

0:00-0:36 - Intro Music

0:36—Intro/News

K: Hi and welcome to 2 GMs 1 Mic, I'm Kevin

J: And I'm Joe

K: And this is Episode 4, Season 6

J: That is true. We're going to talk about PDFs and their impact on the gaming industry and the state of the industry and probably just talking about the industry. Yay!

K: Industry!

J: Yeah, this is the policy wonk episode

K: Woo

J: Did I just say episode weird? Was I like (Garbled sounds)

K: No, you said "Wonk" though. I don't...

J: That's a real thing, yeah.

K: I don't know why you're getting all janky with the language

J: It's a real thing! That's a real thing.

K: Calm down Willy. This is not your Wonka.

J: (Laughing) no... it's... wonky...

K: Get out of my chocolate factory!

J: So speaking of chocolate factories, I kickstarted a game. The Kickstarter is way over by the time you guys hear this, so go to backerkit if it exists. It's called "**Organ Attack**." Have you seen those comics that pop up on your feed of like the stomach and the heart fighting or the brain and the heart fighting. They're like arguing.

K: Maybe

J: Okay. If I find a link, I'll throw one up in the show notes. They're really funny. Anyway, the artist for that has done a game called Organ Attack and what you do is everyone gets a series of organ cards they put in front of them and you attack those organs until you're the last person with organs. So, say in front of you is the pancreas card, I can hit you with diabetes and then that will kill the pancreas

K: This kills the man

J: Right, exactly. This kills the man. And then you can use other disease vectors to knock out all of the different organs. It looks really funny

K: That does sound pretty good

J: It's basically a "screw you" kind of game where you're each just kind of competing—it's a hyper competitive game. It seems really good though because it's kind of cheeky and tongue and cheek

K: As long as you can be mean to people in a smart way

J: It seems to be a very smart game, so I backed it. Plus it was only like 30 bucks and you get the game and all of the add-ons and free shipping.

K: There you go. Neato. Check that out maybe sometime. I don't know.

J: Yeah, buy it when it comes out in stores in a year. The other piece of news we have—do you want to just do that part now?

K: Might as well. Our editor has just started collaboration with a friend of the show, Nigel Bravo, and they have a new YouTube web series called "**Geeked on Comics**"

J: Link in the show notes

K: So far it's kind of funny... I'm just kidding. It's actually pretty good. If you want to, check it out. If you don't want to that's fine. I don't watch YouTube either.

J: I don't know anything about comics, so moving on.

K: Actually... to be fair, that's kind of the gimmick.

J: Oh really? Is that they don't either?

K: Well Jay does.

J: Oh—see maybe I will watch it then. This is what's funny about having friends of the show that do other media is I don't watch it and then I get yelled at.

K: See, Nigel is notorious for going and watching season 6 or something and not any of the other seasons and then going on Facebook and loudly asking why this is happening and I think that's what they're going for.

J: Oh, well that's a pretty good shtick I think I can support that. I can get behind that.

K: I'm pretty sure the first episode is season 2 of Daredevil. I know for a fact that Nigel has not watched Season 1.

J: That'd be like watching the newest season of Game of Thrones and just not knowing who anybody is.

K: I don't think anyone really knows who anyone is on Game of Thrones

J: I know, we all have our favorite like 2 or 3 characters and then we suffer through the episodes they're not in.

K: Exactly

J: Shout out to Game of Thrones. So yeah. Geeked on Comics.

K: Check it out. Or don't. I don't care.

4:20 - 5:10 - Music Transition

5:11 - Main Discussion

J: And we're back everybody. Time to talk about PDFs. That's kind of the beginning of the conversation anyway.

K: PDFs—love them? Hate them? Good for the business? Bad for the business? My personal opinion is Fuck PDFs

J: Okay, why's that?

K: I understand the need for them and I understand why people like them, with the advancing of technology so that you can now look at a PDF on your phone or on a tablet. It's... handy. But at the end of the day, it kind of ruins the experience of actually having the physical thing in your hand. I'm not even that old school of a gamer, but I'm old school enough that smart phones didn't exist when I gamed, so there used to be a rule of "put your phones down" or "phones go in the middle of the table, you can't text anyone." And now it's like "hold on, I need to pull up my phone so I can get to my book." Now are you on reddit looking at porn? I don't know are you actually looking up that obscure rule? I don't know. Are you able to quick search this PDF or is it laid out like shit? I don't know.

J: For me, addressing your specific concerns, I would say that PDFs are one of the few gaming technologies that seem to truly require infrastructure. If I don't have a tablet, I find gaming with PDFs at the table to be largely an exercise in frustration. I'm just very much more used to flipping directly to something in a book. It seems easier that way. I know there's search functions and whatnot but to me it seems like a paper book is easier to flip to. I love PDFs though. Like, you say "Fuck PDFs" I say "I want to fuck PDFs"

K: I know, I know.

J: Because I buy them all of the time because they're super cheap and I do have the infrastructure to read them and I do find reading PDFs doesn't frustrate me at all. Playing with PDFs does.

