

Interview with Kavita – Transcript

January 18, 2021

Finch: And looks like we are good. Amazing.

Kavita: K cool!

Finch: Yeah, so, hi future Finch. Today is Monday, January 18th, 2021. It is about 3pm Eastern Time, a little after 3pm Eastern time, and I am here with Kavi. Um, hi Kavi!

Kavita: Hi!

Finch: Is that Kavi, Kavita, how—?

Kavita: Yeah, it's um, I think I've introduced myself on podcasts before, but yeah, I go by Kavi.

Finch: Kavi. Okay. Cool. Well, actually, that was my next question, which is, say a little about yourself! Who are you?

Kavita: **[00:40]** Hi, I'm Kavita, I go by Kavi. Uh, what's, what am I gonna say—oh yeah, I am a, a game designer. I'm an RPG designer and that's really my main thing. I do some writing sometimes. I'm not... um, I, I emerged, I guess, out of what I would call the *Friends at the Table* wave of indie RPG design. Which is to say that I listened to this podcast and was like, "Damn, that was cool." And then I listened to another part of this podcast and was like, "Damn, that could have been cooler," and then I tried to make it cooler.

Um, I have been designing one game called *Songs for the Dusk* for just about two years now. I think I started it in June or July 2018 and it's, ah... two and a half years, I guess, because it's now January of 2021. Um, and I, I started designing it on my own. I started working with Quinn Vega in, ah... around fall of 2018, I want to say? Um. And ever since we've been making this game together.

Finch: **[02:03]** Amazing. Um, I wanted to see if I could very quickly—I was like, Quinn... it's "Mx underscore Quinn," right?

Kavita: Yeah, Mx_Quinn on Twitter.

Finch: She/her, okay, that's what I was checking. The classic "pronoun??" She... Yeah. Amazing. So I have a bunch of questions, mostly about *Friends at the Table*, about like transness, queerness, about game design, and stuff.

Kavita: Mm hmm.

Finch: **[02:35]** So I think the first question which you kind of alluded to is, how did you get to actual play podcasts and to *Friends at the Table*?

Kavita: Um, I think, back when I was on Tumblr, I got into *The Adventure Zone* on the recommendation of someone I was following. Um, I listened to that for a while and I thought it was cool, because my standards with low. And then I, after that I stumbled off to some Carey Pietsch fan art that she'd done of, I believe it was "Counterweight" fan art? Might have been "Hieron" fan art. And I

was sort of craving more in the genre and was like, well, this looks neat, um, you know, this, this looks like it's by some interesting people. And I went in and, uh, I think I actually tried to get into it... the first couple of times I was sort of resistant, because it was described as a tragedy, and I was like, "I don't know if I'm really into that," but eventually I just sort of was like, "fuck it, you know what, I'm not doing anything else, um, may as well." I dove into it, I think it was probably the summer of 2017, I think? Um, I'm gonna pull up the website just check. I dove in at the end of season... I dove in at around the end of season two. The beginning of the interlude—the "Marielda" interlude.

[04:02] Um, I like started listening to "Counterweight" episode one as, as they were publishing the finale. And I sort of didn't even realize that was what was happening. This is the thing I put together like six months later, I like—because by the time I caught up the finale was already out, right, because it was like 40 episodes, and they were like, releasing the—they were releasing the first episode of the three episode finale. Um, and then I caught up on all the episodes that had been released. And then, so I started listening to "Marielda" as they were releasing "Marielda." I was listening to these things in the back of like a sandwich shop that I was working at? Um... um, so that was like, you know, I was basically slicing meats back there. Um... oh god, it might have been 2016 then. (*Finch laughs.*)

Finch: Marielda was like—

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah no, 2016 tracks. Um, so that's when I first started listening in the back of this like tiny sandwich shop where I would just spend like, you know, hours a day slicing meats. And because I could just listen to podcasts while I was doing that, I would throw on my headphones and I would listen to *Friends at the Table*.

[05:17] That was when I started getting into the show. I didn't really get into fandom until about six maybe eight months later. Um... it was spring of 2017, 20— you know, late winter, early spring of around then when I really started tweeting, or not even—well one, tweeting about it and then two, talking to other people about it. Like, that's when I followed Linda, who is probably like the... in the kindest way possible, *the* big name fan of *Friends at the Table*.

Finch: L I N D A, who sent in 27 questions to the postmortem.

Kavita: The collective of LINDA!

Finch: Yeah, the collective of L I N D A.

Kavita: I think I was almost part of that, but I couldn't come up with a question. But like I was there when that doc was put together.

Finch: (*quietly*) Iconic.

Kavita: **[06:13]** Yeah! And, and so that's when I started making friends with Linda and, and Danny who were like, sort of—big names is maybe not quite the right word, but, you know, were a big part of helping to define *Friends at the Table* fandom and especially like Hieron fandom, which is one of the biggest ones, which is one of the biggest draws for people into *Friends at the Table* is their Seasons of Hieron, like, setting. Um, so I got to be friends with those people, I got to be friends with a bunch of other people. I'm like, trying to think about people who I've gotten to know, um.

(Pause.) Yeah, I guess I would just probably cite those two as sort of the biggest name like fans, and then I got to know their circle, and that's how I sort of gotten to fandom. And that's how I, that's how I like became, developed that new social group.

Finch: **[07:20]** Yeah. Had you been in other fandoms before? Was that a—you said you were on Tumblr—

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah, for sure. I like started in Pokémon for—I did Pokémon fandom for a while, and then like, Digimon. No, I did Digimon first and then Pokémon, um, then I dropped out for a while because I sort of didn't really know how to be online, didn't have any social media, except like Facebook. Then I got into *Homestuck* in high school, um...

Finch: Oh! We talked about that, duh.

Kavita: **[07:47]** Yeah, (*Kavi laughs*) yeah, I got into *Homestuck* in high school and then I sort of got out—I think *Homestuck* had ended in 2016, probably a few months before I like really got into even *The Adventure Zone*, I think. *Homestuck* ended in like April of 2018 **[correction: 2016]** because everything important in *Homestuck* happens in April.

Finch: Ahh...

Kavita: **[08:09]** Um, cause that's when it started. So now they do everything on the anniversary of its starting. Um, and so I did that, that ended in April of 2016 and then so for a few months I was just sort of like floundering without something big to occupy my interest and to form friendships around, so that was the thing that I, that I, then I got into *The Adventure Zone* after that, and then after *The Adventure Zone* I got into *Friends at the Table*. I don't think I'd even finished *The Adventure Zone* at that point, I think it was just like between—because *Adventure Zone* is biweekly, and *Friends at the Table* is weekly. So it was like, “oh, this is more content to keep up with.”

Finch: **[08:55]** Yeah, yeah yeah yeah. (*Finch laughs*) “five star podcast, five star runtime!”

Kavita: (*Kavi laughs*) Yeah. God, there's so much, they have so much to listen to. It's impressive that people can get still get into it.

Finch: Oh, I know. (*Kavi and Finch laugh*) I see people that are like, “I'm about to start Hieron!” I'm like, “I wish you luck.”

Kavita: Yeah.

Finch: Hm...

Kavita: **[09:20]** I think Spring [in Hieron] is actually not that bad in terms of episode length, but Winter [in Hieron] is so long.

Finch: Yeah, I listened to all of Winter in like a month, and it was basically the only thing I did in my free time.

Kavita: Yeah, right?

Finch: I missed a lot. You were, you were talking about how you almost been kind of turned away because it was described as a tragedy, which is hilarious because then you were first on board for Marielda, (*Finch laughs*) which is... whew! But I missed a lot of how sad Winter was because I was just doing other stuff, (*Kavi laughs*) and I didn't really get the emotional tone of it cause it's very subtle. Um...

Kavi: Yeah...

Finch: And so I'm just like, at the gym (*Kavi laughs*) and listening to Winter. (*Finch laughs*) Like, literally! I was at the gym, listening to Winter. Um. Anyway, um... you've gotten to this a little bit, but how would you describe the *Friends at the Table* fan community?

Kavita: **[10:20]** I... there are lot of things I could say, but I guess I'll start with the easiest superlative, which—I think it is easily probably the most mature fandom I've ever been in? Some of that, I think, is—and that's down to a mix of factors, like *Friends at the Table* is of course in a show for adults, or at least it is a show for people around adulthood, even if you get like some 17 year olds, and, and like... I've heard of 16 year olds being into it. (*Kavi takes a drink of water.*) But it's—some of that is just a show for adults, some of that is that the nature of the work I think often just attracts people who are... into the ideas that work presents. So, because *Friends at the Table* is a mature show, not in the sense that it deals with like, you know, gore or blood or sex or whatever, although it does happen to do those things, but in the sense that it is like thoughtful and willing to be slow and willing to make sure it, like, takes into account, um... like, perspectives that may not necessarily like have been...

Friends at the Table is a show I think that cares about its audience, and that cares that it doesn't like, isn't meaninglessly or needlessly cruel to people who might be in the audience. And that, I think, ethos resonates with the kind of people who are very concerned about how to treat each other well, and so I think that lends a degree of maturity to the *Friends at the Table* fandom that I haven't seen elsewhere, thus yet, just yet.

