

Thesis Interview with Arp

February 17, 2021

Finch: Amazing, and we are recording. So I'm going to do just a little, for my own records. Hello, this is Finch, today is Wednesday, February 17th 2021, it is 3pm Eastern time, and I'm here with Arp. Hi Arp!

Arp: [00:23] Hello!

Finch: [00:25] So the first question I ask everyone is, um, just say a little about yourself, who are you? Whatever you want to bring into the space. (*Finch laughs*)

Arpad: [00:38] I am Arpad Hervanek, I grow cells for living, I live in a house in Pittsburgh with a dog and my partner, and I draw a lot. And listen to podcasts *a lot* in my free time and at work, and in the car, and everywhere. I have very limited interest in anything else.

Finch: [01:03] Yeah. That uh that, that makes sense, actually, I'm sorry, I realize I should have asked this before you started, do you have headphones or something?

Arpad: [01:12] Yes, do you want me to use them?

Finch: You're a little bit quiet right now and I'm worried it won't appear on the recording.

Arpad: They're just big and goofy.

Finch: Yeah. (*Pause while Arpad gets headphones*)

Arpad: [01:31] Did it work, did it work?

Finch: [01:34] Looks—sounds great.

Arpad: [01:36] Okay cool. Now you're quiet, (*Finch laughs*) but I can turn up volume.

Finch: [01:39] Now you look like, a like a Twitch streamer, it's really—you're gonna, you're here to tell me about the newest video games.

Arpad: [01:44] (*overlapping*) Oh, oh, yeah, they were the cheapest.

Finch: [01:47] No they're great! I love it, (*Finch gestures to his earbuds*) these are the ones that came with for free with my phone.

Arpad: [01:52] That's fair.

Finch: [01:54] Yeah. Oh man, I hear you on the podcast and drawing a lot. Well, I don't draw a lot, but (*Finch laughs*) podcasts especially. Yeah, when we, when we talked last, you told me a bit about how you got into actual play podcasts and *Friends*, *Friends at the Table*, but for the purposes of just recording if you could briefly say, like, how did you get into actual play podcasts and *Friends at the Table*?

Arpad: [02:20] Um, a coworker got me to listen to *The Adventure Zone*. *Adventure Zone*? Yeah, *Adventure Zone*. Is it—I always—not *Adventure Time*, *The Adventure Zone*. Okay, yep. And I got to the end of it in—very fast, because I was working in the lab a lot of hours at that time. And I got to

the end of it, and I wanted more, and I like just downloaded every actual play podcast I could find, because I didn't know what actual play was before that and I found out I like it a lot. And they all sucked until I found *Friends at the Table*, (Arpad laughs) and then I listened to it nonstop for about six months until I finished it.

Finch: [03:04] Do you remember when, when you got into it? Like when you got caught up, what season it was?

Arpad: [03:13] It was, it was Spring. But I started from the beginning.

Finch: [03:18] That is an impressive—

Arpad: [03:19] (overlapping) When I started it was the end of Twilight Mirage, actually, but when I got caught up, it was Spring. If that makes sense.

Finch: [03:30] Yeah, then that actually about the same time—I think I got in earlier, but I caught up with Spring right as the finale was airing (Finch laughs) for Spring, so I got up just like I'm here and everyone was like, "We've all been dying for the last three years." I'm like, "Oh boy, well I'm here now."

Arpad: [03:46] I caught up like right before Samot got like injured, (Finch laughs) so I caught up right in time to like cry a lot. (Arpad laughs)

Finch: (overlapping) Excellent, excellent.

Arpad: (overlapping) I mean I didn't cry a lot actually, but to feel real bad.

Finch: [03:57] (overlapping) Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. God, I don't know, I mean for me it's the—I haven't been able to cry since T, I started T, which is not a fun side effect but anyway. One thing you mentioned was that a lot of the other actual play podcasts suck a lot. (Arpad laughs) What, what, could you, can you elaborate on what about them sucks, or what about makes, what makes *Friends at the Table* not suck?

Arpad: [04:24] Well, I, in college tried to play tabletop role playing games, and it was with a bunch of straight guys and like one girl who was like... like... I don't want to be an asshole, but like, talked like an anime person—(Arpad laughs) like, used like an artificially high voice and like extreme—and I just, when I listen to a lot of actual play podcasts it puts me right back there, and I hate it, because that was a depressing time. So I don't want to feel like I'm in a room with a bunch of college jerks. And then the ones that weren't, were just about gods or something. And I know, I know *Friends at the Table* is [about gods] but they're also actually queer and actually diverse, and it was just like... I don't know, I saw fan art because I'm in art spaces. And I was like, "That's not that—okay cool it's just slash fic," and then it was canon and I was like, "Holy shit!" And, like the more I listened to the more I was like, "Holy shit!" (Arpad laughs) And I just, I'm spoiled now.

Finch: [05:45] That's a pretty common sentiment I hear people say. "Yeah, so I listened to *Friends at the Table* and it's now ruined to me for all media ever."

Arpad: [05:52] It really has.

Finch: [05:54] It really has. I listened to Marielda first and was like, “Oh, it's nice that they're sort of queerbaiting with god and his husband,” and then they were like, “And they're married and have a kid.” I was like, (*Finch gasps*).

Arpad: Right?!

Finch: [06:06] God is married and has a kid!

Arpad: [06:09] That scene where Aubrey like, finally, like sees them together, I was like, “Holy shit, what!? SamSam isn't one—one, SamSam isn't one person.” (*Finch and Arpad laugh*) I also thought Ferol was one person. (*Arpad laughs*) All the different ship names.

Finch: [06:27] Yeah! (*Finch laughs*) Like, you know, Ferol, the little, the little gremlin dude!

Arpad: [06:30] Yeah, mm hmm, one person.

Finch: [06:37] What do you like about actual play podcasts?

Arpad: [06:43] Um... the... I like narrative things. But I also like making things? And it is narrative, but I'm also listening to people make things, so you get like both sides of it? That's really nice. And you get to kind of pretend like you're in a room with people, which is also good because you can turn it off and not be in a room with people anymore if you want. (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: [07:17] Yeah that resonates... one question I had was that you've told me a bit about sort of your relative social isolation and how putting on a podcast like *Friends at the Table* kind of works against that isolation. Could you say a little more about how *Friends at the Table* sorta fits into your life?

Arpad: [07:37] Um... I, man, I don't, it's embarrassing how much I listen to a day, like. Like when I was working alone in the lab all day I could easily listen to like 14 hours straight (*Arpad laughs*). And then, like listen to it on the ride home, like I just, it fills the silence places. And like now that I'm a little bit better mentally I don't need that filling as much, but, it just... is a really good distraction from bad thoughts, and then also sometimes you do kind of... want to feel like you're around friendly people. And like the live shows are really nice for that, because, like that—you just hear all like the chatter. And it's like, puts you in that space—like I said, like I easily like flashback to like the college shitty situation, it's like a flashback to what could have been a good situation. (*Arpad and Finch laugh*) So what if, what if that was a nice experience actually?

Finch: [08:43] Alternate reality of people.

Arpad: [08:44] Yeah, it's like an AU for myself. (*Arpad and Finch laughs*)

Finch: [08:49] Self AU.

Arpad: Yep.

Finch: [08:51] Boy. Boy. Um... let me see where it makes sense to go... you know, a lot of people that I've spoken to have talked about getting into *Friends at the Table* at rough times in their lives and really appreciating the just, “I'm in a room with other people” sensation.

Arpad: [09:14] Yeah.

