

**Allen Turner**

Inaugural Future Imaginary Lecture  
(transcript)

**EHDRIGOHR**

**Designing Alternative Indigenous Timelines Using Role-  
Playing Games**

hosted by  
the Initiative for Indigenous Futures  
&  
Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace  
&  
Concordia University Research Chair  
in Computational Media and the Indigenous Future Imaginary

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[pause]

[foreign language]

**0:00:29 Skawennati:** Hi everyone. Skawennati, is my name, and I'm here to welcome you and to welcome our speaker, Allen Turner, to Montreal, to Concordia and to Mohawk territory. That's really my whole job.

[chuckle]

**0:00:50 Skawennati:** Thank you. Glad to see you here.

[applause]

**0:00:57 Jason Lewis:** Thanks, Skawennati. Hi, everybody. It's so good to see you here this evening. I'm Jason Lewis. I teach here at Concordia in the Design and Computation Arts department and I also co-direct a research network called, Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace, with Skawennati. We're very happy to have you here for the second instalment, in the Future Imaginary Lecture series. A couple of years ago Skawennati and I...

**0:01:24 Skawennati:** You're talking so fast. [chuckle]

**0:01:25 JL:** Am I talking really fast? Okay. I'll slow down.

[chuckle]

**0:01:29 JL:** We got together with some of our peeps, some of whom are in this room, and we started this project called Initiative for Indigenous Futures. And this is a project that brings together universities, arts organizations, community organizations to develop mobile visions of indigenous peoples tomorrow in order to better understand where we might go today. We have four main components. We run workshops with aboriginal youth. We hold residencies, where great artists and non artists here at Concordia to think about the future of Native people. We also have a public symposia and we do an archive project. This series here is a public forum here in Montreal where we can bring our most innovative, indigenous thinkers, makers, and activists to share their visions of the future. The goal is to set our indigenous views of the future in our public conversation, and to be challenged and inspired by these views.

**0:02:37 JL:** Before I introduce our guest, I wanna give some thanks to Concordia University through the Aids to Research Related Events, and my research chair in Computational Media, and the Indigenous Future Imaginary. They've very generously supported all the work that we're doing on this. To the Milieux Institute for Arts, Culture and Technology that provides us with a home out of which we do the work that we do. I also wanted to thank Mikhel Proulx who is the series coordinator, who I realize I didn't thank the first time.

[chuckle]

**0:03:10 JL:** And he's not here tonight, he's not feeling well, but for the record he's really been amazing in taking on the job of making sure all the parts fit together and everything happens like it

should. Now, Allen Turner. Allen Turner has been involved in storytelling education for most of his adult life. He has coordinated youth and adult programs focusing on literacy, myths and legends, storytelling and role playing, to develop inference of problem solving skills at various Native organizations, including the Chicago American Indian Health Services, American Indian Center in the Mitchell Indian Museum. He's also provided cultural performances for the Chicago Public Schools and Chicago Public Library, as well as the Chicago Historical Society. You can tell he lives in Chicago.

[chuckle]

**0:03:55 JL:** In addition to traditional storytelling, Allen is also a game designer who has worked for studios like Bungie, and Disney Interactive Studios. I first met Allen about a year and a half ago at the first Native and Games Development gathering, that was in San Jose, and he spoke about Ehdrigohr, which is the game he's gonna talk about tonight. When he was speaking about it I was really struck with how he managed to weave together a world that felt both authentically, and fantastically indigenous at the same time. Nine tribes spread across two continents contending with giant plains, galloping tarantulas, called [0:04:33] [REDACTED], the chaos bringing fiddlers, and the warrior society of crows, the malignant shivers, going bump in the night and the world devastating conflict, known as the war of sorrows, that left the land scarred for generations.

**0:04:47 JL:** Now after having participated in several game playing sessions with him over the last couple days, I have an even greater appreciation of just how powerful the game is for imagining alternative indigenous histories as well as futures. Playing the game is a really powerful and moving experience in just how creative we can be as individuals, but also really as a group, creating characters, and thinking about how those characters will interact with each other. And world-building as a way of imagining, not just alternatives, but re-imagining what our present is actually like and what it actually means. I'd like you all to join me in welcoming Allen Turner, to Concordia University.

[applause]

**0:05:41 Allen Turner:** Wow, I'm blushing. [chuckle] Thanks. This is actually, I told Jason, this is my first trip out of the States, too, so I'm really excited to be in Montreal. And the opportune time, right?

**0:05:52 JL:** Yes.

**0:05:53 AT:** I got out while I could.

[laughter]

**0:06:00 AT:** Where do I start? The game that I'm going to talk about is Ehdrigohr, it's table top role-playing game. I figured what I would do is talk a little bit about who I am, what I've done. Talk a little bit about the storytelling and the world set-up of Ehdrigohr. And then a little bit about the why and wherefore, what my motivations were. I can ramble eloquently all night long, [chuckle] so feel free to raise your hand and ask a question if you have a question that builds up in you. And we can move that conversation around from just what I was thinking to what thoughts you have about what we do and what we can do. First off, there's me, Allen. I have two images up here. One is this

monkey eating a peach. How many of you are familiar with Monkey King? This is a character who speaks really to my heart too 'cause he's this guy who starts off in this very small space, has no idea what he's doing, where he's going. And goes through this journey where he meets lots of people and ascends to a place where even the big spirits have no idea what to do with him. And he just kinda causes chaos and havoc. I don't wanna cause chaos and havoc, but I really love embracing that capacity to just bring change. And knowing that that change can be good and bad. And that's just me being all ecstatic and happy. [chuckle] 'Cause that's just how I roll.

