

Interview Transcript – Nico

January 28, 2021

Nico: (*In a deep voice*) “Now recording.” (*Finch laughs*)

(*in their normal voice*) Have you ever recorded with Craig on Discord?

Finch: [00:05] Yeah, we were doing the, the pirates game—

Nico: [00:08] Every time, every time.

Finch: [00:12] It’s so—I know, it’s like—(*in a deep voice*) “Now recording.” Like, ah! Stop! Oh, okay, I have to do my actual intro now. Um. It is January 28th, 2021, 1:30 pm Eastern time and I am here talking to Nico. Hi Nico!

Nico: Hi!

Finch: [00:33] Hello! First question I ask everyone, very low stakes, just whatever you want to, to bring into the space, is like, say a little bit about yourself. Who are you?

Nico: [00:45] Yeah! So, my name is Nico, I use they/them pronouns, I am a queer, trans person of color. I have a long background in academia and I’m also a massive nerd. I do a lot of podcasting and YouTubeing and gaming and streaming, and so I’m kind of like deep in it. Like people say “you’re online,” I am *online*.

[1:11] I do a lot of writing on Black and brown folks in spaces like gaming and tabletop RPGs, podcasting spaces, stuff like that. I talk a lot about the role of Black and brown people in... like, not just TTRPG spaces, but within the books themselves. I have both a writing—article that I’m working on about our involvement in *D&D* and other tabletop games, as well as a *D&D* hot takes series [on TikTok], where I get into like a lot of the elements of racism and ableism and anti-Semitism and things of that nature that tend to be in the worldbooks for these games that people use as the, as the foundation. So yeah. (pause) I think that is it. I do a podcast, I do an actual play podcast... (pause) I think that’s it?

Finch: [02:11] I just made a little note to myself that was like, “read your articles,” because—

Nico: [02:15] (overlapping) Oh yeah! I can send them to you if you want.

Finch: [02:17] Amazing, right up my fucking alley. You describe yourself as a “queer trans person of color.” Like what does that, what does that mean for you?

Nico: [2:30] Yeah so, um. My... I call myself queer and then I’ll either say trans or non-binary, I don’t tend to get more into specifics, because it can get very nuanced and very deep and—a lot deeper than some folks want to, care to go because, like, like, I could say, I could lay it out and be like, “oh yeah like, um, I don’t have a strong concept of gender in general and I’m a bisexual polyamorous person and I’m Black,” but like, it’s—it gets way too far into it, so like. I’m Black, I’m queer, I’m trans.

[03:10] And they all intersect with each other, there is no way for me to separate my sexuality from my gender, which is also why I tend to say queer, because what does it mean to be... like,

certain things when your gender is other things? Like they just kind of intersect. And then also like my Blackness informs my experiences in the world, so that also plays into gender identity. I have to—sorry, excuse me—I have to think about how I present myself. Both as a Black person and as a trans person because I’m... aware that I am being scrutinized a lot more than somebody else may be.

[3:54] So, yeah. But it's not like doom and gloom type stuff, it's just kind of like the factors of my reality, and I have a lot of fun with my life. I like to be colorful and bold and loud in all aspects of things. Which is very funny considering that I’m *incredibly* alt, so my, my wardrobe is not colorful in the traditional sense, but it is... colorful (*Nico laughs*), if you know what I mean.

Finch: **[4:22]** Oh, I know exactly what you mean, and the blue lipstick is amazing.

Nico: **[04:25]** Thank you.

Finch: **[4:29]** So yeah, I guess let's just dive right into *Friends at the Table* and tabletop games and such. Where, um... so you told me in the pre-interview about how you listened to *Critical Role* and then to *The Adventure Zone* on a friend's recommendation, and then you saw *Friends at the Table* mentioned on Tumblr, um, and that you've now been in the fandom for about four years or so. What's kept you interested in *Friends at the Table*?

Nico: **[4:55]** So it is very rare to come across an actual play podcast that is so deeply inclusive, but also one that has—not entirely rejected, but rejected a lot of what comes along with traditional actual play podcasts. That—first of all, they don't play *D&D*, which is already like a break from the norm. They play a lot of d6 system games, they play like you know, like *Quiet Year* and *Dungeon World* and *Scum and Villainy* and all these other ones, and so that already is a break from the norm. And in their first episode ever, they're worldbuilding episode, it's like "00: We're Not Calling it Duckburg," they talk about the intrinsic problems with orcs and elves. Because it's very Tolkienesque, and so orcs as a history within fantasy have been a very racist genre, a lot of anti-indigenous and anti-Black stereotypes, and they were like immediately, "We're not going to do that, no thank you, anyway moving on, we're going to make them like badass librarians." And so that was fun and then they were like, "You know what, who needs elves who live forever and forever? We're gonna make this like, something happened, and now they live like about 200 years max," which I thought was really interesting, cause I'm like, "bro, how often do you see that!" And then they like, threw—tied it in where it was like, elves having longevity was a plot point and I was like, "yes!!!"

[6:26] Not to mention the fact that they have a lot of minorities on the podcast, like it is so nice to have representation in various forms, and be able to hear Black folks, trans folks, queer folks, like, telling stories that center us, and we're not just like side characters, you know. Cause *Critical Role* has a long history of, um, racist tropes or disregarding people of color and using trans and queer people kind of as jokes even when they're trying to be inclusive. Like, I remember, like... oh, what was their name, Lady, Lady Kima and her wife, who was a high mage in the first season. I don't remember their names entirely, doesn't really matter—like there was like a running joke where one of the PCs was like in love with her even though she was like clearly not interested and was a lesbian and then like, when her and Lady Kima—like they were "good friends" and then they got married, and it was like a whole thing. Or like one of the PCs was bi, but never actually like,

whatever, except for to flirt with a NPC named Sean Gilmore, who was a brown man who was very clearly bi. There was like a whole plot point there were just kind of like, “I love you, but I’m not in love with you, sorry I’ve been playing with your feelings this whole time because I’m also in love with this other PC—” it was like a whole thing, like.

[7:52] So just stuff like that in the first game, and then in the second game there was a PC called Mollymauk who died actually really early on, who was like posthumously declared non-binary, was like, “a he, a she, an it, a person,” whatever, and I was just like, *(increasingly pained)* “Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy.” There was a thing about like basically one of the PCs having predatory lesbian thoughts towards a friend, like that was like a whole thing, like, not good. Like it’s just, it’s just not *good*, and the fandom builds the way more into the reality than is actually in the show.

[8:37] *The Adventure Zone*, I, like it or at least I liked—I don’t, I don’t love Travis’s DMing style, so I haven’t really been listening to *Graduation*, but that’s neither here nor there. The McElroys, it’s like, they’re funny. But they’re also three cishet white guys who are brothers who are doing a podcast and so like, even though they do their best to have like queer and trans rep, they also can kind of fall flat a little bit, especially because they’re brothers and they don’t necessarily be wanting to play romance between each other, which is totally fine and understandable. But like, so you had like Taako who, like... wasn’t necessarily completely a stereotype, and some of the things that actually people know Taako for were fanon representations and things like that, but also... Lupe being a trans woman, they were like, “Their names are Lupe and Taako,” so people were like, “Oh yeah, like chalupa and taco.” And they’re like—which like a lot of Latino fans or Latinx fans were saying, which you know and whatever, and then they were like, “No they’re white.” Everybody was like kind of like, “You can’t have a character named Taako Taako who’s in—who’s like, a side point of his entire plot is like invent the taco, you can’t have him be white, like, come on, please, please, please, please.”

[9:56] So that was... interesting, like they’re doing their best, but they’re cishet white men so they’re going to inherently always fuck up. Even though they’re trying. Like I, I appreciate them doing their best to better themselves, however people treating them as revolutionary also tend to be white and I’m just kind of like, “Okay, so, moving on,” so then you—so long story short, *Friends at the Table* gives me a lot of what other podcasts lack. Because even *Godsfall*, which I listened to for a while and actually met a lot of my friends in, as well as all my partners (*Nico and Finch laugh*), even *Godsfall* was a very queer podcast and the GM is Armenian so like, there’s stuff there, but... it was mostly cis people on the team and it’s still very white, because there were a lot of white people on the team for a very long time. So, like, *Friends at the Table*, breath of fresh air, no more *D&D*. (*Nico laughs*)

Finch: **[11:00]** Does *Godsfall* play *D&D*?

Nico: **[11:02]** Yes. Aram Vartian, who is the, the DM of that, wrote a whole worldbook, which is what my podcast runs on for now. But it’s also *D&D*, it’s very crunchy. My name’s in that worldbook, I helped edit that.

Finch: **[11:21]** Oh nice!

Nico: **[11:25]** I feel like full disclosure there is needed.

Finch: (overlapping) Eh...

Nico: (overlapping) Like, I helped edit that.

Finch: **[11:31]** Well, you can, you can promote your, your work to the... I don't know. (*laughing*) I'm gonna listen to this and then maybe one other person if they're really invested, so.

Nico: **[11:40]** To your, to your, your thesis readers?

Finch: **[11:42]** (overlapping) Me myself and I. Yes.

Nico: **[11:44]** Yeah, your—what's, what's the thesis board or whatever like?

Finch: **[11:47]** Reader. Readers—so I have my advisor and then a second reader.

Nico: **[11:49]** (overlapping) There you go, the advisor.

Finch: **[11:53]** (overlapping) Advisor, although. (*laughing*) Lynne, if you're listening to this, I'll put it on record that I didn't think you would listen to all the interviews, so. (*Nico laughs*)

[12:02] (*mumbling*) Rule book... let me see...

[12:11] Well, you kind of knocked out of the park, one of the other questions I had, which was just your frustrations with *Critical Role*, especially in relation to race and queerness. You know, racist tropes, disregard for people of color, using queer and trans people his jokes even when they're trying to be inclusive, um.