Finch: [09:20] Um... oh, so you described *Friends at the Table* as the first sort of talkative fandom you were in. What's that like?

Arpad: [09:34] I don't know well, I. I am starting to feel like I have friends, which is cool. And it's, (*Arpad laughs*) I don't know, I guess it's because *Friends at the Table* is so like, kind of political, I guess, maybe? But it puts you in the fandom where like, everybody is decent people, and they are friendly to each other, consistently. Like, my partner's really into like dog training, and he was like, "I wish I could find a place where people are not assholes," and I was like, "I have an Internet space that is full of not assholes," and he's like, "There's got to be some person that is an asshole," and I was like, "No you don't understand. It's like 99.9% not assholes." And that's just really cool, like, I don't know, it's... it's nice. People talk to each other, are friendly and they're that in a way that is really non-threatening. I don't know.

Finch: [10:49] Yeah, you mentioned both the politics of the show and then the people in the fandom, do you see those as related?

Arpad: [10:57] Yeah, uh huh definitely yeah.

Finch: [11:00] How so?

Arpad: [11:01] Um... well it's like anti-capitalist, like, (*Arpad laughs*) the, the, all the themes of the show are... I don't know, you couldn't, you... they make it really clear, like they're not afraid to make it clear that you would be an asshole to like, want to do this bad thing, or like you know, it's... not obviously moral and like an obnoxious way... I don't know, it has challenged things for me, to like make me be like, "Oh, that is, the possibility," like you know, like it has, like, made me grow as like a person for other people. So I guess it just attracts people who are also that way thinking?

Finch: [12:00] Yeah, I still can't pin down for myself, like, what it is that draws me to—cause the idea that you'd want to listen to three hours of other people that you don't know playing a game is so hard to explain to people that don't derive enjoyment from listening to? Um, I'm like.

Arpad: [12:22] Oh I don't know, for me that makes complete sense because I like I don't socialize much at all, but when I do, I prefer it to be "my partner has friends and they come over, and I do dishes or draw and just like listen." Like that's always been the social situation that I've been like most comfortable in is being in a room while other people do things and I'm not actually involved directly but like, I'm just like hearing people be happy together, so it totally makes sense for me, it's like, I get to have the thing.

Finch: [12:59] Yeah. No that's, that's really interesting. I'm curious, then, how that, how that relates to your art and what you do in fandom spaces, like, where you're sort of putting yourself out there. Let me think of an actual, an actual question. I of course have this whole list of questions and then immediately none of them are the right one to ask so, like, two seconds.

Arpad: That's how it goes. (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: [13:28] So it goes. Um...

[13:43] I guess maybe starting question then is, what's made you want to interact with other people in this fandom?

Arpad: [14:03] Um... I don't want to say, like, "the approachability" so much again, but it is, I guess. Other fandom spaces I had been in where like people would have their fandom account, and it would be full of just like. Nothing but that. And then, like other—I don't, man, I'm sorry, I'm not very articulate right now.

Finch: [14:28] No, you're so fine!

Arpad: [14:37] I guess there's so many stories in *Friends at the Table*, too. It's not just one, that helps. So it's just there's so many places to start conversations about and people would, would. And like, I'd want to contribute. And I didn't for like a year or so, but like in other fandom spaces, I didn't get to that place because they weren't having I guess as many conversations. Like *Friends at the Table* isn't like, they're not like conversing a lot, but it's more, it's so much more than any other space, which is just like pictures and fanfic and like I want this person to sexually explicit blah blah blah. Like.

Finch: [15:20] Just a little, little like just taking the characters like Barbie dolls and being like, "kiss, kiss, kiss."

Arpad: (overlapping) Yeah, yep, yeah.

Finch: [15:28] I mean, I still do that in *Friends at the Table*, but it's like, kiss kiss and then there's also politics.

Arpad: [15:30] Yeah no and like, I, you know, I—it's going to come up, so like, I draw porn a lot—

Finch: Hell yeah. I write porn a lot.

Arpad: [15:35] So I'm obviously not offended by that, but like also I've never really, like... Because I didn't, like I did like furry porn for a living for a year or two and, like, I just have always really been annoyed by... not, it's not vanilla, but like really mainstream-looking like art and stuff. And so like, I haven't actually really fit into other fandoms because I just won't—I draw people ugly, I draw people with different like body shapes, like you know, like I, I'm very interested in that—or not interested, but, like, I find it fulfilling to do that more and it fits in in *Friends at the Table*. I think the first comment I ever got on art, like, directly was like a picture of like Lem and Emmanuel on like a balcony and someone said, "I love your Emmanuel design," and I was like, "I drew him short and fat and bald!"

Arpad: [16:37] And like nobody has ever, like that was just so, just like, what? You like that one? You don't like, like the pretty orc? Like, you like the—and it's just, I don't know if—that was really refreshing. And it's consistent, like, I feel encouraged to like explore and like learn more, like diverse bodies and diverse all that stuff in the fandom rather than pressured to make everyone pretty, you know. And that's really nice and that makes me want to do it more. Like it's a basic reward system, like.

Finch: [17:13] Yeah.

[17:17] Me: I don't care about Twitter likes. Also me: post fic, refresh refresh refresh refresh refresh. Give me the dopamine!!

Arpad: [17:26] Yeah, yep.

Finch: [17:31] Um, what you're saying about sort of annoyance with, with mainstream art and mainstream fandom spaces, really, really resonates with me. I mean, I personally connect it to transness in a lot of ways, where I'm like, I'm just not interested in what a lot of typical, typical, quote unquote "normal," beautiful, idealized bodies look like.

Arpad: Yeah.

Finch: [17:53] Um. I thought I was ace for a while, but it turns out, I just don't... yeah.

Arpad: [17:59] That's very fair, yeah.

Finch: [18:05] Yeah well, I guess, then on that note. I wanted to, I did want to talk about sort of your art, which you do a lot of. Maybe an opening question is what's, what's a favorite part for you of drawing, what do you enjoy about it?

Arpad: [18:25] Um. Figuring it out. (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: That's interesting...

Arpad: [18:29] Like, I draw all the parts of the body, even the ones that are hidden. Like I'll draw in like, layers, like you're cutting someone in half. So like when I draw, I'm figuring out all of the body parts, like you know—because I'm really bothered if I do something and like, an arm is a way that it wouldn't actually be able to be. Like, I don't know, like I'm a biologist and I care about that kind of thing and like. (*Finch laughs*) And like I, I love physics, like I love like thinking about the way light like goes through a lens, I love—and like where it would reflect to, like. So drawing is like, it lets me do all of my interests at once, because I'm thinking about how things would actually be, and like. So, um, yeah, I guess.

Finch: [19:22] That makes a lot of sense.

Arpad: [19:24] Like I love animation because I get to draw every part, it's so satisfying. Like a comic is really annoying because you're like, "here's this and then here's that," and you have to choose like what parts of the image are important. And that's hard for me, because I like all the parts. But animation it's like, you draw every single, every part. Like every little flinch, like eye muscle, like I just—oh boy, it's good, satisfying. Satisfying. (pause) Sorry.

Finch: [19:54] No, nothing to... Sometimes I'll be, I'll be quiet because I have a tendency to start talking before someone is done when they've just paused, so sometimes I just sit and wait.

Arpad: [20:06] That's good, I should practice that because I— (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: [20:09] Yeah no it's (*Finch laughs*)—you keep talking, it's *my* job to shut up. Um... Yeah, let's see...