K: See, I just think they're an exercise in frustration in their entirety, because while I understand the convenience of them, I'm still coming from the background of "haha yeah man, I can't afford that game so I pirated the PDF off of Kazaa" and so you've got that one kid who's like "I couldn't spend the \$60 for the rules, but I printed these off with my printer and pages 6 and 47 are both the same

J: Or it looks crappy because it's an awful scan. I mean, PDF technology has come quite far since those days, but for me, I think there's a nod to that part of the industry, to your specific concerns, because if you look at Drive Thru RPG, I don't know what percentage of their catalogue is POD but they will print them and send them to you now

K: Which is handy, but also I understand the need for PDFs. I'm not just sitting here like "Technology bad. Smash computer. UGH!" it's more of a frustrated bemoaning at the universe the now everyone is like, "well I can spend \$60 and get this huge book that's beautifully laid out and handcrafted with love, or I can spend \$20 and look at it on my phone or my computer or my tablet any time I want or on 3 devices all at the same time and if I'm really an unscrupulous person. I can upload it for all of my friends to read it or I can give copies of it to all of my friends." I understand that they're convenient and cheaper. I understand they're a nice way to disseminate information. Somethings should just be PDFs. Tiny adventures that are 20 pages or some kind of rules supplement or characters for some class. That shit makes sense. But don't do a 600 page rulebook and then be like "PDF only"

J: I agree with you there. There are some PDFs that should have been printed books and the PDFs are kind of ridiculous. I like products that are designed from the ground up to be PDFS verses products that are print & PDF. It seems to me that much of the gaming industry treats PDF as just a printed book and they can be a lot more than that but I don't know what the success or viability is of PDFs as PDFs. I like the Steve Jackson Games model, where their short books, any book under 200 pages, they make a PDF and they usually split it up. Like their Dungeon Fantasy line. Excellent line of GURPS books that's designed to make GURPS into a dungeon crawling game and they do it with all of these specialized rules and whatnot and it's almost as if dungeon fantasy were itself a 300 page supplement and you buy each chapter individually

K: That's pretty cool.

J: Right, it's almost like that. The books are technically standalone but you could see them compiled into one volume. I think they did once in print. Like they did a run of the dungeon fantasy 1-3. They're up to like 12 now. But it's like continually adding chapters to a book and giving you a lot of options. GURPS of course lends itself to

that. Like you said little adventures or small supplements. Very hyper specialized stuff like my favorite game this week. Those really work best as PDF. The bar of entry is low. You get a lot of cool creativity that people can try and get their chops on and I think you can do a lot with the PDF format. Unfortunately we also have people saying "well, I made a roleplaying book, better have a PDF" and it's almost like you should reformat it. Maybe instead of doing a great big hardcover book and then just simply taking the print files and making them into a PDF and then selling them that way, you should almost break it up into different sections and sell them separately. If I was going to sell my 600 page, beautifully laid out, beautiful artwork hardcover \$60 as a physical book, \$20 as a PDF, why sell it as a \$20 PDF when I can break it into 4 \$5 pieces. Or logical pieces like the player part, the GM part, the monster part, whatever. A complete book is more useful to me, at the table is more useful than printing out little PDFs for a core game. I like having a book at the table. I find PDFs frustrating to use during gaming. I like having access to them and I like buying them, but I agree with you with the book thing, especially at the table. I mean, you've seen me use stuff that I bought from the internet and I print it out. Sometimes it's cheaper to print it out and put it in a binder. Sometimes that's cheaper. Although now with POD options, you can take any product that's a PDF and send it to Lulu or PDF through Drive Thru RPG and have it PODed right to your house. And in a lot of those cases you buy both.

K: And in a lot of cases the stuff is out of print and all you can do is get a PDF and that's the best way to go about it. I don't think PDFs are evil, and I don't think they're inherently lazy. I just think they're hit or miss.

J: Well, when you lower the level of entry, of course you're going to get hit or miss.

K: I don't feel like there's any middle ground with PDFs. It's either absolutely a godsend, it's laid out, you can search, it's got chapters, it almost looks like an e-pub. And then you've got like some dude screenshotting off of his mom's Window's Vista laptop, gluing the pages together in adobe.

J: Scans are particularly bad. Especially non-OCR scans. It's like anything else. The bar of entry may be low to do it, but if you actually pay people to do it and get professionals on board, it makes a huge difference.

K: It's not even a matter of paying someone to do it, it's taking time and having respect for your craft. Like, I do not have a lot of skills that I need to do things, so when I have to sit down and do it, I don't just say "Oh that's too hard, better pay someone" or "I can't afford that, better just glue my car together. That mechanic wants \$300 for brakes? Nah, I got laffy taffy, that shit's sticky." It's a matter of taking the time to learn the skill and the craft. If you want to be in the industry, don't just shit on a piece of paper and Xerox it and sell it to me as a PDF.

J: That's actually one of the things I like about the DMs guild; Drive Thru RPG, and One Bookshelf. It's part of that empire. In that one, when you design a PDF for

Dungeons and Dragons, especially if you want to do something in The Realms, there's art and templates and so when you upload your text, there's a bunch of tools that makes it look like a D&D book.

K: See that's nice, but also they take a cut and I guarantee there's going to be someone going "Oh, I don't want to give them 5% of whatever I did."

J: I'll be honest with you, my problem with the DMs guild, from a creative standpoint is not so much with the cut, it's that they keep all of the rights.

K: IT's Wizards of the Coast man, what did you expect

J: Say you do a particularly cool island in the Forgotten Realms and then they throw it in their next hardcover. They'll put your name on it. And that's fine. I wish there had been one more step. But at the same time, I don't think most people who are creating in the DMs Guild are doing it as a way to get published in that manner. Plus, Wizards explicitly says if you have something cool enough that we put it into a hardcover, we're going to talk to you about writing for us. So it's a way to farm for talent. It's a way to kind of troll for talent.

K: At the end of the day, no one gives you anything for free. They're giving you all of these tools and you churn out something great, of course they're going to keep it.

J: and that is fair, but it's part of the reason I don't use it.

K: I don't use it because I have no desire to write in that setting.

J: Oh I don't either, but there's a couple of D&D ideas that I have, but I don't know if I'm ever going to do anything with them other than play them

K: You can't expect to use something that Wizards of the Coast is giving you and then get all mad when they keep it because it was good

J: That's true, you're right. I will have to reexamine my prejudices there because you are correct

K: At the end of the day I would never do it but it's like "You can drive the Ferrari and you can have all of the clothes that come with owning a Ferrari, but you have to put it back in my garage, you can't just take it home.

J: you are correct; I guess it's just—

K: say it more, I need this validation.