[12:06] Um, I remember thinking... it's also just one of those things where because the source material is very queer, it ends up pushing aside, a lot of the sort of fandom discourses that you can see in another shows. I remember getting into—I've been watching *Dimension 20* which is a, which is basically a dimens— a, a *Dungeons and Dragons* actual play show. Um, it's, I think it's by Brennan Lee Mulligan, and a bunch of other comedians who used to work for College Humor and now I work for a thing called Dropout, which is basically just like College Humor 2. Anyway, it's like a comedy improv thing. So it's a little bit more focused on humor, then, you know, *Friends at the Table* is. But like I remember trawling, you know, the sort of search for that show, and just like checking out tags and seeing what the conversation was on Twitter for it. And it was so, like, there were a lot of people like... I don't want to call it, like, reaching for headcanons? Or queer interpretations of certain characters? But it was stuff that just didn't have nearly as much like background as, you know characters in *Friends at the Table*, you know. It was stuff like “this character who basically doesn't have a romance is, is gay” or “this character who is like—we've decided that this straight married character—” and like, “well, they're all noble so all their marriages are political and they're not actually straight” and it was like, I forgot that people needed to do this!

Finch: Yeah...

Kavita: **[13:41]** And, and, and more than that, it was like, “oh, you have nothing—” like the reason I don't do that for *Dimension 20* is because I don't take it that seriously because I have *Friends at the Table*. Um, and it was such a like stark reminder that other people, that other fandoms don't have that. They have to sort of, like, grasp at straws. It's so hard to say this in a way that isn't condescending, um, but it's like they are working with—I guess, I guess that's the—I think this is just a paraphrase of Austin Walker, but they're working with scraps in so many other fandoms and I think the fact that we are not means that, like, in *Friends at the Table* fandom... also takes away from some of the desperation that I think leads to a lot of interfandom conflict. You know, it means... it is a lot less worrying, and it means you have to fight a lot less about like, which characters are which kind of queer when every character is some kind of queer.

Finch: Yeah.

Kavita: **[14:45]** And that is really, really valuable for, I think, maintaining like a degree of goodwill and generosity in terms of like... or at least goodwill and, and taking other people in good faith. Um, and then also just the politics of the show, I think, are aligned with a lot of the politics of the audience at least roughly. You know, I think a lot of people struggle with shows—a lot of fandoms struggle with shows that often, because they're made by big budget studios, have more conservative politics than the people in them would like! You know it's, it's stuff like people, uh... you know, you can't have a cartoon, you know, for children, that is also going to be like, “go read Marx, kids!” You can't have you can't have something that comments on a lot of the things that we find frustrating the world, right? Like, um, you know, *She-Ra* can't talk about the US military and how that's bad, or how that's predatory, or even like, I mean even looking at something that's like a show for adults—I'm trying to think about TV—but like... ah... what's an adult TV show I've watched recently...

Finch: **[16:02]** I, like, *Friends at the Table*, and that's it. So I have no—

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah. *Friends at the Table* is like, my adult TV—

Finch: (overlapping) *Bojack Horseman*?

Kavita: **[16:07]** *Bojack Horseman* is also probably not going to talk about the, you know, *Bojack Horseman* isn't going to criticize a lot of the American institutions that a lot of LGBT people, a lot of queer people, a lot of people of color like find really, really flawed, because people make money off those institutions and the producers of *Bojack Horse*—like, even if the writers of *Bojack Horseman*, or something like to *Tuca & Bertie* or—I'm trying to think of like sci-fi stuff, I don't know, *The Mandalorian*—want, even if the writing team wanted to offer that kind of criticism, you know, Disney or Netflix or whoever is producing these shows will not let them. You know, there is a straight up right of refusal on shows like these. Which is a thing Noelle Stevenson has talked about, that like there was a there was a right of refusal on the gay kiss at the end of *She-Ra* and it's like, if that's the level of approval you need, obviously you can't get anything really radical past the... past those producers.

[17:09] Um, *Friends at the Table* doesn't have that problem, as a lot of indie me—indie media doesn't, um, but, you know, *Friends at the Table* is also just a particularly well-produced example

of indie media, so it—it provides a lot of I think what people are craving, in the sense that it is the sort of grand, epic sci-fi that you hope for when you go to watch something like *The Expanse*, or *The Mandalorian*, or, um, whatever other *Star Wars* show or sci-fi shows are on, onscreen or, or, like, you know, I guess *She-Ra*, the point of comparison for Hieron would be something like *Game of Thrones*. But the politics, at least roughly speaking, align with your politics.

[17:53] *Friends at the Table* is not by any means a perfect show, there are things on it, there are theses on it that I would disagree with, the things I think were handled badly, and I'm sure that if you asked anybody in the fandom, they would probably agree with you that there are some things. But, it is, you know, it is a show that is trying in good faith to see the same world that I want to see, or at least something maybe mostly similar and that's valuable because I think a lot of people have not seen that before or since. In something that is also just so well-made, and so well-produced.

Finch: **[18:30]** Yeah. You're making me think about what you were saying about fandom scraps earlier where, when you're not having to fight with the show on like basic human rights, or even why a human rights discourse is not helpful—like when you're starting off in a level of agreement about, like, “maybe capitalism bad—”

Kavita: Yeah!

Finch: (overlapping) Then it's a lot easier to have conversations that build productively from there, and like, go further, rather than just—

Kavita: **[18:52]** And not just with each—not just with the show, but with each other, too. Um, like so much of, a lot of what happens in fandom discourse is like thing—arguing about whether character is bi or a lesbian, or arguing whether a character is ace or not, and whether that conflicts with a certain, you know, whether that takes away from their other queer identities, or like trans interpretations of characters, and it's like. In *Friends at the Table*, you know, Millie is just trans and Tender's just a lesbian and fucking Aria's bi and like, it's that simple? Um, and you know it, it ends up making things that much easier, to like not have to—like nobody has to fight about that, and because nobody has to fight about that people don't feel the need to protect things that don't exist—like, or not that don't exist, but that aren't sure in the way that they are like...

[19:48] There is a security to the queerness of *Friends at the Table* characters that does not exist in fandoms where the characters aren't canonically queer. And so because of that security, you don't have to... you don't have to spend energy defending it, and you also don't have to have your hackles up, because you know it's patently ridiculous to insist that Aria isn't queer. (*Finch laughs.*) Or that Tender isn't queer. (*Kavi and Finch laugh.*)

Finch: Any Ali character does not immediately see a woman on screen and go, “oh??” (*Finch laughs*) I love when Austin just is like, “So, there's this sexy lady here, character,” and you just hear Ali—

Kavita: (overlapping) —and you hear the little Ali gasp, it's good.

Finch: (*Finch gasps*) I'm like, “Ali, I love you.” (*Kavita laughs.*) Not, not to be, of course, one-upped by “let's roll to see if Red Jack kisses you, Throndir.” (*Finch laughs*)

Kavita: God. Yeah.

Finch: Iconic.

Kavita: **[20:40]** Or and like, I mean, even in, in later seasons, it's gotten even more so. Like when Sylvi came out and sort of retroactively made Ephrim and Aubrey trans, and then also Millie. Or like Broun and Valence, which I think is one of the first sort of like really central non-binary for non-binary romances we've got in the show? Which... are you caught up on Partizan?

Finch: Yeah, yeah, I just, I just finished the last episode.

Kavita: (overlapping) Well, I don't know—don't read too much into the fact that Valence dies, but, ah. It's you know it's, it's, it's a thing you don't see. I mean, even that kind of attention paid to these kinds of characters is just not something I have seen in anything else that isn't, like, a comic. Or a novel. And those are both valuable, but also sometimes you want music with your, with your, with your media.

Finch: **[21:35]** Yeah, and even what you were saying about Valence dying is like, in another fandom where that was like the only queer character, like the only non-binary character, I could see how that would have devolved into a giant fandom debate over, like, fridging queer characters, or like, “you're just trying to kill off—”

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah, and honestly, like not—

Finch: (overlapping) “—all the gay characters.” It's like, you know, that's surely an argument to be had. But then you can point to eighteen other non-binary—okay.

Kavita: Yeah, Broun, Cas'alear.

Finch: God, Cas'alear.

Kavita: Zo'la. Yeah, Cas'alear. I mean, most Apostolosians. The Red Roc.

Finch: **[22:11]** I did... all you, all Austin had to say was, “he's facecast as Dev Patel,” and everyone—

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah, and a lot of—yeah I think a lot of people were like, “Damn, that is hot.”

Finch: (overlapping) Everyone was just like, hm.

Kavita: (overlapping) I have a tweet up that's like, I can't find Dev Patel hot, mostly because I feel too represented?” (*Finch laughs.*) I'm too busy being like, “Damn, I'm proud of you dude. Hell yeah.”

Finch: Exactly. Go you! Go Dev Patel!

Kavita: **[22:34]** Um, but yeah, the Red—like you have—oh, uh, Phrygian! That was the other one I was thinking of, Phrygian. Um, they're like so many characters who—oh, Gur Sevraq, I can't forget Gur Sevraq. There's so many characters that it's like, yeah. So, like, on the one hand, it's a show about war and that means that some people are going to die, but like, it doesn't feel like we're losing... when you lose Valence, if you lost Valence in a show that was on TV, you would lose the only non-binary character. When you lose Valence on *Friends at the Table*, you don't lose that, you just lose Valence.

[23:13] And that is so good at like, helping fandoms feel... it, it really does sort of mean that like, non-binary people don't have to fight for the kinds of characters that make them like feel, feel like they have a presence in the world. And that kind of fight is the cause of a lot of discourse in fandoms where like queerness is not so widely represented. Um, it's a lot of very, very young people, teenagers especially, like, trying to stake out their identity in the media they consume and fighting with each other because, you know, it is hard not to read someone who wants the same scrap that you have as a threat.