Arpad: [20:19] Yeah Emily called it people, people, people puzzles once, and it's like I can't stop being like, that's exactly what it is! It's exactly, it's putting a puzzle together.

Finch: [20:27] Yeah no, you described how you'd like thinking about erotica as like, taking different body shapes and seeing how they fit together. It's not, I have, quote, "not actually all that horny," which I thought was great.

Arpad: [20:38] No, almost never.

Finch: [20:44] I guess, then, the second part of the interview I have is a question I realized I, I usually ask at the beginning, but I, I skipped around a bit, which is about sort of your own experience with gender and sexuality and then how that relates to how you think about fandom and *Friends at the Table* and art and all that cool stuff. As a baseline, though, or maybe as an, as an opening, how do you describe, like, gender and sexuality, as it works for you?

Arpad: [21:21] Um... hm... I'm sorry... I'm nonbinary but trans and like, I really, like the physical part of it is really important to me, I guess—or not important, but like it has been affecting me in a lot, like that's the part that has affected me in life. Like, I have not, like, as soon as I figured out trans was a thing that was an option, I immediately like, just started dressing different ways and like I, like, um, (*Arpad laughs*) like aggressively pursued HRT. I like, aggress—like you know, like it has been like, if I could do it, I did it immediately, as soon as I found out, so.

Finch: [22:04] (overlapping) Hell yeah.

Arpad: [22:05] Like it's, like, like, um. Bottom surgery I didn't have because, like, I could never afford it, and then suddenly I could, and it was like suddenly I'm doing it, so. I don't know, brains, man, they just tell you you want to be a way, I guess. I don't know, I don't know, what is... places to go.

Finch: [22:36] No, that is—it's really, it's open ended, because people have so many different experiences, I'm not...

Arpad: [22:41] Yeah. Um... (pause) I'm sorry, I feel like I have more things to say, but I don't know how to say it, so.

Finch: [22:56] Take your time! We can also circle back around to anything if you think of something.

Arpad: [23:00] (overlapping) That would be good, can we just like come back, like it, cause sometimes my brain will fill in the answer later.

Finch: [23:05] No yeah, I, I do that myself. If you've ever had the experience of like, four hours later you're like, "I know the solution to question four!" Like, that would have been helpful when I was in the exam!

Arpad: [23:17] That's exactly it.

Finch: [23:18] "Glad you were working on that in the background, brain."

Arpad: Yeah.

Finch: [23:28] The—what you said about the physical part of it is really interesting to me because *Friends at the Table* is an audio medium. How do you see like transness and gender working in the show?

Arpad: [23:43] Well, one, they just talk about it, which is nice, but they only talk about like the, I don't think they've mentioned like physical transition at all, but part of it being audio is that whenever you make med—like you make something, it's like you have to fill it in it. For, like, you have to. Like there's no reference for what person whatever's body is, you have to come up with it. So like, it's like a playground, it's like, uh, free real estate, I guess, like. (*Arpad laughs*) Put whatever you want here.

Finch: [24:24] Yeah. I'm curious if you've seen that in... in the fandom at all, like what, what that, what effect that has on sort of how people interpret characters or take up trans characters.

Arpad: [24:33] Yeah no definitely. I've like, the like common designs for characters that just kind of get like accepted because, like everyone draws them. There's like... or like even in fic, like, there are so many—well it's mostly transmasculine honestly, but still, that's like unusual for there to be, like it's consistent, like Gig—I could see it like as I'm reading the Twilight Mirage stuff and, like the stuff all the way, like the early stuff is like a mix, and you can see it get uniform and like. Someone will write him as trans and then people will continue writing him as cis and then like by the newer fics every—consistently, if it comes up, he's trans. Fero, consistently, if it comes up, he's trans.
(*Finch laughs*)

[25:31] Like there's just like—and it's, it's neat to see that happen because, like I, I also like, if I'm not listening to it, I'm probably reading fanfic (*Arpad laughs*). So I read all of it, I don't even try to like pick and choose. I will just like start a tag, go back, open every single one in a tab, and work through it. So like it's neat because you get like the big picture when you do that, because you can see the changes, you know. So it's been really neat seeing that in the fandom for different characters or different, like, the way people talk about the characters.

[26:07] Even's—like Even Gardner's transformation into like, a bug man, like, (*Arpad laughs*) the different ways, people like write that or draw that is really neat to me too. That one's like, least consistent, people are not very consistent with that one, and I like how that ends up. Or like Apostolosians, are like a gender-neutral like, species, people, whatever. And like, the way people treat that is really neat, that one's like free game, people go wild with that, I love it.

Finch: [26:46] There's a couple threads there that I want to pull on. The first one is you sort of mentioned offhand that it seems to be a lot... you notice this headcanoning happening a lot more with headcanoning characters as transmasculine. Do you have any thoughts about why that is?

Arpad: [27:04] Probably because, or at least it seems like, a lot of people in fandom spaces are “assigned female at birth,” quote unquote. (*Arpad laughs*) So it, I assume that it's just like the, what people are able to identify with, and that's what they draw, which is great. You know.

Finch: [27:28] It's good. Looks at Samot: that's a beautiful trans man right there.

Arpad: [27:32] Yeah. Yep. Ah, and I'm so, I feel like I did this, because I ranted about it publicly a lot, (*Arpad laughs*) but like you can also see like the, like the cis people who write trans people over time, like have fixed their fics, like I just, oh my God, I'm so irritated when people describe trans bodies with like... well, because it is all trans men—mostly transmasculine bodies that are described in like these erotic fic, and like they'll use like... I don't even want to say it out loud, I hate it. I hate the word like, “clit,” but they'll like describe that and I'm just like, “you're describing like a trans—.” Like I don't know, I guess cuz like I when I transitioned it was like really like, there was none of the like, “You can just accept your body how it is.”

[28:27] It was like, you know, like I don't know, it was a long time ago, so people were basically all transmed, that's like what was the common narrative. And like my partner has like severe dysphoria and like, just the amount of time it would take to like get out, like, like it's just triggering to see something like that, like for hi, and like it became it for me because, like you know, and I

just—so I just, go off about it in public like if you're describing this like maybe you should describe it, how people want to be seen, and not just like, as their birth assign—like it's not, like you know, like don't just like be like, "This is a lady, but a man now," or like, "This is a man, but like I want to be able to write like the genitals that I identify with so I'm just going to make them trans."

[29:20] Like you can see, like the slow, like, as they learn about trans people, like transformation from like, "I'm just projecting on this as a cis person," to "Oh, I guess this is actually how people think." And I know, I know there's people who are fine with referring to their genitals that way, but like, I don't know, that's just so not my experience that I'm just like, "Oh man, how, how could you do that, to somebody?"

Finch: [29:52] Yeah, it's this weird sort of... I think it's great that we've moved away from transmedicalist stuff in part because that is what discouraged me from being like, "I'm not trans because I don't have XYZ." No, you do have dysphoria, you just didn't recognize it until you retrospective—anyway.

Arpad: [30:10] (overlapping) Yep. Yep. Sure does work that way.

Finch: [30:12] It's this weird extreme of like, removing transness from any physical consequence that I just think is bizarre.

Arpad: [30:19] (overlapping) Yes. Yes, exactly exactly. Like there's just no, like, dysphoria is just not even brought up. But! Oh, I think we talked about that in like the pre-interview, of how like in *Friends at the Table*, because, like, already, trans is like a thing, it's not—like other fandoms, it's like, you get to the point where, oh, this character is trans and like that is radical, so that's as far as you get. But in *Friends at the Table*, it's like, this person's already trans, so now we can explore more complex topics within that. So, like, the thought of even wanting to see that in media or in like fan stuff is like wild because in any other space, I would just be like it's good enough, "Oh my God, they said they're trans, that's good enough. Thank, thank you."

