maybe it should just be kind of basic or whatever— no, it's like you have this ability and it's going to look sick as hell and you just have it. And it's like basically at the start of the game.

Austin: The moment we realized that one, the second arm that we had was the equivalent of a second character, a second Warframe in Warframe parlance, was already great. And then we realized that the default special attack with it— the first one is this kind of bow that fires these light arrows. The second one is just like an orb that hovers in front of your hand, like you're the coolest wizard who's ever lived, but it's like a techno orb? [**Jack** chuckles] And it summons electricity blasts that do chain lightning. [**Janine;** Yeah.] But in these like rapid, you know, like Tesla towers or something from Command and Conquer, or like if you ever see— like if you ever go to a Spencer Gifts and see one of those things, it's like just doing the lightning— the plasma balls, or a Tesla thing? Tesla, not the bad one. Well— even the old one was kind of the bad one in some ways, but you know what I mean.

Janine: Enh...

Jack: He got that fucking elephant!

Austin: He did, yeah. Well wait, wasn't Edison the elephant, or was Tesla the elephant?

Jack: Who got the fucking elephant?

Janine: I think it was Edison, because Edison was just evil, like a cartoon guy.

Austin: Yeah, Tesla was mostly a misogynist. Well, women's brains don't work. You know he's one of those guys, unfortunately.

Janine: Anyway, the electricity.

Austin: Anyway! The electricity was like pop pop pop pop pop pop! And it was like, oh, this game does that too. [**Janine:** Yeah.] And I say all of that because I think the three of us as game writers, [chuckling] probably spend a lot of time thinking about how to write a good game and why does the writing work for us and all of that. I think all of that's super important. But also, like, if it hits right when you pull the bowstring back, you're gonna buy yourself a little patience from me when you're doing something creative. [**Janine:** Yeah.] You get the ability to just shoot an arrow that summons a flock of birds to just harry your opponent repeatedly? [**Janine:** Oh god, yeah.] [**Jack** chuckles] You're like, oh, okay. This game, *rules!* They're taking swings, they're not— it's not just a fire arrow, you know?

Jack: I was playing with Janine the first time, and I loaded into the game, and I didn't know how to do shit. [**Janine** chuckles] And Janine said, I will— I will teach you. And Janine arrived, and looked a lot cooler than me straight away. And then we got into a fight, and I was just hitting guys around the head with a sword, sort of enjoyably, but fairly ineffectively? And then like seventy blue deer came out of nowhere and trampled this guy to death. And I said, was that you? And Janine was just standing over there with you know, with like the Cheshire Cat smile being like, “gottem!”

Austin: [chuckles]

Jack: It was great.

Janine: [wheezes] That was like my second time using that arm too. Like it's, [**Austin:** Janine's—] they just let you do the thing. It's really good.

Austin: Janine simply said, “twas the torment stag,” [**Janine** laughs] and you went, I guess it was the torment stag. Okay.

Jack: I guess it was the torment stag. I— there's a little bit in here as well.

Janine: His name is Darren.

Austin: Ohhh.

Jack: His name *is* Darren.

Janine: It's Darren Rood.

Austin: Right, Darren Rood, yeah. R-O-O-D.

Jack: Yeah! He's kind of scary.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: There's a little bit in here as well of early MMOs? I think about early Warcraft— I mean, Warcraft wasn't the only one that was doing it, but you know, I think it's kind of fixed in a lot of people's minds. It's that early Warcraft, you just went out and saw what happened. That wasn't really a main story that you could go through, you'd just leave Orgrimmar and head out into the wastes and then you know, run into little bits and pieces or whatever. And there's a bit of that sensation in there, as much as I think there is the sort of like From Software, “out you go into the world, my son”, which is really enjoyable.

Austin: Well and like, you know, if you did want Elden Ring to be more like this, you could do it. You would have to get rid of the grace that leads you from bonfire to bonfire. You would have to, you know— maybe you could have your Finger Maiden Melina— Malena? Malena. Melina.

Jack: Melina.

Austin: Melina. God, I always get them all confused— Melina. But like, she would be even more abstract with her guidance than she already is. And you would need to also say, guess what? It's going to take you a lot of— you're going to, you want to make some crafting? You want to craft some armor? Alright, put in the order. [chuckles] Come back in eight hours to pick it up. Because that's the other thing that shapes this— go ahead, what were you going to say, Janine?

Janine: I was going to say you do kind of have Finger Maidens.

Austin: This is true, you do. And they are very—

Janine: But they're all very specialized. [chuckles]

Austin: Yes.

Jack: One of them is Leonard da Vinci.

Janine: And the main one is an old man.

Austin: Yeah, Da Vinci is here from, you know—

Janine: Leonardo Da Vinci with a baby on his shoulder.

Austin: Assassin's Creed II Total Recall, Leonardo Da Vinci, you know? That's the vibe I get from him. And so—

Janine: And he is not going to tell you where to go.

Jack: No.

Austin: He might tell you where you went.

Jack: And, listener, you might be thinking, didn't you say that the bird leads you to things? I need to reiterate, sometimes the bird just leads you towards just like, you know, four guys who you need to kill.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Yeah, four guys in a campsite. Sometimes it leads you to four guys in a campsite and next to them is a giant mechanical head vomiting oil directly into the lake. [Jack chuckles] You know?

Jack: And I think there is a— you know, we want to spend some time talking about Warframe as well. And I think a way into that is that something that a lot of people say about Warframe—and I'm one of them, I haven't spent a ton of time with that game—is that, you know, when you start playing Warframe, nothing makes any sense, and you just sort of have to go with it, and it will start to become clearer.

And there's a bit of that going on, but I think that the difference between Soulframe and Warframe at this stage, is that when people say you just sort of have to go with it, what they are talking about is the accretion of 15 years, 10 years? Of various interlocking game systems, some of which have been deprecated, some of which have been partially deprecated. A story that you are playing through only vaguely in the order in which it was released, like an interlocking web of systems that are so phenomenally complicated, that you just sort of have to— the only way you can enter them is like, take a nice small manageable bite and then see where it goes.

Soulframe is so much simpler at this stage, and it really does feel like, they like the sensation that players describe of, “I feel overwhelmed and I want to start to explore this thing, you know, like at my own pace and on my own terms”. But they have pared it back from five hundred interlocking systems. If something that has always interested you about Warframe is the sense of a game whose outer limits you don't quite understand, or a tool that you sort of want to grow and learn with, but Warframe is proving too much, I think Soulframe might be a really interesting way into that sensation for you.

Austin: Yeah, I'm curious, Janine, you know— so I have played Warframe on and off, mostly off, since it came out, basically, I've been trying to become a Warframe guy, and every time I put about 12 hours into it or 10 hours into it, and I go, I just don't think I can crack it. I don't think— I'm not having, we'll talk about why I bounce off of it, maybe a little bit more, but part of it is what Jack just described, which is there's so much of it, I can't get my head around it. As you know, I am someone who likes to get my head around a game in the way that I feel like I'm making good decisions. Famously, one of the things that makes me bounce off of things like Stardew Valley, is when I feel like I've wasted a day in a season, and it's like, I'm not gonna— I have to wait a whole year of gameplay to play spring again, and I fucked this up, which is a stupid way to think. This is not— I don't advise anyone to have my brain. Please take it, replace it with something slightly different, I would appreciate it.

But Warframe, because of that complexity, it *really* got me the last time— the last time I played, I played with Joel Fowler a little bit, formerly of Waypoint, our publisher at the time. And there was probably about a week or two of playing before he was like, oh yeah, we have a dojo set up, which will help you do da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da, and I was of two minds. One was like, I don't want— I want to just play the game without needing to have been in a dojo. The second thing was like, well, fuck, I wasted all this time without even being in the dojo! Well, I should probably just restart, which is not true, that's not how it works at all. But you seem like you've pushed through that, because you've now been playing Warframe like for real for real, for dozens of hours.

Janine: I have 62 hours in it.

Austin: There we go. See?

Jack: Damn!

Janine: And this is after, like— I, for years, was saying, oh, I should try Warframe, because I, like, aesthetically thought it looked really neat.

Austin: Right. For people who don't know Warframe, a third-person action game, not run-based, but mission-based, sci-fi with lots of shiny chrome, but not bad. Lots of very unique shapes.

Janine: Yeah, robot butterflies, and yeah.

Austin: Yeah, exactly. If you are a Friends at the Table listener, I think it's a very Signet-coded game, personally?

Janine: Yes. Yeah.

Austin: So, yeah.

Austin: Signet's Divine Belgard was definitely sort of influenced by some things I had sort of passively absorbed from seeing Warframe floating around for a while. It was definitely not— definitely like the idea of like, oh, a robot can be pretty in a certain way, [**Austin:** Yeah, yeah.] but also kind of gross. That was very important, but that's okay. So, yeah, for a really long time, I like— I had downloaded Warframe so many times and uninstalled it and downloaded again and uninstalled it.

Austin: Without trying it?

Janine: Yes, because like every time they would show it at like The Game Awards or whatever, they're like, *oh, that looks really cool*, and then I just wouldn't commit to it. So playing Soulframe finally pushed me over the edge because I played what feels like most of what's available in Soulframe right now. And I was like, I really just— I want more. What if I try Warframe? And at first it was a really jarring adjustment because the controls have a lot of overlap, but are different in a way that is very disorienting? If you're trying to just kind of do the same things you do in one game in the other, the logic of the controls is consistent, but it is a little bit weird.

But Warframe is really interesting— so I booted up Soulframe today for the first time in a few weeks, just to like see how the feel is, now that I've been playing a lot of Warframe, and it feels so slow and heavy. And Warframe is— Warframe is so much, and I can't speak to how it was at launch, but right now with all of the 12 years of content—it's just having their 12th anniversary right now—with 12 years of content and shit like, they want you to fire yourself like a bullet through each level, basically. And so—

Austin: I would not be surprised if there was a whiteboard with that on the top of the whiteboard— [**Janine:** Yes.] drawn in so long ago that it has solidified atomically. With the board beneath, you know?

Janine: [chuckles] It can't be fully erased.

Austin: Whereas— whereas Soulframe feels like a sword being swung, which is still fast, [Janine: Yes.] but it is precise, and it is the word that you said 30 minutes ago— one of you said 30 minutes ago, that I always forget when I'm trying to describe Souls-like combat. It starts with a D. I always forget what it is, it's driving me crazy.

Janine and Jack: Deliberate?

Austin: Deliberate. I always lose the word deliberate when I'm talking about Souls-likes, even though that's like, go away.

Janine: Think about Delibird, the Pokemon.

Austin: Oh, that'll do it for me. [**Jack:** Yeah.] I'll just remember Delibird, the Pokemon. [**Janine:** Yeah.] Yeah. Anyway, it's so deliberate, but it's deliberate in a way that still feels heavy and weighty, but not— it's not like Monster Hunter, Soulframe, but it does feel like a sword. But compared to Warframe, I get it. Warframe is so frenetic to me.

Janine: Warframe really wants you to— it's so interesting because I feel like— again, I don't know how much of this is because they want to get new players up to speed, obviously. You get some of this in older MMOs in general where they compress the early parts of the game, and they can all feel like a blur. Like if you're starting Final Fantasy XIV now, you're going to have a very different experience than someone who started Final Fantasy XIV six years ago.

Austin: Sure are, yeah.