**0:07:31 AT:** So I'm Allen Turner. I am black Lakota and Irish. I'm a storyteller. I've been telling stories in the Chicago community on and off for years since... Actually kinda kicked in for me back when in early... Late '80s where we had the American Indian Business Association hosted a summer learning camp for teenagers at UIC and I wound up being called out, asked to be an RA to work with all these kids. And late nights, there weren't a lot of activities, so I found myself telling lots of ghost stories and hero stories and whatnot to the kids. And that just kept rolling. I'm a dancer. In addition to being involved in my native side, I also embrace a lot of my North African and Middle Eastern heritage. So I'm a Raqs sharqi dancer. I'm a belly dancer. I do all kinds of flow-y motion.

**0:08:27 AT:** But most importantly right now is I'm a game designer. I've been working in game design for a while. And I currently teach game design at DePaul University School of Design, which is part of the College of Computing and Digital Media. And a part of my game design activities is I own Council of Fools LLC, which is just my little imprint for publishing whatever comes out of my brain and pushing it out into the world. So as a game designer I have been working on video games for a long time. I started off with Bungie Software and got to work on a number of titles, Myth: The Fallen Lords, Myth II, Oni. These are all before Bungie got bought by Microsoft and turned into a big Microsoft studio. Went on from Bungie to work with Day 1 Studios, anyone here familiar with MechAssault played the game? Yay! One person. You're awesome.

**0:09:19 AT:** What I'm particularly proud about it with this is that when the Xbox was launched, there was no multi-player. And then about a year after it was launched, there was a need for this big multi-player push and Xbox Live was being born. And there was no multi-player game for Xbox Live, no real action multi-player game. And Day 1 Studios, we got to be the launch game for Xbox Live, we pushed it out there into the world and got people playing and blowing each other up with giant robots. And it was awesome. So yeah, robots.

**0:09:52 AT:** And then a bunch of us who were old Bungie people got back together and formed Wideload Games. Anybody here play any of these games or are familiar with them? Stubbs the Zombie? So at Wideload the idea was that we were going to make things that are more lighthearted, community games. Things that kind of push some strange boundaries that we didn't see being pushed in other places. So maybe taking a note from studios like Rare. Just kind of playing with the different topics. Our first game was Stubbs the Zombie: Rebel Without a Pulse, which is a zombie love story about a guy who wakes up in the city of the future as seen from the point of view of people in the '50s, and he's trying to find his true love and making zombies along the way and hilarity ensues. Hail to the Chimp, which was a parody of politics in America and it's a bunch of animals. They're all trying to figure out who's gonna be the new president of the animal kingdom because the last king of the animal kingdom got caught doing stuff he shouldn't be doing and he got ousted. And they decided we're gonna go for democracy. And of course their idea of democracy was just running around and beating each other up until one of us wins.

**0:11:01 AT:** And then Guilty Party which is part of the... When we got shifted over to working with Disney as a Disney studio, Guilty Party was our most family-friendly game in that it's a game about... How many of you are familiar with Carmen Sandiego? Okay. How many of you have played Clue? Okay, so Guilty Party is kind of the combination of those two things. It's a video board game of sorts where you're playing a family of detectives trying to solve the story. Trying to find out who is the evil Mister Valentine and what's his big plot to take out... What's his big plot? And so you're traipsing around these big dollhouse spaces and solving all these crimes. And we had this mystery engine that built randomly mysteries for people. And it was a lot of fun. It got Disney interested in us. Got brought into Disney and wound up working on a bunch of Marvel titles.

**0:11:52 AT:** Also me culminating in not so much Avengers Initiative and Avengers Alliance but the thing that sat in between. So Marvel at the time, head the cinematic universe, they had decided that they wanted to have a gaming universe and we were going to do this thing where we were gonna make this big story that went across all the different Marvel games. I was in charge of trying to figure out what that story was. It was an awesome experience, until it stopped being awesome, and I left.

[laughter]

**0:12:19 AT:** I just hit a point where the big corporate world was just... In terms of games, I felt I was just making product, I was just making stuff, it was getting less and less rewarding, and I wanted something that was my own. And so that thing became Ehdrigohr, the role playing game, which is something that I had been working on on and off for years, since the days when I was working with the kids in the early '90s with American Indian Business Association. I was bringing the kids together, and they actually discovered I had all these role-playing games, and asked me, "Hey, Allen, can we play role-playing games, we've heard about this. Is it like Dungeons and Dragons? Is it scary?" And I was like, "No, it won't suck your soul away, we can play a game." And I started doing stories with them, and had some interesting experiences where I realized that the play of the game, we started off with D&D, and the play of the game was very much about stuff.

**0:13:27 AT:** The big awakening moment was a point where the kids were in a... There was this adventure, and in the adventure they had to stumble into a tomb, and once they got into the tomb they had to ransack the tomb and find this magic item that was gonna be used to stop the big, bad guy. And they got into the tomb, and once they got into the tomb, the kids in my group didn't wanna do anything. I was sitting there trying to urge them to participate in how this was supposed to work. And their pushback was, "Well, this is kind of a sacred place, this is where someone is buried, we should respect this place." And it caught me by surprise 'cause I hadn't realized how assimilated I had gotten, as a function of my gamer culture. There was this way that was okay to play, just because that's what we did. But it didn't really speak to my personal culture, that's something I would never have done in the real world, but it was something that I encouraged people to do as part of their adventure fantasy, as part as they are seeing themselves as heroic, they were seeing themselves as heroic by taking and stealing and ransacking, and it was kind of weird and kind of funky and I said, "Maybe there's a way I can do something with them that speaks more to their tribal backgrounds, speaks more to the tribal mythology." And so I started doing little bits of the game in different game engines, and the world was slowly building itself, but it was very broken.