Nico: **[12:28]** Oh, that reminds me, there was a whole character in the first series, who was meant to be non-binary who the cast misgendered the entire time! (*Finch sucks teeth*)

Finch: **[12:40]** Yeah, I guess then like, didn't that kind of happen—

Nico: **[12:42]** (overlapping) —who was brown also!

Finch: **[12:44]** Ew. I guess though, didn't that kind of happened in *Counterweight* with Cass? What was what was the difference, though? You're still listening to *Friends at the Table*.

Nico: **[12:53]** Yeah so um. Honestly part of it is definitely bias, where I'm just like "Okay, well, I know," well... Okay it's not really bias, because there's trans people on the show. And non-binary people on the show. So there's Sylvia, who is a trans woman and Jack who is non-binary. And they at least can, they've learned from their mistakes. Then they also didn't decide that Cass was non-binary or the Apostolosians didn't have a quote unquote "human concept of gender" till about halfway through the series, so Cass started out using he/him pronouns and though they were later changed to they/them, I know, like, Art and Austin like kind of stumbled over them a while, because that had been the whole like the first half of the season, which *Counterweight* was a very long season, so like, it's not really an excuse. Hold on, I gotta sit up. It's not really an excuse, but it's more understandable as to why, not to mention like, like I said, there are trans and non-binary people on the cast meanwhile, um, *Critical Role* is a very white, very cis and mostly het cast? Where I'm just gonna like... I just like inherently I'm like, "I don't trust you."

[14:16] There's a lot of like, even outside of the cast—even outside of like the show itself, like the characters on the show, the cast tends to be a lot of performative liberalism. And I'm just kinda like, "ew!!!" Like Matthew Mercer can meet me in the fucking streets. (*Finch laughs*) Um, fucking Liam whatever his name is can meet me in the streets. Sam Riegel can meet me in the fucking streets. Yeah.

Finch: [14:48] Liam... O'Brien?

Nico: [14:49] Yeah, there we go, it goes—my list goes Liam O'Brien, Sam Riegel, and then Matt Mercer.

Finch: [14:54] Mm hmm.

Nico: [14:56] Of like just like people I would fight.

Finch: [14:59] I'm still, I mean I only, I only really see *Critical Role* fandom discourse, I guess you could say, I—most of what shows up on my Twitter feed is people being critical of *Critical Role*, which is in large part you being critical of *Critical Role* (*Nico laughs*), and then it shows up on my feed and I'm like, "what's going on over on *Critical Role* Twitterspace?"

Nico: [15:19] It's me and Pat, just like yelling. (*Nico laughs*)

Finch: [15:22] Yeah it's great! Um, no I love it because I—it makes me feel right while not, while not actually having to do any of the, the groundwork, cause I just see it, I'm like, "I agree with this, I don't know the other side of the argument, but I think Nico's right on this," um. Even just recently, the thing with Matt Mercer being like, "The solution to these problems is our like paramilitary fantasy cops." And getting called out on that and then being like, "I shouldn't have tweeted that," and I'm like, "That's not an apology, that's just you saying you should have kept your problematic thought to yourself!" Anyway. That's bad!

Nico: [16:01] Don't forget to love each other!

Finch: [16:03] Yeah (*Finch makes a noise of disgust*). Um... let me see.

[16:14] The question, *Critical Role*: where does the show fall short? Um, I think we hit that.

Nico: [16:20] Yeah. I could write a dissertation on why *Critical Role* is not great. Which sucks, cause I used to really like it, like, that was other the thing is like, a part of my criticisms definitely comes from like, I know if they put in the work they could do better. Like they could do better, and they don't because they have a very rabid fan base that excuses every action they take and is always like "Oh, they can do no wrong," when really... it's really a mediocre show at best, and people are like, "Oh, like, you don't have to like, you can't like just make them like change things, because this is a group of friends who, just like put out their game," and I'm like... initially, yes, at the first arc of *Critical Role* was their home game where they were all friends playing this game and they put it on the Internet, but it has become like a mass-produced show and honestly a brand, and so the defenses of, "well, they're just fans putting their game out for us to see," or "they're just a little indie company," all this stuff, it doesn't really hold water, because they are a multi—their, okay, their company, *Critical Role* itself is a multimillion dollar company, which you can point out because not only do they have like a fucking graphic novel series, and like are themselves all very well-known voice actors within the voice acting community, like you can throw a stone and it's

probably like one of them, but also they had a Kickstarter back in March of 2019 where they raised several million dollars from their fans to make a TV show and then they then partnered with Amazon to make that show.

[18:09] And then there's also the whole thing of, they have hundreds of hours worth of transcripts that their fans provided that they never offered any sort of compensation for whatsoever. Like, they never offered to compensate their fans for that labor. And they have hundreds of hours, because they have well over 100 episodes for each season, each of those episodes is about three to five hours long. So like, multimillion dollar industry, which—also they were part of Geek and Sundry, which is also a well-known group way before that even happened, before they split off and became their own thing! So like. They have celebrities on there, like all the time! Like Felicia Day was one of their first and biggest celebrities, they have Will Wheaton on there, they have like all these people on there and I'm just like, this is not a small thing.

Finch: **[19:03]** Yeah, it's this weird... "indie media" has become such a broad label that it's like, are you still an indie company that's friends in your basement making the show if you're partnering with Amazon?

Nico: **[19:14]** They're partnered, they're partnered with Wizards of the Coast! They work very closely with Wizards of the Coast, like some of Matt Mercer's creations from *Critical Role* are on Wizards of the Coast, they are in official books. Like the Artificer class? That was Matt! Like, some of like the, like the Blood Mage, whatever that Mollymauk was? Matt. Like all this stuff, like a lot of the stuff that's on *D&D Beyond* and Wizards of the Coast properties, Matthew Mercer. Like, they released a whole like whatever Alexandria book, which is Matt Mercer's creation or... no, what... I don't remember, it's, it's something like Alexandria, or Alexandra like... it's something like that, but like, that's a whole book, that's a worldbook, an officially-sanctioned Wizards of the Coast worldbook that they made based off their game. So like... what about that is small indie—like, they're not owned by Disney, is that what makes them indie? (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[20:14]** Yeah... Unfortunately, maybe. (*Finch laughs*) God, you ever listen to the Counterweight stuff with Joypark and just go, hmm...

Nico: **[20:25]** That's life.

Finch: **[20:26]** That's just life, this scifi is just simply life.

Nico: **[20:30]** Yeah...

Finch: **[20:32]** And that's something I'm actually writing about a lot is a sort of, um... capitalism and conditions of production and how *Friends at the Table* and indie TTRPG spaces, like... are to some degree separate from these giant sort of *Star Wars*, *Supernatural* fan dynamics, but are also, you know, remaining independent of that takes conscious work that perhaps some shows are doing, and some are not doing. Um...

Nico: **[21:03]** I could go on a whole tear about that, by the way. Like, I like kind of flew off the handle there (*Nico laughs*). That was on a super tangent, my bad.

Finch: **[21:12]** No no no, you're—I wanted to talk to you about *Friends at the Table* but also more generally about tabletop games, and I think... well, maybe, perhaps the question to return back to

Friends at the Table is, so, you have all these sort of criticisms of *Critical Role*. Like, how does *Friends at the Table* compare?

Nico: **[21:31]** Yeah so comparatively like I said, like they... the thing with the orcs and the elves was really cool. They have players that are kobolds and goblins which aren't just cannon fodder, but are real people with real, like, history, like real places—they have place in the world and histories and are humanized in a way that like, in *D&D* those are cannon fodder, like the orcs, the goblins, the kobolds, the darrow, the... dark elves, what are those called.

Finch: **[22:05]** “Evil races.”

Nico: **[22:08]** What are they called... I don't remember—why can't I remember what the dark elves are called?

Finch: **[22:15]** “Darrow” does sound right.

Nico: **[22:17]** No that's dwarves, which is also—like the Duergar or the Darrow are dwarves, and like the—why can't I remember, normally these are the first things I go to—whatever. All these races are canonical like evil races, whatever, they tend to be cannon fodder, but they like, have like an actual place in the world and they're real people with real stories and lives in the world of Hieron. So that's already, already like miles ahead of whatever. They have a lot of heavy features of minorities, like not just like people of color and but also like queer people, trans people. They're, they're trying to put, like they're trying to showcase disability in the show more, to varying degrees of success. I know a lot of fans, especially fans with disabilities are very critical of that, as they should be, because we can hold them to a standard to do better as well, like there's—nobody's perfect and there's always room for improvement. Um.

[23:16] I don't know, I think *Friends at the Table* is kind of started with a leg up and have gotten better over the years and have listened to their fans, which is another thing, like they listen? Which is important. And they are aware of what they need to be doing and try to implement that. They don't always succeed, but they do try, which I appreciate the attempts, even if sometimes the attempts fall very flat. Which is funny that they have like such a hard time with disability for a show where people like lose limbs *all* the time.

[23:51] Um, it also has like some really interesting aspects of like body horror and just... bodies in relation to what that means to exist, how having a body and what kind of body you have interacts with the world. There's like, there's like, xeno-type aliens, but also not just aliens but um creatures as well, like they have oni and these things called “weavers,” which are like tree stretchy body horror creatures which are really cool and there's like you know, like the, the Branched in their newest season called Partizan which are post-human, transhuman existences that are more sensations and experiences than what we would consider a humanoid experience. Like there's all sorts of stuff that I think is actually really cool, because it really gets into the idea of like gender and a body and... labor and all these things, and what they, what they mean, what they mean to not just the individual, but the world at large and how it's built.

[25:01] There's a whole planet where the planet would not be accessible by human standards, or the kingdom would not be accessible by human standards, because it's populated entirely by robots and AI. Which is really interesting because like you think about, okay, they don't have

bodies in the way that we have bodies, so their needs for access are completely different. And they're kind of a little anti-human because they're like, "We don't want to have to build like stairs and ramps because, like we don't need them, we don't need stairs, what the fuck is a stair for?"
(Nico laughs)

Finch: [25:34] You just plug in!