Janine: And— so, there is this sense sometimes of like, I can't tell how compressed this is deliberately, and how compressed this is just as an experience of being a latecomer to it. [**Austin:** Mhm.] But it's so— there's so much and it happens so fast, and you really kind of don't have time to take everything in. And I can imagine if you were playing it from the beginning, there's a lot of environments where you're happy to shoot through them because you've seen it a million times.

Austin: Right, sure.

Janine: But it's so strange to play a game where they really don't care if you stop and look— at this stage of it anyway. And I would say that Soulframe isn't that. They— they want you to be curious about the world in a way that, in Warframe, I don't feel the same way.

Austin: I mean, Soulframe has a few mechanics that are really built around that. Not only the “throw your sword with the rope puzzles”, but sometimes you'll hear a sound, and it turns out if you go into your soul-vision mode, there's a ghost of an ancient king

who you can let possess you briefly for extra damage or whatever, or there's an enemy type that requires you—

Janine: Little ocarina puzzles.

Austin: Yeah, there are little ocarina puzzles. There's that one enemy type that when you beat them, you have to go into that mode in order to truly beat them. And so there's simply being a mode where you have to slow down and look around, even if that just means for a second, means that the moment to moment play always has these little pauses in it in a different way than the bullet through the air Warframe. And you know, I've watched high-end Warframe. You're still— you are not moving slow through those spaces of anything. I think high end play is even faster from what I've seen.

Jack: It's a racing game.

Janine: Kind of.

Austin: Yeah, it's sort of like Trackmania with swords, you know? [**Janine** chuckles]
You're just going.

Jack: Yeah. It makes me feel nauseous.

Austin: Me too. And this is why I've bounced off of it. Is this— how much time have you put into it?

Janine: There's a rhythm to it.

Austin: I believe you. I just can't play that rhythm.

Jack: Yeah, I think— I don't know that I mean it makes me feel nauseous, negative.

Austin: Okay, you mean like a roller coaster.

Jack: Yeah, sometimes— it actually makes me feel like I'm playing music very quickly.

Austin: Mmm.

Janine: Ooh, yeah.

Jack: And as is often the case when I'm playing music very quickly, I just lose it completely. And you know, the rhythm falls apart and I get out of the flow, and at that point, it's just— it's the worst sensation. You know, in Warframe, this is me doing this sort of like bizarre bullet jump that they let you do all the time straight into an overhang and smacking my head on it, and then losing my momentum completely. But when it's

working, it just— it feels it feels tremendous. Do you have a— do you want to talk about your Warframe, Janine? I sort of wonder— I would love to know how you move through the game.

Janine: So my gateway Warframe, I— so I did the thing of like, when you join up now, they offer you a discount on currency. And like whenever I start playing a free game—

Jack: Sorry, I hate to— I hate to interrupt you. Could you briefly explain what a Warframe is for people who are you know, unfamiliar with this?

Janine: I'm not at the point in the story where I think I fully know. [**Jack:** Oh no, I mean—] So to me, it's a robot body. It is a robot body that comes with a set of abilities. It is— yeah, like in Soulframe, you get arms that are bonded to gods essentially that give you abilities, and in Warframe, it is a robot body that has certain abilities. And you can level up—

Austin: And they also have stats separate from those abilities. Is that true? Like speed and armor and stuff?

Janine: They have stats, yes. And then you equip mods, which are like cards into them [**Austin:** Right, right.] to add other effects and boost stats and things like that.

Austin: That makes sense.

Janine: Yeah. So when I start to play a free to play game, I'll play a little bit, and if I am having a good time, I will do the thing of like, how much would I pay for this game? And then I'll put that into the currency. And then I'll, you know, give myself some walking around money.

Austin: Right. You put 62 hours on this thing. That's enough— that's a full game. Yeah.

Janine: Yeah. So Warframe gives you a 50% off or whatever when you first join. So I got some currency, I grabbed a bunch of Warframes— I didn't look them up. I didn't— I like looked at them in the display thing. [**Jack:** Oh, fun.] And I was like, yes, this one seems cool. So I got a few of them. And the one that I ended up spending the most time with initially was Yareli, who is— she's a character that you sort of are exposed to early on. It's like she's in this comic that these orphans on the working— the like worker, what planet is that? Is that Mars where there's indentured servitude?

Jack: Venus.

Janine: Venus. Yeah, sorry, it's Venus. She's like in a comic in Venus that the kids who space skateboard really like. And I had a— she really is the one that kind of hooked me,

because she has built-in space skateboard [**Jack**: Sick.] before I had unlocked it in any other way, so it was really fun. She also just has an aura thing, like a power where she can just— it's just like a ring of water—

Austin: Is this the ring you showed me?

Janine: [chuckles] Yeah, I showed Austin the other night. It's just this ring of water that goes around her and just immediately bisects any enemy that comes within it. So you don't— and I didn't even have to fight. I just put the ring on, [**Austin**: You just ran through people, yeah.] put it on her skateboard, and then I would just run through a level and then I'm done.

Austin: The first time you fought, it was like I was watching— it was like I was watching someone play Soulframe and as if there had been way too many enemies attacking me— you just can't move that quickly, how do you even deal with this? With the character you have, the weapons that you have— and the second time I was like, oh, I'm watching Vampire Survivors now. Like, you were just running in circles, crushing everybody.

Janine: Yeah, I think the first time I was using Nyx or something, and Nyx is not as massively destructive, or wasn't at that time.

Austin: Right, I'm sure now if you've leveled up your Nyx, maybe it's a different situation.

Janine: She's better— it's, you know, it's a different thing. But this was a mastery test. So it was like, demonstrate your skill, and then you get a little plaque and another little banner thing. So that was sort of the gateway for me and I've sort of been working my way through a bunch of different frames. Generally the ones that have like, at least some damage aura are my favorites, or something I can kind of plant in one spot that will do damage. But also now I've got like pets and stuff, so I have options where like I can kind of have fun with any of them? Even like weapons— I was using fist weapons for a bit and I was like, I think— I think I hate this. And then I put a bit more time into it, and I was like, this is fine. This is totally fine, this is okay. So I've hit a point where I can kind of enjoy any— any frame that I'm playing around with, which is surprising to me. I did not think that would happen.

Austin: Yeah. I'm curious about a thing which is— because I think one of the things I'm so curious to see is how much this shakes out into Soulframe. I already kind of gestured at it, I mentioned waiting around for a blacksmith to finish making your armor in that game. [**Janine**: Yeah.] My experience of Warframe is not just that you have to put time into it playing in order to get through to the stuff that's really exciting, though that's

changed since the last time I played. I think that you've gotten to stuff that I could not have gotten to quickly when I first played. I was stuck in running missions on the kind of cookie cutter ships for like 10 hours when I first played— or not first played, when I most recently played. So I think that's changed maybe quite a bit or you just did it. Maybe you just pushed through.

Janine: I mean, 62 hours, you know, I—

Austin: Yeah. But I mean, you were on Venus pretty quick, right? You were like in an open world— maybe you just put in the time, I truly don't know. But the thing of it— the other thing that was like tough for me was like, oh, if I want to make this sword good, or if I want to build a thing, I have to get all these resources together and I have to put them together and then wait it out. And that's one of the big structural things that makes— that Warframe is— that makes Warframe distinct, let's say, from Genshin Impact or other sorts of hero-based, free-to-play games. Where Genshin Impact is all about— I mean, there is some crafting in Genshin Impact, but I think if you— I played some Genshin Impact in my day, and mostly I was crafting five gems a day or whatever in order to get my daily “you crafted five things” thing, not to make a new weapon that I actually used.

Janine: It's mostly consumables, and then like upgrade materials.

Austin: Yeah exactly, exactly. Whereas with Warframe and with Soulframe, if you want to make the cool new arm in Soulframe, you have to like, grind rep with the blacksmith and then get all the materials— you'd get three pieces of the blueprint or whatever for the new sword, then— which are random drops in certain locations, grind out the materials you need, and then take them to the blacksmith. And the blacksmith will be like, you don't have a high enough rep with me yet. Go make some other stuff to get your rep up. And by the way, *Austin*, don't go sell that stuff for money because if you do, you lose reputation with me, which I didn't know.

Janine: [gasps] Ooh, I didn't know that.

Austin: And makes me feel so sad. It makes me feel so sad because the blacksmith has such low self-esteem, [**Janine:** Yeah. Aww...] and it's like she's getting sad because you sold the sword she made you. Anyway, then you give it to her and she's like, alright, cool, come back in 12 hours, or 24 hours for those arms. And at the time when I was playing Warframe, very much like on a schedule where it was like, I'm trying to play enough of this to talk about on a podcast in a week— or in three days, because Waypoint was twice a week. I was like, okay, well, I'm not going to advance at any sort of real rate here, is what it felt like, because I can't make it my everything game. I can't only play this. And I'm curious if that stuff is— where's that at in Warframe today? How

often are you like, I really want to use the sword, but the only way I can actually use it now is if I pay them five bucks to speed build it over the next— you know instead of waiting three days, I'm waiting three hours or instead of waiting thirty hours, I'm waiting thirty minutes or whatever.

Janine: So most of the stuff that I have access to right now, is stuff that takes a day to make. And I haven't really found it pressing because I have so much other stuff to play with.

Austin: Right.

Janine: The thing that's more pressing is because there's so much in the game and so much of it is kind of recursive and tangly, I have a lot of blueprints for materials that I don't even have access to the planet where the materials are from. [**Austin:** Sure, right.] And they're just going to sit there forever. Or I have blueprints for things where it's like, okay, well, this requires mastery level 10, and I'm at mastery level 5 or whatever. [**Austin:** Right.] And that's like my personal mastery, that's not like the crafting stations mastery or whatever. That's like, I need to level up more weapons and level up more frames. And like that stuff, individually, I can do pretty quickly. But, I think the thing that I keep encountering that's sort of the most running up against a wall is— is leveling up mods, [**Austin:** Sure.] because it costs so much money and so much Endo. And that's the thing where it's like, well, that's where most of your power is actually coming from. The mods that you have slotted into stuff.

Austin: Right. I see.

Janine: And you have a lot of slots and there's a lot of mods. Every single thing you equip, [**Austin:** This is— yeah.] every frame, every pet, even the pets' claws have slots.

Austin: So I think that the pets' clause, like C-L-A-U-S-E, like you have to sign the pets' clause to get a pet, you know.

Janine: Oh no, [chuckles] no no no, like the pets have claw weapons and the pets have slots where you slot in cards, and then their claws are also— you slot cards into their claws. [**Jack:** Oh my god.] Because some Warframes also have like specific weapons to them, like—

Austin: Interesting.

Janine: I forget the name, but there's one that's like glass and has like a glass whip. Gara? Or is Gara the stabby one? I don't know.

Austin: All of this is also a thing that I struggled with, which lines up with my bad brain around maximization, which is like—which again, I don't advise anybody else to do this, this is not me saying that's the right way to do it—but I would feel so overwhelmed by the amount of things I could be focusing on, that it felt like, oh, well, I played for six hours today. And then I read on a forum that I was not actually getting the thing I needed to get in order to advance the thing I thought I was trying to advance. Or like, I'm trying to get this drop, and then I don't realize like, oh yeah, it'll drop at 2% on these maps, but actually it'll drop at 20% once you get a little bit later on, I just didn't know, I was so overwhelmed. Which I think is a me thing, to be clear. I'm not saying that it's a failing, but it's part of why I'm so excited about Soulframe. [chuckles] Is it's a clean slate that I will not feel that overwhelmed by.