**0:14:54 AT:** So talk a little bit about what Ehdrigohr is. I like to call it a game of post-cataclysmic tribal horror, where heroes stand against encroaching darkness and humanity is eternal divisions in a world drawn from indigenous mythology. What all that means is this is a survival horror game.

How many of you are familiar with The Walking Dead? Okay. What's that other... The movie with, where all the Zombies come out at night?

**0:15:23 JL:** I am Legend?

**0:15:23 Skawennati:** I am Legend, thank you. I am Legend. I have a couple points of reference I use for people when I try to explain the game to them. First off there's Princess Mononoke. How many of you are familiar with it? Yeah, so this is to me a story that really speaks to the heart of a lot of things that. And when I think about indigeneity it resonates with me, this kind of closeness to the earth, this relationship with all the things and this struggle with being who you are versus these big changes that are being pushed onto the world around you, mixed with these dark things. So we get Pitch Black. How many of you have seen this film? So, Pitch Black is this movie where these people are stuck on this planet and everything is cool, they're to figure out how to get off the planet, and then night comes and all hell breaks loose. And all these ancient creatures come running out and they start eating everyone and it's awesome and it's terrible and it's got Vin Diesel, and he's got muscles. [chuckle] And so Ehdrigohr takes two of those big ideas and squishes them together and says, "Hey, we've got these tribal people who are living in this world where they're trying to build these relationships and trying to manage. But at the same time, the real planet doesn't like them."

**0:16:36 AT:** At night there's this terrible stuff that comes up and so you do everything you can do during the day to live normally, but at night everyone has to hunker down and figure out how to survive. And survival becomes the big key to the game. How many of you have played the tabletop role-play game? Okay. So, for those of you who haven't, tabletop role-playing games are these social face to face games. You sit down... It's not like a computer role-playing game where you're pushing around a bag of inventory. You are sitting face to face with people and you're doing this kind of improv story telling as you go. But this is actually an image from the Native Heritage Day at UIC a couple of years back right after I launched Ehdrigohr, and a bunch of people were interested. It was actually neat, because the people who came out to play were all women, or just about all women, and that was the first time I sat down with a mostly female group to play the game. And then I had to rethink also what tropes and things were being presented in the overall story. None of them had actually every played a role-playing game before, and they probably had a good time. So, when people think of fantasy, I think most folks will kind of tend towards the space of elves and dwarves and orcs and trolls and all that jazz, and Ehdrigohr doesn't have that kind of thing.

**0:17:54 AT:** So it's primarily a human-centric world. All the special peoples of Ehdrigohr are actually people. They're humans. But the vision of the world and of these people is filtered through these bigger Native ideals as opposed to a very European mindset, and with European myth. I like to think that the primary lens is one of my own tribe, Lakota. What I know is what I was raised in, and it's just a bunch of sensibilities really. And so the sensibilities are that relationships are important, that story and narrative, your story is a very important thing. Then the story of your people, and the story of where you've been, and the story of where you're going, those things are all very, very important. Tribalism is the norm. And when I say tribalism, I'm talking about these social structures. These tribal social structures being seen as civilization as opposed to being these weird other things that have to be remedied or fixed or educated. That's just the way people are. Survival is resistance. We're still here. Holy crap! The sun came up and we're still here. Count heads. How many of us are still left? We all high five, and we keep on going. Rites of passage. As we build these relationships, it's important for us to know where we stand in relation to the people around us. So these points where we stop and we recognize that people have had achievements, people are

going through transitions, and we witness them and move them forward into the next stage.

**0:19:26 AT:** Names. Names are tags and descriptors that talk about... It's not just this thing that says who you are. They're poetry. They describe a little bit of who you are and who you could be. And so everything in the world needed to speak to the fact that names, when you name something, when you play with something's name, there's an exchange of power there somehow. And then poetry. It's just not about stuff. It's about the flow and relationship of the words and the story, both within the people and as it moves out into the world, and building a dance, a rhythm relationship with it. And then just the idea that things change. Nothing is static. So if you've been here for a little while, realize at some point you're gonna have to move over to here, and you need to figure out how you move yourself through that transition.

**0:20:17 AT:** Let me go back actually. So these things aren't necessarily things that other cultures don't do. The idea is just how they're prioritized, and these things are much higher on the list than they are in these other games where it's more about the stuff and ownership and whatnot. So, like I said, this is a human-centric world. There's all these peoples, they are divided into nine big nations. These nations themselves are even further subdivided into lots of smaller nations. And these are symbols that we came up with for each of the big tribes, and the idea is that each of these symbols represents the shtick of them. So even though we don't have big, fanciful, magical creatures that we're calling our races, our humans are special. Humanity is special. We can do some crazy stuff. And as they've learned to survive, each of these has built a way to connect themselves to the world around them, survive in the world around them, and that has become part of their magic in the world.