Finch: [31:19] Actually, that reminds me of the other thing that your, your first talk about transness and gender in the show reminded me of, which I very helpfully left a note for myself that just says, "A." (Arpad and Finch laughs) Thanks for not finishing that thought, brain. (Finch clears his throat) Excuse me. What you said about Apostolosians and weird gender stuff and how people just go wild with that, it's like when the show already has a baseline of, "of course, trans people exist, why wouldn't they?"

Arpad: Mm hmm.

Finch: Then the fans are just like, "My playground now."

Arpad: [31:51] Yeah.

Finch: [31:52] And I love it. (Finch mumbles) Watching cis people get better with language... (pause)

[32:17] Let's see, where is a good place...

[32:25] One question that sort of reminds me of is, what do you want to see more of in the fandom?

Arpad: [32:38] Um... I guess, with relation to transness, just different ways of being trans. Because we do have a lot of like transmasculine representation and that's great, but even then it is still limited to like one type. Like you know, like I don't know, there's just, there's so many ways, and I would love to see it explored. And I know people do like—like Blue J people like draw different ways, or like, like again the Apostolosians, people go wild. But like I guess in, once it gets to places where it would be relevant, like... porn, I guess. (*Arpad and Finch laugh*) Like you know, like in regular fanart it's like people can be going wild and you have no idea because they're like, you know, who knows what that person's shaped like under the clothes, but like in the spaces where it is adult stuff and you are confronted with it, I would like more diversity there I guess.

Finch: [33:37] Mm hmm, mm hmm. It's like, yes, good that we're not taking for granted everything about human bodies and just mapping that on to people in the future, but also, can we apply that to genitals too now, please?

Arpad: [33:47] Yeah!

Finch: [33:51] Yeah, and honestly I think I see that as relating to what you were saying about, sort of, watching cis people get better with language, where—it's an extreme example, but sometimes I feel like cis people just want to do the *Cyberpunk 2077* thing, where they're like, "Trans people are just when you just sort of Lego, Lego, take different, different body parts together." I'm like, why?

Arpad: Yeah.

Finch: Uh, no?!?

Arpad: [34:20] Yeah and I'm just, like I spent so many times, like—because I've been like estrogen dominant and then testosterone dominant, and like I've watched my own body change, I've watched my partner's body change, like. And there's just so many shapes and things that change based on everything, and like why, why limit yourself? Like, you can have so much.

Finch: [34:43] Exactly! Exactly. Yeah. You've reflected a little bit on your own just sort of how you relate, how you think about transness, to you know when you came out and how you came out, and maybe the limits of coming out as a helpful way of thinking about gender, which is my personal—anyway. Yeah, I just think, I just think it's interesting, I didn't have a question (*Arpad laughs*) I just think it's interesting. Um.

[35:17] I have a general question, but I want to make it specific, so I don't just ask you about something we've already covered.

Arpad: [35:26] Sorry I'm sitting by a window, so (*Arpad laughs*) if I'm like, spacey—

Finch: (overlapping) No, my window's right here and I'm just like. (*Arpad laughs*) No, it's great, I can zone out in class and look like I'm paying attention, it's like.

Arpad: [35:40] Very engaged with this window.

Finch: [35:44] Yeah (*Finch laughs*), there's a little birds nest in one of the dryer vents—

Arpad: (overlapping) Oh, you got a nest? Wow...

Finch: (overlapping) —in the house across the way. It's, it's a little hard to see now, but I do, you sometimes see the birds go in and out. Anyway, that's important stuff to record for posterity. Um...

[36:04] So, both in the fandom and the show, something you talked about in our pre-interview was safety as something that drew you to the show, like not feeling like you needed to keep your guard up when you were listening, or when you were in the fandom. Where does that happen, can you say more on that?

Arpad: [36:23] Um. I guess they just, they just don't. (Pause) The narratives that get shown in like mainstream media, they'll sometimes, like, go in that direction, and I don't anymore, but like when I was starting like it'd be like, "Ah, they're gonna just use like this transness to do this, or this queer relationship to do that." Or, like, um, like Broun, I love the way they treat, I love—like. Like they're like, "Yes, this is like a horrible person," (*Arpad laughs*) but they don't, they don't. I don't know, they treat things realistically, instead of just like, "We're going to punish this character, because we want that moral to show," or, "We're gonna..." I don't know, every time I'm afraid of something happening that I know would happen in like a TV show or something, it usually doesn't. Or if it does, they give it so much narrative context that it makes sense to happen and I no longer am offended by it.

[37:41] Like they just, they really do a good job of, like they say all the time, like, "Does this follow the narrative?" Like you know, like. And they do it, they're committed to it. And like, so even when it's not like, gender or politics or anything, even just like storytelling, like basic storytelling, they're just like really committed to like having it flow and instead of interjecting, like, "This is the popular way to treat the situation right now," they will instead be like, "Well, what would actually happen?" And like, that's really appealing to me because I'm not an abstract person at all, so like, I have never like, anytime I'm reading a story and it's like clear that they're doing this thing because it's like, "We want to reflect the morals of the time, so we're gonna like punish whatever," or—I'm sorry I'm not very good at specific examples, but, but like they just don't and I appreciate it a lot because, like. I always just want like what would actually happen like what would actually happen in this context.

[38:47] And like. Like they have so many stories and they play with different like worlds, and it's like, "What would happen in this world," and like I just feel confident like if they took the same character and put it in a different world, they would treat it as that, like, in the appropriate way for that world, instead of carrying like that character's tropes, or like, you know, like I don't know, they're just, they're committed to good storytelling. It's right in the, it's right in the intro and they sure do do a good job with a it.

Finch: [39:17] Yeah, what, what I'm sort of hearing you say is a lot of things, but, but maybe one of them is like, they're faithful to the rules of the worlds they create?

Arpad: [39:26] Yeah.

Finch: [39:28] Where it's like, they're not trying to impose the rules of our world onto their fictional worlds?

Arpad: [39:33] Yes, yes. Austin, Austin yelled at (*Arpad laughs*)—I don't know if you, you listen to Tips at the Table.

Finch: [39:41] I'm not on Patreon yet.

Arpad: [39:42] Oh my God, I, when we were st—you're in the pirate game, so you know, like I have that fish character?

Finch: (overlapping) Yeah, I saw this, yeah.

Arpad: [39:46] I was, I like wrote in, and I was like, "I'm afraid that I'm going to get too committed to the biology of this fish person and I'm going to stop the storytelling to make sure that the biology is correct, what do I do?" And he was like, "Stop bringing, like, real world science into this fictional world, like, stop being bioessential—" like he was like. (*Finch laughs*) I was like, "Oh shit, oh no, oh no, I'm the bad person." He like, referenced—ah, just blasted, destroyed, destroyed.

Finch: (overlapping) Didn't think—

Arpad: [40:22] (overlapping) But it helped, like you know, cause that's, that is what they do, like, and it makes sense, like you are, it's just, it's whatever the world is, it's not... why, why limit the world by our science and stuff? And they, they do commit to it, they're really good about it. Whereas like, even knowing that and agreeing with that, like, I'm still like, knee jerk, like I want to bring, like, how I know this world works into that. Like you know, like. They are very good at setting up... world states. Like I'm not even offended when Austin's like, "30,000 years..." I'm like, that's silly, but okay. (*Arpad laughs*) All right.