[24:02] And some of that, you know, some of *Friends at the Table*, like... some of that is down to the fact that these people are younger than *Friends at the Table* fandom, like, you know, 14- or 15-year-olds. But even in something like you know *Dimension 20*, like I was talking about, the fandom skews, um, a *little* younger than *Friends at the Table*, and that is a lot of like, ah, 17, 18, early 20s, where I would say, I'm actually—in *Friends at the Table* fandom, at 23, I would say, I'm on the younger side of things. Whereas, because this fandom is like, probably centered around 25, 26 is the median age, um. But even then it's like, oh, you know, I don't have to fight about, you know, the king being gay because God is gay. (*Finch laughs.*)

Finch: Exactly.

Kavita: Also, are there even any kings in Hieron? I can't think of any. Besides Samothos.

Finch: Yeah, and Samot, kind of.

Kavita: Yeah.

Finch: Hmm...

Kavita: **[25:05]** Yeah, I think that's it. Because Ordenna has like a three-tiered leadership system that doesn't have royalty, and then everything else is city-states. Huh. That's cool!

Finch: Sorry, I'm just tearing up thinking, thinking about SamSam, I—god. (*Kavi laughs.*) Completely insufferable. (*Finch and Kavi laugh.*) Um. But what you were saying about the politics of the show—have you listened to the latest Partizan episode?

Kavita: Um, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Finch: **[25:33]** Yeah, but (*Finch laughs*) the, the whole point where Austin was like, “so I saw a tweet the other day that was talking about how Gur Sevraq is a Marxist.” (*Kavi laughs.*) I was like, “oh my god?”

Kavita: (overlapping) Ah, that was funny.

Finch: **[25:43]** (overlapping) I was walking back from my COVID test and just died. I was like, “I'm citing this as an example of like, creator-fandom interaction in a very specific *Friends at the Table* way, where on the podcast Austin's like, “so, just five minutes while I hash out the specific political beliefs of this character.”

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah, Gur Sevraq is not Marxist because Gur Sevraq believes, Gur Sevraq was too busy believing in the power of the internet.

Finch: Yeah! (*Finch laughs.*) So funny.

Finch: [26:11] So I have a lot of other questions about *Friends at the Table*. But one thing I do—you said you listened to TAZ for a bit? I, that's where I started was *The Adventure Zone*.

Kavita: Yeah.

Finch: I think most people I know in the *Friends at the Table* fandom look back... let's say critically, at TAZ, or sort of look down on *The Adventure Zone* fandom. But I'm curious, just like, what was your experience there? How do you see it now?

Kavita: [26:38] It was... the honest answer is that it was fine. Um, and then I sort of fell off right after they finished their first story arc, because then they started doing representation, and I didn't feel like listening to four white guys do capital-R Representation. Um. Like, *The Adventure Zone* was the thing it was, which is, it was a group of, you know, four white dudes playing a fun D&D campaign, who are improv comedians. Um, and that was cool, because like, that was like... and they were doing it in D&D, which is a system that is not very good for telling stories. So like, I didn't have a bad time when I was listening to TAZ because it was like, "this will come out every two weeks, it'll have D&D in it, I'll listen to it, and then I'll be done."

[27:28] I wasn't really in fandom for *The Adventure Zone* except in a sort of passive sense. You know, I would like keep up with... I don't think I sought out fandom for *The Adventure Zone*, it was just the people who I was already following on Tumblr at the time, because I still had Tumblr... Like, you know, a significant chunk of them were into *The Adventure Zone*, so an episode would come out and be like, "ah, that was a cool episode," and some people would make jokes, some people would reblog fanart, and sometimes I would go search for fanart of a specific character or something.

[28:00] But I wasn't like, you know, paying attention to fanfic or like watching fandom trends or anything like that. Like, that wasn't participating and fan events, um. Whereas with, with *Friends at the Table*, I like actually went out and sought out *Friends at the Table* fandom because it was that much more compelling to me. Like I said, I listened to *The Adventure Zone* and *Friends at the Table* at the same time for a long while. I ended up, like, listening to all of the first *Friends*—*The Adventure Zone* arc, basically. All of the Balance storyline. And I got to the end of that and I was like, "that was a little corny, but it was neat."

[28:45] And then I sort of like, listened to one of their mini-arcs, fell off in the middle of one of their other mini-arcs, because it was just like, I think I hit the halfway point. And I was like, "Okay, this is cool, I'll listen to it more later." And then a lot of my, um... I remember seeing a few tweets from like various different friends of color that was like, "Oh boy, the way they talk about race in this episode is not good." And I was like, "cool, I trust you. I don't want to, like, I'm good. It's not that interesting," and I fell off there. And I just never got back on, and I don't feel like I'm missing anything.

[29:25] You know, even I, I've talked about what *Dimension 20*'s fandom is like, is dealing with some things that I just like are alien to me. But even that show is like has better politics, then *The Adventures Zone* did, where *The Adventure Zone* was kind of like, uh, you know, they're vaguely liberal and like you know will be nice to trans people and say the right pronouns and all that, but it's like... um... not the—it lacks the sort of like... What's that tweet, that's like, "oh, I'm, I'm

socially liberal but fiscally conservative. I like—the problems are bad, but their causes are very good.” (*Finch laughs.*)

Finch: Not seen that one.

Kavita: **[30:09]** Um... (*Kavi types*) Problems... are... bad... but... their... causes... are... good. And it's sort of, like it wasn't quite that bad in *The Adventure Zone*. Um... uh... but, uh... sorry, I zoned out trying to look for this tweet. I was talking—it's like, *The Adventure Zone* isn't quite that bad, but it is sort of just unwilling to comment on that? In a way that I think is fun for some people, but can often feel hollow when you understand the way, you know, the problems are connected to their causes.

Finch: Mm hmm.

Kavita: **[30:57]** And so I was like, alright, cool, you know, now that I want something more substantive, it's cool that *Friends at the Table* is here and we like to talk about that stuff. Uh... yeah! It was, it was like, basically, the short answer is, like, it was all right, because I never was that deep into it. Um, but, uh, you know, I don't, I'm not going to go back.

Finch: **[31:24]** Yeah. That's, that would align pretty well with my—I sort of saw it from the outside and was like, “cool. Nice. You guys have fun over there.”

Kavita: Uh huh.

Finch: And then would just see—every now and then tweets would come into my feed of people just like dunking on whatever the fans were up to.

Kavita: (overlapping) I hear it gets, I hear it's gotten really bad lately.

Finch: **[31:47]** (*sarcastic*) Yeah, uh huh? It's almost like the content of the show, being completely uncritical of the systems it's upholding, makes—draws fans that don't mind uncritical media.

Kavita: (overlapping) No, I mean, it's also like I hear the show itself has like, gotten significantly worse, even for people who like *D&D*.

Finch: (overlapping) Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Kavita: Which is, I guess, you know, how many—I don't actually want to dedicate time away to shit-talking Travis McElroy. But. Here's my brief five second away: that man could afford to shut up more.

Finch: **[32:30]** I think maybe connecting back, I think that speaks to a level of... I mean, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I assume you kind of respect the people that make *Friends at the Table* and like value their opinions and, like—

Kavita: Yeah, for sure.

Finch: (overlapping) —want to hear more from them versus not want to hear more from the people that make, um, *D&D* and *TAZ*.

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah, it's, yeah. I think the people who... Sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off.

Finch: Please go ahead. I was done.

Kavita: [32:58] I mean, so like, I have a... I mean, it's one, that the lived experiences of, of certain things eventually get a little bit... That's, that's a little unfair, like there were elements of *The Adventure Zone* drawn from those people's lived experiences that I *like*. Like, I do think that, you know, I know I did just talk shit about Travis, but there was, there were elements of his character's storyline in the first *Adventure Zone* arc that were like, based around the loss of his mother, who I like—you know, as much as it was sort of a fr—it ended up manifesting as like a fridged ex-wife storyline, there was, there was something like genuinely a little bit moving, and there was something genuine moving about the fact that, like he was using that to express the love he felt for his mother, who passed away, you know, I think some years before the show even started. And of course, because it's a family show it's like three brothers and the father and, you know, they're all feeling that, and like that's not... that in, that in and of itself was like, not necessarily, not even like a bad thing, but um...

[34:06] You know with, with the cast of the show, Austin Walker is like a really sharp guy. He has really well-motivated politics. Keith Carberry, for example, his characters have always had this... his characters have always brought a very dedicated sort of irreverence and like, um, an anarchist spirit to every season? And like, that's the thing I appreciate, this like relentless desire to question and like, not, not just take things for granted because that's how the world works.

[34:47] I would say that those are probably the, the most like... those are the two things I can think of off the top my head. I think a lot about Janine Hawkins, who often talks about like femininity and feminine labor in, in, in thi—in the shows. Like I think there was a lot of stuff with Adaire and Hieron that was like, “Oh, here's things that women used to do in medieval societies that like Adaire has twisted to some sort of criminal purpose,” but it was like an interesting way to think about... You know in a lot of media where it's like, “Oh, we have women in our show, but they sort of just do the same things the men do.” And it was like, um... it's not just paying attention to female characters, but it is paying attention to areas of femininity that were not considered worthy of telling stories about, you know, previously. And I think that just putting female characters, but bringing the focus around to the things that women were historically both constrained to and denigrated for. Like there, there's a lot of value in that.