J: You are correct

K: Who was wrong?

J: Joe was wrong.

K: [whispers] I am the champion.

J: You are the champion on this one. You win

K: I win the internet, you can all log out now

J: It's just like that video I posted on the internet of Guy Fieri eating food to Johnny Cash's "Hurt"

[laughing]

J: It didn't quite line up with the music, I would have made slightly different directorial decisions, but I saw that and I belly-laughed so hard. Tears were rolling down my face. I don't know. Maybe my sense of humour is just evil, but oh my god

K: I don't know why they even chose that song. Any song by Smashmouth would have done because he is the man from Smashmouth.

J: The point is just watching him stuff his face with food and just it keep repeating "I hurt myself today?"

K: No it's funnier if you play "All Star" because you get to see him eating while singing. Even though I know it's not the same person, it's the same person. If they were to kiss, their beards would be full.

J: For me, the view of him eating to the sad song and then all of his happy faces just looks so disengenuine. Like, he was slowly shoveling death down his gullet as he questioned the futility of existence. I just belly-laughed. Tears down my face.

K: Aren't we doing that every time we eat something because we're good Americans?

J: I guess. "Can I have more cheese on my cheese fries?"

K: I would like more grease on my fried fried chicken.

J: I could tell, when we were doing my patio this past weekend and we fed everyone and everyone wanted garlic fries covered in nacho cheese sauce with bacon on them.

K: And then I just didn't move for an hour.

J: Everybody liked it though, so—

K: It's so good. Shout out to Sizzles in Lockport

J: Yeah, Sizzles in Lockport. If you ever find yourself in beautiful Lockport, IL. There's a burger joint that Joe can recommend to you. Kevin can too. The owner knows us by name. Shout out to Merv.

K: Shout out to Merv. I love you.

J: We love you. We both love you. You're my surrogate kitchen. But anyway, PDFs and the industry in general. One of the things I like about PDFs is their cost. Sometimes I see a book or I see a game system that I've never heard of and it's nice to buy a \$5 PDF instead of a \$60 or \$40 book.

K: And that's the price of print and so at the end of the day it's a nice failsafe if you're feeling iffy on something and no one else can vouch for it or no one else is talking about it or you can't find a decent review for it. Why not give them \$5. And if it's a truly terrible stinker, maybe you'll find something for \$5 down the road that's totally worth \$10.

J: Generally we review PDFs for the show and I read a lot of PDFs, but I do like them as a medium. I think they're a little underutilized and I think they're good for shows like us that need a high volume of stuff to review and it's easy on everybody to distribute that stuff around.

K: Underutilized? I feel like everything is PDF

J: I think the format is underutilized because with PDF there's some really powerful things in the technology that you could use that many companies don't.

K: Okay, you meant the medium itself was being underutilized, not the under use of PDFs in the media

J: That's correct. First of all, in the gaming industry, you don't release stuff without PDFs unless you're making a statement. As I'll mention when we talk about currently playing, my tastes have gotten super weird over the past couple of weeks and so I bought this independent 'Zine called "Ingar." It's super cool, I think it might be available in PDF but it's this dude who prints it out, staples it together and then sends it to you in the mail. It's awesome

K: Does he write you mixtapes too?

J: I bet you he would if I asked

K: This sounds like a man who etches his own music on stone tablets and only releases them to himself and plays them on the winter solstice.

J: Like I said, I think he releases the PDFs, I don't have a PDF of it. But I did order the little 'zine thing and it's bizarre. I'll bring it up again in currently playing and actually my favorite game of the week is another of these things that are proving how weird I am. But I think unless you're making a statement, it almost always has to be released in PDF. And some bigger books, like I said, I don't think huge books work well as a PDF. I think they work better as a book, but not so much as a PDF.

K: See I'm coming from that era where PDFs were just crawling out of the muck and your Windows 98 computer would sit there and stall while loading those 500 page behemoths and then all of the pages are off because the cover is page 1 and the index is page 2 and shit like that.

J: I've encountered publishers that I would get a PDF from or I would buy a PDF from and it's monstrous for no reason. Not like page-count, just file size

K: Like they didn't compress it properly?

J: Right, I remember one that I got, it was a 200 page PDF, I actually reviewed it on the show, and it was - I'm sure I'm exaggerating the number so if you know who you are don't freak out on me—it was like 500 megabytes and I was like this is ridiculous. I can't use this on my iPad 1. So I emailed the publisher and I was like "Dude, I can't open this thing on my iPad, it's too massive." So he sent me another one that was slightly lower res pictures and it was only 70 meg and that was fine. It was still huge, but it worked. I don't know how to do PDFs, I have a suspicion that you can compress them just right. You can tell people that really know how to make a PDF because you can download a 300 page book and it's 20 mb and it's full of art and it looks fine, but then you'll have someone else who has the same exact quality of art, quality of layout, quality of everything and it's 300mb and I don't know what it is that they do there. So if anyone out in TV land wants to explain that to me in an email, you are welcome to email me because I'd like to know

K: Well, joe, that's the PDF goblins and if you don't pay the toll in Kilobytes

J: They won't stoke the fire to make it small

K: They don't poke it with the res sticks right

J: They can't shrink dink it enough

K: nope, can't go into the digital oven to make it the perfect size

J: See, that's why I don't trust those PDF goblins.

K: Can't. Can't trust them.