Nico: [25:35] Right, because I think it's a fun look at what these things mean and what they are. Gender also very good in *Friends at the Table*, tablefriend gender. (Nico laughs)

Finch: [25:51] Oh boy.

Nico: [25:53] And *sick-ass* music.

Finch: [25:55] God, I know.

Nico: [25:57] Jack de Quidt, fucking legend, absolute legend.

Finch: [26:02] I had to listen to the intro to the first finale episode of Partizan several times over, because I kept getting distracted by how good the music was? I was like trying to listen to the context that Austin was setting up and the synth in the background, just, my brain just wanted to listen to that. Um...

Nico: [26:21] We're getting harpsichords next season.

Finch: [26:24] (*whispers*) Harpsichords!? Harpsichords!! Oh my god I'm so excited. (*normal voice*) Um. One thing that you brought up was *Friends at the Table* sort of listening to fans and being receptive to change, but I know one thing I've noticed and admired is how the tablefriends set boundaries with fans? In interesting ways?

Nico: [26:45] (*overlapping*) Yes.

Finch: [26:48] So I was just curious to hear sort of your reflections on that balance between listening to fans but also not taking advantage of fan labor.

Nico: [26:55] Yeah! So one of the biggest examples of this on not taking advantage of fan labor, to go back to transcripts is, there were no transcripts for a very long time, and the fans were attempt—were trying to organize a way to just make transcripts, like we just wanted to transcribe, like we were just like, "We're going to transcribe this because we need the, we need the transcripts, because this is—" much like *Critical Role* they are long-form podcasts that can sometimes be very difficult to listen to, especially as audio quality has varied. Over the years it's gotten better, but it used to be terrible and so like anybody can tell you that the first like four episodes of their first season ever, almost completely unlistenable (Nico laughs). It's just, it's so bad and so like we wanted to transcribe it. But the tablefriends were like, "We can't just let you transcribe this, we can't pay you, and if you were going to do labor for us, we are going to pay you."

[27:49] So with the setup of the Patreon, they were suddenly able to pay the fans to transcribe. It took a lot longer than people would have liked, and there was definitely like I remember a lot of grouching on the fan side of things, because they were like, "Okay, but like we need these, so why is

it taking so long and so hard to get them?" So, I remember that being like a long struggle, but now people are being compensated for the work. I think it's like... I don't remember the breakdown for per word, but like people are getting fairly compensated for their work, which is good, because this is the thing we need, but also they didn't want—they specifically said they did not want to be like other podcasts and take advantage of their fans, which also like... they have known beef, so they will not name names, with *Critical Role*. I also really like that Sylvia like constantly rags on Travis McElroy—

Finch: **[28:50]** (overlapping) It's so funny—

Nico: **[28:50]** (overlapping) —because I don't like him, I fucking hate him, like he's the most obnoxious instead of the three of them, he bothers me! Um, but yeah, so.

Finch: **[28:59]** (overlapping) —but like he's an ally, because he paints his nails sometimes.

Nico: **[29:02]** Somebody said that he was genderqueer because he paints his nails, I'm like, "I don't think you know what words mean!!" (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[29:08]** Someone's writing, out here writing RPF of Travis McElroy. (*Nico laughs*) Okay, sorry, cursed thought.

Nico: **[29:15]** (*wheezing*) Cursed! Cursed, cursed! Cursed!

Finch: **[29:18]** (overlapping) Cursed. Cursed! On a different, different, different note um. You sort of hit on this a bit with discussions of you know transcripts and of fans sort of making criticisms of the show. But like, how would you describe the *Friends at the Table* fan community?

Nico: **[29:39]** As a whole? This is literally the chilliest fandom experience I've ever had. Like the discourse is very limited and usually like you can see... I'm not going to name names, but there are people where you can see who is starting the discourse. It's usually a group about—not a group, but like there's usually about five different people who tend to bring up the most stuff. While there is also like collective like "Okay, they could have done this better here's my thoughts on this thing," stuff like that, like, there's also like usually about five or so people who like do *the Discourse*, capital D. But like even then it's not really anything bad for the most part, like I've seen a couple things where I'm just kind of like, "I think you completely misread what's going on here," but for the most part, like it's like valid criticisms of things that could have been done better.

[30:26] And the tablefriends have really helped, I think, also with rejecting the formation of parasocial relationships—like obviously like you can't just like say, "Don't form one with me," but... by seeing the fandom—or by the fandom seeing them as real people with real lives and having like... I don't know, like, "access" is such a weird word to use, because I don't, I don't feel like it really conveys I'm trying to say but, like the fans couldn't talk with them. But they, but the tablefriends also have very clear boundaries, which is good, and they're starting to step away from the Discord because it's gotten very big and like they're just like—it's not sustainable, for what it used to be.

[31:16] So, I don't know, like, there's like a healthy, there's healthy interaction is the best way to put it between the creators and the fans, like. Like I'm, like I'm, like I mentioned in the pre-interview, like, I'm mutuals with Dre on Twitter, stuff like that, like. Austin and Ali talk to Linda

and Danny like all the time. Stuff like that, where it's like, you know, there's communication with the fans and, like some of them are more friends than people because they've been in fand—they've been a part of the community for so long, so like, it's not as weird.

[31:49] But yeah, so I think it's been interesting too because they are so active on Twitter, they can see what people are saying and can incorporate that. Like between Twitter and the Discord, there's a lot of like places for people to be like, “Hey, I think this thing could have been done better.” Like I know post Twilight Mirage there was a lot of that, and even now with Partizan there's a lot of that. (pause) Yeah.

Finch: [32:14] On a less serious note, the Partizan episode where Austin like, “Yeah so I saw a tweet that said Gur Servaq was a Marxist, and I’d just like to lay out why Gur Servaq is not a Marxist because he rejects the Internet.” And I was like, (*Finch laughs*) “oh my god, Austin.” The poor person that tweeted about Gur Sevrq being a Marxist is just sitting there like.

Nico: [32:34] Oh sometimes it's, it's very apparent that Austin was a philosophy major.

Finch: [32:38] Yeah! (*Finch laughs*)

Nico: [32:40] Love the man, but also sometimes I’m just like, I want to like grab him by the shoulders and say, “Austin, shut the fuck up,” like.

Finch: [32:46] “Austin speak English. English.”

Nico: [32:48] Like philosophy majors have few rights, in my opinion, like in my humble opinion, philosophy majors few rights, (*Nico laughs*) mostly because I don’t like them.

Finch: [32:58] I’d like to think I’m not a philosophy major, but I try very hard to not be a philosophy major, um.

Nico: [33:03] I mean there's a difference between like philosophy and like *philosophy major*, you know?

Finch: [33:09] Yeah.

Nico: [33:09] It’s like a business—

Finch: [33:09] (overlapping) “I think critically about media” versus “I think critically about thinking critically.”

Nico: [33:15] Would you like me to—

Finch: [33:16] (overlapping) —like, shut up!

Nico: [33:17] (overlapping) —talk about Freud, and...

Finch: [33:20] (overlapping) No—

Nico: [33:20] (overlapping) —and Plato and—

Finch: [33:22] (overlapping) No.

Nico: [33:23] —fucking, what's his name, what's that bastards name—Foucault.

Finch: **[33:29]** Foucault! (*Finch laughs*) I read a lot of Foucault.

Nico: **[33:30]** And, and what—I don't have anything wrong, there's like, nothing wrong with Foucault, but also like, if you bring him up in a conversation, I'm going to kill you. I have a literally a line of hoodies based on hating Freud that I sell, (*Nico laughs*) because Freud is the devil.

Finch: **[33:47]** Yes. More on Freud later. I had a couple of clarification about what you said, though, where you sort of differentiated between like discourse and criticism, could you say a little more about what you mean on the difference between—?

Nico: **[34:00]** Yeah, so I think discourse has become one of those terms that because of the Internet has, like, completely lost meaning. It's like "problematic." Like you can't just say the words "problematic" or "discourse" anymore without like connotations behind it. So when I say discourse, I mean like... people kind of bring stuff up that they personally feel is wrong, but maybe not actually, it's just their personal thing, and then it kind of like sparks like a whole like, "What are you even saying, what are you even talking about type" thing, versus like criticisms, which tends to bring up more like, "Hey, I think this thing was done wrong, here's maybe some ways that I could—" like, discourse tends to be deconstructive, IMO, like just because of... just because of the nature of the Internet, when I say discourse, I mean like, decon—like, deconstructive, "I'm going to just say shit to say shit, and this will probably start a fight and good" type thing, like rather than like, anything actually helpful or productive.

Finch: **[35:12]** Yeah, it's like... being right versus trying to start a conversation.

Nico: **[35:16]** Exactly, there we go. Thank you.

Finch: **[35:19]** Yeah. No, I think that, I mean I asked, because I use the two words differently and also didn't know exactly what I meant, so I wanted to sort of get a sense of what you were saying.

Nico: **[35:28]** Yep. That's kind of my opinion on the term discourse.

Finch: **[35:33]** Yeah. So now, you should tweet about it and say that anyone who disagrees with you is wrong. (*Finch laughs*) And then you can start discourse—I saw you were drinking. (*Finch laughs*) Start discourse yourself. "Here's my definition of discourse, if you disagree with me you're transphobic."

Nico: **[35:50]** Sometimes I like to, like, sometimes I like to cause problems on purpose, and like if somebody is in my comments being a jackass, I'll be like, "I can't believe just called me the N word." (*Finch laughs*) Just because like, it throws them off! It throws them off and they're like, "What the hell are you talking about?" and like they like go this whole tangent about like how I'm such a snowflake, and all this stuff but it's so funny like it always, always just throws people off and it's so fucking funny. It's so funny! Every time! It throws them off and they don't know what to do with it. (*Nico laughs*)

Finch: **[36:20]** I love that strategy. Um. The other clarification I had was, (*Nico laughs*) you talked about table—(*Finch laughs*) Sorry.