[36:00] So it's like, there's the, there's the thoughtfulness and the storytelling of, of *Friends at the Table* that I think is not present in many other actual play podcasts and actual play shows, because I think a lot of those things sort of manifest as improv comedy? You know even *The Adventure Zone* began as an improv comedy thing, and like, you can tell because there are certain moments where... this is like a personal pet peeve, and it's something I've had to let go of. I had to let go of it in *The Adventure Zone*, I still have to let go of it in *Dimension 20*. But there are moments where people will start making jokes that like don't make sense in the context of the world. And I'm like, you shouldn't—that shouldn't be funny to you, you shouldn't understand what that is, like you shouldn't be able to make jokes about, um, about, I don't know, like, I'm trying to think of something.

[36:59] Um. I guess here's the thing. It's like in *Friends at the Table* I think sometimes they'll say, “Jesus Christ,” and then they'll sort of half-jokingly go, you know, “a guy that we'll definitely remember 50 billion years in the future,” or whatever.

Finch: Yeah, yeah, (*Finch laughs*).

Kavita: **[37:14]** And it's like, that's funnier to me then the inverse, which is like, um... fucking oh there—I remember, there's a joke in *The Adventure Zone* where someone asks, an elf, the elf Taako where he's from, and he's like, “New Elfington,” and like, that's—why? That doesn't make sense. That's just, you don't name a place, like, I don't—there are no towns in America named like Irishton, or, or like Scottish, Scott's, Scottstown or things like that, that's, people don't name places after, like, that's not how—anyway, the point is that kind of throwaway joke is like more frustrating to me, um. As, that kind of—and like that's a personal thing that's not necessarily a thing of, of... that's not necessarily a criticism because I think you know when you're engaging with a mainstream audience, you often do spend time on jokes that are throwaway gags that don't have implications for the large world.

[38:19] But you know, I like that in *Friends at the Table* that isn't the sort of style they approached, that they like to do try and make sure that the humor, and that the, you know, even though they do improv and that they, they are improvising, that they are relying on humor often, the, the themes of the show and the, the consistency, the internal consistency of the show setting is the priority. But, like, making sure that the show follows through on what it's trying to say is more important than taking five minutes aside to do a quick gag about, about some like, I don't know, pop culture reference. Or are about, like, making the corniest or most irreverent joke you could possibly think of.

Finch: **[39:10]** Yeah, and it's the difference between that sort of joke almost becoming part of the world in these sort of comedy D&D oriented podcasts that are trying to do something fundamentally different from *Friends at the Table*, is sort of what I'm hearing you say—

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah.

Finch: **[39:24]** (overlapping) And that's how I think about them as being like, not really comparable, necessarily. But even in the latest episode there's like several minutes where they're talking about fucking hockey. No, Rapt—basketball. I don't do sports, I'm gay. And they're like, “what's a Cinderella story versus a—” and it's like, but that's understood to not be in character, like that's not the characters talking to each other.

Kavita: Yeah.

Finch: (overlapping) It's separate from the worldbuilding.

Kavita: **[39:51]** (overlapping) Whereas, like, you know, in *The Adventure Zone* there's like a long, extended bit about a town being filled with identical copies of Kenny Chesney, I think his name is, some fucking country singer, and it's like, “Okay, that's, I guess that's funny.”

Finch: Like, okay...?

Kavita: Um, if you know who Kenny Chesney is and think it's inherently funny that like he would be in, there would be a fantasy, like, “Haha! Mis—it's not supposed to be—” like, I don't know, it's just not...

Finch: Yeah.

Kavita: **[40:20]** Yeah, it's, it's a throwaway guy that they stick to because they said it, but it isn't, it just stops being interesting for me after a while. Um, and like that's the kind of—that's one of the other sort of major differences, I think, between *Friends at the Table* and a lot of other shows, which is like—you know, even in *Dimension 20*, this is the things that *Dimension 20* does sometimes, and I have to be like, “okay, Kavita, let go. This is not going to come back. You need to accept that this is a different show.”

Finch: Yep. Yep, yep. I have, I think, one more question that's kind of in this group, if you're down for that? And then we could maybe take a break?

Kavita: That sounds good!

Finch: **[40:59]** Amazing. Um. You can tell which questions I came up with, as I was listening to you talk because they're never as tight, but. One thing you mentioned was how you fell off of *The Adventure Zone* once they started doing like, capital-R Representation, where it's, “we are going to represent people that are different from us on screen.” And I know something that *Friends at the Table* helped me realize was my discontent with representation, especially as it related to like transness and queerness, where I would see trans and queer characters on screen, and it was just representation, and like, what? So I guess I wanted to hear a little more about, like, do you have similar discontent with representation? Like what do you, what do you think about how *Friends at the Table* does representation? Does it do representation?

Kavita: **[41:50]** Um, I... I guess the capital-R representation I'm parodying there is a concept of like... I think a lot of, I think there's a, I think the sort of current fandom discourse is that, you know, there are two kinds of representation. Which is the kind where you're writing from the identity that you're, you're talking about and every other kind. Um. And that's, like, not an inaccurate characterization, because obviously you know if you're writing from the identity of... I mean race comes up here too, right, where like if you're writing from the identity of, ah—you know, I'll take my own self. You know, if I'm writing from the identity of an Indian person I can represent that as an Indian person and I—like, there is a degree of authenticity. Or at least, you know, understanding of what many Indian experiences are like, because I have that identity, right, or in, in terms of queerness, you know, I'm bi, so I can write about bi people and like speak from the heart, I guess, when I do that.

[42:59] But then there is a perspective that, it's less valuable for example when you have someone who is writing about a different identity, like you know, when you have a straight person who's writing about a gay character when you have a white person who's writing about a character of color, or a cis person writing about a trans character. Um, I do personally, I think there is a sort of ground there that you can get. And this is a little bit complicated by the fact that *Friends at the Table* is a group project, and therefore, like not under the sole direction of Austin Walker, but I think even Austin's trans NPCs feel more genuine than the trans NPCs of some other people, because Austin knows trans people. (*Finch laughs.*) Um, and Austin, like, has trans friends.

Finch: Wow, amazing how that works.

Kavita: **[43:45]** And, and, you know, it's still one of the things that's very strange to me, or that often feels very alienating to me, is like when people try and do representation because they have a lot

of queer fans. And this is what I feel like happened with *The Adventure Zone*, is that like, it felt like, what, what happened was there were a lot of queer fans and there were a lot of fans of color, but like Griffin didn't have—or like the McElroys didn't have that many queer or trans, uh, friends? And so like, were trying to describe those characters from an out-of, like a very distant perspective and like, there was a degree, you could feel that disconnect when you tried to understand those characters. Even *Dimension 20* is like much better at this than I think, um, than *The Adventure Zone* was, and certainly than *Critical Role*, for example, is, because like Brennan Lee Mulligan is a person who has been—I don't know if he's queer, but he is certainly connected to a lot of queer people, has a lot of queer friends. You know, is sort of in the RPG, like, and LARP community that is—and a very queer portion of that community. So like, when he represents a queer character, he is at least speaking from the experience of being friends with those people, even if he doesn't have that identity.

[45:11] And something similar is happening with a lot of, for example, Austin's queer NPCs. A lot of, for—like, you know, even though Ali is not necessarily publicly non-binary, I'm like, I trust that Ali knows non-binary people. Um, and so like, there is a, there is... you know—writing from within an identity is I think a shortcut for, like a shortcut or a heuristic for judging whether somebody knows what the fuck they're talking about. And I think that a lot of what feels good about *Friends at the Table* is that people know what the hell they're talking about, even if they aren't necessarily from that identity, or at least know it better than you know, a complete stranger does.

[45:58] And I think, for example, there's a lot of gaps where people are critical of—and rightfully critical of—gaps in *Friends at the Table*'s ability to represent disability is a thing that's come up a lot in the latest season. And people have been like very critical of the way the show has handled disability and um... I think I actually had a long conversation with a friend of mine, with some friends of mine about this, that like, a lot of the ways we feel about other shows in handling queerness, where it's like, "Oh, you don't know any of us, or if you do, you know, one or two of us and like are very unfamiliar with what this experience is like." Often is a thing that we, we don't feel that about queerness, for example, in *Friends at the Table*. But you know there is a degree of that that we do feel about disability in *Friends at the Table* that is like... you aren't really—sometimes it feels like Austin, at least in his NPCs, isn't really familiar with what the lived experience of certain disabilities are. And so he tries to represent them without knowing anybody who's like that, or at least not knowing them well enough to, like, understand how those things affect their lives. And that gap can be felt. Um. (pause)

[47:17] But, you know, at least in terms of queerness and in terms of race, broadly speaking, it's clear that they, that *Friends at the Table* does understand, you know, it is a majority queer cast, but, you know, even when cis people play trans or non-binary characters, even that's from a perspective of knowing trans and non-binary people, being friends with us, and like, representing... representing people they know, I guess, or at least representing people as full human beings and understanding how their queerness impacts their lives in a way that I think, like, strangers don't. And that's why I think that it's like, I don't bother asking for that kind of thing from strangers anymore because I don't want to get disappointed.

Finch: Yeah.

Kavita: Like I don't, I don't want the representation from Griffin, because I know he's gonna handle it badly, because, uh... because like he doesn't fucking know any of us! And it's like, it's, it's so clear when that's the case. As a listener or reader or as a, as a, as a, as a, as someone who's engaging with that media.