J: See, that's one of the things I don't like about PDFs. Another thing I do like about PDFs is that you can, as a company, constantly revise them. Bigger companies will usually send out pretty regular updates. As the game is popular and people find problems with it. Which actually leads me to something that I noticed in the 7th Sea kickstarter rewards that we recently got and with Onyx Path and Chronicles of Darkness in general. They're releasing Alpha books that have not been professionally edited or have only gone through one round of professional editing and then asking the fans to like... fix it. Now, with the 7th Sea PDF, obviously we already paid for it so it's not a problem and we got heavy discount because of the

Kickstarter. With Onyx Path, they offer these alphas as a slight discount and then you get the full version once they finish the editing

K: Hmm

J: yeah it's an interesting thing. I don't know if this is a good or bad thing in the industry. As someone who is now actually a professional technical writer, I don't know what that model says about the gaming industry other than it's probably cash flow poor. I can't really judge it because sometimes I look at these Chronicles of Darkness books and I'm like "dude, I would totally buy that." I could pay \$5 now or I could wait 6 months and pay \$8 and I know it's perfect. Sometimes it seems like a good deal and sometimes I just want to wait until it's perfect. The price difference isn't huge but it's there. I'm still confused over whether or not I like the idea, but it's something that I see a lot.

K: See, I'm just indifferent towards it because it's still a PDF

J: Oh, since you bring your attitude back, which is good, I like it. There is a downside to POD (Print on Demand) which is that some PDFs do not look good as books and they didn't change it. One of the books that I plan on reviewing later in the season is a miniatures game that is obviously a PDF turned into POD and I feel that the implementation was a little off

K: You feel it was off?

J: well, I'll bring it up when I get into it later, not today, but later in the season. Basically, there are large blank spots in the book that are obviously placeholders for art that was never added, and so in a PDF that's totally forgivable because nobody cares about a blank page, but in a printed book it looks super weird. Unless it's there for a reason. I think Andy Hopp from Mutha Oith Creations, the guy who does Low Life, I think he does a blank page in his books you can write in. Or he did in one of his books where he's just like "I had nothing to put here, visit me at a con."

K: That's a very Andy thing Shout out to Andy.

J: Yeah, Andy's the best. When we get closer to Gen Con, I'll have to announce which games I'm running. Right now, I'm running one Low Life game and I'm running one Apocalypse Prevention Inc. game. 'Cause my Gen Con is truncated, which I will bitch about as we get closer to Gen Con.

K: Don't worry, I'll hold it against you for the rest of your life.

J: But that's one of the issues with PDFs is that sometimes what you can get away with in a PDF, you can't get away with in a good book. It seems like the skills for doing a good PDF are actually so separate from doing a good book that when you cross the two over, I feel like the PDF is being underutilized.

K: That's fair

J: I mean, do you have any books that you have in both?

K: No because PDF is the devil

J: That's true

K: Actually no that's not true, I probably do.

J: I know I do because the FATE stuff, I have all of the PDFs because FATE, their kickstarters were so successful, they released all of the PDFs for "Pay what you want" or free. They also have the books are relatively low priced. I mean I've played with the Dresden books, their Bits & Mortar. The company Black Hat Games, they do Bits & Mortar where if you buy their book and you just have to send them a picture of you holding it or a receipt from a con and they'll send you a PDF for free. Those PDFs, while very well hyperlinked and well organized, I find the PDFs to be a little unwieldy because they're huge, but the books are great and it's nice to be able to compare the books immediately.

K: Yeah! I don't really know what to add to that because I have the Dresden book. It's one of the many books that I own.

J: To be fair, it's one of the most fantastic games.

K: It is, it's pretty much the gold standard for a lot

J: yeah, I'm a really big fan of them. We've played it a lot. I've run it 3 or 4 times. I really enjoy Dresden. I really enjoy FATE. But that's beside the point of PDFs. You know one thing that is interesting about PDFs too is that in the gaming industry, there's really only one place to buy them

K: Yeah

J: The 3 stores that I can think of that sell gaming PDFs are E23, which is Steve Jackson Games' PDF store, which they do have almost all of the PDFs that Drive Thru RPG does. Then they have, of course, Steve Jackson Games stuff which that's the only way to get their PDFs is through their house company. Then there's Drive Thru RPG juggernaut of One Bookshelf which has RPG Now and Drive Thru RPG and then a series of other Drive Thru and Now branded websites. RPG Now and Drive Thru RPG are still separate websites when you go to them. One's purple and one's kind of orangey, but other than that they're identical. They also run DMs Guild, they used to have D&D Classics and a few other stores. Drive Thru Comics, Drive Thru Fiction, Drive Thru Cards. I wouldn't be surprised if they have 90% of the market share of PDFs. Well over 75% of PDFs are going to be sold from there, from One Bookshelf. So the final 25% is being fought over, basically, by E23 and, I think it's Tabletop Gaming Library, that's the newest one. Popped up a couple months ago.

Mostly because some of the kerfuffle that have occurred with Drive Thru RPG, we talked about once.

K: Oh yeah. We have talked about that.

J: And now they have the report button and a very vocal segment of the online community has already started complaining about it. I don't really have an opinion because most of the stuff I read is not in danger of being censored and most of the stuff I love is not in danger of being censored. So I would say that them having a huge market share is interesting, not bad. So we've got those 3 players off the top of my head that is where you get gaming PDFs

K: And if you don't like any of those, you can just mail me your hard earned cash in a brown paper bag and I will PDF you something. I don't know what you want, but if you send me money, you'll get a PDF.

J: Mhm, that's a good way to do it

K: gonna tear down those corporations. Break them down.

J: Tear them up. I don't have any reason to rail against the big companies of the RPG world. The biggest company is Wizards of the Coast which is fucking Hasbro. I suppose if you hate big corporations, they could be your evil corporation

K: I feel like if you're going to get on a soap box and stand against Drive Thru RPG as a big evil corporation, it's like what are you going to do man. They're obviously just swimming in all of that money.

J: All 3 people who work for it are just swimming in hookers and blow

K: how are you going to get to their private islands without that private island money?

J: When people rail about RPG companies, having been involved with the industry, especially at this capacity, for quite a while now, I have to say... at a certain point, you read this ugly comment about how greedy or stupid a roleplaying game company is and you're like "Dude, now I feel bad for Ted, who is that company. That hurts his feelings."