**0:21:19 AT:** So the people on the backs of the big turtle that was in the first slide, that's how these people identify themselves, and so they've got this image. All of these have some place that connects them to where they exist in the land, and where they exist in terms of managing and surviving and building themselves up. So even though they're really different from each other, these cultures, even though they're human, they're really different from each other, and the cultures all start with a native tribe or a concept of a native tribe, and then I mixed them with bits and pieces of other tribal indigenous people from around the world just to drive home this idea that native doesn't mean one thing. There's this idea that when you are a Native American, you've got feathers and you've got all these things that are your stereotypical Hollywood view of what Native is, I wanted people to understand that there's different religions, that there are different ways, with different people. So they need to think of the native lands and spaces the same way you would think of Europe. You think of French and Germans as different people, and they might be white, they may be European, but there are distinct differences between them, and people recognize that in a way that they don't for native peoples.

**0:22:43 AT:** So by doing this, I feel like a result in these cultures that they're familiar. You have a jumping on point. Everybody has a point where they can jump onto 'em, but as you dig deeper into them, they start to become a little alien and weird and strange and magical. So as I was working on this, when I was reaching out to artists to show them what kind of artwork I wanted, I made these art reference sheets, and I would show them the primary tribal influences I was going for, and then reach out for another tribal secondary influence from somewhere in the world. In this case, we have the Witiijaasa, and they're primarily this Lakota ideal, but they're mixed in with bits and pieces of Serbs just to give it a certain difference.

**0:23:30 AT:** So all these peoples are affected by and learn to live with, adapt to all the craziness that's going on in the world. There's spirits, there's monsters, there's creatures, there's animals, and as they have progressed, they've built these structures and cultures that help them to survive. So for instance, we have these... These are rabbits. They're Mastincala in the world. They're gigantic rabbits that people ride instead of horses. We've got the Chi'an, which are these great turtles that these people have built a city on that lifts them up so that they are away from danger.

**0:24:07 AT:** We've got these people in the far north, who have these large predatory jumping spiders that they use to hunt with. They're like malamutes but jumping spiders. And then, spiders. So I love spiders. I'm a big fan of spiders, and as I was building Ehdrigohr, there was this thought that I wanted to weave spiders through the entirety of the mythology and the cosmology of the world in the way that they typically weren't represented in most fantasy. In most fantasy, they are like these monster things that are gonna come and get your blood, there's Shelob, there's Ungoliant, they're almost demonic things. And I wanted them to be big, wonderful, majestic, natural things that were in the world. Yeah sure, they could be scary as hell. You come across something, this great big tarantula, that's scary. [chuckle] But it's a natural thing and the people in the world see it as a natural thing. And so, the people have relationships with it, and the game establishes that this stuff is okay. It's as okay as having a big sheep dog or having a big buffalo or elephants or what have you. And so, they take the place of a lot of the creatures that are there.

**0:25:20 AT:** And as scary as those things are, they're not the horror. They're not the thing that makes the place, makes Ehdrigohr a scary place for people to live. So I said it's a post-cataclysmic horror, and the idea is that over the years, over multiple centuries, there have been these successive wave of cataclysms. So every time the people begin to gather together and start to make nations and start to build community, something would happen that would break it and send them all scattered. And there's this force within the world called WhatMoves, this is the name for creation. And WhatMoves intervened and said, "Okay, I'm going to help you all out," and it put up a bunch of barriers and a bunch of things that pushed a lot of the big bads out, made them afraid to engage the light. There's this idea that when the sun rises, anything that is evil, anything that is unbalancing and destructive in the world, if it's caught within the sun, it'll get burned away, much like a vampire. But this lets the people be able to walk around during the day, but over the course of time as the night comes, there are these creatures that come out called the Shivers. And the Shivers are nightmares.

**0:26:40 AT:** So the big concept is that there, beneath the world, there are these things called the Woe, the Woe sleep. The Woe used to be things that would get up, and they would destroy everything. They're like big, titanic monstrous Godzilla-sized things that they couldn't stand for humanity to gather. The people got to put those things to sleep, but while they sleep, they still create nightmares. And these nightmares rise up when the darkness comes, and the nightmares go out trying to feed and partake of humanity. And so, no two Shivers look alike. These are some artistic renderings that I got while we're working on the game. [0:27:16] , they come out. All they wanna do is feed, all they wanna do is tear humanity down. Luckily, when the sun comes out, they are typically burnt away or they run back into the darkness to hide. But there is this thing that happens. So they come up in the darkness, they start moving out across the land, then they go back into the darkness. As the year progresses and we get to a point where we're getting deeper and deeper towards winter, the nights get longer, and as the nights get longer, the creatures are out a lot longer, and as the creatures are out a lot longer, they get stronger. And so, eventually, we get to this point, when the winter comes, that the people have to take up big arms and stand against a tide of these Shivers.



**0:28:06 AT:** And this is mostly up in the frozen North, and what's funny about this is that I had this idea of this line, that there are gonna be a group of people who, for whatever reason, needed to have a certain kind of rebirth. And so, that rebirth, that blood would be shed for all the people on this line, and it's kind of like a sun dance experience but it was the idea that you could go up there, you would put yourself forward, there would be prayers, and then the horde would come and people would fight. And then, someone said, "Hey, that's kind of like Game of Thrones, right?" What? I hadn't actually read the stuff, and it was like a big doh' moment.