Finch: **[48:27]** Yeah, no, and I, I need to... be more a part of the conversations about disability in *Friends at the Table* because I'm like... I don't know, my own trying to figure out if it's a word that applies to me or not aside, I definitely was a bit frustrated with how a lot of it was handled this season and know that I'm not the only one. Um. Yeah. Well, on that very cheerful note, I'm going to pause the recording so we can take a little bit of break. Um. And... how do I do that...

-----break-----

Finch: **[49:07]** Alrighty. And we are back. So for the second half of this. I have a lot of—a lot is probably an overstatement—I have a bunch of questions about sort of game design and, when we spoke at the pre interview you talked about how the *Friends at the Table* fandom is really weird because there's so much overlap with sort of indie tabletop game designers, a lot of who've gotten into game design because of *Friends at the Table* and are now publishing games that got played on the podcast. And sort of, it's become this really cool sort of creative space. Um, and you talked about at the beginning about the sort of *Friends at the Table* wave of tabletop game design. So I'm just curious. Like, what does this, what is this wave look like to you?

Kavita: **[49:53]** I think for a lot of people. It was a lot of... it's hard because it's har—I can't track, I can tell—I don't keep track of a lot of other people's sort of entry into fandom, so I don't know exactly when, like, my friends who are fans of the show and are also game designers, when exactly they got into it, you know? Whether people were fans of RPGs at first, or whether they were, you know, you know, not at all fans of RPG in the first place. I think a lot of people got into it vaguely through theatre—Caro Asercion, Takuma Okada, I think they're both theatre people, I know that they're—I know that they're both theatre people. I think that was how they got into the show. Um.

[50:41] So, so like it's, it's hard to say exactly who got in how? But I know for a fact that a lot of people in this sort of like new wave of *Friends at the Table*-inspired design, like, got into the show. If they weren't—they were either already designers, or like realized they could design because of the show, and then end up having their designs influenced a lot by things that happened on the show, you know, the most famous example I think is *Beam Saber* right now, because like... *Beam Saber* was of course—like *Beam Saber* is being played for season six and was hugely inspired by season two, like to the degree that they're just like, there's a list of sample, like, superior officers in *Beam Saber* who are just straight up named after the cast of *Friends at the Table*, like...

Finch: **[51:29]** It's so sweet, I saw it, I was like, “oh—”

Kavita: (overlapping) It's so cute, it's like, “Project Lead Walker, Virtue de Quidt,” things like that.

[51:38] And then there's like, ah, there's a bunch of name—I mean, like, Austin Ramsey who designed *Beam Saber*, and you know, I and a bunch of other people have also done this, where, like, you know, a lot of people will name abilities like various pop culture allusions or things like that. And a lot of them, a lot of—a lot of my ability names in *Songs for the Dusk* are just straight up

allusions to things that happened in *Friends at the Table*. And, you know, *Beam Saber* is similar. I think *Beam Saber* has a thing that's like, um, *Beam Saber* has a move called "Regent's Brilliance," which is this just the name of a Counterweight mech.

Finch: (*laughing*) Yeah I was just like, that's just a mech! That's just a mech!

Kavita: (overlapping) I mean, I have—yeah, that's just, it's fully just the name of a mech, and it works! But you know, that's what that is. (*Finch laughs.*)

[52:23] I think I have a movie about adopting a pet in *Songs for the Dusk* which is called—which is named "A Horse Called Duck," because that's a thing that happened in *Friends at the Table*. There was a horse and Keith named Duck.

Finch: (overlapping) So Keith, so chaotic.

Kavita: [52:42] I think there's a couple others in here. Yeah, it's things like that, right, where it's like people, people will name, fill their things with allusions to *Friends at the Table*, people are like really inspired—*Songs for the Dusk* began as a way of trying to make a game that I felt was more suited for Twilight Mirage then had existed, because Twilight Mirage is played in a couple of systems that I just didn't think work for the story they were trying to tell. Um, I think honestly *Beam Saber* might have been inspired by something similar, if not quite as much critical of, of *The Sprawl*, which is what they played Counterweight in, but like was an attempt to bring a really proper mecha game into the indie sphere that was like narrative-driven. Um. And, and so like a, there's a lot of impulse to... there's, there was a lot of like motivation that is directly from the show in that sense of like, oh, here's the thing that I wish was better represented, or better—like there was a system to handle this kind of genre that *Friends at the Table*, like, did. In, in a way that is narrative-focused and like is better suited for certain things, then maybe currently exists.

[54:00] And there's also just like a deeper level of inspiration, which is I think that Austin Walker, for me, was one of the first queer people of color who I like, ever saw in the tabletop scene? Um, yeah, I think he was actually just fully the first. He is like, he is *the* first queer person of color at all that I like saw in the tabletop scene, and like, saw sort of in—knew about in game design than ever. I knew there were a lot of like white queer people involved here, and I knew there were... I didn't know there were very many people of color at all. But he was sort of like, uh, it was... it's like corny to say, I feel like. But it was like realizing, "Oh shit, I can do this." That it wasn't like... a version where I would have to leave pieces of my identity behind to engage in that community? Because Austin was figuring out how to do it, and I could learn from him. And I think—I mean, I don't know how common a feeling that is, but I would bet that—I think a lot of people have, I like to think that a lot of people have felt similar.

Finch: [55:18] I think that's definitely a sense I've gotten personally and seeing other people around. Um... I guess then you said, it's hard to say like, who got into the show when and how, but I'm curious what's been your personal experience with that kind of cycle?

Kavita: [55:36] Um, yeah. So, I mean, I talked about how I got into the fandom, and I guess I can talk about how I started designing. Which is, I think, shortly after—I think it was probably—I should check. Actually, I'm going to look up real quick when Twilight Mirage ran from... (*Finch makes a thinking noise*)... Twilight Mirage was *long*.

Finch: [56:01] So long.

Kavita: [56:02] Okay, so I think I started designing close to the end of Twilight Mirage. Twilight Mirage, at this point Twilight Mirage was being played in *Scum and Villainy* which is a system I don't think worked very well for it. And I was like, you know, I mean, it was the confluence of a lot of things, there were a lot of creative impulses in my life that I felt weren't showing up that I wanted to put somewhere. Like, I'm a really big fan of *Destiny*, the video game by Bungie. I wanted to make a *Destiny*-esque tabletop game for a long time. There was some stuff—there was a lot of me integrating one of my favorite video games, which is the *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* series, into something that I could like—I wanted to convey, I wanted to convey what it is that has affected me so strongly about that series to a grand—a greater audience. And I wanted to do it in a setting that I found really fascinating, this sort of like space fantasy setting that I think Twilight Mirage was trying to adopt.

[57:06] And I was frustrated with some of the things that I thought were, hadn't worked very well in Twilight Mirage, some things about the like way they talked about different cultures and nations interacting, the way they talked about, you know, you know, utopianism and certain things like that. And so all of that sort of culminated in me sitting down... or I don't know that it culminated, because the first thing I did was sit down and write three playbooks we were basically just, "what if I had to make the *Destiny* character classes in a *Forged in the Dark* system?" And I did that.

Finch: [57:42] (overlapping) As good a place to start as any!

Kavita: [57:44] And I think as I continued to design the game, more and more of those other influences started to show up, like Pokémon was, ah, the *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* series was always really central and that started to show up. Twilight Mirage was always an inspiration, but became even more one as I went further and further into the game. Um, there's elements of like *The Legend of Korra* in there in terms of setting? So like a bunch of stuff like that.

[58:14] But I think... I think, I think it sort of like helped me... I mean so Twilight Mirage was obviously a really big inspiration, even if it was like, sort of, not necessarily the kind of inspiration that is classically referred to. Where I was like, you know, I made things out of frustration with Twilight Mirage and, and not just like, oh, I want to also make something like this. But! You know, it did motivate me in that way. And a lot of like what I felt was, ah... I think, Austin—I think *Friends at the Table* spoke to something that I had been feeling for a long time and figured out how to put down in words, and so when I started writing *Songs for the Dusk*, I was like, drawing on the things that I had learned by listening to *Friends at the Table*.

Finch: [59:11] Yeah, absolutely. Um, before I asked my next question, did you turn on like an AC or move somewhere? I'm hearing this weird sort of low-pitched, interference-y noise.

Kavita: I think it—hm, hang on. Has this fixed it?

Finch: Yeah, it was sort of intermittent like it would kind of go nnnnnnnn and then fade off.

Kavita: Oh, I think somebody might have been—oh, that was the garage.

Finch: (overlapping) Ah!

Kavita: (overlapping) I live with my family, so the garage was just opening.

Finch: **[59:48]** Oh, yeah, no. Amazing. Cool. Um, I was like, I can still hear you but it's a little bit fuzzy! Do do do... yeah, no, that's really, that's really cool and really helpful. And I think that speaks to a lot of the reason why I like write fanfic, is sort of filling an urge, in a way. Um, one thing you spoke about in our pre interview was about how Hieron created a lot of empty space, and how fans can be drawn to these empty spaces that story creators leave. And then you know you had your experience designing *Songs for the Dusk* in part because of your frustration with *Twilight Mirage*. So I was curious, how do you see empty space working in tabletop games? Like your own games and other games.