Finch: [41:07] Time is long, space is big. Yeah, what you said about "why limit the world" really just...

Arpad: [41:20] Yeah no, that was like completely eye opening to me, like the, being on, like, writing in a question and having them just like joke about it was just like really great, like I wasn't even embarrassed, because I was just like, "Great, I needed to be told this. Thank you."

Finch: [41:37] Yeah, yeah. We should—there's something there I want to circle back to, but I do want to talk about—so, instead, of how you relate to the cast and how you both, like, in a—when you are there alone listening and also how you sort of on a more real level interact with the cast. So in our pre-interview, you talked about how like, Art and Austin are from similar areas to where you grew up, and there were sort of, like that was like an immediate, "Oh, I can I feel comfortable with these people and I can't figure out why."

Arpad: [42:09] Yeah.

Finch: [42:11] Um, but I guess then to open the general question like, how do you relate to the cast of the show, how do you, how does that work for you?

Arpad: [42:24] Man, I don't, that's such a general question, I don't. I appreciate them, I guess. I don't know, I'm like, I'm impressed with their work. I don't, like I, like I don't know, I have, I guess, I think, "Boy, I wish I could be friends with people like this," or like, "I wish my experience with friends was like how they sound like their experience of friends is." And I just am like kind of like living in the fantasy land of like—alright, I guess that's like it's really nice with like Austin and Art being from like, my area, because they'll like reference stuff that is familiar to me. But like, if,

every time I've interact with someone with the area, they're horrible. (*Arpad laughs*) They're horrible, I hate everyone, I will never go back to my hometown (*Finch laughs*) because I just can't, I can't, like you know it's just, it was bad, but like it allows me to be in the space of like, "What if it was good?" Like it lets me be comfort—like it lets me think of the things that they're referencing and not have that colored by my actual knowledge of the area, which is like, "I would be killed there." (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: Yay...

Arpad: [43:36] Or like, I feel like, I—not anymore probably, actually, but, like, like I don't know—and they're like the same age, like they're in my age group, they're not actually like, in their early twen—no offence, like they're not in their early 20s or whatever, but they like, so they can reference things and it's like, of the same time period, even, of when I was growing up. So it's like, really just like, it lets me be in this place of like, "What if it wasn't ter—" and they acknowledge the things that are terrible too, and they like play off of—like Bluff City, like they just like, like, let's acknowledge it as terrible, like all these terrible things, what if we instead of just being like, "That's normal," if we were like, "This is terrible and like it's so terrible that we're going to just like treat it as, like horror or whatever," like you know? And it's just like, it's really, I don't know, it's nice to be able to do that.

Finch: [44:30] What I'm hearing you say is... critical worldbuilding?

Arpad: [44:34] Yeah, critical worldbuilding! How about it, it's right in their—

Finch: (overlapping) Wow!

Arpad: (overlapping) Man, everything in their intro, that's it. They got it.

Finch: (overlapping) It's just right there!

Arpad: (overlapping) Why are we even doing this interview, just like repeat it, like just repeat their intro.

Finch: [44:43] (overlapping) Actually yeah, no thesis, thesis is just, you know, "critical worldbuilding, smart characterization—"

Arpad: (overlapping) They did it!

Finch: (overlapping) "—fun interaction between good friends."

Arpad: [44:50] (overlapping) Yeah, uh huh.

Finch: [44:51] I'm turning that in, that's all.

Arpad: [44:52] Yeah, that's like—I don't know if you, I don't know if they still make you have like one sentence statements, but there it is.

Finch: [44:58] Yeah, no, right there. The, the, the, like the, um.

Arpad: [45:01] (overlapping) You can, you can expand on it, but like, that's your thing.

Finch: [45:04] (overlapping) Argument. Yeah, that's my thing right there. Maybe those should be my chapters. Anyway. Maybe, maybe I'll break down the sort of interview analysis in like those three and be like, various things. That would be cute. Anyway.

[45:17] Yeah I mean I know it's a really—"How do you relate to the cast of the show" is a really general question, and it's because I want to see what people like bring, bring, bring into the space, you know. Yeah, what was it like hearing them discuss your question? I mean, it seems like it was pretty good, but.

Arpad: [45:39] Um, yeah it was... (*Arpad's dog walks into view. Finch gasps.*)

Arpad: [45:42] What, do you see her? She's not supposed to be in this room, but I can't—Clover, get out of here. (*Finch laughs*) Sorry, my art room is like supposed to be dog free because I actually hate dogs. (*Arpad laughs*) So like—well anyway, sorry that's not that's not, let's stop with this (*Arpad keeps laughing*)—I love my dog daughter.

[46:03] But... I'm gone, I'm gone, what was the question? Oh, how it felt hearing, like—

Finch: What was it like hearing—

Arpad: [46:12] Yeah, um. Embarrassing, a little bit. Because it made me think critically about myself and like what I was doing. But, um. Good? I don't know, I appreciate... I'm not ever, I like learning. So even if it's learning something bad about myself, I'm happy about it, and it was just like, I was grateful that they took the time to do it, I guess. And like they also just like gave really genuine answers, too. I don't know, it was—they were really thoughtful about it, and they have been, cause like I've written, I forget what... like every time I have interacted with them, it has been really genuine.

[47:01] Or like it wasn't my question, but somebody asked like, "How do you make a playlist because, like, I don't know how to find music." And they treated it *so genuinely*, they just were like, "Well, like, here's the basics of how you find music." Like it—they were just, they didn't make, they weren't, they're just not cruel people. And that's like really nice because it's like, it's... like, I don't know, like the, the music person I really identify with because, like I my media knowledge is like nothing because I grew up without Internet or TV or a library anywhere near me or radio or like you know just completely isolated in that way. So like, I like music, so I got into it easy but, like the way they treated it, it was like. It made it feel like if I did interact with them, they wouldn't be assholes about me not knowing literally anything. (*Arpad laughs*) Or like, like, I don't know, I just appreciate their... (*Arpad mumbles*) commitment to worldbuilding, even in the world.

Finch: [48:08] Yeah. No, I think—you sort of mumbled it, but I think that's true, like I'd agree there. You know, what if we made the world a better place not only in our fantasy settings?

Arpad: [48:20] Yeah.

Finch: [48:26] Yeah, I think... I ask about how you relate because a lot of people have brought up wanting to talk about like the weird parasocial aspect of like following the people that they create and like not knowing boundaries and how to interact, but it sounds like you've had a really good experience overall.

Arpad: [48:42] Yeah well, I mean I do, I—I, like my interaction with socializing normally is it takes me like literal years to even *think* of calling someone my friend? Like, I'm practicing, I'm using the fandom space to practice being able to like have casual friends like, like I have, like... telling Ciarán I have this interview, I'm like, "I have this interview with this pers—this fri... frie..." (*Finch laughs*) "This person who I think might be my friend." Like, it's so hard for me to do that that like I don't have that problem at all. I'm not, like, the cast, I have no issue not thinking of them as my friend, because, like...

Finch: They're not.

Arpad: [49:24] They're not! And, like in normal life, I just like eavesdrop on people all the time because I'm quiet in public spaces and, like, I never think they're my friend, but like I still get comfort from it. So like I do have like a weird parasocial thing where it's like I pretend they're in the room, but like I have no problem being in close spaces with people and not expecting anything from them. (*Arpad and Finch laugh*)

Finch: [49:47] Nico called me out on that a couple weeks ago, where I was like, "Yeah, you know—" and Nico's like, "Yeah, and like, I mean you're my friend, so this." And I'm like, "What?" Nico's like, "Did you not...?" And I'm like, "Oh, I just don't think anyone's my friend until they're about to confess their love to me—

Arpad: (overlapping) Yeah, yep!