K: I always feel bad when people are like "we made this beautiful, wonderful RPG but did you know there's no money in making games?"

J: I know I feel really bad about those people. Well, then you get someone like 7th Sea and they can do it full time for quite a while because they have quite the giant nest egg in it. I wish them all of the luck in the world. But even the author of 7th Sea, John Wick, who I still want to get on the show... I posted on your Facebook page, John. I hope you're listening. He wrote on his Facebook page the other day, he was like "I released the PDF to everybody and I got these 5 complaints." I told him, I was

like, there's 5 out of the thousands of people who have said nice things. A lot of people got mad because of some of the artwork. I really like the new 7th Sea. After the reactions from Nicky and Chris about it, I want all of us to read it and I hope some of us in the group fucking hate it. I would get extra microphones just to mic a round table about how awesome the new 7th Sea is and then prove everyone wrong. Okay, at least have a lively debate about it.

K: I feel like one of the biggest things that's really sad about the industry is when people shit all over someone. The internet just brings out the worst in everyone. I don't care about how many people have Gofundme's to help people with cancer, those 5 people who all contributed, that's great but I guarantee they're on some other message board talking about how they want someone to drink bleach because they hate them. I just assume that everyone is their worst self on the internet. I feel really bad for people who just can't handle that kind of filter. Like, people that didn't grow up living on the internet.

J: Yeah, because people like you and me who grew up with it, we know that of course you're going to get yelled at on the internet by someone.

K: Like all of the hate mail we get. Oh my god, I love that hate mail. It keeps me warm at night

J: We don't even get a lot though. I would have to say that hate mail wise or public flouncing on the Facebook page, we probably only get 1 or 2 a year or 1 or 2 a season. I agree, sometimes you get it and—I'm not a jerk. I really do appreciate all of you who are listening to this right now if you do feel strongly enough to write me or write Kevin and say how you're never going to listen again because "You're a jerk", it does hurt my feeling at first, but then... I don't like being an asshole. When someone's an asshole to me, my first reaction is always "I will gladly refund you all of your money."

K: [laughing] we know how much you pay for this product

J: this podcast comes with a money back guarantee. If you are unsatisfied, you are welcome to ask for a refund of everything you paid in the downloads.

K: Sometimes, we get a complaint and it's fair. It's valid. You had a valid opinion. But then, you'll just be like "I'm never listening again" and it's just like... well we can't apologise to you because you won't give us the chance and.... I don't care anymore.

J: Yeah, I know. I just let it go. There are some people who don't get out sense of humor or like us and that's fine. I think those of you who are listening now, who are the true fans, the true believers, you guys are the best.

K: You are the best, all 3 of you

J: all 3 of you are the best. I love each and both of you.

[laughing]

K: by the way, mom, I want Mac&Cheese for dinner.

J: Alright, so now that we're completely off topic, why don't we switch to a new topic. Let's do that. We'll just let the music, which I can hear now in the background, we'll ride that wave out into the next segment

35:15-36:08 - Music Transition

36:09 - Joe and Kevin's Favorite Game of the Week

K: And we're back!

J: And we are. It's time for favorite game of the week

K: Would you like to go first or should I

J: I don't remember who went first last time

K: Uhh... probably someone here.

[Joe's review begins 36:19]

J: Alright, how about I go first. Mine's kind of weird. I'll talk about the reasons for why I selected a weird one when I get into currently playing. So I have selected **the Weird-Worm Ways of Saturn for Crawljammer from Moon Dice Games**. It is for the Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG and there is an attached magazine, or 'Zine as the cool kids say, for the Crawljammer setting which is sort of what spelljammer meets the Dungeon Crawl line, is sort of the line of adventures and magazines he's doing. So the weird thing about Crawljammer is it uses our solar system but all of the planets are inhabitable - inhabited and have basically the same gravity and same atmosphere as earth.

K: So just like our regular atmosphere

J: Crawljamming, when you actually use a spaceship, you can use anything from a normal ship into an iron spaceship looking thing. Gravity is set by the Star Drive, I guess, the crawljamming device, and so down is always just the deck of your ship when you're on your ship but only for about 30 ft. off of the outside of it. After that there is no up or down, but you can breathe in space.

K: Just like regular space.

J: But you could leave your boat and you just float until you fall into a planet and die

K: Just like regular space

J: And there's all sorts of weird creatures. I don't even know what the inspiration for the setting is. It just becomes more and more bizarre. The point of this adventure—spoiler alert—is you meet an ancient wizard who lives on one of the moons of Saturn.

K: Like in real life

J: Right. Are you going to do this for every point?

K: I'm just saying, this is probably what it would be like to play games with Neil deGrasse Tyson.

J: You know, actually it might be, I agree. So her name is Sitrampa and she wants you to go onto Saturn because it normally has gravity that eats metal somehow. Metal is particularly drawn into the center of Saturn. So it is rare to land there and survive having any kind of metal instruments.

K: [close to the mic] much like real life

J: and it's full of giant worms and ape men. That's the whole point of Saturn. And in there is a buried temple with an idol to a god that was worshipped by this ancient sorcerer and your job is to go in and either destroy the idol or get the mcguffin that the sorcerer left down there.

K: When does this become a fantasy game?

J: Well, from what I can tell, there's not a lot of guns and stuff in the setting. Earth is referred to multiple times in the crawljammer setting as a fantasy world, like a normal D&D world, but then it's never talked about. They just say that earth is a normal fantasy world and there's already dungeons and weird shit there and by the way you can also go into the fantasy worlds in the rest of the solar system.

K: Much like real life...

J: One of the suggestions in crawljammer, I'll try to put it in the shownotes, there's a dungeon crawl classics adventures where these raiders have a flying Viking ship and the way you're supposed to kick off a crawljammer game is you have the players play this dungeon crawl classics adventure until they find the ship and have the ship take off and like land on Mars and that's what starts the crawljamming.