Nico: **[36:31]** No, sorry. (*Finch and Nico laugh*) See, and now I've thrown you off, I've thrown you off your rhythm!

Finch: **[36:40]** That's okay—

Nico: **[36:41]** (overlapping) Street smarts!

Finch: **[36:42]** (overlapping) —I'm taking notes, so that I stay on, on-task and, (*Finch deepens voice*) "You'll have to try harder to throw me off my rhythm!" I'm a Naruto mini boss. (*Nico laughs*) You talked about the tablefriends sort of rejecting parasocial relationships? How have they done that, like, what have you seen there?

Nico: **[37:01]** Yeah, so, I've seen both on Twitter and the Discord and on the podcasts like, usually behind—like on the clapcasts and stuff they're like, "We're real people, and you can't just like say stuff to us." Because some people will like—not most of the people, because, like I said the fandom tends to be very small, we all know each other type of thing, but like there have been people who act out of pocket and will just like post things or say things directly to the tablefriends that are like, "You shouldn't, you wouldn't say this to somebody you knew in real life, and you wouldn't say this to somebody that don't know well, so why would you do that to them?" Like, "they're not your friends" type thing, like. Which is funny considering we call them "tablefriends," but that's more like a moniker than like they're our friend-friends type thing.

[37:48] Like, it's this whole Internet thing where it's like you just like are rude to people like your friends, but you don't know folks like that? Like you see that especially like under artists and stuff where people are like, *wildly* out of pocket, for people they don't even know, because they like, like their art or whatever, so they're like, "Oh yeah like, let me just like, do the like the friend bullying thing," except for you don't know them. And so it's like a weird, it's like a weird thing. So like, they do very directly say, "Hey, that's fucking weird, don't do that."

Finch: **[38:23]** Yeah and I've appreciated that, in contrast to perhaps other actual play podcasts—I'll be specific, I'm thinking of *The Adventure Zone* here, where the McElroys kind of cultivate an image of being like, "we're your friend!"

Nico: **[38:36]** Right, "we're your friends or your family, your—we're your like, your family, like we're you're, we're you're close favoritest family!" like. And I'm just like, "We don't know each other like that, calm down."

Finch: **[38:47]** And then that becomes a way to like, it's a way to sell stuff, like it's not—

Nico: **[38:51]** It's like when your company like that you work for is like, "We're a family," and I'm like, "I don't like you!"

Finch: **[38:57]** (overlapping) You're like—

Nico: **[38:58]** (overlapping) I'm here for a paycheck.

Finch: **[38:59]** (overlapping) "I'm here because I need to do this to eat."

Nico: **[39:00]** Right, like, "I'm here because I enjoy it, but do not think for a second that you're going to manipulate me into like, buying your merch."

Finch: **[39:12]** Yeah... "if you were actually my friend you'd support my show." (*Nico snorts*).

[39:21] Bunch of other questions. Let's see... I guess going off the—what you said about parasocial relationships, though. Um, let's see...

Nico: [39:34] Also, please let me know if I'm ever like not making sense.

Finch: [39:37] I—I'll ask for clarification if needed. But yes, will do. I have similar things where I'm like, "I just said all that, but did any of that, was that coherent?" And they're like, "I guess?" Sorry.

Nico: [39:53] No it's okay, me too, that's why I was like, "wait."

Finch: [39:56] It's the, it's the, "Sometimes I get carried away by brain not work same as other brain" question mark?

Nico: [40:03] I've become a... oh sorry.

Finch: [40:05] No, go ahead.

Nico: [40:06] I just, I just saw, I got notifications on my phone, so I just want to say I have become an e-boy gamer because I ordered some fucking LED lights, like I bought like the, LED light strips.

Finch: [40:15] The TikTok lights.

Nico: [40:16] The TikTok lights, yeah, I was like but like, they're so... I want them! Like, look at those.
(*Nico holds up their phone to the camera*)

Finch: [40:21] Oh, I love those.

Nico: [40:23] Plus, I have like lights—you can't see them right now, but they're like all around my bed frame and they're like bats and pumpkins, they're jack o' lanterns and then, just like normal fairy lights and then I got some spiders that are purple. Like I, I've been doing the lights thing for a while, so this is like an extension of that, but also, I feel like a fucking e-boy, and especially because they were reco—they were on my front page on Amazon of things that I might like, and then like it's been like recommending me like, the pink gamer chair, and like the headphones with the cat ears and I'm just like, "Oh my god, please stop calling me out." My boyfriend texted me and was like, "You're such a fucking e-boy, like, you're an e-boy gamer." I was like, "leave me alone!" Like I'm like, "No I'm not!"

Finch: [41:05] God.

Nico: [41:06] "I'm not a gamer! I'm not a gamer!" I yell as I shrink into a hob of corn.

Finch: [41:12] Yeah. (*Finch laughs*) Oh, mood.

Nico: [41:13] Anyway, (*Nico laughs*) what were you saying?

Finch: [41:16] What was I saying, um...

Nico: [41:17] Parasocial relationships, maybe? Something about that—

Finch: [41:20] Parasocial relationships—I think, it's not. I'm trying to avoid doing the thing that... you've been in academia, you know that really annoying thing people do where they're like "I have a question" and then it's not a question it's just a statement?

Nico: **[41:35]** You can like, just say the thing, it's okay.

Finch: **[41:36]** But there's an interesting sort of—you're talking both about how the tablefriends are very intentional about like, "We are not your friends, we are producers have a podcast," and yet I think part of the reason that the show draws so many queer and trans fans is because they see themselves in the people that do the show, and they want to watch queer and trans people, like, make art and make shows, and like want to consume that. So the question I have then it's like, how do you relate to the cast members? With the acknowledgement that, like that's not—

Nico: **[42:10]** Yeah.

Finch: **[42:11]** (overlapping) —it's a boundary that should be there.

Nico: **[42:13]** Mm hmm. So it's actually been really cool to see, like, first of all, Austin Walker is a—not, not just black but he's biracial, he's a biracial queer man, like he's biracial queer man. He has a background where like, we're not—like obviously he's lived a very different life than I have, but like being also like, I'm also like a fat black queer man—or, not man, but like man with quotation marks around it—who is biracial. My dad's Black, my mom is white. He has a similar like... I don't want to, I hate saying "similar" because it's like we're not similar at all, but like. It, it's a dynamic, it's a, it's—there's a certain dynamic to it.

[43:01] And he does a lot about games and tabletop RPGs. I also do that. Like there's like, kind of like, "See, if he can do it, I can do it" type thing, where it's just nice to like, see someone like me, or with a familiar background to me, also do the things that I like to do. Like this kind of like, "Oh yeah, like, see? There's space, you can do it" type thing. Which also I mean it also like actively colors how he sees the world. Which is nice, because then I get to see things that I also think portrayed in the game that I would like to listen to. Because how often do you get that? Not super often. And then there's also, like, you've got Sylvia and Jack on there, who also are trans, non-binary. Jack uses they/them pronouns, Sylvi uses she/her, things like that, like it's really cool to have trans people like making up a big portion of a show. Ali is also a queer—Ali and Janine are queer women.

[44:14] Ali is also fat, super cool to see. Art is also really cool, like, how often do you have people being like openly Jewish on a podcast and having that like color life? And also he just loves his wife, which I just think is like great. And then Dre is also really cool... queer, queer man, living his best life, he did psych—he was getting his psych degree as the show was going on and actually when I met him at Gencon I was like, "You are so cool because you also made me think, *if Dre can get through the fucking psych program, I can do that too.*" He laughed, he thought it was hilarious.

Finch: **[44:49]** Aww!

Nico: **[44:51]** Cause I'm like, "Hello fellow psych major! This can suck sometimes!" And he was like "yes!" So it's just like stuff like that we're seeing myself represented, both on screen and by people makes me think that like, "Oh yeah, don't forget, the world is not just made up of like singular groups, like the *Critical Role* cast or the McElroys, like there's other people doing these things." Which is also been cool because it's also why I wanted to like start writing about different groups that don't get the same recognition that *Critical Role* and *The Adventure Zone* do. So like there's a lot of podcasts that not only have directly sprung from *Friends at the Table*, but are in similar

veins. So like, you know some, some that have directly sprung from it, you've got like *Follow the Leader*, which is a cast of people who are *Friends at the Table* fans. It's like Dora and Alix and Jade and, like all like these people, like all of, all the people we know, like they have a podcast where they only play GM-less games. And they play these games and it's really cool.

[45:52] And you've got like my podcast *Hostile Takeover*, we-we're all *Friends at the Table* fans, except for Will who's never heard it before. And we all listened to that, and that has colored the way we play *D&D* as well as our own, like, whatever sp—we're actually going to, um, we're on a hiatus at the moment due to COVID, and we have like we were going to play *Blades in the Dark* and then switch over to a system that we are writing ourselves and then, um, we are... Yeah so then like, and then, and other veins of people who have similar, or, are "smaller shows," quote unquote. Like some are smaller, some are big like, um.

[46:33] You've got *Dimension 20*, which is a cast that is also has a lot of queer people and people of color on it, which I think is really cool. And the DM, Brendan Lee Mulligan, he's a white cis het man, but he, like actively listens to people. He has consultants on the show, he has consultants come on to the show and they talk about things, especially because their current season talks a lot about addiction and drugs and alcohol abuse and things like that, um. They had a season that the cast of characters was basically entirely black because Lou only plays black characters and he was the king. And so, he was like, "Okay, if I'm the King, King's black, that means everybody else's black too." And so like, it like—because, like most of the, most of the cast was really, most of the characters were related to the King and so like that was really cool. Stuff like that.

[47:21] They had a portrayal of a, like the struggles of being a queer teenager growing up in a very religious household portrayed on their *Fantasy High*, like there was a lot going on in *Fantasy High* that was really good. But that was Kristen Applebees', love that storyline. Stuff like that, so they like, they have consultants on the show. They're a bigger show because half of them are from like a like... what the fuck was that—I can't think of what it is right now, I'm not gonna even try, but like they're from a very well-known comedy group, and then, you've got like—

Finch: **[47:56]** (overlapping) College Humor?