Finch: (overlapping) —and then I think that they might maybe think of me not as an enemy.

Arpad: [50:06] (overlapping) Yeah, yep! No Annie said, like, "I saw someone like named Arpad and I thought, *Oh, my friend Arpad,*" like, "Excuse—what? What?" (*Arpad and Finch laugh*)

Finch: What?

Arpad: "My friend? I have a friend? Okay..."

Finch: [50:20] Oh boy, friendships hard!

Arpad: [50:23] Yeah.

Finch: [50:27] I'm trying to make this—something that I try very hard not to do interviews is like, I want to hear your thoughts and your opinions and I don't want to take up time doing the thing that like, you often see old academics do, where they'll be listening to like a graduate student give a talk and be like, "Here's my question on your paper, which is just three paragraphs of me talking about why you're wrong, period."

Arpad: Yeah.

Finch: [50:55] You're like, "Thank you?" So I'm trying very hard not to be like here's an interesting thing I think you said, people are like, "...Okay, and?" I'm like, "Sorry, that wasn't a question." But the thing I was going to say with that preface is, um, I'm curious what you said about the sort of tension between... there's like, part of their storytelling is like why limit the world and it doesn't have to follow our rules, you know, it doesn't—the fish doesn't have to obey our laws of physics. But then also you've talked about, especially with relation to transness and queerness, like, it's

good to see people that are like you in media, so like. I guess what I'm curious about is like, could you speak a little on this balance between, like, realistic representation, but also imagining something better?

Arpad: [51:49] Yeah, yeah, no, that's hard for me a lot, actually. And that is like it's not a complaint I have, because I don't want anyone to do something they don't want to do. But like, man, when people depict trans people in worlds where they just have no problems at all? I'm just like—okay? Like, like, I don't know, I really like Millie being trans, I really wanted them to expand on that, like make it some kind of struggle, like a little bit, like Clem's an *ass*—like you put a trans woman in a situation where she's like under the power of this, like, canonical asshole. (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: [52:29] Yeah.

Arpad: [52:29] Can we, like, they could make it like a better world where Clem is an asshole about it, and then we get to see her fucking destroyed. Like that'd be great, but like, having it just not come up at all ever is like, I understand that fantasy, and it seems to be one that most people have so like I don't want to be like, "make it edgy," but like, I just I have, I do have a hard time with that part of it. That balance, I guess? Because, like in an ideal world it wouldn't be an issue, absolutely, you're right, but like, that's just so far out of my perspective that it's like, I don't even like, whenever I do write fanfic I put it right in there because, like I can't, I can't, I just can't like... I don't know, it's hard.

Finch: [53:21] It's hard!

Arpad: [53:22] Cause like—yeah.

Finch: [53:24] Yeah... what were you gonna say?

Arpad: [53:25] No, that's it, I was just gonna repeat it again, because I repeat things.

Finch: [53:29] Repeating's great, it's a—you repeat things and then people remember it. It's a good way to highlight your point. Um... yeah, I wonder how much of it is like an... (*Finch laughs*) I don't want to say "as I've gotten older," because I know that I am in fact baby, um, but—

Arpad: [53:49] (overlapping) How old are you?

Finch: [53:50] I'm gonna be 22 at the end of the month, um. (*Finch laughs*) Baby. Um, I guess, maybe a better way to phrase it is, as I've gotten more comfortable with gender and sexuality and have gotten farther away from being 15 on Tumblr, um, or feeling like I need to fight over some sort of scarce, like, trans validity, I guess? Um, I've gotten more comfortable with stories that are like, that don't just show transness, transness without problems, because... I don't know, I feel like maybe it's like being older, maybe it's just different media, different people making the media, but, you know. I definitely empathize with people that are like, "I just want to see people that are trans and don't have a problem with it because that's what I would like my life to be." But then also, I want to see people that are trans and get to punch people that are shitty to them.

Arpad: [54:45] Yeah, I guess like my experience was also is like, um, I am, like, I've been like non-binary for like five years, six, I don't know how what time is, but whatever. But, like, for me, a lot of it is like, again, because I am like... physical parts are important to me, it's important to me for some

reason, I don't know why my brain wants it to be, but it is—that like, I confuse people in public. Like I need—

Finch: (*overlapping*) Great.

Arpad: [55:17] I gotta. So like in these worlds where it's not an issue, that wouldn't be an option. So part of it for me also is like not only do—is it hard to identify with because, like I have faced so much like, like, I don't know, like, mothers like chasing me into the parking lot and telling me to like get away from their children, like, like, cause I'm going to like taint—like you know, like I've had that experience a lot. So it's hard to identify with like people who never have that experience, but like also... part of the fun is scaring the shit out of cis people!

Finch: [55:51] (*overlapping*) It's great! It's amazing!

Arpad: [55:51] (*overlapping*) It's fun! It's fun! It's fun, like, like, I don't know, when I was like your age, I was like really obsessed with being stealth, like, like nobody can know, nobody can know. But like, this world now—and like, the 15-year-olds on Tumblr totally helped me with this, so like, thanks. But like, the ability to like do that is like part of the thing. Like I had bottom surgery specifically to make it so nobody could tell—like, “who knows what that is?” (*Arpad and Finch laugh*)

Finch: (*overlapping*) That's excellent.

Arpad: [56:28] So, like, like, extremely important to me, for some reason. Some, some really weird chemical reason in there, I don't know what it is, but I ain't fighting it.

Finch: [56:38] Yeah, exactly, it's like, brain says this and it's much easier to just go with what brain says—yeah. Yeah, I mean I think there's a pretty well-developed... there's a lot of discussions about how often—in academia and, more broadly—about how often questions of gender and specifically transness appear in relation to questions of monstrosity. There's a great essay from the early 90s that's considered like the foundation of sort of academic studies of transness? I have my own qualms about—anyway, but it's called “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” and it's about these sort of questions of monstrosity and whatnot. So yeah, I think a lot about, you know, what makes a monster, and I think that is actually (*Finch laughs*)—to return to the topic at hand, that is kind of what drives me to *Friends at the Table* is that they're thinking really critically about what makes someone a monster in a lot of cases.

Arpad: [57:35] Yeah, and they don't ever fall on like.... the like, “orc are this,” like they don't do that even a little bit. Like I've heard other stories that like, challenge it but make it a big deal that they're challenging it? And in *Friends at the Table*, it is very clear that it's the actions of the person that make it a monster and not literally anything else. Like, *literally* anything else doesn't matter, and it's nice.

Finch: [58:03] What do you mean by some other things like, challenge it but then make a big deal of it?

Arpad: [58:10] Like, like, um, like all of the like sexy vampire stories that are like, “Oh, vampires are evil, but like I love this one! And we're going to like show over time that they're not evil.” Like you know, and then like that is the story, the story is “let's accept these monsters,” and I guess that does relate directly to transness and how they treat it because, like. That is how media shows like gender, too, is like... if they're showing a trans person in a positive light, it is always like, “Oh, they

are a whole person, whoa!” and that's the whole story. So, like, *Friends at the Table* just skips past that, we're just past it and everything. And that's nice because that is a very tiring thing. And that's hypocritical of me to say, when I'm like, “I wish they would show conflict with like trans folks,” but like. They skip past this other thing and that's great, but like man, that's nice to not have to deal with that.