K: Hm, that's kind of cool

J: Yeah, and so basically the whole point of crawljammer is that you're supposed to gallivant around the solar system. There's even an adventurers guild for people who explore the solar system and what to go find out there and such. It lets you put a lot of science in your fantasy.

K: Much. Like. Real life.

J: much like real life, yes. But Weird-Worm Ways of Saturn, the adventure itself is you're supposed to find this place and there's 2 ways to get there. There's kind of an easy meandering way that takes you through a lot of difficult problems and then there's a quick way that's almost certain death for the party. So it's a hex map. You get to see what kind of trails you follow, you run into the ape men of Saturn, you run into the Giant Worm. Basically Saturn is a world of pink and red foliage and then you run into giant, white-skinned ape creatures and then giant worms from Tremors and that's pretty much the whole ecosystem

K: The spice must flow.

J: mhm, and it gets weirder and weirder. It's almost too weird to talk about. One of my favorite parts of the crawljammer ethos, and this is available in most of Moon Dice Games products, is the random tables. Of course, I love random tables, they're my favorite. The random encounter tables are hilarious. They're all full of bizarre things. The gravity of Saturn, the game has a time limit, as you're going through the game the gravity well of Saturn is changing so if you're in the adventure for too long you'll literally just be killed by having metal on you. On the negative side, none of the natives have metal anything. They only use Stone Age technology. On the plus side, that means that you can beat the hell out of them because they don't have armor and stuff.

K: That's good

J: and then the whole point is that Sitrampa is double-crossing you. You get double-crossed at the end and it opens up more adventures.

K: Woohoo!

J: it's a pretty cool thing. I really recommend anything in the crawljammer line. Especially if you like super weird, super bizarre science fantasy D&D. One thing about the science fantasy in D&D is that it is not as science-fictiony as even spelljammer is. They assume that you're fighting with swords and using torches to go into dungeons. It's almost just like normal renaissance D&D with the occasional robot thrown in and then just bizarre space adventures. Yeah, I really, really dig it. Weird-Worm Ways of Saturn is probably the best of the adventures so far. It's \$5.

K: That sounds worth it.

J: it's really cool. I would like to run it one day. Maybe I will, we'll see. I'll probably get less weird as we start playing again. What's your favorite game this week?

[Kevin's review begins—42:40]

K: My favorite game this week comes up first with a shout out and an apology because I have been sitting on this game for almost an entire year. We told Zeke of Reliquary games that we would review his game and I am finally doing it because it

got stuck in the pile of reviewed games when it wasn't. Probably got put in there because it's a big game and generally when I get into big games, I really get confused as to what I need to read and what I am reading. But this time, I read the whole damn thing and there wasn't any kind of confusion as to what I should or shouldn't be reading. It was "I need to keep reading, I love this game." I apologize for taking this long to get to it because also it's in one of my least favorite styles which is steampunk.

J: You say that, but you really liked Widening Gyre.

K: I did like Widening Gyre, and I thought it was the exception. Well, now there's 2 exceptions. Steampunk fans, I'm sorry, I hate you. I don't hate you, I just don't understand it and that's cool. I don't understand a lot of things. But, you know, I get it more than I get anything else that's just kind of bizarre to me. I understand your love for something, your dressing up, your painted nerf guns and your fanciful crafting of bowler hats. I get it, it's a style. It's neat, but until then I didn't get it. But now I can get behind it. It took **Clockwork Dominion by Reliquary Games**, core rulebook to change my heart. Because holy shit is this game cool. The thing that turned me off to it was when I found out that it's diceless.

J: In Kevin's world, 2 strikes, it's steampunk, it's diceless, I'm waiting. Bottom of the pile.

K: yeah, it was one of those things, It got mixed up and I'm like "Holy shit I didn't review this, I'll open it but if I remember correctly, it's diceless" and it is. But here's where it gets crazy. It uses a card deck and it's a special card deck and you can get it for free and print it out but I gave the man \$20 for it.

J: To get the artwork one?

K: I wanted the artwork one, I wanted the special printed one and I paid the \$5 in shipping and I paid like \$3 extra for the actual deck holder because that's how good this game is guys. This is not just me being like "Oh my god, I get kickbacks from this game" because I don't. I get no kickbacks. This game is just that good.

J: We do this for free, not because we're getting paid by anything else, we do this for free because we don't want to make money because it corrupts our journalistic integrity.

K: So if you want good reviews give us money. I mean no, don't do that. [whispers] give us money. But no, anyways, Clockwork Dominion is a steampunk-based game that is really well done and I just love the setting. It's well thought out and there's lots of nuance and minutia. The whole game has got this crazy gothic steampunk vibe where you've got all kinds of horribleness going off in the world and you have these weird monsters that are called Pontus. And you can play aristocratic nobles that are going on silly adventures like in League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, or you

can be part of the Night's Watch who go out and try to rid the world of Pontus and all kinds of the infected nonsense that is sweeping across the world. The whole game is designed to be played in this serial format that the old novels were written in, like Sherlock Holmes and stuff like that. So you have a distinct way of the scenes and the episodes and the serials and the way they're all supposed to be laid out and it's really kind of how we play games in a sense where they have the episodes and then once an episode is done, the next episode doesn't necessarily have to start directly after that, it can be like there's an episode in between there that you can come back to later which is really cool.

J: That is a really cool idea.

K: And they have flow charts for combat and they have interrupting.

J: oh really

K: You can interrupt actions

J: You can react? Nice.

K: You can react. So you can take 2 cards of your initiative order and then you can go whenever you want.

J: Oh that's pretty cool

K: The cards system is very simple but intuitive. You have like a stat and a skill essentially. They're not called that. And then you draw a card and the card has a number from -5 to +5 and then you add or subtract that to your score and if you get it within a certain range, it happens normally or it happens exceedingly well or you fail exceedingly bad. So it's nothing mind-bendingly hard to get your brain around. It's got a lot of cool classes and not even so much classes, but races. The races really got me excited because you can play like a devil or Nephilim or a fairy kind of person. Any of these kinds of things

J: So is the setting our world? Like a fantasy version of our world?