**0:28:42 AT:** And so, there's this whole process of fighting against the Shivers, beating them down. But what's most important about this is that this all happens in the winter, and in the winter, this is when the world and the humans struggle for coexistence. And people keep track of the winters because that's when you count how you survived. So you're marked by what's called a winter count. A big part of making a character in Ehdrigohr and we did a couple sessions this weekend where people made playing characters. We took them through this process of making winter counts, which I'll talk about in a few moments. But the goal was just to create a device that brought storytelling in a big way into the process of making character and moving those characters through the world. The idea is that the winters that you survive, they're defining for you. These are things that you remember, and later on, when things are tough, you'll say, "That's okay 'cause I survived the winter of falling leaves.", or that's not a big deal because I remember that winter of dry waters.

**0:29:46 AT:** And this stuff becomes part of your character's pre-history, it's part of the entire game's pre-history. You make it as a team, and it has this meaning for you as you move through the game. So as a designer, I was really looking for something where I could make storytelling a big part of the game. I've played hundreds and hundreds of role-playing games, I'm kind of a role-playing game addict [chuckle], I've got a basement filled with them. And there is this problem that I always ran across, especially when I was trying to figure out how to do Ehdrigohr, where much of the role-playing games are about crunch, right? They are about stuff, they're about inventory, they're about... Really about the game's mechanics and less about the narrative. There's a movement within the role-playing game community to have a lot more narratively driven games, but at the time when I was planning Ehdrigohr there wasn't a whole lot. So, this has had a lot of incarnations over the years, D&D, Role master, does anybody recognize any of these game engines, games?

**0:30:50 AT:** So I found a way to play the game in every single one of these, and eventually stopped because the focus got to be about the wrong thing. It wasn't about who you were, it was about what you could do, it was about the stuff that you had, it was about the stuff that you took, it was about how much you killed. It was just all kinda weird and twisted, they're far too crunchy and the rules got in the way. And then I discovered the Fate Core System, anybody here played a Fate game before? Okay.

**0:31:21 AT:** And so Fate games have this neat thing where they have bits and pieces of story, in the early versions they were called tags, well, they're called aspects and you could tag an aspect. These bits of story were things that you could use, you could invoke your own story and use it to change the scene. And it was much more focused on moving you through dramatic moments, you went from scene to scene, drama to drama and you were encourage as a player to buy into the drama so that you can change the drama. And then I also came across this game called Dread, does anyone here ever play Dread? So Dread is a very beautiful game to me. Oops.

[chuckle]

**0:32:02 AT:** I think I stepped on something. So Dread is this game, is this role-playing where you... There's no stats at all, you go through an interview with people, the game actually goes through the interview with the players and finds out what's special about you, what you can do, what you can't do, what you like, what you don't like. And then once everyone has been interviewed and you've got these interview sheets, you break out a Jenga tower. I'm sure most folks here at one point or another have played Jenga, and what was great about this was that anytime... Now we had this list of what was important about you, if you had to do anything over the course of the game, there is no dice rolling, you had to make a pull from the Jenga tower. If you ever drop the Jenga tower you died, straight out, dead. [chuckle]

**0:32:48 AT:** And as harsh as that it may seem, it was interesting because I love horror games. And there's this problem with a lot of horror games where again it's still a bunch of stuff and and you've got all these stats that kinda dictate who you are. You could do this thing where you could play the rules and you were okay until you weren't okay, right? You've got a 100 hit points and you don't have to be worried until you've got one hit point. Or the game tells you you've got X amount of fear, X amount of insanity. And so the rules tell you that you should be anxious, but there's nothing that actually makes you anxious. And what was great about the Jenga tower is that it was like this physical ritual of anxiety. Every time you went to do something you had to pull it, and if you drop the tower you died and we will rebuild the tower, and depending on how long we've gone, the longer we have been playing when we rebuilt it you would build it with a bunch of peep holes.

**0:33:40 AT:** So over the course of the game the tower got purposely more and more rickety, and the more rickety it got the more likely you were to die. And since you're more likely to die for doing something people didn't wanna do stuff.

[chuckle]

**0:33:53 AT:** And so, then when you hear a sound in the basement and you're like, "Where's the cat?" It's like, "There's something going on the basement." You should go down to the basement and find the cat, and you were gonna open the door to the basement and the game master says, "Well, make a draw." You're like, "Oh, I don't wanna open that door because something might get me." and you sit back and you watch. But then you could choose not to make a draw and nothing would directly kill you but you would then be stuck in this weird limbo space where you may be battered, in pain and in a terrible situation and you're kinda trapped by your own inaction. So you have no release at all, so eventually you would have to do something that made you commit to the experience, and then take a chance and probably die, and it was awesome.

[chuckle]

**0:34:42 AT:** It made it very hard to run a campaign, but for a great Halloween one shot it was beautiful. So that gave me a lot of inspiration of thinking about there gotta be better ways to get people into the thematic play space of the games I want them to play. I want people to be able to metabolize that experience. I guess I should've forewarned people that I get excited really easily and sometimes I start talking really fast. So if I start rambling too quickly just kind of fan me down.

**0:35:11 AT:** So like I said I recently discovered Fudge and Fates and this whole combined open-

endedness of the idea of aspects and how aspects could... You could define a character more by who they were in these narrative bits, and less and less by particular bits of statistic information. And I decided, "That's the kind of thing I wanna do when I build my game." So I threw away all the stuff I had been writing and I think I've mentioned that I had multiple incarnations of this. Well, I had worked on it multiple times over the years, it wasn't until I had, when I left Disney that I decided that I wanted to this thing, I wanted to make it my own. And all the versions... I think I had matured as a designer and as a storyteller, and I looked back on what I started off with.