Nico: **[47:58]** College Humor, thank you, yes, I was like, "It's not, it's not the BYU one," and I was trying to think what the other one was called, College Humor, yes. Um, and then you've got like other smaller podcasts also done by queer people, trans people, people of color. Like you've got like *The Musafirs*, which is one that I really like, which is entirely a, it's an entire cast of Southeast Asian people, and they're all some form of queer, most of the cast is non-binary that, they play *D&D* but the worlds directly influenced by Southeast Asian, their Southeast Asian backgrounds. And that's been successful and that's really cool. You've got *Asians Represent*, which I haven't gotten a chance to listen to more than one episode of, but it's really cool. You've got like... there's some other ones that I like to listen to that are like... I can't remember off the top of my head right now but yeah, like, there's a lot of podcasts that don't get the spotlight that they should. But are really good. I think I answered your question?

Finch: **[49:08]** Absolutely. If you're down with it, cool if we take a break for a little bit?

Nico: **[49:14]** I'm going to get more coffee, and water.

Finch: [49:15] Amazing, um why don't we say... how long does it take for coffee?

Nico: [49:23] I was just gonna go pour a mug.

Finch: [49:25] Okay cool, I was like, if you need to brew stuff.

Nico: [49:27] Oh, no.

Finch: [49:28] I need to run to the bathroom. Why don't we say back at like 30?

Nico: [49:31] Okay yeah totally.

Finch: [49:32] Amazing, I'm pausing the recording.

Nico: [49:33] Okay.

-----pause-----

Finch: [49:35] Alright, we are back. So where we left off, you were talking about lots of different shows, lots of different small shows, and one thing that you touched on that I kinda related to something I wanted to ask was about representation and how you like—on *Friends at the Table*, like representation, the sense I got from you, was it wasn't just about seeing people that like shared your life experience, but about stories that you could relate to. Or about, like, you talked about like Art and loving his wife and I'm like—I relate to that!

Nico: [50:08] It's nice to see healthy portrayals with marriage like just in general. Um, like people—there's too many, too many men talking about how they hate their wives and I'm like, "Stop it! Why are you married if you hate your wife!" And then meanwhile Art just over here like, "I love my wife."

Finch: [50:23] It's so good, and I was talking to someone else, and they were like, "If I, you know, if I had a wife, I would also love my wife, and that's why Art, despite being the token cis man of the podcast, is relatable."

Nico: [50:33] Right!

Finch: [50:35] But the question that I was going to ask is, what does representation mean to you? Both in the sense of what does the word mean, and also what is significant about it.

Nico: [50:45] Yeah so um, definition. Representation to me means like, portraying nuanced and varied types of people on screen. People with different life experiences, different backgrounds, different races, sexualities, genders, ability versus disability, like all sorts of stuff. Like, show the human, like, human existence is so multifaceted, and media does not often portray it as so. So for me representation means reflecting real life on whatever medium, it is.

[51:30] To me, as a person, though, it means I don't feel so othered. Because, like growing up, I don't think I read a book with it actually Black, like, explicitly Black protagonist until, ooh, like... fourth or fifth grade and I read *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, which is a very sad book about a family who's, who are sharecroppers, and like, like a lot of the tragedies of Black existence. That was my first book I read—the first fiction book I read with Black people in it. The second was the *Percy Jackson* series, and then *The Kane Chronicles*. *The Kane Chronicles*, first book I ever read with

a Black protagonists whose experienced was not just about just about, like, Black suffering. Which was cool and it helped—it was cooler too because him and his sister were biracial and I was like, “Holy shit, I’ve never seen that before in my life.”

[52:31] But yeah. It's like, outside of like me headcanoning, me thinking that Hermione was Black because she had very frizzy uncontrollable curly hair, a massive gap between her teeth, and was like very bookish and kind of know-it-all-y, just like me, I thought Hermione was Black until I saw the movies, and I was like, “Who the fuck is that?” when I saw it. (*Finch laughs*)

[52:53] But yeah. So it means like knowing like—and then I didn't see like queer people in media till like... God, like canonically queer representation. I don't remember the first time I saw it, but was it... it may have been *Orange Is the New Black*. (*Finch hums*) But um, yeah, so like you know, like there was like shipping and stuff like but that doesn't really count. Although like I won't completely discount shipping and fan culture, obviously, because, like one, I'm part of it, but like, two like that was my introduction to gay media was shipping, and like, kind of like the introduction to questioning my sexuality and gender. So like, I'm not giving Johnlock credit for like, making me realize I was gay, but like, it was a part of it.

Finch: [53:50] Yeah...

Nico: [53:51] As loathe as I am to admit it.

Finch: [53:54] I've been in plenty of, I've been in plenty of cringe, cringe fandoms.

Nico: [53:58] (overlapping) Oh, the cringe...

Finch: [53:59] (overlapping) The cringe ships.

Nico: [54:00] (overlapping) The cringe...

Finch: [54:00] You know, were we not all 14 years old on Tumblr once?

Nico: [54:06] *Homestuck* may have actually been the first piece of media (*Finch laughs*) with canonical queer characters. (*Nico laughs*) Hate it here!!!

Finch: [54:17] Which... would you care to elaborate on why you hate it here?

Nico: [54:24] Um. (*Nico laughs*) It's just... okay, so like theoretically, it's cringe, but also like, it's a little embarrassing to be like, “Oh yeah, like my first queer representation came from fucking *Homestuck*,” which is a piece of media with a significant—actually so like, a really interesting piece of like. It's a really interesting anthropological look at the world because it is a multimedia, multi-year story with a huge fan base and a massive, like, it actually like follows a lot of like really interesting themes of like literary, like lit—like literary skeletons or structures let's say, it follows a lot of those and takes some really interesting twists and turns. It's like a multimedia project that a lot of people—so like, it's really fascinating but also like it is, it is associated with like, the girl who destroyed the hotel trying to dye her skin gray with sharpies and rubbing alcohol. Like, so like, you know, two sides of the coin. (*Nico laughs*)

Finch: **[55:36]** No, absolutely I, I completely dodged the *Homestuck* bullet in a way, where I, um, in the time I would have gotten into it, I was just too busy because it was so long that I didn't have the time or energy to get into it.

Nico: **[55:48]** God I wish that were me.

Finch: **[55:49]** But I think it's a fascinating case study of like fandom and how it interacts with the broader world and the source itself as like a multimedia, one author but also lots of authors, kind of folkloric, way—anyway, I think it's fascinating.

Nico: **[56:05]** (overlapping) He had Dante Basco, like, he—there were like several celebrities that he, like. Like I don't even know how the man like got them to be interested and be like references and stuff like that in the word like but like Dante Basco? How the fuck did he do that?! (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[56:32]** Like, what, what?

Nico: **[56:33]** It's like one of those things where I just think about it sometimes, um, like there's such a weird intersection of like *Homestuck*—like *Homestuck* has its fingers in so many pies and it's so weird to notice.

[56:45] But yeah, representation means that I don't, like people don't get, don't feel so alone. Like, people see themselves and they're like, “Oh yeah, I'm normal, like my story is normal, and it's the media that doesn't—it's the media that others me and not my own existence.”

Finch: **[57:04]** Yeah, yeah, and what I'm kind of hearing you say is that representation is part of a—it's done in community, it's not something that really happens alone necessarily, where it's about seeing people like you rather than just seeing you.

Nico: **[57:21]** Yeah.

Finch: **[57:27]** Trying to think of where it makes sense to go next... yeah actually I guess on the topic of representation is um, what do you want to see more of in fiction, as it relates to like gender and sexuality and race?

Nico: **[57:40]** More nuance. I want to see more nuanced queer stories. I want to also see queer stories that aren't simply high schoolers, like I, I'm 22. I have moved on from like high school romance stories, like, I'm good, like give me college, give me messy adults. Like I read a lot of YA, one because I think it's, it's such a wide genre that YA isn't really one thing and people think it is but it's not. I did a whole course on it last semester as well, so like I'm just like I'm deep in it. But YA as a category is such a varied thing with lots of genres, and it, it literally is meant for ages 11 to 25 like young adult is like, if you're in college, that is also like a young adult or if you're in the college age range that's also a young adult. But like, it's like a such a wide range of things that it's just like. It's not the same, like, it's like, there's like... people think it's all like one thing and it's not. But like, also I don't need to read high school romances, but also the most representation you kind of see in current literature comes in YA books, because a lot of queer and trans authors tend to write YA books.

[59:06] If you've—it's like a just a trend I noticed, or maybe it's just because that's the space I'm in but like... which is cool but also like I would read adult literature, if that didn't just like mean

either classics or really dry current novels, which... I feel like I've kind of gone on a tangent here, but like um, (*Nico laughs*) more I want to see more representation and things like I want to see more queer lit, more trans lit, more showing people of color, and also more disability. Like I want to see more real-life connections in literature, like I don't need more high school romances between like two cis white gay boys. Like I, I need to see more stories, like, I need to see more stories, which I think is a reason that a lot of people turn to fanfiction because that's like the best place they can get these stories.

[1:00:04] But I would like to see more in TV and movies and books—like I go to books first because that's, the first thing I think of, but like TV, movies, they definitely need to expand outwards. Like I think podcasts are—honestly podcasts and fanfiction I think are a huge draw for a lot of people, because podcasts have the ability to do kind of whatever, because it's not like a network thing, it's just a bunch of people creating, just creating things. And like the same for fanfiction where it's like, expanding on characters that you may already know and love, but basically turning them into like their own original characters and stuff like that, because you put them in situations like outside of the norm and stuff like that, where it's, it's interesting. My friend Maayan actually did a study on fandom, fan culture, and fanfiction that was really good.