Finch: [59:13] Yeah I'm curious, then, what would—what I'm hearing you say is that you want to see conflict and transness is not as default but outside of these tropes that have become just really kind of problematic stereotypes in a way. But what—I guess, if you were to... like, what would you want to see in media in relation to transness? Like, what would that look like for you?

Arpad: [59:42] Um, I mean, it would look almost exactly like what *Friends at the Table* except for when they like depict XYZ character as being like a bigot for like whatever reasons, they would include like transness, because like, I don't know, that's... they would be. (*Arpad laughs*) Like, I don't know, cause I think about this whole lot, like, how do you even define someone as trans in like, like, Apostolos or whatever? Like where it's not, where it's a non-issue, how do you even depict this person as trans? And like, the easy way, or kind of I guess lazy way, would be having like an outside perspective, where they go, “Whoa, what is this?” (*Finch and Arpad laugh*)

Finch: [1:00:33] “This fish has boobs? What??” (*Finch laughs*)

Arpad: [1:00:37] So if they're not gonna like just, have characters that experience dysphoria on screen—because that would be another way where like you don't even have to like have conflict against it, it'd just be like, depicting the like, weird, like, “I have this body and don't like it, and I would like to change it,” or like, “I can change it, but like that would mean these things, and I don't want those things,” and like you know, like all that conflict would also be another way of like, showing transness without having to have—because there's plenty of internal conflict, there's plenty of it. (*Arpad laughs*) So you could just show that, you don't have to have the outside conflict, but if you're not going to do the internal conflict, then a little bit of the outside conflict, I think, would be part of it, but otherwise almost exactly how trans—you know, like, they do, they got it, I just... something to make it obvious that it is actually something? Instead of just saying this is, “this is a trans person”—and like I trust them to like depict it that way, especially because like the cast members are trans, and so like, like I know that they're, it's not just a throwaway line, but like, you know?

Finch: [1:01:48] Yeah. Yeah no, that makes perfect sense. And what you said about depicting dysphoria had—got me thinking about mechanics, and how so much of what they show on screen on the show is determined by the mechanics of the games they're playing, and like, what would a game look like that has, that like opens up space for players to talk about dysphoria.

Arpad: [1:02:10] Yeah, well like um... I don't know if you've listened to all of Bluff City, but like they played... yeah, there's like the—

Finch: [1:02:16] (overlapping) Not all of it, but spoil away, I don't care.

Arpad: [1:02:20] It's, it's just about the mechanics. So like, but the game that they play for like the finale of the first season has like these heartbeat mechanics. And the, the game does actually, is like, like, “Ladies should have like this range of heartbeat, and like, old people should have this range of

heartbeat,” and they're like, of course they're like, “We're, fuck, fuck, fuck that, we're not playing that.” Which, of course—but like, a way of dealing with it would be like, mechanically like having a character like have to like, deal with that shit? Like, I don't know if you'd even want to, that's annoying, I wouldn't want that either honestly. It wouldn't be good, but like that would be a way. Would be a bad way. I don't know how other—like other than enforcing like shitty limits, I don't know how you would get that into like the mechanics of a game, but I'm not a game person either, so, that's not my thing.

Finch: [1:03:19] I'm also—yeah no, people have plenty of like... game designers are cool. I'd love to write one one one day, but I don't—anyway.

Arpad: [1:03:25] I feel like everyone in the fandom is like, “I'm a game designer.” Like, alright.

Finch: [1:03:30] You know what, cool. I did write a game, but it's like a narrative game.

Arpad: [1:03:32] (overlapping) Yeah.

Finch: [1:03:33] (overlapping) No one's ever played it to my knowledge.

Arpad: [1:03:34] Like I'm, I'm like making a game now, but it is literally like just choose your own adventure, it's not—

Finch: [1:03:39] I'm so excited, I'm so excited for the game. Yeah, and I think that does kind of connect to a lot of the criticism they've received about like disability and showing other different bodies on screen, where like... yeah, it's hard to think about how you would show dysphoria in a mechanic that doesn't feel like... limiting, and that acknowledges that dysphoria isn't just limiting, but that also doesn't throw dysphoria away because dysphoria is a real negative force.

Arpad: [1:04:11] Mm hmm.

Finch: [1:04:12] Shit's hard.

Arpad: [1:04:13] Yeah, it is, but it can also be a positive force, cause man it motivates you to get shit done. (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: [1:04:18] It's great, it's great.

Arpad: [1:04:19] Like, holy crap. Like when we found out that like Medicaid had to cover, like, trans surgeries for like my partner, who had like much like obvious severe dysphoria. Like, the shit we learned to fight insurance to get that done, is now benefiting us in other ways, like you know? Like, so it's bad, but at the same time sure does make you learn things.

Finch: [1:04:45] It sure does. I know I've had so many phone calls, I was like, “I need to get all this done before I turn 26 (*Finch laughs*) and get kicked off my parents' health insurance.”

Arpad: Yeah

Finch: [1:04:55] Um. Anyway, um... I feel like we've, we've really hit... Oh, okay well there's one last question I have—a couple more—but one thing I like to ask is, what's a *Friends at the Table* moment that's resonated with you, on any level?

Arpad: [1:05:16] There're a lot. I keep, today I keep thinking about that intro with the Orion whatever where they describe like, "There's no such thing as, as disaster, it's all like part of the rules," like, oh God, like, oh. Holy shit. Like some of the intr—like I feel bad because a lot of the intros, and like obviously those are like the ones that like he took—like Austin took time to write, but like man, in Marielda, like all those Red Jack¹ intros, every time it would come on I'd be like, "woah." (*Finch laughs*) "I can think about the world that way?"

[1:05:55] Because like, I'm like a science person, I don't—like literally, it was the 15-year-olds on Tumblr that like, made me think, "Oh, non-bin—uh, what? What? That exists?" So like, I've had to learn things a lot along the way, and I continue to. I'm still like at a place where—like, Buddy had to message me and be like, "Hey, we don't want to do like, fantasy racism with your fish person," and I was like, "Oh no, am I making someone uncomfor—damn it." Like you know, like I'm completely aware that I am able to do that because it's not something that is—I didn't... grow with that, like that's not part of like the things that I learned, so like.

[1:06:40] There's been a lot of times in *Friends at the Table* where I've just been like, "Whoa, whoa we can think about the world that way, huh? Okay." And it's good, it's great. So I don't have like a specific one, that's the one I've been thinking about like literally today, because there's a Bjork song that sounds very similar. (*Arpad laughs*) "It's Not Up To You," is like, like the disast—like, oh, well whatever, whatever. But there is one that made me think of it, and then so that's been on my mind, but. There's been so many, there's been so many parts that I have just like... which is amazing, too, because, like, I like started listening when I was in like a severe depression episode and like apathy is like my main, my main—that's it. Like I can do things, I'm not the type of person who can't get things done when I'm depressed, I don't like experience like sadness really? It is just that nothing is anything. So *Friends at the Table* has really, like, even then there were periods where it's like "Oh, whoa, my heart's beating faster. Whoa, oh geez."

[1:07:58] Or like, this is—the stupid game I'm writing, like, because of like the, trying to fit the, like, the narrative that they set up into like this positive thing, like put me in this part where I had to write like this thing where they addressed grief. And I was writing it, and I just started crying? And like it, like I hadn't cried because of that type of thing in so long, and like I don't know, it's been also just like, I don't want to be like, "Healing, it's healing," like I hate saying things like that, but like. It has been like a good, like it's... been a good place to practice having emotions. (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: [1:08:42] Yeah no I, I feel that. Could you elaborate a little on your game and what you were, what you're doing there, about like we said about grief and fitting the story in?