Janine: Yeah, yeah. I'll also say like, there is an auto-equip mods thing, and I'm a person who—I have no problem using that. I don't even look at what it's equipping. I don't even think about, [**Austin:** Couldn't be me.] oh, I like it when I have ice on this gun, but it put fire here—I don't care. I'm going to be in this mission for one minute, I'm like, fine.

Austin: You might as well be playing—you might as well be saying you're not even playing the game.

Janine: [laughs]

Austin: Because for me, that is part of what I like. That is part of the play, is being like—**[Janine:** Uh huh.] well, today I was playing Xenoblade Chronicles X today, and my highlight of the day was realizing that the character who didn't think had any beam-type weaponry, could buy a beam-type you know sword that allowed her to get the boost from when I used the aura that increases beam-type damage. And I went, ooh, a little synergy I have found in this video game that I've played before.

Janine: Well, okay, I do find that fun, [**Austin:** Okay!] but like, it's—I haven't noticed in my particular case—I mean, there are synergy things, but it's like when you're polarizing a slot, and like, I'll do that stuff deliberately, that's when I do that. When I use Forma—you know, this is jargon—when I put the thing in the other thing and then the thing changes. That stuff I will still do deliberately, and be like, you know, which is the thing I'm most excited about having here—okay, what polarity is that? I'll put that slot there, and then that makes it half price to use, essentially. Or like half resource point cost, whatever.

Austin: Right, right right right. Sure, sure.

Janine: I'll still do that stuff. But like, just in terms of— especially because you level stuff up so fast, like I did— I did one mission where I like stuck around for a few rounds, instead of just bouncing after the first one? And like all my shit went from like, rank 10 to rank 28.

Austin: That's wild.

Janine: And when things are happening that fast.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, why are you wasting time? Totally.

Janine: Do I want to spend time between every single mission picking the perfect? No, I'm just gonna go in, I'm gonna hit right stick, I'm gonna auto-mod whatever. And then like, you know, when I get something maxed out and I'm like really into it and really committed to just sticking with that, sure, then I'll handpick, I'll be careful, I'll be deliberate.

But like when I'm just leveling stuff up to get my mastery up and I'm not encountering—that's the other thing—that I'm not encountering any resistance because Warframe is to me like a Musou game at this point where it's just— there is just a wave of guys and they are all turning into mush. There's no point in wasting— in like spending time maximizing— like, I'm not at the point of the game where it has been hard, I guess. I'm sure that will come at some point. But I still haven't—

Austin: Maybe, maybe they've done a really nice rework of the on-ramp, you know, I don't know.

Janine: Maybe. I've done like— because there's that 12 year event going on right now, I've mostly, yeah, I mostly stick to things that are sort of at my level-ish, those are the things that it surfaces for me fine. But for some of the event stuff, it is higher level and some of it doesn't gate you out, even if you're a lower level. So I did something that was like level 110 or something, [**Austin:** God.] around when I was doing things that were level 10 and it was fine. Like it was a little bit tougher, I was a little bit squishier, I definitely had to stay close to the group, I couldn't just wander off on my own. But it was still doable you know, it was still like— I didn't feel like I couldn't hang.

I did feel a little bit like kid sister syndrome? But it was still fun and I got the reward I wanted, and like and then I went back to the stuff that I do normally, or that was at my level. It feels very— I don't want to say seamless, because there is still a lot of stuff that's just like, this is locked until you get your Robo... Hangar 6. And it's like, I don't know what that is, I don't know when I get that. I could look it up, I'm not going to. I'm just going to keep doing my thing. So it's still a little bit like obscure and weird.

But it is so much a game of just like, the numbers go up. You hit the buttons and the numbers go up, and you get the rhythm— it's like the rhythm of the rocket jumping or whatever, where it's like Alto's Odyssey or whatever those iPhone games are? Where you just tap and release, tap and release, tap and release. [chuckles] It's very soothing. It's a great bedtime game somehow.

Austin: That makes sense to me. I think that's part of the appeal, right? Is, one of the things I know you compared it to in terms of setting certain sorts of goals for yourself, was Infinite Nikki. Where you're like, okay, I'm just going to spend a day.

Janine: Yes. *Infinity* Nikki. Thank you.

Austin: What did I say? I wrote down Infinite— *Infinity* Nikki.

Janine: So the actual— the real thing with *Infinity* Nikki, mostly because I have run out of stuff to do in that game. I've like run out of stuff to make and missions to do and whatever— I think the interesting parallel between *Infinity* Nikki and *Warframe* and *Soulframe* is the— there's outfits that give you abilities in Nikki. But Nikki is a gacha game, [**Austin:** Okay, right.] and you have to roll for those outfit pieces.

Austin: Right *Warframe* is not, I guess—

Janine: No, *Warframe* does not have gacha.

Austin: There's someone listening right now who does not understand that *Warframe* and *Soulframe* are not gachas. They are not— you put in real money if you want to buy a new *Warframe*, but you can also grind for those— for things like *Warframes*.

Janine: Yeah. It feels like pretty much everything you can acquire through other means. But Nikki is a gacha game.

Austin: Right, right. Not in *Infinity* Nikki though, right? Yeah.

Janine: Yeah. The only kind thing I can say about Nikki— because I kind of from the start thought it was a little bit gross to have ability outfits, and then some of the outfits would only be in the gacha.

Austin: That's kind of the third rail of gacha, isn't it? Or free to play, in some ways.

Janine: They're not like— you don't need those abilities to succeed. It's a little bit less mercenary than *Genshin* in that way, where some— originally in *Genshin*, there were some characters where you needed that character to do this world thing or whatever. It's

not quite like that. Usually, it is like a superficial ability, or just like kind of a fun gimmicky thing, or a twist on an existing ability.

Jack: Can you give me an example of one of these?

Janine: Yeah, there's a— ability you get, and an ability outfit you get in the story where you have a— you summon a flower and you glide with the flower. And there is a gacha outfit from a few rounds ago where it's that power, but instead of being in that dress and summoning that flower, you're in a different dress and you summon a bunch of balloons. And you float on the balloons.

Jack: Oh, right, so those are different— and I don't want to downplay the difference there, especially in the game about different outfits. But it's not, for example like, you're unlocking an ability to open locked doors that you just can't get elsewhere, right?

Janine: Yeah, it's definitely not that.

Jack: The balloons are an alternative, like a similar gameplay alternative to—

Janine: Yes. And there are some— you know, an example of something that you can't do without paying the money or winning in the gacha. But also, it's not like a big thing, it's not game-breaking. They had a bicycle that they were selling for like a dollar of real money. [**Austin:** Mhm.] So then you could summon the bicycle wherever you wanted instead of having to go to a bicycle stand and rent the bicycle from them.

Jack: Oh sure.

Austin: Oh sure, those kinds of convenience.

Jack: And those bicycles are fun.

Janine: The current gacha banner has an outfit where the power associated with that outfit is you summon a motorcycle and then you can ride the motorcycle.

Jack: Holy shit!

Austin: That seems useful. I wish I had that outfit.

Jack: That's so funny because the opening to that game is like cozy pastoralia, [**Janine:** Yes.] and the idea of being like four months later and Nikki has a motorcycle is very in keeping with the tone of Nikki.

Austin: I was gonna say, isn't the previous Nikki game filled with like, war crimes?

Janine: All of the previous— yeah, then the one before that, has many more war crimes.

Austin: I thought there was only— I didn't know that there were— I thought this was the second— there's three? I didn't know there were three.

Janine: I think it's actually the fourth or fifth.

Austin: Okay.

Janine: The first one's really bad though, it was barely a game. The thing I was gonna say though is like the kind thing that I can say about Nikki is that when you are pulling items from the gacha, you don't get duplicates until you have the full set of that outfit.

Austin: Right, so if you're—

Janine: You'll get duplicates of like the garbage? But if you're pulling for the motorcycle outfit, you're not gonna pull the hat, and then pull the hat again, and pull the hat again. You're gonna pull each piece in sequence until you have the whole thing. And then—

Austin: Right. And then start pulling the second set so that you can upgrade the first set after that and then etc.

Janine: Ye— well, and the upgrades are cosmetic. It's a color palette upgrade.

Austin: Okay, that's not so bad. Yeah.

Janine: Yeah. So it's like, there is some kindness to it— but, and like, to the point where I can't decide, when I look at that versus Warframe, I can't decide which mode I prefer? Because I think something about Warframe's model is definitely— I'm more susceptible to spend money in it than I am in gacha. Maybe that's just because I've built up gacha self-preservation muscles after years of being a MiHoYo player.

Austin: Yeah. It reminds me of being the person who swore off CCGs—collectible card games—and then being like, oh, but I can play Netrunner, because Netrunner comes out as a specific set of cards once every three months, [**Janine:** Yeah.] and then another one every six months. And it's— the whole set is in there, and I know exactly what I'm getting, and I can preview all the cards ahead of time, and now I can play this again. Because what I can't do is fall into the trap of wanting to just keep buying single booster packs so I can chase something. That is like, not a fun way for me to engage with the CCGs I've been playing at that point, and whatever dopamine hit I originally had was quickly replaced by frustration, and then like, you know, you end up— at a certain point if you get into CCGs, you do end up going like, well, is there a secondary market

where I can just go fucking spend the \$7 on the card I actually want instead of spending \$17 buying individual packs, hoping I get it.

And so much around in that space—and this is so true for gacha games—is also about FOMO and also about the build of the moment, the like— not the gameplay build, but the build, the PR build of, “ooh, a new character is about to drop, a new banner is about to happen”. You're going to get excited about this character who you might not ever really play. You're hoping that they're fun and good.

And I think that that probably also happens when Warframe is getting ready to drop a new Warframe? I know while we were playing Soulframe and we realized, oh, there's two new arms we could grind for, we got very excited. Because it's like, oh, new core abilities are about to drop. That's like a whole new way of engaging with this game we already like. But I do think that there's something really different between, I'm going to give you 15 bucks for this thing, and I'm going to start at 15 bucks, or I'm going to start at 99 cents or \$3. And then from there, maybe I'll spend \$100 before I get this thing, or maybe I'll spend you know, four weeks trying to get it, not get it through earning the in-game currency, and then as it's about to cycle out, which is something that happens in gacha games, the window will close on the thing that you want— the windows don't seem to close on Warframes, right? You can just go get Nyx, if that's— if you've heard of— or, who's the one with the water ring?

Janine: Yareli.

Austin: Yareli. Yareli is in the shop probably forever, right?

Janine: Yep.

Austin: They're not Disney vaulting the Warframes.

Janine: They do like sales with the— [**Austin:** Sure.] mark stuff down, but it seems like, I mean, there is some stuff I think that's limited, but it's usually like, very, very cosmetic. It's like the shiny, weird version of this guy or you know.

Austin: Sure.

Jack: They're not like, I want to push back a little about— there are dark patterns at work in Warframe.

Austin: Oh, for sure. Sorry, I was not saying there were not dark patterns. I was saying this particular one that I can't fucking deal with anymore.

Jack: Right right right. But when we're talking about FOMO and stuff like that, something Warframe will do is like when you log in, you will get like a random login bonus.

Austin: Sure.

Jack: And some of those login bonuses are things like you've got a 20 percent off coupon.

Austin: Oh that's a classic.