Finch: **[1:00:54]** Ooh... No, and I think that kind of ties back to what we were talking about earlier about capitalism and companies and corporations and the differences between *Friends at the Table* as a much more independent sort of Patreon-supported versus like *Critical Role* or *TAZ* where... perhaps one of the reason *Friends at the Table* draws so many queer and trans people is because they're not part of a—they don't have to get approval from a network official to show these sort of stories. What was, I had another thing that you mentioned that I thought was cool. I mean all of it, but... (pause)

Nico: **[1:01:34]** I really did kinda just go on a tear about YA there. (*Finch laughs*) I really—I lost my train of—I literally like—

Finch: **[1:01:39]** (overlapping) I think you zipped back around!

Nico: **[1:01:40]** I had to stop and think about what the question was to go back to, cause I was like, "wait, what am I talking about?"

Finch: **[1:01:46]** You're so fine, I'm also, I'm really interested in what people bring up and what people bring into the conversation so like anything is.

Nico: **[1:01:52]** I have ADHD and my brain like will literally jump from A to C without explaining how I got there from B, and so like sometimes I have to like stop and think and be like, "Wait, let me, let me explain what I'm talking about."

Finch: **[1:02:04]** Yeah yeah. Oh, and the other thing that I heard you say was that it's not just about having a character that like has identity labels, but about stories that you can relate to, and about—

Nico: **[1:04:11]** Yeah.

Finch: **[1:02:21]** (overlapping) —stories that draw that like identities into account.

Nico: **[1:02:24]** I think sometimes, especially with more popular—and I hate saying mainstream media—but like more popular, mainstream media like, it becomes like a checkbox rather than a person. I point to *Glee* as the main example, where it they weren't people, they were stereotypes. They weren't people, they were labels to check off for drama, type things. Like it, like I, I want to see more representation of people because I don't just want, like, the stereotypes of like you can pin this person—I don't want like a like a list of TV tropes, like I just want to see stories about people, because people are nuanced, they aren't just one thing, and life experiences influence those stories. It doesn't matter if it's a fictional character, or a real person telling their life story, like, you are never just one thing and it's important to showcase that as well in fiction if you're trying to do, accurate, accurate representation, because... a person isn't just one thing, so your character shouldn't be either.

Finch: **[1:03:38]** Snaps to that. Um...

[1:03:43] This is going off what you said about sort of podcasts and fanfic and how you've noticed that podcasts have become a space for people looking for these sort of stories, for queer and trans stories and stories that actually take race into account in interesting ways, because of the sort of maybe a lower barrier to entry, or just like you can just get a mic and record yourself. And you've alluded to it, but you have your own actual play podcast, *Hostile Pod*, right?

Nico: **[1:04:09]** Yeah! Yeah.

Finch: **[1:04:11]** How did that start?

Nico: **[1:04:15]** Okay, so it started because me and a group of my friends were very frustrated—cause like I said, we all came from *Godsfall*, so there was like, literally like the start of going downhill for this show... there was other external factors as well, some drama that is not mine, so I cannot get into. But there was, uh, the—Aram was promising a non-binary character. We were all very excited about this because there were no non-binary people in the show. It ended up being a sentient cactus who kept getting referred to as “it” the whole time. To which we realized that one, Aram had no idea how to write non-binary characters, and two, Aram didn't actually know what he was talking about when he was talking about non-binary representation. What he meant was it didn't have a gender because it was a cactus. And we listened to this live, like we all listened to it on a call on Discord. Like we were all like listening, and we had a channel where there were no—like, it was no cast allowed, like it was locked, only for the fans. And literally in that moment, everybody like collectively was like, “What the fuck is this?” And they just kind of went from there.

[1:05:30] Um, so me and a group of friends, when the worldbook were coming out, when the worldbook was getting like ready to be released, we were like, “What if we made a podcast and just took this and, like, fixed it?” Because also it's very broken, like it's a very, it's very broken, because the whole concept is you're like, you're a godling, like you are a god of something, and you have powers related to that domain, stuff like that. But it's like massively OP in the way that *D&D* can often be, there's like a lot of dice rolls, there's so much dice that go into it, the longer it goes on.

[1:06:04] He was very weird about orcs, again, there's this race, called the Gyudari which he told me was supposed to be like a *Black Panther*-esque society like Wakanda, where it was like, to the

outside world, they seem very like... backwards and stuff like that, but surprise! They're actually really technologically advanced and other stuff but like they're like gorilla people, and all this stuff. And I was like okay well, two things are wrong. One, you never showed this on screen, so what's written in the book is that you wrote a bunch of un-technologically-advanced tribal, like, ape people, like bigfoot, sasquatch-type people with very short life expectancies who are apparently like, very backwards. And then the orcs are monstrous, and there's even a group of orcs that are in there, like that are basically "the good ones." And then, like the sun elves and blood elves play into some anti-Semitic, anti-Romani stereotypes that I don't even think he realized he wrote in there, because like I said he was going off a lot of *D&D* shit. Stuff like that. So we were like, "What if we took this and said, our city now, and fixed it, made it ours." And so we did!

Finch: **[1:07:25]** That is what I love about, just, I don't know, fan spaces and whatnot, is the ethos of just like, "Huh. What if this was just better?" And is also mine now, just.

Nico: **[1:07:37]** (overlapping) —my city now.

Finch: **[1:07:39]** My city now!

Nico: **[1:07:40]** I figure, you know what? Half of us have our books—have our name in the book like, our city now.

Finch: **[1:07:46]** Our city now! Yeah, me listening to *Friends at the Table*: "So, all these characters are trans. Um. Yeah! They're all trans now."

Nico: **[1:07:55]** They're all trans.

Finch: **[1:07:56]** Trans now. As I said yesterday—

Nico: **[1:07:58]** (overlapping) Thrandir trans, Hadrian trans—

Finch: **[1:08:00]** (overlapping) Hadrian trans!

Nico: **[1:08:01]** (overlapping) Rosana trans, Lem trans, Hella trans, Adaire trans, Adelaide trans, Calhoun trans, Mako trans, Cass trans, Aria trans, Jackie trans—like I'll just, I'll just go down there.

Finch: **[1:08:15]** They're just all trans—I think the only cis person is Arrell. Because he's a fucking asshole.

Nico: **[1:08:18]** Arrell cis.

Finch: **[1:08:19]** Arrell cis, that's the only (*Finch laughs*)—Alyosha trans.

Nico: **[1:08:22]** (overlapping) Alyosha trans.

Finch: **[1:08:23]** (overlapping) Arrell cis cause he's a fucking asshole, um, Um.

[1:08:28] I once again don't have a question written for it, but something you brought up was I'm really interested in this concept of fixing it, and of sort of... reclamation, but one thing you alluded to was how it's so easy to just port tropes and really harmful racist tropes from older media? Into like, for *D&D*. Yeah I just think it's interesting... about like how *D&D* can be used very uncritically even in these sort of liberal spaces.

Nico: **[1:08:59]** Well, I mean you can look at over the summer, last summer, they, after announcing, after a, after Orion, who was a Black—

Finch: **[1:09:12]** (overlapping) Orion is so cool—

Nico: **[1:09:14]** Orion so cool, I actually interviewed them for the first piece I ever wrote. Orion is so fucking cool—anyway, so Orion worked for Wizards of the Coast, quit Wizards of the Coast, because they revealed that... or, they revealed that they were being treated very terribly, like she had like a whole list like a whole document of just like all the shit that happened. So after she quit very publicly, then, Wizards of the Coast was like, “Hey, by the way, we're going to like remove like, inherently evil classes from the game,” like “we're going to remove like the inherently evil like alignments from different races and we're going to like, write a supplement that can help be anti-racist, but you have to buy it and it won't be actually part of the game when we publish it.” And so, even though it was very bad and very poorly done, and also they're harboring still a known sexual abuser, which is a whole nother story.

[1:10:14] Still, because of this, because they said, “Hey, maybe racism bad,” the fanboys lost their *shit*. Like there was a shitstorm on Twitter for about three days of like white fanboys, and some women, just losing their mind about how like you can't just do that, how you can't just like get rid of the cannon fodder because, like, if you don't have that who are you supposed to like just like give to your party to level, a level up XP, and stuff like that, which also then reminded me that people—some people play *D&D* like it's a math game and just about farming XP and not for the roleplay, but you know that's, that's neither here nor there, people have different ways of playing, but I was like, “Oh yeah, I forgot that people do that.” Um, stuff like that. Just like the worst, like it really exposed how deeply racist the fan base is, as well as the content.

[1:11:08] And then there was, like the *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* that came out. Um, my friend... V.J. Harris, who is a friend, did a whole... sorry, excuse me, a whole series, um, both on TikTok and on Twitter, talking about the problems within *Tasha's Cauldron of Everything* and also they wrote a book called *An Elf and an Orc Have a Baby* [correction: *An Elf and an Orc Had a Little Baby: Parentage and Upbringing in D&D*] which, um, kind of like made a playbook for like multi-racial characters, like play-playable characters, and *D&D* was kind of like, “Hey, well, if you have like a half-orc, half-elf, like, the stats are going to be really wild!” Stuff like that, because so much of like *D&D* is inherently tied to racial abilities as well, which is kind of weird as well. Like stuff like that, just like there's so much inherent like... a lot of inherent racism built into the game, a lot of inherent misogyny built into the game, ableism, anti-Semitism—like so much anti-Semitism, so much anti-Romani stereotypes, like, it's a mess. Like literally, honestly burn the whole thing down and start over.

[1:12:22] Just shit like that, and then um. I had something else I wanted to talk about... (pause) I don't remember what it was, but like, *D&D* has a really long history of bad shit in it and then also of just being inaccessible in general, because it's very expensive, very hard to get into. The fandom around it, though it has slowly been getting better as it's gotten popular through podcasts, is still very gatekeep-y, stuff like that.