K: Yeah, it's an alternate like 1896 and there is no God. There's like this clockwork deity. And he made man to be perfect but man can make choices and man has just been making really bad choices. So instead of doing his work and keeping everything in tip-top clockwork order, people have been just fucking it all up because they're humans and they have free will. So you have angels that hate the humans because you're not doing everything perfectly, god is quasi-absent so it's very deus ex machina. And it's just got so many weird, crazy things that go on in the background that all make up the tapestry of the clockwork dominion. But I think one of the coolest features in it is when you have Pontus encounters, you have a corruption rating. When you do bad shit, you get corruption ratings and if it gets really high it makes pontus encounters worse and the only way to make it go away

is if you have a redemption vignette or an episode where you truly try to work off and absolve your sin.

J: Almost identical to how it looks in the new 7th Sea

K: It does work very similarly to the new 7th Sea except there's also social combat along with regular combat so your skills matter. Your combat skills, if you don't know how to work them properly, they have flow charts for how you can perceive a slight for a slander and how to go about it if they escalate or what not. And there's flow charts for like everything in this game. And there's just so much fluff, like holy shit is the fluff good.

J: I do have a system question before you go onto the fluff. Do you need 1 deck to play for the whole group?

K: Yes, one deck for the whole group. Like I said, you can just print it out online. The cool thing about the deck and one of the main reasons I wanted it is the deck not only has numbers on it like -5 through +5, they also have unique numbers in the top right corner that can be used for tie-breaker or other kinds of effects. Also each card has a unique effect on them for different kinds of skills or status effects. So you can get a +5 that gives you that you out maneuver the enemy and now the enemy has +1 to their check to try to defeat you.

J: Whoa, so you can use the cards like we use collectible cards?

K: Yes, the cards are multi-faceted, verses just being a strict dice mechanic.

J: Oh that's really cool

K: The cards are much more than what they seem. Originally I was like "Oh let me guess, whoever gets the highest card goes first, we're playing Deadlands now." But no it's not, it's actually... you would think that if it's got a unique deck it's a cash grab, but no it's got a unique deck and it's interesting as hell because it's really well thought out and well done. It's a quasi-complex game. Or at least that's what it looks like from outside looking in, but I have a feeling that when you play it, it's very intuitive. I really want to play it because holy shit does this look good. This is not just me being like "Oh man I'm really sorry I forgot to read this," it's "Oh man I'm really pissed I didn't read this."

J: It sounds really cool. Now what about the fluff jumped out at you, because before I interrupted you—

K: Well, the fluff is really great because it's taking all of those really great Victorian era shit you know and love and then twisting it with dark fantasy and gothic horrors that lurk out at you.

J: I'm fucking sold. It's like Ravenloft mixed with steampunk which sounds like exactly what I would like to play all of the time.

K: They've got the beast people from Island of Dr. Moreau. Like, they wash up in Asia and they instantly start becoming like second class citizens but now people are augmenting other people with like animals. So you can have that as a playable race. And then there's just so much cool shit like I don't even know where to begin. The book is obviously a labor of love. I'm pretty sure this is the only game Reliquary games has out and that broke my heart when I went to go look it up because I was like "I need to buy this deck right now." I read this book and I was like "I need to get it" so I went on Drive Thru and I was like "Oh I can print this out for free, no I'm buying it." This is how important this is to me.

J: They looked neat, I remember them at Gen Con. I like the design. So it's cool that they offer them for free.

K: Yeah, they offer them for free so you can just print them out, but that's not my style.

J: That'd be hard to shuffle.

K: Probably. But yeah. Clockwork Dominion. 437,000 Million thumbs up.

J: Yeah that sounds really fucking cool, I'm probably going to have to give that a read myself.

K: Honestly, I know my review probably sounded like I was just a blathering idiot but it's just that good. And there's that much to it. It's worth the price of admission. It's fully color, full art, it's beautiful and it's just good. I'm not used to reading exceptionally good things. Everything I read is pretty good, it's exciting and I want to play it, but this is something that I feel like I need to play.

J: it's really outside your wheelhouse too. Normally when you get this excited, it's generally for more traditionally fantasy type stuff, and this is way out of what you usually like

K: I don't like anything outside of like standard stereotypical fantasy, I am very type cast and this is something... like the cover. The cover sums up something that I'd like to play. There's a woman with a magic potion in one hand and a six shooter in the other and there's a dude in a top hat pulling out a cane-sword. Like that's my Saturday night. That's just me

J: That sounds really cool, I'm going to give that a read myself because I would like to play that as well.

K: It's so good

[Dragon Review begins - 54:45]

J: Cool, cool. Alright so the Dragon has for us, actually something part of a series that I've wanted to start talking about more on the show which is **Evil Hat's FATE**, their worlds of FATE settings that are available as "Pay what you want" on Drive Thru RPG. Or you can buy them collected on various paperback books. I think that they do like Worlds of Fate and I think there's 4 or 6 of them in each book. The book the Dragon picked this week is **Aeon Wave**, which is a really neat supplement for Fate. So the world of Fate line is there to show you how flexible fate can be. They have one that's basically a He Man knockoff, they have a hard sci-fi underwater one, I read the one where you can sail amongst the stars because I'm really into that whole medieval ships flying to different planets type things because I'm into that starjammer type stuff

K: Like real life.

J: Just like real life. So this one is none of those. This one is a cyber punk game. Aeon wave is both a setting and an adventure. So the point of this is that in 2073 a group of scientists that are studying Martian artifacts—yeah they find artifacts on mars—they find out that every... there's some kind of galactic time period, I don't remember it off the top of my head, an Aeon Wave blasts through the galaxy and basically kills all intelligent life.