Arpad: [1:08:53] Yeah well because time is so weird in *Friends at the Table* that like, of course, like Maelgwyn, Maelgwyn never would meet Fero, because they're like thousands of years apart when Maelgwyn was a kid, but like, in a modern AU and I have them all living together, like if... Fero... (*Arpad laughs*) if Fero was dating Samol, then, what would the timeframes be set up? And like of course Maelgwyn would have been like a kid when they were together if I'm setting this like 10 years later, and I don't want Fero to be like 60. Then like, so in my setting it's like, Maelgwyn was like a kid and like would go over to their—so Fero's like, has this weird relationship where he's like

¹ Arpd's correction: The Marielda intros were actually from the character Samol.

a kinda young person, but like this person who's like a little bit, is like also like a, like his grand—like you know, like a weird thing. So like, I have like, um, Maelgwyn come in and like there's a scene, where Fero like—I don't know if you've read the fanfic that it's based on, but Fero— (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: [1:10:04] I actually haven't! I just, I don't have a chance to read too much, because I'm always busy.

Arpad: That's fair.

Finch: (overlapping) But I know the general, the gist.

Arpad: [1:10:10] Oh no, college, oh my God—

Finch: [1:10:12] (overlapping) Flower shop AU.

Arpad: (overlapping) I'm so happy to not be in college, wow. (*Finch laughs*)

[1:10:17] Like in the story that it's based on, Fero like gives Samol like a, a terrarium in a bottle. So in my story it's like 12 years later in the flower shop, and the bottle is still like on the shelf? And so I have a scene—cause like the whole story is like, they're trying to sell, like, the SamSams are like trying to like sell the place. And so Maelgwyn comes in and like offers to buy the bottle? For like a shit ton of money? To try and be like, “well, I can use this as an excuse to like help save the shop” is his perspective, but like Fero doesn't know that, so like you can choose to like, find that out—like, you know, cause it's choose your own adventure, so there's like all these different ways it could play out.

[1:11:05] And then, like some of the ways it gets us like where they're just talking about Samol in a weird way. Like, I don't know, and like having to like come at it from all the different ways that it could happen because, like I'm like obsessive about having like all the ways it could happen depicted, so like there's so many endings. But like, ah, there's this one part where like that you could see where Maelgwyn like describes why he hasn't called Fero, like you know they're like, they haven't talked, like Maelgwyn's in college now and, like why haven't you like ever, and he's like, “Because, like, you reminded me of Samol.” Like you know, like all this stuff and like... I don't know why it got me, but like, it really did. And like, I don't know, like. It just like it got me talking like, I don't know... I don't know, yeah.

Finch: [1:12:00] Yeah no, I mean that, that helps. It was more, I was just like, “I'm not quite clear what you're what you're referring to here.”

Arpad: [1:12:05] Yeah no, you couldn't be, how could you? (*Arpad and Finch laugh*)

Finch: [1:12:09] Only one of us here has been working day and night on this for two months straight—three months straight?

Arpad: Yeah...

Finch: [1:12:15] Yeah, yeah. I think you're hitting on something that I have experienced a lot to where it's like... I don't know, a lot of the mainstream understanding of fanfiction or fan work more generally, is often like, it doesn't, it's not real literature or real art because it's only, it's just for

people's satisfaction or it doesn't deal with deeper, intense stuff and I'm like, that runs contrary to every experience I've had with fan work and fanfic? Where they're taking about, I don't know, fucking *Star Wars* or some movie that is like faux deep and being like, "What if we wrote 80,000 words about what it means to be human?"

Arpad: [1:12:54] Yeah! Well, to me fanfic is like academic, it's like academic papers, like there's essays people write about literature, and in those essays they take these itty-bitty pieces and say, "This is justification for saying that this literature was about like this, this, and that." And that's what fanfic does, except for they do it in a story. And that's great. (*Arpad laughs*) Like it's the same thing, it's the same thing, it's just one's narrative and one's not.

Finch: [1:13:23] It really is...

Arpad: [1:13:24] There's no difference, like all it is is people being like, "I'm arguing that this is what should have happened here, and here are the details that I'm going to expand on to get that way." And like that can be really powerful because it's the same, like, it's like I've read, like I loved literature courses in college where you'd like read it and you'd be like, "Holy shit, I didn't realize the story was about that!"

Finch: [1:13:48] Mm hmm, mm hmm.

Arpad: [1:13:49] And fanfic is the same way, where it's like, "Holy shit I didn't think that could happen," or like you know I know. Yeah no, it does the same thing, except for it's accessible. (*Arpad laughs*)

Finch: [1:14:01] Yep!

Arpad: [1:14:02] It's the poor persons' academic paper. (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: [1:14:05] The poor person's academia—I mean but literally though! It's like, it—the communities operate on very interesting, similar levels. Anyway, that just blew my mind, um, like.

Arpad: [1:14:15] Everything's the same.

Finch: What is literary criticism but fanfiction?

Arpad: It is, it's all it is.

Finch: [1:14:21] It's like—you know that comic that's like, "Everything is actually the same. I'm very smart."

Arpad: [1:14:24] Everything is actually the same, though. It's just, is just... yeah, sorry it is.

Finch: [1:14:32] Boy, boy. Um. Well, the last sort of closing question I have, is there anything I haven't asked about that you'd like to talk about or bring into the space? Any, anything you have bottled up that you want to share, or just things that you're like, we didn't talk about this?

Arpad: [1:14:54] I'm sorry if I had the type of memory that wasn't, "I need a trigger," then I probably would, because I know there's things I think about, but like I literally, I can't ever remember anything unless there's something that reminds me. (*Arpad laughs*) Yep.

Finch: [1:15:15] I'll have to do the thing, where I walk into a room and I'm like, "What was I..." and then I go back to what I was doing and that just, for some reason, trigger—like... brain. Brain!

Arpad: [1:15:24] It took me so long this morning said look up if ibuprofen was the same as Motrin.

Finch: [1:15:30] I only recently learned that ibuprofen and Tylenol are different things.

Arpad: [1:15:34] Yeah, no, I'm so bad at remembering. (*Arpad laughs*) Like I, and I should not be because I work in science. But, whatever.

Finch: [1:15:45] I did realize pretty recently that I think almost everyone, I'm, I'm interviewing here is like, um, not neurotypical, so I was like, that's a fun trend that I didn't even realize, I was, I was bringing into the—

Arpad: [1:15:57] Oh yeah, no, oh man, one of them way it's like... I, I, I wouldn't have, I would have fought, like if my therapist was like, "You're autistic," I'd be like, "Fuck you." (*Arpad laughs*) But like, and this is the same—like my partner's like, literally like the government recognizes him as disabled, that's how autistic he is. And he was like for years fighting it until you realize everyone around you is autistic, and they're like, "You did get—you think maybe you fit in here for a reason?" (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: Exactly!

Arpad: And you're like, "oh no..."

Finch: [1:16:28] Looks at my circle of fandom friends: "All these people are autistic. This says nothing about me."

Arpad: Yikes!

Finch: [1:16:39] Yikes! Um... I don't think I have any, any formal closing stuff, but this has been a joy and, if you think of anything else just be in touch. Amazing. I'm going to stop the recording.

Arpad: Okay.