Finch: **[1:13:00]** Yeah, I think that's interesting because something I will see a lot of on Twitter is debates about... I don't want to reduce it to just “whether or not *D&D* is fixable” or whether or not people

are still playing *D&D*, but I so often see the solution people proposing, like, “Just play another game, like you, can't fix *D&D*!” But I mean you're probably—like, *Godsfall* still runs on like, a *D&D*—it's supplement to *D&D*, so.

Nico: [1:13:26] Yeah, I don't know, like, I think um *D&D* is great for some people, like some people really love *D&D*, they love the numbers aspect of it, they love how crunchy it can be. That's the same reason that some people play *Pathfinder*... God bless them, (*Finch laughs*) cannot understand and never will, I fucking hate *Pathfinder*, but some people really love the crunch. And I'm just like, “That is not for me, enjoy.”

[1:13:46] But like a lot of times I see people where they don't actually want to play *D&D*, but that's the only system they know, so they will like go out of their way to, like, try and make *D&D* into some other game, where the point—I'm just like, “Let me show you a different game you can play that'd actually do the thing you want with the mechanics that you want.” Like, for example, love *Dimension 20*, they don't actually want to play *D&D*, even though they want to play *D*—even though they're playing *D&D*. Like, they're trying so hard to mod it to all this stuff, I'm like, “Let me just, let me just, come on, come on, come with me, (*Finch laughs*) let me, let me show you DriveThruRPG, let me show you itch.io, let me show you—let me, let me, let me take you away from here.” (*Nico laughs*)

Finch: [1:14:28] “I'm going to play *D&D*, but it's set in a high school,” I'm like there's probably a game—you want to play *Monster Hearts*? Go play *Monster Hearts*—”

Nico: [1:14:34] *Monster Hearts* or *Masks* or, um, *Lasers and Feelings* would be a good one for that, like there's all these games that people could play that they just don't know exist.

Finch: Yeah.

Nico: [1:14:45] My friend who drew this (*Nico points to art on their wall*) made a game. Hold on, let me just—my friend Jaime drew this—elsombreoart on Twitter—and it's literally part of like a small zine they made that's a TTRPG? It's called “Oh No I'm Running Late to the MCR Concert and I Have an Extra Ticket,” [correction: “Oh No I'm Late to the MCR Concert and I Have an Extra Ticket”] and it's a date, it's a dating sim for cryptids and monsters.

Finch: [1:15:14] I love it. I love it. I have so many games that I want to play, and then I have no time, but someday.

Nico: [1:15:20] Mood. Big mood.

Finch: [1:15:23] The mood.

Nico: [1:15:25] Yeah, there was literally one more thing I wanted to say about the whole thing that I just cannot remember what it was.

Finch: [1:15:31] *D&D*, racist fan base, the question of mechanics...

Nico: [1:15:38] Yeah, I don't know, like, there's so much of *D&D* that I just think is so inhere—oh, Tolkien! There we go.

Finch: [1:15:44] Oh yeah.

Nico: **[1:15:45]** Because it's based off Tolkien people will want to be like, "Okay, well, like, it's just based off Tolkien, that's just how it is, like, it's totally fine because it's just based off *Lord of the Rings*," and I'm like, "Surprise motherfucker, Tolkien was racist too!"

Finch: **[1:15:59]** You want to see a, a— (*Finch laughs*)

Nico: **[1:16:01]** (overlapping) You want to look at the original orcs? Do you want to look at the original orcs, because we can get into the original orcs! And then there's like so much anti-Semitism and they're like—it's not really my place to talk about but, like the phylactery, which is an inherently like, it's a, it's a religious Jewish thing, got turned into, "Oh yeah, this is where a lich keeps their soul, you know the evil undead liches? The evil things, this is where they keep their soul." Or like the concept of the golem as a whole and *D&D*, very bad, like a lot of like the goblins.

[1:16:37] Which also—fuck Sam Riegel for Nott-slash-Veth. Because he made a goblin that is like, among many things—like goblins in *D&D* are inherently like whatever, and then was like—who's also like kind of like a metaphor for transness but it's not—and then also was like, "Oh yeah and I ate a baby once," and I'm just like, "What the fuck is happening here?" Um. (*Finch makes a disgusted face.*) Yeah, like baby-killing, baby-eating. Dwarves also being like tied to it, which that's more like getting into the whole fantasy element of fantasy as a whole, has a big problem with bigotry being built into it.

Finch: **[1:17:28]** Yeah. And I—you mentioned, though, that part of the reason that you stuck with *Friends at the Tables*, because in the first episode they were like, Austin was like, "Yeah so the way that fantasy does races is whack, and we're not going to do that."

Nico: **[1:17:39]** Yeah! Which was cool,

Finch: **[1:17:44]** That's cool! Yeah, I think you also alluded to, I've always been struck by how *Friends at the Table* uses system so intentionally and seems to really understand, like especially even, even in Partizan, like the choice of a system for the, for the finale, like, felt very intentional. They're not just playing *D&D* because that's what you do.

Nico: **[1:18:01]** Mm hmm. I think *Dungeon World* was a great starting point, both for them and for the fandom, because a lot of people like had never really heard of other games to play and so *Dungeon World* was great, because also Ali was a new player, I think Ali and maybe Keith were the new people?

Finch: **[1:18:16]** Jack was also new, right?

Nico: **[1:18:19]** Jack, yeah, Jack was also new. So like half the cast was new players, and so, like they didn't really know where to start, and so they were like, "Let's do *Dungeon World*, that's a really great entry point," like stuff like that. And even *Dungeon World* has its problems, but like, it's a good entry point for people who have never played a tabletop game before in their life. So like, they're very intentional in what they use, and like sometimes they'll switch what games they're playing halfway through the season, because they realize, "Oh, this doesn't work as well."

Finch: **[1:18:51]** Mm hmm, mm hmm. Yeah. I really only have a couple more things.

[1:19:07] One question I have, you've talked a lot about sort of queerness in your own identity as it relates, and—

Nico: **[1:19:15]** Can you hear the trash can in the background, on my mic?

Finch: **[1:19:17]** Only very, very barely, you—I can hear you perfectly fine.

Nico: **[1:19:21]** Okay.

Finch: **[1:19:24]** Yeah, there's someone doing yard work next door so I'm like, (*whispers*) "better not be fucking—" Um. Can you hear me well enough, or is it—?

Nico: **[1:19:32]** Yeah. I can't hear the, I didn't know there was somebody doing yard work in the background of you.

Finch: **[1:19:34]** (overlapping) Amazing.

Nico: **[1:19:35]** I'm right by the window, which is at the front of the house. I'm like, "Oh, here comes the garbage man."

Finch: **[1:19:40]** "You want to dump some glass, some glass, like loudly? Do you mind? Are you busy?"

Finch: **[1:19:48]** Anyway, the question that I am really interested in, that I've been reading a lot, that I've I'm curious to hear just if you have any thoughts on it is like, where do you see queerness in *Friends at the Table*?

Nico: **[1:19:58]** Yeah, so I mean there's like a really obvious answer of like, oh yeah like, look how many like, queer relationships there are, but also you see it in the way that they talk about relationships to people. Like it is so inherently built into the societies they build, the relationships they have with people, the way that their friendships work and stuff like that.

[1:20:20] Like, um, like there's a whole joke about "getting a dog badge" that is like. Just like it's like a joke, or just like a very in-fandom, very—honestly small thing but it's just like a—like, oh yeah like, "haha, they're, they're boyfriends, they may, they may have or not done the thing of getting the dog badge." But like it's like... the characters, the fashion, the way that people talk about bodies and relate to each other, like there's such a very like trans aspect to bodies and like body horror and stuff like that. Like, okay, like, how do we... how, like—because there's such an idea with trans people of like deconstructing bodies and ourselves, and like what is a body in relation to a person and stuff like that, like that's kind of like inherently queer and trans, like, it just is, it just is! Um.

Finch: Hell yeah.

Nico: **[1:21:15]** Like you see like the friendships that people have and like. Non... like the, like the, the relationships between men in the game is nontoxic. Like, even though we joke like, "Oh yeah, you see an NPC and you're like *I'm going to tap that*," like it's literally just like, not toxic. Like there can be bad people and bad relationships and whatever, but it's not like inherently, "Oh we're two macho men, so this is how the relationship is going to be." Like, there's a very—it's not abrasive, like I find myself sitting here listening to the story never just kind of wincing, waiting, like I'm never

on edge waiting to hear where they're going to say in regards to like, am I going to get hate-crimed by a podcast today?

Finch: **[1:22:03]** It's a real concern!

Nico: **[1:22:05]** Right, like, have—like there's also a lot of, looking at like mental health and things like that, like how does depression and cancer and chronic health issues and stuff like that, how does that relate to the world as well? Like, you know, you've got like Alyosha and Samol who were both like chronically ill, Samol was dying, like literally he was an allegory for cancer, stuff like that, which is interesting to look at as well. There was Grand Magnificent who literally I think I remember that I wanted to tell this story, like there was a whole new the character, who literally was going through depression, who was like, “Oh yeah, haha, I’m worthless,” like all this stuff, and literally it was so, like it hit too close to home, and I had to turn off the podcast because it triggered me while I was at work and I had to turn on something else. And I talked about it at therapy and that was really hard to explain. (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[1:23:04]** Yeah, I’ve been there. Oh man. I mean, I know when, when, even the—on a lighter but very relatable note was when they did Blue J coming out.

Nico: Yes!!!

Finch: **[1:23:18]** And the conversation with Throndir. That is... not exactly how mine went, but I would have liked it—

Nico: **[1:23:22]** (overlapping) “By the way, um... I use they/them pronouns now.”

Finch: **[1:23:27]** (overlapping) Yeah!

Nico: **[1:23:27]** (overlapping) “Okay!”

Finch: Yeah, and Throndir’s like, “Yeah, cool buddy!” and I’m like, (*Finch makes a crying noise*).

Nico: **[1:23:33]** And then immediately they uncover the wreckage of a bombing of a procession.