**0:35:58 AT:** And what I started off with was such a mess. And I looked at what I really wanted to do, I had these more solid lenses. And so I wound up throwing away about 95% of what I had written before. And worked it down to this core and built everything back up. And then suddenly I had this thing that was, for lack of better words, alive. Had this point where I could kinda feel like it was tickling in my ear and whispering and telling me stuff in my dreams. So as I became more mindful about the creation of this, a bunch of goals started to rise up. And a bunch of lenses began to appear. So there was this thought defining experience that was about who you were in your history. It's not just your stuff, it's you in relation to the world around you.

**0:36:45 AT:** I wanted to connect you to your story in a way that had meaning. A lot of games, you'll do this thing where you'll sit back and you come up with all this back story, and then you're just a fighter with a D10 hit points and one D6 long sword, and you've got one attack. [chuckle] That wasn't working for me. I wanted your character story, the who of you to be part of what you played. When your story's affected it should mean something to you. When something changes your narrative, that's profound. It should change who you are, how you play, and how you interact. It is never about how much you have. It's about who you are, and where you've been. And most importantly, you can start playing just by telling a story. We don't have to have stats. We can just sit there. I can say who I am, what's cool about me, and we can go. As I said, it's about who you are. I wanna make sure that your character was important, not your items. I wanna connect you to the world, via all the relationships.

**0:37:43 AT:** So you make a character, you have to dictate six winters that your character has survived through. This gives winter counts, the thing I showed you before, meaning throughout the rest of the games. The winter counts, these things that define who you are then become your memories. How many of you have ever watched a Naruto episode? Okay. There's this point when Naruto, who's like this crazy ninja kid in an orange jumpsuit, he gets backed into a corner and he's freaking out and it looks like everything's gonna go belly up, and he starts a soliloquy. He starts remembering. He's like "Oh this, I'm never gonna give up on my friend's, because blah, blah, blah, blah." And he just goes off. And when he goes off it inspires him, and inspires his friends around him, and that allows him to change a scene. And suddenly, better things and hopefully, flip things around. It's a big narrative moment and that's something that happens with your winter counts. There's this idea that, like I said, winter is always a threat. It's the thing that can take you out.

**0:38:42 AT:** So we wanted to make this thing a tool that moved you forward. So the six winters that we go through are, The Winter of Childhood Remembrance, where we talk about where were you as a child. This is a terrible place. When you're a little kid, what stood out to you? What was the significance to you that made you strong enough to keep going? 'Cause a lot of people give up. A lot of people get got by the stuff.

**0:39:05 AT:** The Winter of Becoming, which is about being an adolescent. Your teenage years, life

is chaos enough as a teenager. You got hormones rampaging through your system. You think you know everything, and you don't know that much. You make lots of mistakes, and you're not quite sure how to get around the mistakes. Add to that, the problem of having to survive every night. And that your people are being devastated here and there. And that makes for a really, really troublesome world. So, what stood out for you? What was significant to you as a teenager that made your life worth moving forward?

**0:39:38 AT:** Then there's The Winter of Adventure. At some point, where ever you were comfortable, however you have been, you are kicked out. Something changes, your village gets destroyed by monsters, or a monsoon comes through, or there's a famine. Something happens that causes you to have to leave where you are and be out there in the world. What is that? Tell us about it.

**0:40:01 AT:** The Winter of Companions. And what we do here is that after you've gotten these first few winters figured out, these things that you have survived through, we gather them together on some cards, stack the cards up, and then spread them out amongst the group and everybody has to pick a winter that is not theirs. And tell people what they were doing at this time. So now we're connecting the characters to each other. They're not all directly connected, one character will be connected to this person, and this person will be connected to that person. And so some how or another, now they all know each other. But all of these winters are now real for them. They all have knowledge of that day. When someone starts talking about that day, you can say, "Oh, I remember where I was on that day." And so, since everyone can remember that makes it real for you.

**0:40:47 AT:** Then there's The Winter of Awakening. This is the point where you came across the mystery of the world. The world is awesome. This big, beautiful stuff that's always creating us and always building us. Somehow or another, you're special. You've come across it and you've said, "Wow." Or you got scared at hell. Whatever it was it's something that caused a stirring in your heart. What is that saying? Why does it affect you?

**0:41:08 AT:** The Winter of Nightmares. Terrible stuff is happening all the time. At what point did you come across the really bad of the world? How did it affect you and why is it not resolved? And the important thing about these is they lead to the creation of these aspects. And what aspects allow us to do, there are these little short phrases, in some cases these little poetic phrases, and over the course of playing, if you're in a situation you can invoke the aspect to change the scene. You get these things called fate points. So you're up against the wall, you could say, "But, I'm the fastest, I'm the best swords-person in the East", or "I'm the strongest builder in the South."

**0:41:48 AT:** And that will give you a hook that you can use to start to change the narrative. If you have a fate point. If you don't have a fate point, you're outta luck. But these things that you can invoke, these bits of your story that help move you forward, they can also cause drama for you. So the game master can say... Can do what's called a compel. And a compelist says, "Hey you've got this piece of story. There's a piece of drama attached to this piece of story. Will you engage it?" You can choose not to engage it, and in that case nothing happens. But if you choose to engage it you get a piece of... You get a fate point that you can use later on to change a story. And so by owning your narrative and figuring, and engaging the bits that your narrative brings to you, you're later able to change how the narrative is playing out when things are gettin' hot and heavy.