Kavita: **[1:00:42]** Um... that's an interesting question. I think a lot... I think empty space is like... I, I think all tabletop games have—are trying to figure out how to strike a balance between empty space and, ah, rails, I guess. You know, it's about... this is going to be a strange metaphor. Game design is like building playgrounds. When you build a playground, you need an empty space for the kids to go. You can't just fill it entirely with innavigable like you know, bars and monkey bars and jungle gyms and what have you. You have to have places for the actual play to happen. But you also have to get—but like, the point of a playground is that it provides springboards, right? But like it is more fun to play with a set of monkey bars than it is to be in an empty field with a bunch of other kids. Um.

[1:01:45] And so like, I think the challenge of game design is figuring out what kinds of play you want your game to be able to produce and what kinds of empty space, you want to leave for, um. Like, what structures you want to build and what kinds of things, what kinds of things you want to leave for the players to fill in. Um, and doing it in a way that's like... and one of the big challenges is that like, a lot of the times that empty space is going to be communicated by one person. Because in traditional tabletop game, or at least it is *usually* the case that in a tabletop game. The person running the game has—is the one who's read the rulebook. And so, in a way, you're... like, all of your rules are not necessarily optional but like, you're not—when you build a video game, or when you even build a physical game, you provide all the pieces and the game doesn't necessarily work unless you put all the pieces in place.

[01:02:59] With a tabletop game, the only machine, you know, you don't have a machine responsible for executing it that doesn't also have preferences of its own. The machine that executes the commands, the program of the game is also the player. And if they don't like your rules, they will ignore them, often. Or they will, you know, if you don't communicate your rules well, they will be forgotten or misunderstood. And so there is a challenge of figuring out how to... at least the way I try to write, I try to gently encourage, I try to treat the play structures or the like level design, I guess, or not—level design is a bad word—but like, the structures of play as, as, like... I try to write from a position of like gentle encouragement and like, “Hey, go over there,” you know. “You will find something—I think you will find something fun and you will find the thing that I'm trying to tell you if you do things this way.”

[1:03:59] And it's like, not... but leaving also, also leaving a significant portion of that empty space is really important. I'm not saying like, “once you go over there you need to do this, this, and this.” And it's like, it's so hard, because there's so much I want to say about the world. I could like, I could talk about my own setting for hours, and like still come up with new, newer and newer

things to say, and it is really, really... you know, people ask me sometimes things about the setting, in, in my Discord that I have for the game, in the Discord that Quinn and I set up. And, like, I have to be... I have to check the first impulse which is just to start talking about what I think is true, and to say like, and this is, this is in the book too, which is like, you know, "You're not obligated to think of anything—you're not obligated to say anything, to treat anything that isn't in the book as true."

[01:04:56] Um, you know, I can say stuff in the Discord about things that, things that I think are true about the world, or like things that would be true if I ran a game in that setting, but it is really important to me to be like, "Hey, you know, I don't have a monopoly on what's cool, and I don't have a monopoly on how the world should work. I have a cool set of guidelines for, like, roughly how this should go." But there is a degree of flexibility that I want to leave in the game, in the setting design of the game, and in the things implicit about that setting, because I think it's important that people can bring... bring their own sort of like creative impulses to that game. And in a lot of way—like, game design or RPG design is about providing a springboard and a set of guidelines to channel creative impulses, to like not, you know, push them in a direction but not necessarily to produce the exact same end result, I think.

[1:05:56] And so like, building those channels is a... I mean, when you think about a channel it is a sort of setting apart a certain kind of empty space, I guess. And I think that is what game design is, is like putting down guidelines or putting down guide rails around a certain portion of empty space and then asking people to figure out how to fill it in.

Finch: **[1:06:32]** That makes a lot of that makes a lot of sense. I know you started by saying, "this might be a bit of a weird metaphor," (*Kavi laughs*) but it made perfect sense to me. Although I now do have the image of a playground that is just completely impenetrable. And it's just like bars.

Kavita: **[01:06:47]** Yeah, that's called *D&D*.

Finch: Yeah... Yeah! (*Finch laughs*) (*Kavi and Finch laugh*) Oh...

Kavita: But everyone's like, no, I will, I would rather die than go to another playground.

Finch: **[1:07:09]** Oh boy... Yeah, I guess this is in my head a related question, because I think—I see a lot of, you know, quote unquote "discourse" on tabletop Twitter about empty space in game design and, like, producing the intended effect, maybe, or basically just like how to make sure people don't do bad shit for your games. And this sort of ongoing discussion about like, is *D&D* salvageable given its history with racism and colonialism, etc? Like, to what extent do mechanics determine play? Like there's so many of these really interrelated discussions. And I think that, you discussion of like flexibility and mechanics and rails is really, really cool and really enlightening for me.

[1:08:03] My next question is a bit related to that. Which is like, where do you see queerness in *Friends at the Table*?

Kavita: **[01:08:11]** In the cast? Is the easy answer. Um...

Finch: (overlapping) Okay true, yep, yeah, you, you did say that. (*Kavi laughs*)

Kavita: **[01:08:17]** Um, I do think that's important, though, that like, um, you know, insofar as I was talking about familiarity earlier like the friends—the queerness of *Friends at the Table* feels bigger than the queerness of something like *Dimension 20* because there's more of it in the cast, you know? Without wishing to do an exhaustive list of people's identities. I don't—it's a majority queer cast, it's a near totality, which path and that falls through, right? Like um—and, and the second place, I guess, is that the assumption of queerness is default in the cast? Most characters are queer. You know, I think, in fact, it's not inaccurate to say that every—I don't think it would be wrong to say that every character in *Friends at the Table* is queer, um. Certainly they are sort of assumed to be and treated that that way by both fandom and cast. And so there is the like... just operating with that default assumption is, is like a very good and strong thing.

[01:09:27] I think people talk about queerness in mechanics and queerness and production and things that are like not... not necessarily related to people or characters' identities? And that's always a little bit tough for me to understand, um, in that it sort of breaks from the immediate practical implications of queerness that I, I know. Like if somebody asked me, "How do you make the game more queer in its design or in its mechanics?" I would have a hard time answering that question.

[01:10:00] There's a podcast called *Game Closet*, run by a guy named Taylor LaBresh where he, he basically—his thing that he does, he reaches out to queer, LGBT game designers and does like long interviews with them that are cool, and one of his questions that he always asks is, like, "you have one piece of advice to make your games more queer, like, what would they be?" And I don't have... and I've thought about that question and I don't have an answer to that question that isn't just like, "make queer people in the—like give people queer default characters or tell them to make their characters gay," because like I don't—I have a hard time processing that question in, in sort of ways that aren't related to people's identities.

[01:10:43] But you know those identities are important and understanding the cultures that emerged from those identities are important. And to me, it has always felt like *Friends at the Table* does have that understanding. And has grown in that understanding over the course of its, of its showtime, you know. Counterweight is sort of like... one of the notorious flaws of Counterweight is that it doesn't really handle non-binary identities as well as it should, in part because it like set up a culture and then like sort of came in and was as like, "what if everyone in this culture was non-binary?" and then forgot about it all the time? Because it wasn't a part of the base from the jump. Um, but like, you know, it's much—things get much better in *Twilight Mirage*, they get much better in future seasons of *Hieron* and they get, they're...

[1:11:31] Apostolos is—when Austin designs *Stel Apostolos*, which has a very fascinating take on, on gender. I like fully... I was like, "a cis person shouldn't be able to make something this cool!"

Finch: Yeah, yeah! (*Finch laughs*) Yeah, (*Kavi laughs*) uh huh, uh huh.

Kavi: (overlapping) Like what the fuck man! (*Finch and Kavi laugh*) You're muscling in on my market, I don't have, like, what am I going to sell people on if (*Finch laughs*) you're doing this!

Finch: (overlapping) Come on man. Yeah. (*Kavi laughs*)

Finch: **[01:12:01]** I've definitely had that with multiple cast members, where they're like "So, I'm playing a trans character this time," and I'm just like, "it's okay. I'll wait. But like let me know if you want me to use different pronouns for you." (*Kavi laughs*) "Like, I'll wait." I don't want to be weird, but like...

Kavi: (overlapping) Yeah...

Finch: (overlapping) If you have something to tell us you can tell us!

Kavita: **[01:12:20]** Yeah. Um. It was cool to see Sylvia come out.

Finch: It was, I mean everyone I know was just over the moon. Um, and very excited for her.

[01:12:35] Yeah, what you're saying about like queerness and mechanics and prod—I mean, I have my own... I have always been a bit, not even uncomfortable with, but like, queer theory can sometimes get really taken out of context in ways that make me uncomfortable? I think that's part of the reason why I wanted to talk to other queer fans of *Friends at the Table* is because I think it's important to consider discussions in communities of practice, cultures that emerge from those identities, rather than just taking it as a cool theoretical buzzword.

Kavita: Uh huh.

Finch: **[1:13:10]** Future me, you can make that into a paragraph probably. (pause) I think I hit most of my questions, um...

Kavita: **[01:13:27]** Oh, I was gonna say—I remembered something that—I have this very, I have this very grounding philosophical principle about theory, which is that if I can't figure out the practical implications of it in five minutes. It's not worth remembering.

[01:13:47] Hello? Did I lose connection. Yes, I did.

[01:14:07] Hello.

[01:14:27] Well...

Finch: **[01:14:30]** Ughhhhhhh... my internet just decided to drop. Um, it seems fine—

Kavita: Oh, I was worried, my internet also does that and I was worried that it was happening to me again.

Finch: Oh, good. Well, it looks like because you stayed on the call recording stayed, which is what I was—

Kavita: (overlapping) Okay, that's good.