Finch: Oops!

Nico: **[1:23:38]** Like you know, you know, *Friends at the Table* shit. Like, you have a nice soft gender moment and it's like hey, by the way, Samot’s full of like, wood.

Finch: **[1:23:50]** Yeah, oops, oopsie! God is dead, question mark?

Nico: **[1:23:55]** Did we kill another god? How many gods have we killed? How many breads have you eaten? (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[1:24:03]** I once, I may have said this to you already, but *Friends at the Table* is in a lot of ways a show about bad dads and learning to be better than bad dads.

Nico: **[1:24:11]** Yep. Name a good dad in *Friends at the Table*.

Finch: **[1:24:17]** Throndir.

Nico: **[1:24:19]** Correct.

Finch: **[1:24:20]** Yeah. (*Finch laughs*) The art Annie did of Throndir and Hadrian and Red Jack all with shirts that said “Hieron’s Best Grandpa.”

Nico: **[1:24:30]** And then Ephrim with the mug, “Grandpa.” (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[1:24:32]** That just said “Grandpa.” I love it. One clarification I had though is, you started, when you were talking about relationships on the show and how relationships get talked about and bodies and how they relate to each other, you kept saying, like, how “they” talk about relationships. Is that the characters or the players?

Nico: **[1:24:54]** The players, so the players—like I mean obviously the characters as well, like what is through the players comes through the characters but like. There was specifically like in Winter in Hieron when they went through the rhizome—not, not the rhizome, that, the strata and lamina, they were like, “What is your lack?” And Adaire was like a true connection and there was something inherently, like, there's just something so lonely... and... like, maybe I just read into it too much, but like there's something about like kind of like the way you can feel the inability to connect when you have trauma and mental illness and are queer. This—how hard it is for you to connect with other people. Because on one level, you're like, “Okay, well, I’ve never had a real connection before due to trauma and other things, on the other hand, is it predatory for me to like this person? Like, am I wrong for liking this person, am I, taking advantage of our friendship?” Things like, things like that that kind of read into it.

[1:26:00] Or like, there's like—like I said there's not like this inherent toxic masculinity between the men on the show, like the men characters on the show and also like you know the friends, like they are soft with each other. And like, I don't know how to say it, but like, like, they're soft, like they're soft with each other. Like it's just like checking in with your friends, seeing how they're, doing stuff like that, like. It's not the way you normally see things portrayed, both by people and by characters, like, there's like, you know?

Finch: **[1:26:37]** No absolutely, that makes, that makes a lot of sense. I mean I—

Nico: **[1:26:40]** Even their straight relationships are respectful in the show. Like Surge and Jeannie I think from *Twilight*, they were very nice, like. Rosana good.

Finch: **[1:26:55]** Rosana good. I can't believe *Friends at the Table* made me care about a straight couple.

Nico: **[1:26:59]** Right!

Finch: **[1:26:59]** Being Hadrian and Rosana.

Nico: **[1:27:00]** (overlapping) I’m like, “Damn, I care the—I care them so much.”

Finch: **[1:27:04]** I mean they're straight but they're also T4T, so like.

Nico: **[1:27:07]** Yeah. Both bisexual, both T4T.

Finch: **[1:27:11]** Yeah. We all know—

Nico: **[1:27:11]** (overlapping) I’ve decided.

Finch: **[1:27:12]** (overlapping) Hadrian gets pegged by—

Nico: **[1:27:14]** (overlapping) Hadrian gets pegged by everybody.

Finch: **[1:27:15]** By everybody.

Nico: **[1:27:16]** Hadrian just gets pegged. (*Finch laughs*)

Finch: **[1:27:19]** I love that Art's character archetype is just "gets pegged."

Nico: **[1:27:22]** Big, gets pegged.

Finch: **[1:27:24]** Yeah, big, big buff boy gets pegged.

Nico: **[1:27:27]** Except for Grand Magnificent—no, even Grand Magnificent got big—

Finch: (overlapping) Did Grand—I think—

Nico: (overlapping) He got big, he got big.

Finch: **[1:27:31]** (overlapping) Oh I was gonna say, "I think he gets pegged." I haven't even seen Twilight Mirage—

Nico: **[1:27:33]** (overlapping) Oh no he definitely gets pegged, but I think he got big, I think. He was a trucker for a while, he got big.

Finch: **[1:27:40]** He got big. Big boy. Um, anyway, the last question I have that I'd like to ask, as a sort of closing is, is there anything I haven't asked about that you'd like to bring into the space?

Nico: **[1:27:58]** I don't, we don't have to get too far into it, but I think there's a really interesting connection between *Friends at the Table* fans and the media they get into relating to other stuff. Like you could see—

Finch: (overlapping) Say more.

Nico: **[1:28:08]** —a lot of like, a lot of the fans got really into like *The Magnus Archives*, which is a horror podcast that does have queer relationships in it but they're not like the main focus but they're in there, that is a lot about body horror, psychological horror stuff like that that a lot of people got it into. Like *The Untamed*, which is a Chinese gay drama. Or *Hannibal*, which is about cannibalism and psychosis and eating people and relationship drama and... what else—a lot of people gotten into like *Granblue Fantasy*, *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*, *Hades*, like you can kinda like see like a trend between the media that *Friends at the Table* fans get into, and they all tend to get into it like either independently or together, like some people will just like be like, "Oh, I didn't know you watch this thing, I watch this thing!" like type thing, and it's like, of course you do. Like sometimes you see people getting into stuff and like of course you are. Like I know I don't know how else to describe it.

Finch: **[1:29:11]** Yeah, you're hitting on how it's hard to know how much of it is... I mean I've certainly gotten into stuff because people that I consider friends in the fandom have gotten into stuff and I wanted to see what they were excited about.

Nico: **[1:29:23]** *Warrior Cats* is another thing I feel like is inherent to this fandom.

Finch: **[1:29:28]** Did you—I can't remember, who is it that just started a *Warrior Cats* podcast that I need to listen to?

Nico: **[1:29:31]** Paz and Liz and somebody else.

Finch: **[1:29:34]** Yeah, um.

Nico: **[1:29:36]** Hold on, I sent it to my partner Kellar because they are big into *Warrior Cats*. Hold on I gotta like pull it up, it's right at the top, so it won't take long.

Finch: **[1:29:44]** And then that goes back to what you were saying about the sort of podcasts sphere where it's so many of these people... I'm really interested in how the podcast sphere mirrors kind of fandom dynamics and a lot of—

Nico: **[1:29:53]** (overlapping) Paz, Liz, and Julian.

Finch: **[1:29:55]** Yeah. That sounds right. People that in my brain are all categorized as “Linda friend.” Like, people that I don't know but would maybe like to know. What was I saying, though, about, um... yeah where like people instead of just be—maybe in another show or another time people go write fanfic, and now it feels like people all still go write fanfic but also then go make a podcast.

Nico: **[1:30:26]** Yeah. I feel like that's a new niche is, let's make a podcast about it.

Finch: **[1:30:31]** (overlapping) Let's make a podcast about it!

Nico: **[1:30:33]** Like I said, me and Ben made one episode of an *Eragon* podcast. Me, Altair, and Maayan made a Yugioh podcast, like people like, you say something and make a podcast about it, let's go. And people will listen to it!

Finch: **[1:30:50]** That's the weirdest thing, I'm like, “people would listen to this—” yeah well, I still want to do a *Friends at the Table* re-watch podcast.

Nico: **[1:30:56]** That would be fun, I feel like Peel the Onion could have been turned into a podcast. If you ever want to do a *Friends at the Table* analysis podcasts, let me know.

Finch: **[1:31:05]** Oh hell yeah, I would be so down. Yeah well, I guess is this a podcast. Did we make a podcast?

Nico: **[1:31:12]** I think we made a podcast.

Finch: **[1:31:13]** Is my thesis just podcasts?

Nico: **[1:31:14]** Your thesis is a podcast.

Finch: **[1:31:16]** Shit. I mean, part of that was intentional, where I'm like, “I want to oral history because of the parallels with podcast.” Anyway.

Nico: **[1:31:23]** Yeah, you could release this as a podcast.

Finch: **[1:31:29]** Perhaps, perhaps... well, I'll think about it. Yeah. Any, anything else?

Nico: **[1:31:41]** Be gay do crimes fuck capitalism. Also big—also big thing with *Friends at the Table* is anti-capitalism.

Finch: **[1:31:48]** Right? It's so good!

Nico: **[1:31:49]** A lot of, a lot of leftist ideologies within the podcast, it's so good. Fuck capitalism, go home.

Finch: **[1:31:57]** Yeah, and it's both on the level of how they run the show, and also the themes of the show.

Nico: **[1:32:01]** Yeah, which also played into the fan labor thing and how they wanted to pay people for their work because, like, especially because it popped up around the time of like, Winter in Hieron, Spring in Hieron, on the heels of you know, like on, on the, on the, on the, around the time of like Winter in Hieron and Twilight Mirage, and especially coming after Rigor, they were like, "We're not going to just like take free labor."

Finch: **[1:32:29]** "We are conscientious about the themes of our, of our show and..."

Nico: **[1:32:32]** Right! They're—like the show was not just "wow cool robot." Although honestly the show is more like the, it's the "wow cool robot" meme but it's more like, the one directly to your face is "exploitation of labor in capitalism is bad and the inherent queerness of relationship," and then over the head is actually just "wow cool robot."

Finch: **[1:32:52]** (overlapping) Wow cool robot—yeah exactly. (*Finch laughs*) Oh boy. Oh boy.

Nico: **[1:32:59]** Okay, for real, though I think that's it, I think that's—

Finch: **[1:33:00]** (overlapping) Yeah for real I think, I think that's it. Amazing.

Nico: **[1:33:02]** (overlapping) — all the points I have to make.

Finch: **[1:33:04]** Amazing. Well, and thank you so much, this has been absolutely lovely. Um, I'm going to hit stop.