Jack: That is going to expire.

Janine: For currency.

Austin: That's a classic dark pattern, yeah.

Jack: The first thing you see is, do you want to spend something? But it'll be a little bit cheaper.

Janine: But this is also why I say I'm not sure which model I prefer? As someone who's engaging with both of them like willingly, and like, I you know, am fortunate in that I have a good sense of how much I'm willing to spend on entertainment and a free to play game, and like, it's— you know, I'm on top of that and comfortable with it. If someone isn't and is not comfortable with it, do not engage with them.

But for Warframe, like I find I am a little more prone to impulse, of just the idea that I can have the whole thing right now, for this money, is more alluring to me than the idea of, well, I can put some money in and then pull for this and I'll probably get most of it, but maybe not. And like that stuff, I can— I can wait for that. Like I know I will get X amount of premium currency a day just by doing my dailies and I'll plug away. And then maybe at the end, I will have— you know, the night before, I'll have a moment of like, do I really want this, yes or no? And then maybe I'll put some currency in and get those last few pieces, you know.

Versus the Warframe thing of like, I could have this whole thing right now. I could have this Warframe, I could have this gun, I could have this hat, I could have this weird dog. If I just give them \$30 right now. [chuckles]

Austin: Yeah. Yeah, that's dangerous.

Janine: That's tricky.

Austin: That would— that might get me too if I was in, yeah.

Janine: That's tricky. It depends, but.

Austin: Right. Again, imagine— imagine at the moment where playing Soulframe, I realized I'd lost enough reputation with the blacksmith that I now can't craft the thing I thought I was going to be able to craft. If at that moment they were like, five bucks, buy yourself a little reputation, put a little money— put a little money in Tuvalkane's pocket, and she'll make you this cool new wolf arm that you want so bad, they might have fucking gotten me, you know? So, of course, none of that stuff is in there yet.

Janine: Yeah. It's like, I'm always going to prefer sticker price. Just— I just want to pay you for the game and be on my way.

Austin: Yeah, put the game in a bag, sir.

Janine: I understand that's not always the model. I understand that if that had been the case with Warframe, it probably wouldn't have stuck around for 12 years. It probably would have had a shorter shelf life and they would have moved on to do other stuff and, you know, to some extent, it's food in the trough for the animals to— who's the animal in this? Where am I going with this?

Austin: I lost this— what's the metaphor? I don't know where that metaphor is going.

Janine: I think I mean like fuel for the engine or something, not— not slop for the trough! [laughs]

Austin: Not food for the animals?

Janine: For me! Me and my sloppy trough.

Austin: Yum yum yum yum yum.

Janine: Yum yum yum yum yum. Yeah, I— [exhales] it's tough, right?

Austin: It is.

Janine: It's a balancing act. I will say I'm more or less happy with Warframe. I'm not unhappy with Nikki, I just wish there was more content.

Austin: Yeah, sure. There's— it's early though, right? Warframe— or, Nikki has not had the 12 years of what Warframe has had to make a bunch of stuff.

Janine: Listen. I've started a lot of gacha games, I've played a lot of fashion games, I've played a lot of Nikki games. I have never run out of steam with— run out of something to do as fast as I have with that game.

Austin: Fair enough.

Janine: You really— if you play it a little bit every day, you really do just— it's all done. It's all— you have done everything and there is nothing for you to do except for you to go to the machine and spend your energy points and level up stuff.

Austin: [chuckles] I love to spend my energy points at the machine, which I'm going to go do right now. We're going to take a break while I spend my energy points at the machine and then we'll come back and we'll talk about some more stuff.

[music play for the short break]

[music ends]

Break [01:20:38]

Austin: Alright, we are back, and we actually— we actually took a kind of a long break, long enough that there's been a Soulframe update.

Jack: Yeah!

Austin: I don't know if either of you saw this.

Janine: I did— I haven't watched, I didn't know how much was gonna actually bear fruit immediately, or how much was just gonna make me stressed.

Austin: Preludes 9 is out.

Janine: [gasps] Oooh!

Austin: Yeah, I went and played it. I went and played the game more today.

Jack: They released it in the middle of our recording.

Janine: Is it different— is it more different?

Austin: Yeah, they've— that's— there's big differences. They got rid of a thing that I think was previously pretty key, because they've— do you know the idols, the super weapons, like the bow or the lightning blast? Those have been removed because they're gonna be like, full weapons instead.

Janine: Huh.

Austin: And instead, they did roll out a regular bow as a weapon, and a new lightning spell punch thing, that is a whole new weapon type. And you— I'll put the.

Janine: Ohhh. That's very consistent with what I've seen from Warframe, how the weapons are in Warframe, that makes sense to me.

Austin: They also rolled out a new thing where you pick your starting kind of your class, your frame— in this case your Pact, outright at the very beginning between what was the magic bow one and the lightning— the kind of lightning fist or lightning ball one. And now a third starting one also, which is like a stealth focused one.

Jack: Huh.

Janine: Ohhh.

Austin: And that one starts with a regular bow as a weapon. The one that previously was— I mean, it still is the one that like does like the knockback attack and the— what's the other thing it does? Gosh, I'm blanking. Actually, you know what? I think I didn't end up getting this one. There's one here now that's new— the Pact of Courage, Tethren, is like a tank focused Pact where you're getting— one of your abilities is just like do more damage on consecutive attacks. One of them is like, a taunt that gives you increased damage and defense. So that's like— there was no taunting before, and in that stream today, they were talking about— they were talking about the idea of there being more role-based multiplayer stuff. There's factions now, you're getting faction rep now between three different factions.

Janine: Again, very consistent with Warframe.

Austin: If you look at the patch notes, you can see— if you scroll down enough, you can see what the new kind of like, casting lightning attack basic weapon is? This is so sick.

Janine: Yeah, this Odiac?

Austin: Odiac, yes.

Janine: This reminds me a lot of— I've been playing with a weapon in Warframe that's a combination whip and taser.

Austin: Sure, right.

Janine: It's kind of a similar vibe.

Austin: Yeah. And all the map is covered with mist. You have to go find these trees to recover your map, which is very fun. Otherwise, you don't have map access anymore.

Janine: Huh.

Austin: And then there was one other thing that I think was— yeah there's a bunch of little changes for balance.

Janine: Totem, new totem gear slots.

Austin: Which is tied to your faction, and like your faction rep and stuff like that. But like, a thing they didn't add was like a bunch of tutorial or something, you know.

Jack: Mhm.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: I will say I immediately had to solve a puzzle. I found the entrance to my faction area— there had previously been a sort of tavern that was like a social hub? That has now become one of three similar social hubs, and there's— each one is tied to a different faction. I picked the faction unknowingly of the little avocado guy?

Jack: Oh, the fellow I don't like?

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: That little— [**Janine:** Avakot?] yeah, Avakot. There was a little totem, like, shrine thing out front. And it said, “Beloved when lost, but loathed at home, I crave a jewel born not from stone”.

So a little riddle, I had to do a little riddle. [Jack: Ohhh.] It asked me which of the, like, gem drops that I had did I want to place in the altar.

Janine: Kidney stone.

Austin: Pearl. Close, right? [**Janine:** No.] In some ways, right? Because loathed at home.

Janine: Yeah, Pearl is a kidney stone for— yeah.

Austin: Yeah, exactly, for an oyster. So yeah, put that in there, opened up new little social space, which was cool. [**Janine:** Cool...] I didn't put a ton of time in, I tried out these new, like, lightning bolt, the Odiac, as you said— the crackle of lightning bolt bottled up one sleeve. Even just reading these notes—

Janine: I see there's also a new fucked up dog.

Austin: There's a new fucked up dog.

Jack: There is a new fucked up dog. I misread this—

Janine: We didn't mention— [**Austin:** I forgot about this, you're right.] when we talked about Soulframe before, we didn't talk about how there were dogs, and the dogs have helmets, and instead of killing the dogs, you knock the helmet off and they run away. I bet you kill this dog, this dog looks fucked up.

Austin: No, because look at the— what it says is, it says—

Jack: Seek to free them from the Ode'n Reign.

Austin: Seek to free them from the Ode'n Reign. You know.

Janine: Oh, okay. Okay.

Jack: I thought this said, corrupt doll dog, not corrupt old dog.

Janine: Aww.

Austin: Corrupt old dog. You know, even just looking at these faction notes or these patch notes rather, are a great description of like, hey, what do they mean when they say the writing is weird in some way? The writing is extremely built towards its own voice. And it's like, okay, let's take a look at something as simple as what are the three classes? And one of them says,

Chief of the Solist Warriors, was she, wreathed in flame and fury. Claim the pact of the Fey champion, Tethren. Raise your sword to sun, howl the Felling song. Have Courage, Envoy. For a warrior's heart is both weapon and armour. And a human heart can crack.

And it's like, yeah, okay, they're like, they're doing it, you know?

Jack: It's great. [**Janine:** Yeah.] And then at the same time, you read stuff like,

Kith of Kings Enclave. Heralded by his towering throne. Haunted by his subjects, stone. The crumbling crypt of The Fire King, Fenn Jotar. Hidden away in an untouched pocket of his Undercity does his body rest... and his restless soul wander..

That's just good fantasy writing, you know?

Austin: It's just good fantasy writing, yeah, a hundred percent.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: When there's an undercity and like a tomb of stone, I love to see that stuff.

Austin: New Pact, Mora's Hand.

Her ever-flame will she impart,

To braving souls with burning hearts.

Not life nor death will do you part.

Take Mora's Hand, Envoy. Make a pact with the red sun. An honour once held only by the mighty Kings and Queens of Midrath is yours. Do not sully her flame.

The first ability is Ignis Wroth— you'll see why I'm reading on.

Wake the old flame, set the earth ablaze. Enemies in area of effect take fire damage.

Jack: It's so funny!

Austin: You know, sometimes enemies in the area take fire damage. It's still the thing.

Jack: Yeah, these will return as mythic tier, earnable weapons, etc etc. Premium currency testing, you know.

Austin: Well, there we go, we'll be back to that, I am sure, so. We'll have to see how that shakes out, I guess.

Jack: This is a precedent that we will not be continuing, which is midway through every episode of Side Story, they've released a new patch that we play.

Janine: [laughs]

Austin: We don't know— what if this does continue? Who could say, you know? Maybe this is our weird, special version of The Shining. Anything we talk about, if we happen to take a break in the middle of the episode, something will shift the world such that you know, a patch comes out.

Janine: We're set to record the next one of these shortly after Switch 2 news, right?

Austin: This is true, yeah. So who knows, right? Anything could happen.

Janine: We'll take a break and then the Switch 3 is out.

Jack: [chuckles]

R.E.P.O. [01:27:45]

Austin: Exactly. We also played something else in between sessions, which was R.E.P.O. by Semiwork, a developer who I think previously put out a game called Voidigo or something like that? Which is like an action rogue light? This is not that, this is another game— do we have a name for this like, horror-extraction-comedy?

Janine: I don't like that people— they're getting called Lethal Company-likes, which I don't think is fair because I don't think Lethal Company— **[Austin: Started this.]** I don't recall feeling like, wow, Lethal Company is doing something new. I remember thinking, oh, people are refining the Phasmophobia—

Austin: Phasmophobia, which itself is in a line with other stuff.

Janine: Yeah, itself is— yeah. So, I don't like that they're being called Lethal Company-likes, but also when you say that, people know what you mean, you know? So.