Finch: (overlapping) —panicked about, um, and it's recording to the cloud and not this computer. Thank you, Zoom gods.

Kavita: (overlapping) Um, I don't know if you caught what I was saying—

Finch: (overlapping) Where did you last... what did you last hear from my end?

Kavita: **[01:14:56]** Um, I think I was, I was talking, I was, I think you mentioned you had just finished talking about communities of practice and I was saying that I have a very specific philosophy—

Finch: (overlapping) Ah, okay!

Kavita: (overlapping) —about my approach to theory which is that if I can't figure out the practical app, app, like implications of it in five minutes, um, then it's not sort of worth remembering?

Finch: Honestly—

Kavita: (overlapping) which is...

Finch: Powerful.

Kavita: **[01:15:22]** Yeah. Um. It is, it has been such a relief, because I think queer people see a lot of theory in their lives, or at least a lot of them do. And it is such a relief to be able to think, “I don't understand, like, I don't understand what this means for my daily life. So I'm going to ignore it.”

Finch: Yep, yep.

Kavita: And if you want me to change my daily life. You better tell me in a way that makes more sense.

Finch: Yeah no, it's like, “Judith Butler, I know you write the way that you do because of your particular context and you're aiming for a particular audience, but also please? English? Please?” (*Kavi laughs*)

Kavita: Yeah.

Finch: **[01:16:02]** Like, I have a Judith Butler quote on my wall that resonated with me and my personal experience, but I'm not trying to figure out the rest of that!

Kavita: Yeah...

Finch: Like, if it's relevant to me up, I'll, it'll, I'll hear from somewhere else and it'll make more sense.

Kavita: Uh huh!

Finch: Exactly. Well, then I'm glad to hear that it cut off before I bumbled through figuring out how to set up a question. Um. But... um, the question, I'm really curious about is like... let me, let me look through my notes because I you did talk about this and I want to make sure I don't ask you something, you've already addressed. (pause)

[01:16:53] Alright, cool. I may have missed it, but I write so I can stay focused. I'm just curious, like, in your opinion, does *Friends at the Table* make tabletop games like more accessible? Like does it broaden the market? And how so, if, if it does?

Kavita: **[1:17:09]** I hope so. I do think it has done a lot to bring indie games to a... um, it depends. So, I guess this specific question of accessible depends on what you mean by accessible, but I do think it's done a lot to bring indie games to an audience, which would not have otherwise discovered them, you know. I like, it is... there's a real instinct that people struggle with, which is that like, there is something about *D&D* that makes you not want to play other games. Um, I used to feel that way, um, before I really got into *Friends at the Table*, um. And I don't know what that quality

is, but it is very, very good at making you feel like this is all there is. Um, and *Friends at the Table* broke that for me, because *Blades in the Dark* is a good game, because *Dungeon World* is a good game. And because things happen, because of—things happen in *Friends at the Table* because of the games they choose.

[01:18:14] You know, not exclusively, but like there are things that would happen—there are things that happen in Marielda that happen because Marielda is a *Blades in the Dark* game, that wouldn't happen if it was a game of *Dungeon World*. And that feeling is really like... I think that feeling is a big draw for people who want to understand why the system matters. And that explains—and it helps communicate why the system matters, right? Like, it's a question, ah, like, if you can do the same thing in every game, then there's never any reason to play, like, I don't know, you know *Starfinder* instead of *D&D* or whatever, or *Pathfinder*, or, or, or anything like that. But *Friends at the Table* was like, "Okay, here's how the system affects the story you're telling." And that I think brought—was the thing that brought me into the indie sphere, and I—hopefully will bring a lot of other people too.

[01:19:12] And I do also think it makes it accessible in the same way that just hearing a game played, um, like for real, um, is a way to understand its mechanics that often, like, sticks with people more than, um, reading a rule book. You know, even in rule books we try and do sample texts and like sample examples of how a game should work. But those are never as good as actually hearing something genuine because we have to make things up to sort of contrive a point. And they also have to be short and like that—there's a bunch of constraints that makes sample texts very hard to write, um. You know, I think as a reader, it's easy to be like, "this is a really corny, this isn't how people really talk to the table," but like figuring out how to have write down how people talk to the table and not fill an entire page with like weird table talk is not easy. Um, and so there is like, there is, uh... there is accessibility there in that it explains... is that explain—it can explain how the game works in a more accessible format than I think a rule book can. So it's both, like, "hey, this is a thing you can do, and it will produce something better for you than *D&D* does, and here's how it works for the most part."

[1:20:34] And I think it just also, like, in general, it does a lot to produce something that is true in indie culture, of like having a more equal divide between player and, and, uh, like, facilitator? Which is to say that, like, it is a game—*Friends at the Table* is a show that really values, the, the ability of players to contribute to, like, huge elements of the setting or the world. (pause) ... sorry, I was drinking.

[01:21:14] But one of the things that's like often understood in traditional *D&D* is that the DM makes up a world in their spare time and then just sort of like, leads the player—leads their players around on a leash. Um, and that's not how *Friends at the Table* works. And sometimes it's fun to just sort of like run through an adventure that somebody has set up for you, um, in the same way that's fun to play a linear video game. But it's also, like, it is really, really fun to play a game—an RPG—where you get to build the world yourself. Where you get to just say, "even though I'm a main character and not responsible for, you know, portraying this world. I still get to decide what is in it and how, how it behaves and what the rules of it are and like what, what elements of it I think are—I get to add elements that I think are cool and interesting." And like,

that's really, really valuable for people who want to figure out how to tell stories as a group, who want to figure out how to have influence on, on, on the worlds they create.

[01:22:22] I think this is—there's a broader thing, which is—and I have a tweet about this somewhere—which is, I think one of the most valuable things that *Friends at the Table* does is it helps communicate to people that what they are doing isn't special. Um, I, I, I've come, I've... and this comes back into the fandom thing that I was talking about earlier, which is that, like, you know, a lot of times when people are frustrated with their, the fandom they're in, and frustrated with the media they consume. It's—they don't have a recourse, right? It's like, you know, the show is probably going to continue to be that thing. You know, it'd—*The Adventure Zone* is never going to become a sort of like radical podcast, or it's never (*Finch laughs*) gonna develop really a left-wing politics. It is... liberal, it is liberal, it is sort of like vaguely centrist. It is... not willing to comment on how economics influences identity, and influences people from marginalized identities, because that would be a kind of controversy tho—those dudes don't want to cultivate.

[01:23:25] But *D&D* fucking sucks! To run and to learn! And so, like, the... when you start listening to *The Adventure Zone* and say, "Oh, I'm frustrated with this thing," it is that much harder to go home and say, "Okay, I'll do my own thing." *Friends at the Table*, I think serious—and people do do that anyway in things like *D&D*, like *Crit Roll*—fans of *Critical Role* do that with *D&D*, you know, fans of *The Adventure Zone* do that with *D&D*. Um, but *D&D* is so hard to, like... *D&D* makes it harder to do that than a lot of the games that are played on *Friends at the Table*. *Friends at the Table* provides games—like, when I'm frustrated with *Friends at the Table*, I can go and play my own game of *Beam Saber*, and like, *Beam Saber* is so much easier to get into the *D&D*. It's like, you know, it is not—people have argued that *Forged in the Dark* is about as complicated as *D&D*. I don't think that's strictly true, but even if that's true, it also gives you so much, it's so much more rewarding to master that complexity, you can get so much more done in a single session of a *Forged in the Dark* game or of a *Powered by the Apocalypse* game, than you can in *D&D*.

[01:24:40] I think I ran a *Dungeon World* campaign once that never quite finished but got close to the end of it. And in eight months I was able to tell a much more—the kind of story that in *D&D* would probably have taken like, four, two to four years, um. And that is—and like, that's not trivial either because like, it is, it is not—like, burnout is a real thing. It is easy to get burned out on a story when you don't make much progress. It's easy to sort of zone out during combat sections, and like, you have—having a system that moves quickly, that respects the players' time, that isn't about, you know, optimizing, that doesn't just sort of like take a break to have an obnoxiously long fight (*Finch laughs*) in the middle of it... and that is, like, good at internalizing stakes for fights that aren't just, "oh, you know, do you make the bad guys' health go down before they make your health go down?" Um, ends up producing the kinds of stories that really stick with people.

[1:25:44] You know, and, and that, like, is really—that matters in terms of getting people to do the things themselves that they wouldn't ordinarily be willing to. There are people who are willing to tolerate that stuff from *D&D*. There are a lot more people who would play games at home if they play—if they heard better games on the shows they liked.

Finch: **[01:26:02]** Yeah, no, I saw a great tweet about how *D&D* as it exists today is almost a folkloric tradition, in the sense that people are not playing *D&D* based on *D&D* books, they're playing *D&D* based on what they hear on *TAZ* and *Critical Roll*. (*Kavi laughs*) And are then getting frustrated

when the D&D— like, there's this, there's this misalignment between what *Critical Roll* and *TAZ* do with *D&D*... because they're using them to tell stories, but the game mechanics don't support that. It's just, they're using that I was like, I just want all these people to not play *D&D*, is basically where I was—

Kavita: (overlapping) Yeah, it's—yeah.

Finch: It's like, “have you heard of literally any other game? May I interest you in literally anything else?” Like, “no!”

Kavita: **[01:26:54]** Yeah.

Finch: Um...

Kavita: It's... I mourn every day.

Finch: I know. Hm. This is making me want to play more games that I never have time to do. I nearly said, “maybe in grad school, I'll have more time.” (*Kavi laughs*). No, that's not how this works!