K: Like real life

J: and it's coming right for Earth. They believe it happened to Mars and they believe it's coming in exactly 200 years and so they need to get the hell off the planet. The problem is that the world is a cyberpunk dystopia run by mega-corporations. So the scenario is that the players are contracted by an AI programmer to go and get this mcguffin for her to help save the human race. They stumble upon a conspiracy within the corporation that hired them and the corporation they're going after and it ends up being kind of the seminal event of whether or not humanity can survive the Aeon Wave. It's a good application of how fate works. Of course they give you new stunts, new skills. Those are always standard in these kinds of books. None of those really jumped out at the Dragon. Self-contained nature of these settings is, what I think, is probably one of their best selling points. I have a bunch of them because they're pay what you want so it costs you nothing to read them. Like I said, they're POD and if they're not POD they're in a collection and, of course, Evil Hat's Fate books are so reasonably priced that I swear they're sold at a loss. There's no way that they make money on the Fate core stuff. The hardcover book is \$20

K: The hardcover book is \$20?

J: The hardcover Fate core is \$20, and I think all of their books are \$20 or \$25 and they're all hardcover, full color

K: That's insane

J: Yeah, I don't know how they're selling them that way but that's fine. The Dresden books are expensive but they're full size, full color, glossy pages. The Fate core ones are not glossy pages but they're still full color and hardcover and they're all around \$20, all of them.

K: That's awesome

J: Yeah it is awesome, and Aeon Wave is one of the many settings that are available for Fate core and you should check out all of them. Check them out, Evil Hat Games, Fate Core, \$0 is the minimum you can pay.

K: Huge fan of Fate core

J: Me too, I think Fate is one of the most important systems to come out in the last 10 years. Not to sound too industry insider-y, but I think the two most important things are, what I'd like to agree with the online commentators are calling the Third Wave of Old School Renaissance which is new iterations of how old school D&D systems can be broken out of their box and broken into new settings and changed and morphed. Crawljammer being a huge, huge example. And then the design elements that brought us Fate are still around and still giving us good innovative ideas and it sounds like Clockwork Dominion also follows that pattern of ideas, doing these kind of new innovative things with gaming that make the games better. We're living in a true golden age

K: That's great.

J: Alright, so do we want to talk about what we're currently playing?

K: Yeah, let's do it.

59:03-59:41 - Music Transition

59:42- Currently Playing

J: Okay, we're back from talking about games we want to play to talking about games we're not playing.

K: We've had a very large, distended stop in our gaming

J: We're all still getting together and it's nice to hang out with friends, but dude am I getting the gaming equivalent of stone ache over here

K: Joe is blue-balled for gaming

J: Big time, big time. It's making my taste in roleplaying games that I read for pleasure exceedingly weird. I'm starting to pick up these really little science fantasy supplements and reading the hell out of them, wanting to play these bizarre games that no one would ever want to play in our group. It's just really starting to bug me.

I don't even want to convince anyone to play these bizarre ass games that I want to play, I'm just reading them for fun, which is when I know I have not been gaming enough because my tastes get super weird.

K: Well a lot of that just has to do with the fact that we have now come to the conclusion that being adults we no longer have time to play games every week, at least not during the week.

J: Right.

K: And since we're adults, none of us can give up our weekends because we need those. Because we're adults!

J: The whole gaming group is basically couples or people with kids. It makes weekly gaming difficult. I mean, I'm still going to be gaming every week. Probably not being able to do big roleplaying campaigns like I was able to, probably just have to do smaller things if we can get together once a week. It would be minis games or board games or not showing up, you know. I'm basically just changing the format during the weekly gaming space, I'm changing it to "Joe's doing gaming shit that night." Whether it's painting or writing or whatever. Then we've converted our weekly group to a monthly group where we will do the massive roleplaying campaigns over a series of weekends

K: Which will hopefully increase the amount of roleplaying we do

J: From none to at least some, yes.

K: And I've always enjoyed the larger format of, you know, sit down for 6 hours and get out your mountain dew and Cheetos

J: I have too, I really have too. We're still playing Deadlands. So I'd like to, in the first monthly group, play Deadlands, maybe do an entire adventure in one shot and then switch games. I'd be absolutely perfectly fine with that.

K: I'd be fine with that too. Just because it's been so long, I'm no longer invested in Deadlands

J: I know, no one is. Well, I'm not although Deadlands is one of those games that I can always run on autopilot. I don't have to be super engaged in Deadlands because I love westerns so much that it doesn't take me so much to get back in the mood to do Deadlands. It's a western with monsters. Those are two of my favorite things. And then otherwise, like I said, I'd like to continue doing weekly gaming and branch out and play a few more miniatures games and I don't know if I can not game every week just for sanity's sake. We'll see what happens. We'll see what's going on in the future but for now it looks like the normal weekly group has now turned into the monthly group

K: And who knows, maybe it'll evolve backwards.

J: We'll see. We'll see what happens. So yeah, right now we just haven't been playing much and don't have a lot to report. Right now it's still Deadlands and it should be fun. We'll be able to tell you more about what we've been playing next time on 2 GMs 1 Mic

K: Bye.

1:03:07- 1:04:20—Exit Music

1:03:17—Credits

K: 2 GMs 1 Mic is a 3 Die Stunt production hosted by me, Kevin, who is a glorious peregrine falcon who doesn't preen his feathers for anyone but himself. Also hosted by Joe who is more of a who is more of a peacock man who spreads his feathers and dances the merengue. Edited by Jay, who's really kind of a flamingo with a mental disability, more borderline anger issue than anything. Transcribed by Amanda who's a wonderful, beautiful bird that I can't describe, mostly because I think it's some kind of legendary Pokémon that's not in the Pokédex right now. The intro song is Roll the Dice, Make My Day by the Mustard Men (Stick Jones Remix)