Austin: Get what it is, yeah. Jack, have you heard any other term?

Jack: I don't think so. They're horror comedy games, which is really— and Phasmophobia is more explicitly a—

Janine: Muppets and Peril.

Jack: It's Muppets and Peril, yeah.

Austin: That's R.E.P.O. for sure, yeah.

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: And you're right, Phasmophobia obviously had comedic moments, but it's— one, unlike Lethal Company and unlike R.E.P.O. and unlike— what's the— Content Warning? Is that the other one that people played a lot last year?

Janine: Yeah. And Headliners, and—

Austin: And Head— I think Headliners is different also in one way, which is R.E.P.O. and the other two I just mentioned, Lethal Company and Content Warning, do have the extraction element of like, go in and get a particular— **[Janine: Yes.]** literal objects— I guess the one you just said, what was the one? What's the one?

Janine: Headliners.

Austin: Headliners, you are trying to survive and escape with photos, but you're not like go in to get stuff and leave the way that R.E.P.O. and co are doing that almost as if it's Tarkov or something, except you're trying to find, in the case of R.E.P.O., a big vase instead of like an AK-47 or whatever?

Jack: [chuckles]

Janine: Yeah, it's— because it's got that like moving out, [**Austin:** Yes, yes.] it's moving out plus, you know, that kind of thing.

Austin: Yeah, totally. Yeah, so R.E.P.O., like you said, first person, multiplayer, I think it's up to six players by default. A game about going in to creepy places with your friends, trying to extract a bunch of valuable things. Each new level is set up where you arrive in a big truck, and at the truck, there is an extraction point. And to start with, all you have to do is come back with a bunch of valuables which you load in via a weird physics carrying system, also a hover cart.

But as you play deeper into a run, you unlock levels that need— you know, consecutive levels end up having multiple extraction points that are placed deeper and deeper into the level design. And importantly—the word has already come up—you're playing a bunch of muppets. You're playing a bunch of kind of cylindrical people—

Janine: Trashcan puppets.

Austin: Trashcan puppets, yeah, there you go.

Jack: It's a stroke of genius. These little guys are— okay, so Austin briefly mentioned that there's some sort of physics going on here. And physics is the backbone of this game. You know, if in Lethal Company, you're kind of just picking things up and putting them down, in this game, you are trying to wrestle like a grand piano through a door that you can't quite manage. And every time you bonk it against the floor, it loses, you know, \$50 of its value.

Austin: Right, because you're trying to extract a certain percentage of— or a certain dollar amount of stuff from these places. You know, it's like you're ripping out the copper pipes from the walls, except the copper pipes are a big statue or someone's, you know, a vat of— or a canister of liquid flame. And if you drop it wrong, it'll blow up in front of you, you know?

Jack: Or like a glass— a statue of a glass rhinoceros in a glass case.

Austin: Oh, in the glass case, it's so funny.

Jack: And there's— there's some real understand— in the same way that—

Austin: Or a doll that will kill you.

Jack: [chuckles] The doll that attacks you. Yeah, like in the same way that the understanding of the Victorian bedroom farce is like, predicated on how it's extremely funny to run in and out of doors and slam doors open and closed, the understanding of R.E.P.O. is predicated on the fact that it's extremely funny to like, pick up a cup and then your friend turns around and bonks the cup with the thing that they are holding, and it just shatters immediately.

I found a vase— I was climbing this unbelievably tall set of spiral stairs. And halfway up the spiral stairs, there was a ledge looking out over the gap with a huge, very valuable vase on it? And I picked the vase up and mislicked and immediately dropped it down five flights of stairs where it shattered. You know, it's— the physics in here is amazing, and it is built into these trashcan muppets who are moving with sort of like, inverse kinematic stuff going on. They are affected by physics in the world as well and they are looking— their eyes are not controlled by the player, their head motions are controlled by the player, but their eyes are looking at whatever is making the most noise or what they consider to be high value objects. And the physical comedy involved in watching your friends embody these guys is exquisite.

Austin: They can— there was this great moment where, I guess, you know, you can crouch down, importantly. You can take this little trash can and it will like— person, the design that they are, they're almost like cylindrical trash cans, and they can telescope down into a tiny little, like a flat button almost. Not quite flat, but like just the cap of where their head is and then a little bit of leg underneath that and that's about it. And there was a moment where we had taken a little break, or I'd stepped away or something, and I came back and— I don't remember who the two people— we streamed this, [youtube.com/friendsatthetable](https://www.youtube.com/friendsatthetable), the archive will go up at some point. We can probably go see the archive still on [twitch.tv/friends_table](https://www.twitch.tv/friends_table).

And it was you Jack, I want to say? Or maybe Sylvi were both in the cart in your little tiny hiding mode, in your crouched mode? [**Jack** wheezes] and you were both making perfect eye contact with me. And I was like, wait, is Sylvi playing and just listening and like looking at me? And you told me that the eyes naturally follow sound. And so it's just— it's so expressive because of that. It's so filled with character whenever anyone yells or runs or gets thrown across the room or gets shot by Elmer Fudd, the guy with the gun who will—

Jack: We'll talk about Elmer Fudd.

Austin: We have to— I mean this is— I was saying Janine the other day to you, that I think the thing that makes it stand out for me is, there are enemy types in those other games, right? Like, there really truly are enemy types in Lethal Company and in Content Warning. And I *know* in my heart of hearts that repeated play would have led us to develop strategies of dealing with them. You know, outside of like, I know how to deal with the blob in Lethal Company pretty easily or I did at the time anyway, right?

These are so legible. The enemies in this space or in this game, you very quickly go like, okay, I understand how it's patrolling this route. I understand the type of— not very quickly, not so quickly that it's nothing, but the first or second time it kills you, you know, I see what just happened there, someone made noise and it caused this old guy to raise up a shotgun and shoot at us, and next time we got to be more careful with the noise. But you don't know how careful you need to be necessarily. *And be—*

Janine: Yeah, I was going to say, explain the Frog Chef to me then, smarty pants.

Jack: [laughs]

Austin: The Frog Chef is just chasing you around. The Frog Chef just wants to get you, you know? I didn't get— I never— the Frog Chef only killed me in the back because someone led the Frog Chef to me once. So I didn't get like, a look at the Frog Chef.

Janine: Okay okay, alright, okay.

Austin: Whereas for instance, I know I should probably not mess with the big box, the cart— or the wooden box, that if you drop it begins to break open revealing a creature inside, you know? That, I've learned my lesson.

Jack: The creatures are tremendous, and they are subject to the same weird physics shit that you are. I've seen Elmer Fudd, who is like a huntsman who is blind, but has really, really advanced hearing. I've seen him fall down the stairs on several occasions, and then get up and shoot someone in the face who laughed as he fell. There is an alien who floats around menacingly and summons you into like a— oh, there's gnomes?

Janine: Mhm.

Austin: That's a great example for me, right? Is we— were playing one of our early missions or one of our early runs. There were these little gnomes that were hopping around and killing the whole party. And on a whim, I was like— maybe I went to pick up something else, but I grabbed one of the gnomes, and then had it and held it and whipped it against the wall, and it like broke like a ceramic— like a little ceramic gnome

would break. And then the next 30 seconds was me like, destroying a half-dozen little ceramic gnomes.

Jack: [chuckles] Just chewing through the gnomes.

Austin: Yes. And so, that for me is one of those things where it's, not just there are cool monster designs, but they are interactable in really particular ways. The doll was similar where there's a little doll that you can cash in as loot basically, but the second you pick it up, it will start— she will start trying to stab you to death with a little knife or reach out with her arm— she's like flailing, it's a nightmare, it's a tornado of violence. But I realized if I keep doing the thing where I'm holding her— in this game when you pick stuff up, you have a little gravity beam is how you're picking stuff up in the interface? And that, you can pull stuff closer to you with that or push it further away.

So I was just like, push her further away! Push her further away! And she's like, [makes doll screaming noises], trying to kill me, and I'm running to the drop-off point because I'm like, as long as she's not near me, then it— you know, I can keep her out of reach and then we can still cash her in and get the money we need so we can leave this level. And that is just not the way I've interacted with any of these other games before? Again, I'm willing to say that if I put 20 hours into Lethal Company, maybe I would have that depth of interaction? But the core set of verbs in this game just are so much more expressive than what I've seen in those other ones.

Janine: There's a really good sense of like— there's sort of two like branches here that converge that I want to talk about where it's like, they've one, picked the most expressive kind of puppet to base their main character, [**Jack:** Yeah!] [**Austin:** Mhm.] their main models on, which is the sort of muppet where the mouth is made out of like a margarine lid you cut in half kind of thing. I don't know if anyone else is like a puppet kid, but.

Austin: You were just a puppet kid, you're not a puppet grown adult?

Janine: I still appreciate puppets, just you know, not as much. I watched a lot of puppet contests as a kid, [**Austin:** I see.] including shows involving making puppets. And— so there's a kind of puppet that you see a lot in Sesame Street and Muppets and stuff, like if you look at Elmo, Elmo's mouth is basically a big circle cut in half and folded. And basically, anything where you're getting like this big wide circle shape where it is so obvious when it's open, and then so minimal when it's closed, is very expressive and people tend to respond very strongly to it? You get this a little bit with Kermit too, but Kermit's more of a soft mouth, like he can twist his mouth around more and stuff like that.

Austin: Right, fold it up like a little pizza but upside down.

Jack: [chuckles] Yes.

Janine: Yeah. Another thing you'll see a lot with really, really funny puppets is the eye—you'll often see like, the eyeball will be like a little plastic black disc, or the pupil will be a plastic black disc that's like attached to a pivot point. And the pivot point is not at the center, it'll usually be like near the top or something, so that the pupil can like waggle [Jack: Yes.] and sort of move around.

So again, you get this sense of animation that like, even you know, if you're using it correctly, will feel directed and will feel like really expressive. So they've learned—and I think you can say a lot of the same stuff about the enemies too, right? They've clearly got some opinions and done some looking at, you know, what is evocative, what like, what do people really respond to on like a primal brain level of like, what gets us feeling things.

But also, I think a thing that they've done that's really smart is they have kind of figured out some of the kinks in the format that they're looking at, in a way that reminds me of like when shooters figured out like, what if you could just get back in a match real quick? [Jack: Mhm!] Like what if— what if once you're out, you can just like keep, you know—and it—you know, so you have health, you have—you can share health. Healing isn't like a rare strange thing.

Austin: Oh yeah, the healing— oh that's so huge, you're totally right.

Janine: You can give health to other people, you can survive taking a few hits depending on the context. Usually like, there is room for you to make mistakes, and that's good because mistakes are funny, but what's less funny is when you're immediately out of the action. And you can't— there's no room to recover, there's no room to steal victory from the jaws of defeat.

Austin: There's even— yeah, I got to tell you, I don't know that I've ever been more clutch than in some of those rounds that we played. [Janine laughs] People should go watch, because I think the final version of this—

Janine: It's very MLG.

Austin: Yeah, yeah, I was e-sports-ing for sure.

Jack: E-sports gnome killing.

Austin: E-sports gnome killing, e-sports evading the guy with the gun. Lots of very— e-sports learning how— [**Janine:** Well! Mm—] okay well, / evaded—

Janine: E-sports getting other people killed [**Austin:** Yeah well sometimes—] because you were saying shit about the guy with the gun.