[1:27:22] Okay, before I completely lose focus, um, the last question I had is very general which is just, is there anything I haven't asked about that you'd like to bring into the space?

Kavita: **[01:27:33]** Uh, I don't think so... I'm trying to think of things that I could talk about that I haven't covered yet. But I think actually it's good that we ended on this note because that's the real thing that I think is the most valuable about *Friends at the Table*, is that *Friends at the Table*... okay, actually, here's, here's the thing I'll talk about a little bit. Um, which is I'm gonna, I'm gonna reiterate this thing I've just said, but by contrast with another fandom.

[01:28:08] *Homestuck* has had... there, there was a, there was something I guess that I you could—*Homestuck* “ended,” quote unquote, in 2016, and then in 2020 I want to say they came out with *The Homestuck Epilogues*, which was a, like, *massive* fucking novel of a work that ended up following through, that was like a—it was supposed to be an epilogue, it ended up being essentially a transitional story to the next *Homestuck* thing, which was just called *Homestuck 2*. It was long. It was, it tried to handle, it was, it was sort of like a... I'm trying to figure out how to summarize it, but it was a, it was a story that was like, critical of the idea of the happy ending that *Homestuck* had presented to, to its audience earlier. In a way that I don't think works, because it was also *Homestuck*. (*Finch laughs*)

[1:29:05] So what that meant was, there was there, there was—what that meant was, ah, like... weird clown sex and also like racism against aliens, but also they can't ever talk about human race ever. Um... (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[01:29:25]** That sounds like *Homestuck*.

Kavita: **[01:29:26]** Yeah. And so, but—but I think part of, part of what was *Homestuck* was trying to convey there is like, *Homestuck* is also—*Homestuck* is a fandom that has been driven—*Homestuck* is a work that has been driven a lot by its fandom, right. There are fandom memes that wind up in *Homestuck* proper. They're, they're, you know, a bunch of things that are, uh... you know, its own memes get reiterated in the work, and the work is defined by its interaction with fandom. And so a lot of what the sort of post-*Homestuck*—like *The Homestuck Epilogues* were written by a fan, um, by

a group of fans, you know, Hussie had—Andrew Hussie, the author of *Homestuck*, had some consultation and he wrote some of it himself, but, ah, huge parts of it were written by Jennifer Giesbrecht, who is now an independent—like, an author of in her own right, but like, also did a lot of *Homestuck* fanfic back in her day.

[01:30:23] And a big part of what the sort of post-*Homestuck* era of, like, the post-epilogue era and the epilogue era was supposed to do was drive, bring home this idea that like, *Homestuck*... this, this sort of attempt to weirdly democratize *Homestuck*? Of being like, “*Homestuck* is now out—*Homestuck* isn't just what Hussie writes down. It's like, you know what the fan art—the fanfic writers and the fan artists do, it's what people who are in the fandom create with their podcasts, and their, and their fandom activity.”

[1:30:53] Um. And the reason it never quite worked is because it was always hollow, right? And because at the end of the day until unless something is public domain or at least Creative Commons, you know, Hussie always has final sign off on what's official in *Homestuck*, right, like, you know, I can write... If I sat down and wrote something as long as the epilogues that went in place of the epilogues, people wouldn't treat it with the same thing they would as, with the same, like, degree of canonicity, or at least... like, people wouldn't take it as true, or as, or as reflecting something genuine about those characters, the way they do the way they, the way they, the way that many of them did in the wake of the epilogues, which, you know, even though they were written by a fan, had Hussie's sign of approval.

[01:31:45] *Friends at the Table* by contrast, I think, is like, not... *Friends at the Table* doesn't pretend that *Friends at the Table* is influenced by anybody who, anybody besides the people it's influenced by, right? Like, you know, those—*Friends at the Table* is made by the cast of *Friends at the Table* and is influenced by the author of whoever, whatever game they happen to be playing at the time, right, like, you know... And sometimes by certain consultants and, and fan artists, but usually they'll mention those on the show.

[01:32:16] And, and *Friends at the Table* isn't going to tell you, “*Friends at the Table* is a democratic story. It's a story is determined by its fandom.” Um, it's obviously a show controlled by Austin Walker and by his, his cast. But what *Friends at the Table* does is it says, “if you don't like the story we're telling, you can buy these games on your own and tell your own story and bring forth the themes you want to see explored.” Um, *Friends at the Table*, in spite of being a queer show is not actually a show that focuses on the development of queer identity very much? Um, like, it is not a story, you know, Millie doesn't have a coming out story, um, Tender doesn't have a coming out story. They are queer already, and that's like a thing that happens in the past and they will behave in queer ways, but it is not a show that focuses on the development of queer identity. Um.

[01:33:06] I can think of one coming out story and it's honestly not even a story, it's like a moment, where Blue J in, in Spring in Hieron comes out as non-binary, and it's like a very sweet moment and one that's handled very well, but it's not a moment that like... you know, anything you want to read into gender in that moment is mostly, I think you feel on your own. Um...

Finch: Yeah—

Kavita: (overlapping) –but if that’s a thing you want to.

Finch: (overlapping) –I did tear up at that.

Kavita: **[1:33:30]** No, I love that moment, but it's like, you know, put it this way: there's, there are things you can say about, “oh, Blue J doesn't want to be like their father, you know, and so stepping away from masculinity is like, maybe part of trying to break the cycle of violence that is, that is, there's the Red Jacks.” But like nobody—that doesn't come up, you know, at least not by anything more than implication, and that is probably one of the most, like... and this is probably the most, the story that is even most focused on the development of queer identity.

[1:34:02] But like... *Friends at the Table* is like, “These games are, you know, \$20 if you want to buy a PDF and they're like \$50 if you want to buy—\$50 is actually maybe high, it's like \$35 if you want to buy a hard copy of the book.” And it feels, it feels like it is a show that encourages the idea that you can go home and play your own *Blades in the Dark* game and have... you can pay a lot of attention to something like the development of queer identity. You can pay a lot of attention to things that aren't covered in the show like disability, or something like, you know, getting into really specifics of how a person's gender or their sexuality manifests or, you know, things that aren't covered.

[1:34:44] Like, Austin, Austin is, you know, a Black man and is therefore great about making really well-developed black characters. And there are a lot of characters of color on the show, but like you know he has one perspective of color. And so it's like, if I want to tell a show that—if I want to tell a story that like really focuses on things that I think are core to the Asian-American experience, I can do that at home, even though Austin can't do it in *his* show, or at least hasn't necessarily tried. Um.

[1:35:14] And so like I think *Friends at the Table* has always been... there's, it's honest in the sense that it won't pretend it's show is yours. Like, it won't pretend that you are a co-author. Because you aren't! Um, which is the thing that Hussie tried to do, or that *Homestuck* tried to do, and I don't think worked, because it felt hollow. Because it was hollow!

[01:35:35] But what, what *Friends at the Table* does say, and I think frequently makes clear, is you can't, you know, you're not a co-author of this story, obviously, even if we do respond to fan criticism. But you can be a co-author of your own story, and the thing you tell at your own home, even if it's not recorded, even if it's not for publishing, is just as valuable as this thing that we do here. At least on, you know, sort of a psychological level or a spiritual level or whatever level matters to you, you know, maybe you can't sell it and maybe you shouldn't need to sell it, (*Finch laughs*) but that doesn't mean it isn't worth your time to make.

[01:36:11] And I think that's the thing that I really, really value about *Friends at the Table* at the end of the day, is that it is like, “Hey, you know, we tell a story and we tell a good story. But if you don't like it, if there's something that frustrates you about it, please go make your own thing, because we know you can do it. And we know you can do it in a way that will satisfy you, just as much, if not more than we do.”

Finch: **[01:36:39]** That was beautiful. (*Kavi laughs*) I... no, I was just (*Finch laughs*), that was the, the interviewer pause where I'm like, (pause) “Okay, I think she's done.” Um... (*Kavi laughs*) yeah, no,

I mean, I'm thinking of a tweet that came out right towards the end of Spring in Hieron where Art was just like, "Hey, if you don't like the direction it goes like, you can just stop listening, and like, it can have ended where you want it to end." But he's not then saying, "...and your interpretation is canon."

Kavi: Yeah.

Finch: He was just saying, "If you don't want to keep listening, like, you can go and write your fanfic about what else happens instead." Like...

Kavita: **[01:37:16]** Yeah.

Finch: Yeah. Yeah. And I think that's also—it really points to like, setting boundaries, um, rather than this sort of false democratization of knowledge.

Kavita: Yeah.

Finch: **[01:37:31]** Um... Yeah, it's nothing. We've touched on, but I'm talking with a lot of people about, like, parasocial relationships, and...

Kavita: (overlapping) Uh huh.

Finch: (overlapping) —that sort of, that sort of sphere. Um... yeah. Amazing. Um. That is all I have. Thank you so much, this has been absolutely lovely, and...

Kavita: Yeah, it's been really, really fun.

Finch: **[01:37:57]** Yeah, and I'm always down to... I am personally running out of energy, but I'm always down to talk about this sort of stuff, and I will keep you in the loop about projects and whatnot. I have a chaotic couple of months ahead of me, (*Finch laughs*) but...

Kavita: **[01:38:10]** I'm excited to see what comes of this, I—you know, if you're gonna do writing, I'd love to read the paper, as it were.

Finch: Yeah, so I basically the plan—uh, actually, okay, I'm gonna stop recording.