**0:42:42 AT:** So winter counts themselves are this thing that traditionally were used among the

Lakota and some other tribes in the area where we tracked the years. Now again, winter's harsh out there in the plains and out in the forests. How did we survive? Did we survive? And so what wound up happening is that you have a [0:43:03] [REDACTED], this band, and within the band there's someone who keeps track of the most significant events of the year. Who survived during the year and it's on... It takes a bunch of different forms. This one is a spiral. There's some that are more circular. But you can track the history of a band as it moves around.

**0:43:22 AT:** And each of those pictures has a term associated with it and someone can tell you a story of what happened there. And so it's the significance calendar of you. And we wanna do the same thing in Ehdrigohr where as we are making characters, we're not just making something for you. We're making a community of all the players who are gonna play. It's about the significance of the story and the individual in response to all the forces that are out there that are trying to shape them. Engaging your winters... Engaging this winter count process allows every group to build a pre history. So this pre history is important because it's the thing that drives our campaigns. It's the thing that drives our bigger story. I already talked about aspects. I got ahead of myself there.

**0:44:10 AT:** So the other goal I wanted to go with as I was building Ehdrigohr was the idea that I didn't want a colonized world. This is something that happens a lot when you look for how natives are being represented in games. They're often those other people who've been discovered. They are the weaker people, they are the people who need to be saved. But it's their world. Another group is coming in and they're being revealed to you. You're the exotic other.

**0:44:42 AT:** So there's this weirdness where as a native... As native peoples, as natives within this cultural space, you're only there to empower the cultural ideals of what that main game story world is. It's the colonizers idea and lens of you that allows you to be there and not who you actually are. You can't be there for yourself. So the colonizer gets to decide what's authentic about you. What makes you Indian? What makes you native? Where should you be? Where should the land be? They get to decide how powerful you are. Are you... How powerful your skills are. How powerful your weapons are, how powerful your magic is. And it's never as powerful as the stuff that they have. Where is it located? 'Cause there's this weird thing that I bumped up against when I was doing the Kickstarter where when you do Euro Fantasy, you're allowed to do and place the fantasy wherever you want. The people can do whatever they want. When you start doing Ethnic Fantasy, they have to be in a particular place in relation to where the Euro World expects them to be.

**0:45:54 AT:** So for instance if it's Asian, they have to be in the East. And they're gonna be patterned after these ideas. If they're Native Americans, there should be something that's very much like ancient America. And there's a tendency to actually create, recreate ancient America in some of the old Dungeons and Dragons video role playing games back in the old SSI days. There was this Aztec group, I can't remember the name of them, but you were going there to stop them, and stop some of them from conquering the others but you were not among the people. It was weird but it wasn't very representative of the groups and how they could be in the world as powerful beings.

**0:46:38 AT:** And so to me, the weirdest was that they were being set up to be removed. They were being set up to be saved and brought in. They were being set up to be explored and conquered and mined for materials and resources and or for wisdom, right? Wisdom is also one of those resources that gets mined, where you're this magic ethnic person who sits back and you've got all this great power, all this magic but you can't use it for yourselves. You've gotta wait for the colonizers to come and say, "Here you guys are smarter than us. You use this and save the world." But one way or

another our magic and our ways just aren't good enough. We're like a bunch of babies with Bazookas. We don't know what to do with it.

**0:47:16 AT:** So I did not want that to be the case in Ehdrigohr. I wanted the people of Ehdrigohr to be the people of Ehdrigohr. I wanted their tribal ways and everything to be as big and as magical and as wonderful as anything you have seen in a Tolkien story or Narnia or any of that jazz. I wanted to break a bunch of those assumed rules. And it's funny how those things wrap around your head. When I was building the space I wanted a group that had an Asian quality to them, kind of Chinese or Korean quality to them. And it was a real struggle in my brain to put them in a place that wasn't the East. [chuckle] And I didn't realize that was gonna be a problem until I was trying to do it, and then said, "Why do these people keep winding up in the east? I wanna move them to the west." And so I purposely put them there to make myself redesign who they were and see them as their own kind of people as opposed to being the easterners.

**0:48:13 AT:** And then it was also a big mind-opening for me, because then I realized, in terms of being native, if I look at the Americas, we're in the middle, and Asia's off the the west, and Europe is off to the East. So who our easterners are and who are westerners are are two different groups, and so that felt like it kind of released me. I felt powerful because suddenly it was much more of a Native point of view and not a euro point of view.

**0:48:44 AT:** And then, I didn't want people to be divided into this idea that there are the civilized people who know stuff and then the savages. I wanted that tribal ideal to be across the board, so people could be savages and be in cities, and people could be savages and be out there in the wild and vice versa. There's this blend.

**0:49:07 AT:** The other things I wanted was that it could not be fantasy America. I was not recreating the US ancient days, where one day people will wake up and become the tribes of the real world. That's not what they were. I didn't wanna give you permission to play Indian. [chuckle] I wanted to get you to look at that there are these differences between people. But it really bugged me, the thought that there might be some people sitting around playing Lakotas or playing Crees and that was their game. It was kind of like... Anybody familiar with the German, the Native clubs in Germany, the German Native clubs? Where we had these people who, they basically LARPed our culture, [chuckle] which is a very strange thing, but whatever.

**0:50:00 AT:** And I didn't want any more of an attempt at historical accuracy than what you got in something like Lord of the Rings or The Wheel of Time. They are their own thing, just like there are no real orcs in our world, there's no real Riders of Rohan in our world, there's no real [0:50:13]   in our world. But they are inspired, just like so much of what happens in Tolkien's world is inspired from Germanic myth and Finnish myth and all these other places. The same thing happens in Ehdrigohr, but instead of mining those cultures that Tolkien was connected to I mined the cultures that I was connected to.