Austin: Sometimes being clutch is being the guy who's faster than the slowest person with the bear. And sometimes—

Janine: The guy behind the human shield.

Austin: Yeah, exactly. Sometimes you cover someone else with peanut butter and then you can outrun them. Anyway.

Janine: That's e-sports!

Austin: That's e-sports. E-sports isn't fair. E-sports is like love and war, you know?

Jack: Mmm.

Janine: Wow.

Austin: The— sorry, I was reminded— I have our footage on it, I was reminded of the duck, which is a little duck you *cannot* interact with or else. But it just like hangs out and quacks at you.

Jack: Jumps up and down.

Austin: Inquisitive.

Janine: It tries to break the shit you're holding.

Austin: Yeah! It's like a little brother or something. Like a little sibling who's like, oh, what are you doing! What are you doing! What are you doing! [**Jack:** It's so good.] And like a little sibling—I don't have any—my plan would be, I'm just going to ignore you. I'm just going to not give you any attention. And that seemed to work fine for me in the little guy.

Janine: I wonder what would happen if you put the feather drone on it.

Austin: Well, that's what I was going to say is, my favorite clutch moment was spending an entire round being stupidly obsessed with a feather drone, [**Jack** chuckles] which is a thing that can make any object light enough to float— or light enough for one person to lift is really what it is. Cause what—

Jack: You went through hell with the feather drone.

Austin: I really did. I was like, oh, I got this feather drone, how do I make it work? And I made it work pretty quickly, where it was lifting not *me*, but an object. Then for the rest of that map, I kept making myself lighter, which lets you jump really high instead. At one point, I jumped out of what was the primary area of the map, and up to like some balconies looking down, I was like, I don't know how to get back down without hurting myself! Feather drone helped with that, it turned out.

Janine: Yeah, that's not a game where jumping is a real strategy.

Austin: I was jumping a lot.

Janine: There's not a lot of verticality in that game.

Austin: I think the number one place for jumping is when gnomes are trying to bite your knees and you go, *ahhh get away from me!* So.

Janine: Yes. Yeah.

Austin: But that feather drone ended up helping me lift a big heavy case with like a— witch's— it was either the— I almost said grand piano— [**Janine:** It was the broom, right? Yeah.] it was a broom. Was it the case with the broom in it, or was it just the raw broom? I don't remember, but.

Janine: Mhm. Case with a broom. Big box, big annoying box.

Austin: Yeah, and that was the last thing we needed to get out of the area. And to your point, Janine, things like the feather drone, other games have had things that you can buy between rounds, a hundred percent. Sometimes those things are really funny or like multipliers. Content Warning is big on like, bring this new thing with you into the world so you can take better pictures or get better video that will give you more points. But they don't lean as much into the way that this has both stat increases in terms of stamina, strength, being able to lift things more. And then like outright verbs like the feather drone. Obviously, there's like grenades and weapons and stuff too, but there's a lot of things that are just like, oh, what if we used this thing? What if we brought the shock mine? What if we brought, you know— there's a recharge drone, charge your other drones, and those things, I think—

Jack: There is a *gun*.

Austin: There is a gun. But those things speak to the thing you're talking about, Janine, which is like, there has been a focus on how do we change what the loops are in this

game. To go from, you do a run, most of your team might die, or maybe you won't, and you'll get out with the stuff, and then you do it again. There is like both short-term loops of, okay, I'm going to go in, I'm going to get hurt, my friends can heal me, I'm going to die. A number of times, people would die together and/or near each other, and then— or not even near each other, they'd both be dead in the voice comms for dead players.

When you find someone's body or their head, just their head, you can bring it to an extraction point that you haven't used yet, and when you use that extraction point for the first time, you can only use each one once, it'll rez that person, and then the player will come back and be like, I know where Sylvi's body is! I know where we can go save Sylvi! Or Jack said that they have no idea where they died, where their head is, we can't save them, we have to go.

And those little loops, combined with the kind of larger progression schema, really do the thing that you're talking about, Janine, which is like, oh, this is maybe what will a standardized version of what this might look like. It feels like we're arriving at that a little bit more. You know, there is a more fully functional, fully featured look at these sorts of comedy extraction horror things that you could imagine breaking bigger because of that structure, you know?

Jack: And all of this stuff compounds to produce something that is just so funny. I can—I can—the horror comedy of this genre tends to balance the two fairly evenly. Phasmophobia is a funny game, although it's much more frightening. Lethal Company is about equally frightening and funny. This is just so deeply— all of these mechanics have been tuned to producing moments that are not just moments that are exciting, but moments that are funny. I feel like a lot of column inches have been spent talking about how and why games struggle to be funny, or succeed in being funny. And you know very often, there are conversations about how successful funny games are funny because of what you do rather than because of what the game says. You know, it's quite difficult to write a comedy game, although it can be done, and you know, it's extremely funny in a match of Warzone, where something goes very very badly wrong because of one player's inaction or something. And In R.E.P.O., you are just seeing mechanic after mechanic after mechanic like turned towards, how can we make people laugh?

To— you know, you're describing earlier people coming back and saying, I think I know where Sylvi's head is. There was a version of this where we were talking in the voice comms, and Austin and someone were trying to evade Elmer Fudd. And we came back and you just said, *“shut the fuck up, everybody stop talking!”* [**Janine** laughs] Because they can't hear you in the voice comms, but as soon as we were in the world and we were still just maintaining our conversations.

Austin: It might be because I had one HP, which is not a thing— you know, you have health in those other games, but it's not a big one on the screen. On the top left, which you'll carry for nine minutes as you're like, I just think you could get to the end of this level because if I do, I'll get 25 more HP and I'll be at 26 for the beginning of next level, and that'll be way better, you know?

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: You were going to say about the character we call Elmer Fudd, who I think is actually called The Hunter.

Jack: The Huntsman or something.

Austin: The Huntsman, the Hunstman, I think that's right.

Jack: To Janine's point about how you're given opportunities to make mistakes, I think central to the way the game is really aware of kind of the mechanics of comedy, there are exceptions to that, and they are the exception rather than something that happens regularly. But you don't get an opportunity to make a mistake with Elmer Fudd. Or you do if you're very, very lucky. And the idea that, you know—

Janine: Or if you're already in motion.

Jack: Or if you're already in motion.

Austin: Or if you're hiding at a table and Jack is actually closer, or in the line of sight. Because I didn't get shot, certainly.

Jack: No no, that's true. But there being a monster out there that will just get you, makes the narrow escapes all the funnier. And it makes the moments when you encounter that fellow walking quietly down the hallway genuinely terrifying and intense because you're like, alright, well, this is it. Now, the rules are very clear to me. In this moment, I have to be silent. We've learned that— oh, we need to talk about the text to speech.

Austin: Oh my god, it's so funny.

Jack: The game is mostly played over voice comms, and it has that really good, not just proximity stuff, but also like processing done on the voice to mimic the spaces that you're in. Phasmophobia was wonderful at this, you know, as you step into some gigantic school or asylum in Phasmophobia and hear the reverb in your voice. But it's slightly crunchy, it's slightly reverby, things get muffled through walls.

Austin: Yeah, things, I think, get super muffled when you're one room away.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: Like, I think that they made a very key important choice, which was even if you're fairly close on the map, being in a different room on the grid automatically makes someone more quiet than they might be in real life, as a way of creating kind of information asymmetry? There are so many times when playing where, you know, a good example of this is like, there's the laughing child enemy? I never saw that thing in person. I always heard it laugh and then heard someone scream and then someone would try to explain to me, but from a room away and I never quite— I still couldn't tell you what it actually looks like. I have no idea, so you know, I'd be screwed if it showed up near me, outside of I'm going to get small and hide in a corner, you know? But that asymmetry I think really is important for— for selling that distance between you, you know?

Jack: Yeah. But for players who don't have a microphone plugged in or who don't want to play with voice chat, there is text to speech. This is hilarious, because the voice that they have chosen for the text to speech is the most garbled, like, tone-shifted robot. And it fits *so well* with these stupid little trashcan muppets. And it is— it differs in tone and pitch based on whether or not you're crouching. If you're crouched, it appears as this awful hissed robot whisper? Sometimes they'll speak in a very deep low voice for seemingly no reason at all.

Austin: It's because you're looking down, Jack.

Jack: [wheezes]

Austin: If you look down, it gets deeper; if you look up, it gets higher. Which again feels muppet-y to me.

Jack: And they mispronounce things— yeah, they mispronounce things like a computer does. They have no real sense of where stress falls in a word. Just standing around making these things talk to each other is great, because it is the ultimate transformation into a muppet-like character. I think about the— the Sesame Street aliens who don't know what a telephone is and are trying to talk with each other about what they think a telephone does. The various like little gangs of weirdies that the Muppets will just send into a scene to cause havoc or whatever, just using the text to speech transforms you perfectly into one of those. It's great. And we learned to our cost that the enemies can hear text to speech as though they are being spoken to through a microphone.

Austin: As if it's actually, yeah.

Jack: We learned this because in warning friends about Elmer Fudd, I typed “reacts to sound”, and was shot in the head so quickly that the word “sound” still appeared in text above my head.

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: I mean— and the timing of that, you know, you got shot and killed by this guy, you didn't get shot and then immediately blow up. There is a, you know, a half second beat where your whole body turns red as if you've been super charged, [**Jack** chuckles] and then you explode into pieces, which again is—

Janine: Yeah, if anyone reads the newsletter, that— Sylvi took a screen cap of that moment and I put that at the top of the newsletter.

Austin: So funny.

Jack: It's so good.

Austin: And that's the— and that's the like— there is— in the same way that like doing— playing Monster Hunter, or playing a fighting game means that there's a little bit of hit stop on certain attacks, like, that kind of hand-crafted animation timing for maximum effect can sometimes be in video games, “yoooo, check out this dragon punch you just hit!”, in this case, it's like, it is the funniest thing in the world when somebody gets shot and explodes into little pieces. We have to emphasize that moment, we have to punctuate it, you know, with something that makes it stand out from just any specific split second. And that's, you know, it's good. It's simply good. But one thing that I think is genuinely not good about this game, is its logo.

Jack: Oh my god!

Janine: Oh god.

Jack: It's bizarre! Okay, so the logo is clearly pushing for some sort of virality, which I say not so much as a value judgment. My value judgment here is that I think that the logo is bad, not that they went for virality. [**Austin:** Yeah...] It shows a grinning, smiling, yellow smiley face with like rotten teeth. This does not represent the production design of the rest of the game in any way.

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: There are emojis in the game. Your like, your email communication thing in the truck only ever has emoji on the— as your respond button. And I have to imagine that

that's where it grew out of. **Jack:** Yes.] But it's not— it's not these sorts of like rotten, gross, you know? It's just regular ass emoji, you know?

Jack: And the Muppets are such a beautiful piece of art direction that it is clear that there is really skilled, thoughtful production design going on here, but not in the logo. Um, it's fucked.

Austin: It's a shame. It's the one thing that I would like— I would love for them to just change it and be like, we got a new logo, you know?

Jack: It's the Muppets.

Austin: It's the Muppets. Yeah, they just put these little guys bouncing around.

Jack: I would die for the little— the little guys.

Austin: Make this the duck.

Jack: Oh, it's also worth saying that they're— yeah, make it the duck! The Muppets are small. They are— I don't know if you've noticed this, they're about three feet tall. All the levels that you go into, the architecture is like, slightly bigger than you. And this is presumably to allow for hiding under chairs, tables, couches, etc., but it further characterizes the R.E.P.O. crew as this, like this bizarre rowdy gang of small mascot characters that rock up into a house to strip it for parts.

It's worth saying that they are adding some stuff to the game that I'm really excited about in terms of new maps, new monsters, they're adding a bucket that you can put over the duck to stop it coming for you. [chuckles]

Janine: Woah!

Austin: Oh, good.

Jack: And they're also adding stuff that I am less interested in. They're adding like expressions for the characters. And one of the big things that they're adding with the expressions is eyelids. And that sounds like not a major addition, [**Austin:** Huh.] but so much of the humor of the little trashcan robots is their blank faced, big eyed stares. [**Austin:** Yeah.] They have no expression in their face and they communicate entirely through like, the posture of their head, the way they're moving, whether or not they have a tiny trashcan. Sometimes they roll their eyes purely procedurally, like completely by accident, and I think the idea of making them narrow their eyes or something, is a really weird moment of something that seems like it would add more expression to the

characters, but might end up robbing them of a particular kind of expressivity that is really funny.

Austin: Now, I wasn't on board until you said seeing them narrow their eyes because I am curious— I want to see it. [**Janine:** Yeah.] I got to see it. I got to see it.

Jack: I think I can send you a picture [**Austin:** Send me a picture.] and then we can get a reaction.

Janine: I mean, you know when Animal from The Muppets like lowers his eyebrows?

Austin: Yeah.

Janine: That's funny.

Jack: [sighing] Yeah... But you kind of get that.

Janine: Or Gonzo? Like Gonzo— it's going to be a question of restraint, right?

Austin: That's the thing, yeah.

Janine: Like if they do it all the time, it's going to suck. But like Gonzo has big, huge eyes, and then every now and then those big eyelids do something funny, and it's funny.

Jack: That's true. The other thing that they are interested in adding is lore. [chuckles] [**Austin:** Yeah...] There was a question where they were like, does the game have lore? And they're like, yeah, the game has a lot of lore and we're really excited to tell you about it.

Austin: That's— that's making a video game for this audience in 2025, right? This is— you got to— [**Jack:** Yeah, I know—] you got to SCP Backrooms it. You got to Skibidi Toilet.

Jack: You gotta SCP— you got to Skibidi Toilet it. These guys are funny to me— going into the houses is funny to me because they are just these like— there's like a magic school, there's a weird old mansion, there's the base from The Thing. [**Austin:** Yeah.] These are inherently weird, funny spaces, and they will not be made better to me by someone saying, you actually work for the GlaxoBack Corporation and the Huntsman is actually a guy who has been—

Janine: Yeah...

Austin: As long as that stuff is— you know, when I think about the way that that stuff gets delivered in these games, it's like so tangential to what playing it is like. You know,

Jack: Yes, yes.] Lethal Company has data disks you can find and load in to read the lore docs. I think that's fine. If we were finding every once in a while, some sort of, you know, not even an audio log, but that sort of text log that you could then like, in your side time or you know, it goes back to like the Halo 3, you can find lore dumps in that. Like, that's fine. It's okay. I'm not going to— what I wouldn't like is—

Jack: Yeah. I'm not that player, right?

Austin: What I wouldn't love is if there was like, a big briefing about each location that before we went in, that explained why there was a magic school and what the history of the magic school was. You know, I don't need that.

Jack: Yeah.

Austin: But— and I don't— I guess the other thing is, I like it when writers get paid. And so, I'm happy that there is someone being paid to write lore for the Muppet, you know, horror action comedy game. **Jack** chuckling: Yes.] Even if it's not going to be to my particular taste, you know? I gotta tell you, Jack, I kind of like this angry Muppet expression. [chuckles]

Jack: No! I do not like these angry Muppets.

Austin: I'm sorry. Well, they're not going to always be like that, it's going to be a moment—

Jack: It does look very angry, though.

Austin: The thing is, for me, it's like I'm going to trust them to continue to understand what makes it work, **Jack:** Yeah, that's true.] and like—

Jack: They got here.

Austin: They got here. Yeah, exactly. Maybe you're right, though, it's not like I haven't played games before where I've been like, I really liked it early on, and then as stuff— as they added to it, they kind of diluted what was great. You know, that does happen.

Jack: They're adding a museum. **Austin:** Oh my god.] That's going to be extremely funny because—

Austin: [laughs] There's a lot to steal. There's a lot to repo.

Jack: There's a lot to steal. Well, and there's a lot to break, you know?

Austin: Yeah, that is a hundred percent— the funniest thing in this game is you pick up something that's worth \$20,000, you only need \$17,000 to clear this extraction, you know? And you immediately drop it and take \$6,000 off of the top of it, you know?

Jack: It is simply innately funny. What is your favorite object to find in a R.E.P.O. level?

Austin: Oh, great question. Oooh, I do really like the rhino. I really liked— I like the big dinosaur bones, the like giant—

Jack: Big dinosaur bones are good.

Austin: Dinosaur bones on a— on a stand is really great.

Jack: I think I like the—

Austin: Janine, what about you?

Janine: I like opening like an armoire or something and just finding a little pocket watch or a diamond, [**Austin:** Oh yeah, those are good.] or just something small out of the way, just a quick 2K right in the bucket, you know?

Jack: Froggy purse, which is a frog purse that croaks when you pick it up.

Austin: Sorry, it's the doll I described before. That's the— because the line being blurred between monster and thing I want to trade in for \$9,000, you know?

Jack: Yes.

Austin: The experience I had of lifting that thing, getting mauled by it as its arms went, [terrible doll noises] and then learning to keep it at a distance was just like, I like the reactive things. Ah, the gramophone that can make noise is very fun. Yeah.

Jack: A flamethrower that if you pick it up by its handle, [**Austin:** Oh, is that what it does!] turns on a flamethrower from the thing and just sets you on fire.

Austin: Okay. I've picked that up before, I never picked it up by the handle. That's very funny. Can you use it against the monsters?

Jack: You can, but it's *really*, really hard to use. [**Austin:** Yeah, perfect.] It's great. God, it's so good.

Austin: I like that big painting, like when you grab a giant painting with somebody. That's the other thing is like, we haven't been super explicit about this, but things have weight and you often need a second person to pick it up. And so there's a lot of comedy

of like, alright, now let's quick— we've got to rotate this thing this way. And then you hear the sound of like, the Stay Puffed marshmallow man walking down the hallway like, ah, shit! Okay, everybody hide. Put the painting down— put it down soft, put it down soft, [Jack chuckles] we don't want to break it. Great game. [Jack: So good.] Really, really thrilled with it.

Jack: Great game.

Austin: If you want to play it before they add the eyelids, you should go play it now. You know, now is the moment.

Jack: They'll look back on that like the beautiful day before they added the eyelids. I think the eyelids will be fine.

Austin: Yeah, but I get what you're saying. I mean, again, like—

Janine: If the eyelids suck, there'll be a no eyelids model.

Austin: There will be a no eyelids model.

Janine: And that'll fix it.

Austin: You're right, you're right. You know, I get this, Jack, because I am the person who really misses launch No Man's Sky. I'm that person, so.

Jack: I was just talking to a friend about this the other day. Oh, Side Story update report, they added bones to No Man's Sky.

Austin: Oh yeah, they did. They did do that.

Janine: They did, yeah.

Austin: You could build— you could build one of the dinosaur stands, the dinosaur displays that are in R.E.P.O..

Jack: That you then have to carry away. Yeah, you know, I'm always— because of stuff like— what they've done to No Man's Sky is really cool. I think both Austin and I are talking about primarily from a preference sense rather than from a value sense.

Austin: Yeah.

Jack: But whenever a game hits massive success and their designers, carrying forward that massive success, are like, here's all the stuff that we are adding, I feel like a tingle of fear creep down my spine, you know? But also.

Janine: I mean, because there's a sense of like, because this is a game that is following a sequence of games that have come and gone, when this game was originally conceived of, what was the list that they had on their whiteboard? [**Jack:** Right.] And how much of that was cut for scope reasons, because they didn't know— am I going to make any money? Are we ever going to have time to do this? How much of that was cut, and it ended up being a lucky and good thing that it was cut. But then when they do have the time, the budget, etc., to return to it, they maybe are still of the impression like, well, this is the thing we should include. [**Jack:** Yeah.] [**Austin:** Right.] This is a thing that these kinds of games have, whatever. And there's, you know— you have to trust, [chuckles] you definitely have to trust that like, it's their game, they'll— they have a vision for it. Their vision so far has been represented in a way that has resonated.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Cool. Hopefully that remains true. Hopefully they change their logo though, actually.

Jack: It was never originally intended to be a Lethal Company type thing, it sort of became that?

Janine: Mmm.

Jack: The developers say that it was originally a single player cleaning game, [**Austin** laughs] where you tried to clean a mansion [**Janine:** Huh.] while remaining hidden from the Headman.

Austin: Very funny.

Jack: One of the monsters in the final game.

Janine: That's very funny.

Jack: And it's great!

Janine: Like that goblin maid game— what's that game called?

Austin: I don't remember. I know the one you're talking about.

Jack: Goblin maid game?

Austin: Yeah. You know, the game where you're a goblin maid.

Janine: It's a game where you're a goblin maid and you're cleaning out the dungeon, but the traps are still active and stuff.

Austin: Goblin Cleanup?

Jack: Oh that's really funny.

Austin: Is that what it was called?

Janine: It's a good pitch. Yeah, maybe? I don't know.

Austin: Yeah yeah, I think this is it. I think this was it. So there's one where you're cleaning with the slime—?

Janine: There's actually multiple games where you're a goblin who's cleaning things or repairing things. I can think of three off the top of my head right now.

Austin: Damn, there's a dragon in this now. So yeah, this is not out yet.

Jack: It's one of the seven basic plots.

Austin: That's right, that's right. You're a goblin cleaning up, and the dragon is here now.

Janine: Yeah.

Jack: Yes. And also Man Against God. Goblin— what's it called? It's just called Goblin Cleanup?

Austin: Goblin Cleanup. Cleanup.

Jack: Oh, this is great. And of course, this is, you know, there's a lineage here with Power Wash Simulator, but way before that, there's Viscera Cleanup Detail, [**Janine** and **Austin:** Yeah.] like way back when. This is like a kind of expression in games that has been like percolating for a decade.

Janine: I would say even longer than that, because like, if I look back at when I first played Harvest Moon, Super Nintendo—like the very first Harvest Moon—the best part of that game and all subsequent games to me was cleaning the field when you first get the farm.

Jack: Oh, it's so good to tidy up in a game.

Janine: And like, chopping the wood, hammering all the stones, getting a nice clean field. And then, you know, when, when the summer storms come or whatever, like repairing your fences and picking up the— the crap that the— that the windstorm

leaves. Like, so I feel like, I feel like there's been a thread of it around for a while, but it did take a while for people to just be like, this could be a thing on its own.

Jack: Yeah.

Janine: Why not?

Austin: I'm sorry. I've just been notified by Steam that there is actually another R.E.P.O. change that has arrived or is arriving.

Jack: Oh, yes, I think I've—

Janine: Is it explosions?

Austin: Yeah, it's explosions. Do you see what this is? Do you see like—

Jack: No. What is happening?

Janine: I tried— I didn't understand what I was looking at.

Austin: I want you to guess what— Jack, since you haven't seen it, Jack, guess what—the title of this video is, “Introducing an explosive new mechanic”— let me see how much I can read without it— this week we're showing off a new mechanic and some progress on matchmaking. The image is everyone blowing up around the Huntsman. What do you think the explosive new mechanic is? I'll even say it is— they've added explosions. They've added explosions in a particular way.

Jack: Is it farting?

Austin: No. I see where you— see this, this would be the bad version of this, I think. You know, I think that if the first thing they added was farting—

Jack: If the *first* thing they added.

Austin: Maybe that's someone else's fault.

Jack: Now that's, 30th or 40th— is it, is it the players willingly exploding?

Austin: Not willingly, but that's not a bad guess.

Jack: Is it that— like a weird, like, you can have a timer put on you. **[Austin:** In a sense!] If you don't do something, you'll explode.

Austin: It's actually the other way, it's if you *keep* doing something. So, when you are lifting an enemy—let's say you get enough strength upgrades that you can lift one of the

enemies up—it creates a new, like a new meter in the top left next to your health and your— next to your health and your stamina— there's stamina in this game, it's a roguelike— or it's a Souls-like now. [Jack chuckles] I have timestamped this for you. If you're holding, say, the Huntsman up in the air and bashing him against the walls, which you can do with a high enough strength upgrade, or even just holding something in place so that your friend with low health can get away, it will start ticking up this meter. And if it hits 100, you blow up and die.

Jack: Oh that's really interesting.

Austin: And if more of you are holding it, it speeds up— or it goes up slower. So you know, if multiple people are trying to hold back the creature so that the weak person can get away, that is acceptable, you know— it's always acceptable. It's about gaming this. I don't think this is for items or anything like that. It's just for monsters.

Janine: It's like overheat.

Austin: Yeah. I mean, that is exactly what it is. It's like overheating. Yeah, uh huh. Yeah. Great.

Jack: Yeah. This charge only affects enemies. There's some footage of the— of the museum, which they're gray boxing towards the end of this video as well. You could just see weird statues of the robots— oh my god, there's a load of bowling pins, like balanced on top of each other to make a pyramid with a bowling ball on the top.

Austin: Hell yeah.

Jack: Excellent.

Austin: We didn't even get to do the thing in our run because our run was so successful of what happens when you lose. Jack, did you get to do this in a different game?

Jack: Oh yeah! Yeah. I've done it a few times through failure.

Janine: [chuckles]

Austin: We don't lose, so we're just never going to see it in our group game.

Jack: Yeah yeah yeah. You play an extremely small, extremely stupid, last man standing, King of the Hill game with a combination of weapons and also just stuff where the last remaining sort of surviving player gets to claim a crown that they wear in the next level.

Austin: It's good.

Jack: This mechanic is exactly as like— this joke would not be funny at all if it was three minutes long. It is— it is 90 seconds long and it is just an immediate free-for-all.

Austin: We've been talking for longer than most of those rounds go, you know?

Jack: Yeah. You fall and you pick up like a massive hammer and you just hit your friend with it completely off the platform that they're on, or then you stumble backwards and fall into the thing. It's great. It's just such a fun little coda.

Janine: I think the way to think of it is it's like you are suddenly dropped into a Mario Party minigame.

Austin: Totally. That is the vibe. Shout-outs to R.E.P.O. I think that that's—

Jack: Shout-outs to R.E.P.O..

Austin: That's probably the last thing we'll talk about today. We've already gone at this point for a reasonable time, and I know— I know I'm well-known for five-star runtimes, but I'm trying not to make this default to a three-hour monster podcast every week, so that when that does happen, it's special.

Is there anyone we want to shout out that we didn't— I guess, important one before we wrap up, we did not talk about our cover art at all.

Jack: Oh my god.

Janine: Mmm.

Austin: Jack, you really took the lead on that. Do you want to talk a little bit about our incredible cover art [**Jack:** Yeah.] and kind of what makes it so special visually?

Jack: Our cover art is by A Liang Chan, or formyths— that's F-O-R-M-Y-T-H-S. This is a piece of cover art that is so beautiful. I am in love with this art. It is riso-printed, which is a style of printing that produces these really great tactile images. Something I knew that I wanted in getting art for this podcast was something that felt really warm and felt really tactile. And I'm so excited that we were able to work with A Liang Chan on getting this art that has such a cool feel to it. I love it so much.

Austin: I will say a really fun thing in it is, without giving it away, one of the things on the— on the cover art was an alternate name for this podcast. It was a name I really wanted.

Janine: Multiple things.

Austin: I guess so— yes, sorry. At least one of them was one we explicitly did not ask for. And A just kind of put it in there, and I— and that felt good. That felt like a little bit of kismet, you know? A yes sign.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: So yeah, shout outs to A Chan, shout outs to formyths. Really incredible, really beautiful. I think we'll probably end up having some cool digital assets around it for our— for like if we ever do special streams. Maybe I'll use some of those in our Outward Let's Play.

Jack: Oh yeah!

Janine: Mmm.

Austin: You know, put some frames up.

Jack: Available now.

Austin: Available now, patreon.com/friendsatthetable, friendsatthetable.cash. You can watch our R.E.P.O. stream again, twitch.tv/friendsatthetable. We're on YouTube— youtube.com/friendsatthetable. I don't think the R.E.P.O. stream is up quite yet because Keith got a—

Janine: No, it's going to take a while.

Austin: Yeah, Keith got a huge amount of different perspectives and is doing his best to actually put them all together, which is going to be incredible. It's going to be the best way to watch that. Maybe a good way to watch it the second time, you know?

Janine: I believe all of us were recording, [**Austin:** I think so.] even though only one or two of us were streaming.

Austin: Yeah, I think that that's right.

Janine: Yeah.

Austin: So, yeah.

Janine: That'll be a good one.

Austin: We have a lot going on right now. We are very close to Perpetua starting in proper mode very soon. We are deeper into our Dreamcast stream series. Jack, [**Jack:** Yeah!] you have now played two of the seven Dreamcast games that have been

prepared for you on a beautiful slideshow, introducing you to the world of the Dreamcast. Of— you've now done two. You've done, what was the first one? Evolution, the RPG.

Jack: Evolution.

Austin: Now, you've been— I was going to say indoctrinated, maybe that's too strong. But inducted is better.

Jack: Inducted—

Janine: Introduced—

Austin: Yeah. Introduced is too light though. I think it is more than just an introduction into the world of Shenmue.

Jack: Shenmue is astonishing. I think I— everyone who has played it either says, this thing is garbage, or I love it deeply so much.

Austin: Yes.

Jack: I got to experience it for the first time. I love it deeply so much. It feels not just like a game that was made for me, but also like a weird jewel— I don't know how or frankly, why it got made, but it's excellent. [chuckles] There's some stuff in Shenmue that is— it is gorgeous today. Like, you know, the way that game looks and the way that it moves, and its also, its bizarre sort of like singular spirit. Really, really special. I had a great time playing with Keith. We're definitely going to go back to it.

I accidentally left my Dreamcast running while I went to do something else midway through a cut scene to— I was like, I was in a cut scene and the cut scene reached a point where I could talk to this guy and offer a response. And I was like, okay, I'm going to go and make lunch and then come back because I'll still be in the middle of the cut scene, save the game. Instead, of course, 11 p.m. happened, and I was immediately teleported back to my house. So I don't know what the status of that cut scene is anymore, whether I can go back and learn a move from that weird old man.

Austin: I bet you can. That's very funny.

Janine: Well, good news. We know some people who've— [chuckles]

Austin: Yeah, yes. We know a lot of people. You can go—

Jack: [chuckles] We do.

Janine: Done some things with this game.

Austin: Run Button has an entire Let's Play of it. I think the first few episodes are very easy to find, at the very least. And there is a Patreon for Run Button, you can go support our good friends Keith and Kyle, and go watch them play through the whole thing, if that's what you want to do. Or like Jack, you could go down this route and become inducted into the Shenmue fandom. It is a valuable journey, I think you learn a lot about yourself and video games by doing it. Jack, have you decided what the third of the Dreamcast games is you're going to play yet?

Jack: No, we haven't decided yet. I'm really excited.

Austin: Stay tuned. [twitch.tv/friendsatthetable](https://www.twitch.tv/friendsatthetable). And I guess that's going to do for us this first week. Thank you so much for giving us a shot. If you enjoyed this, feel free to let us know. We are over on Blue Sky @friends-table. I think that's our primary social space at this point.

I would love to hear your feedback, we'd love to hear what you think. Obviously, the best thing you could do for us right now is to share this, to let other people know about it. We— you know, don't have any advertisements for the show outside of us shouting about it on our own shows and our friends' shows and stuff like that. So, please let people know. We have already decided a little bit of what we're going to talk about next time, which is exciting. So, look forward to us coming back in two weeks. We're going to do an every other week structure right now. You know, obviously, we can revisit that if this is some sort of giant smash success and everyone is like, no, you have to do it every week for a million dollars! Like, okay, maybe we'll do it then. But let's—

Janine: I'll do lots of stuff for a million dollars.

Austin: See, this is the thing. So, we'll see. If you all could get a million dollars together every week, [**Janine** laughs] I promise you we will do this show weekly. And maybe even for less than that. But, you know, we got to like start somewhere. Start with a strong first offer. You know what I mean?

Janine: A million dollars a week, I'll do face cam.

Austin: Wow, okay.

Janine: I'll do video.

Austin: Okay, look at that.

Janine: That's the only way, though.

Austin: See, this is, yeah. We're taking a Jerma stance to face cam. [**Janine** laughs] It's a little reward, you know? You got to earn it, you know? Alright, that's going to do it for us. Thank you so much for hanging out with us. Any final thoughts from either of you?

Jack: No, I'm having a great time. I'm really excited to do more of this.

Austin: I'm having a great time.

Janine: It's going to haunt me until we have a good sign out.

Austin: These are our two good— these are two test sign outs right now. I'm having a good time, and I'm haunted right now. Stay haunted.

Janine: Is it too corny if we're like, to be continued? [**Austin:** Ohhh.] Because it's stories.

Austin: Because it's stories.

Janine: It feels corny.

Austin: It's pretty corny. But maybe we should bring corny back a little bit, you know?

Janine: Mmm. Is it time?

Austin: We're trying to be a little less irony poisoned, you know?

Janine: Yeah, that's true.

Austin: The thing is the world is bad and so it's hard to be genuine and sincere because if you open that door, it's like just, burning in there and you just have to let that out.

Janine: The corn subsidies are getting scrapped. We got to pick up the slack.

Austin: I see. I see what you're saying. It's a fake until you make it type thing. Alright, we'll just try it. I'll say it here.

To be continued. [inflected upwards]

Is that to be continued, or is it to be continued?

Janine: I don't know. You have to say it the way that you like it.

Austin: The way I like it. Yeah.

Janine: Because if I dictate how you say it, you're going to try and follow that, and it's going to defy whatever feels natural to you, you know?

Austin: Yeah, it is. You're right. I do the voice up thing. I do to be con— to be con— hm, what do I do? What do I do with this?

Jack: I'm feeling a little haunted right now.

Austin: To be continued.

Janine: I could also imagine you going like, to be, continued.

Jack: To be.

Austin: To be, continued.

Janine: No, that's too long. I take it back. It was not— it was bad.

[["Side Story"](#) by Jack de Quidt begins playing]

Austin: To be continued.

[song ends]