**0:50:32 AT:** And then there's this really big thing for me is I needed to be inclusive and accessible. I had this thing while I was playing games where I found often that, when I looked at the game, when I looked at the setting of the game, there was really no place for me and I had to have an excuse to be there. I wanted a place where I could recognize the cultural and tribal bits and pieces of my own traditions, both native stuff and non-native stuff. And I wanted a place that anyone who looked at this could find some way to connect to it and play it, even if it wasn't for everybody. Not

everybody's gonna like this. Let me stop and get some water here. Like I said, feel free to ask me questions at any point.

**0:51:19 AT:** And so all this led to this idea of world building. I had never really set down to do real world building from the ground up. I was always kind of working with the templates that were already out there. And so I had to really think about, what are my sensibilities? What's the logic of the world building I want to do? I did not want to deal with people being murder hobos. Any of you ever heard this terminology? Murder hobos are basically what you are in most D&D campaigns. You're these people and you roam the countryside looking for an adventure, and you go, "Hey, there's an adventure over there. Look at all those monsters. Let's kill them and take their stuff." And you go in there and you kill them, so you take their stuff and you're walking around with these big bags of stuff. [chuckle] I'm exaggerating, but that's ultimately what you're kinda doing. The system sets you up to move from place to place, destroy and take, and destroy and take. And you become important by doing these things, and that's how you level up. And there's this idea of this vertical growth of you. And that just turned me off.

**0:52:20 AT:** I wanted some narrative constructs that helped to suggest play to people without dictating a correct way. I didn't want you to have to do it a certain way. There's not really a wrong way to play Ehdrigohr. You can play it however you want to. When we were doing the play sessions earlier today, we made these characters. We just stopped at the point when we had our winters and aspects. And at that point we coulda just jumped in and started playing the game. Or we coulda dug down a little bit deeper and got lists of skills and lists of other abilities that affected things, but we didn't need all that. All we needed was the character's story to begin playing.

**0:52:56 AT:** And I also wanted a world that had opportunities to solve for interesting problems. With these thematic hooks that gave you a place to start, but you didn't have to be stuck in any of those thematic hooks. But I wanted those thematic hooks to kind of permeate the entirety of the game. So examples of those, there's this idea of sorrow, which I'll get to a little bit later, but sorrow is something that's at the foundation of the world. When the world is being created, there's this character, there's this great creative spirit Okoboji whose job is to create the changing process of people. And at one point, when she's making her people, she's not quite sure how to proceed, and she goes looking for WhatMoves, which has created the world and gone on to do other things, it's still in motion.

**0:53:48 AT:** And she pokes her head out of the weave, out of the great web of stuff, and into the chaos out beyond. And something in her just kinda got broke, 'cause was seeing something that was outside of her scope, even as a spirit to understand, and then something came inside of her, and that thing that came inside of her is called sorrow. And what's interesting about that is that, this is something that could have been resolved if the other spirits were paying attention to her and they sat with her and they worked with her to resolve this thing, but they didn't. And she hid herself away and it affected her ability to change in this really unfortunate way. So even there, there's this idea that there are, she's not bad, she just got hurt and no one took the time to help her. And so the thing that hurt her continues to hurt everyone else. So part of...

**0:54:44 AT:** Another thing is this idea of the great societies, so there's all this crazy stuff happening, all this stuff that can undermine you, that can destroy you and it seems like all hope is lost but the spirits have taught the people to do things to help move them forward. And they have these groups that are there that help to protect the people. They come from the four thunder beings, we're all like

thunderbird type creatures, and they all are represented by a particular type of bird. The birds are crows, morning doves, owls and jays. These are their symbols. So the society of the crows, they're like your... The Jedi of Ehdrigohr. They are these warriors who run out there, and they put themselves in front of all the dangers, they're willing to die so other people can live. They're warrior society.

**0:55:45 AT:** The doves, they have all this earth-based magic, and they're there as doulas and undertakers, they move around the world going from village to village, town to town and ensure that life is maintained. They make sure that new life comes into the world, and they make sure that old life goes out of the world and stays out, it stays dead. They bring prayers, they bring medicine, they do all these things to maintain the spiritual health of the people. Then there are the jays who are clowns, singers, storytellers, they travel around and they keep people informed. They are the folks who make sure that while everyone is huddled together in the night trying to survive, they keep you from being depressed because half of your family has died by telling you all these stories of where other people have survived. They keep you in the light inside, they keep you moving forward. Their songs, stories and dances, are filled with magic and they help fend off the force of sorrow that's in the world. And they also maintain communication between all of these different spaces 'cause there's long stretches often between villages and towns.

**0:56:52 AT:** And last but not least are the owls, these are these powerful mystics who will go off into the deep places of the world, where the world is still in creation, and so every now and then the world starts to break a little bit and things start to come in. And the owls find this old stuff and they also find those places where the people tried to gather at one point another, and they were failed by the Woe. And they bring back old stories, they bring back old legends, they bring back old magic and knowledge and help the people to move forward in better ways. Really? Wow.

**0:57:24 JL:** Yeah. You can keep going but just, it's almost an hour.

**0:57:25 AT:** So ultimately the idea is that these societies show us how to be heroic, and in the context of Ehdrigohr, one of the things that are important in the world is protecting our people, maintaining our spiritual health, communicating with each other and remembering our histories. I'm gonna skip over the magic stuff but, so there's this idea, actually before I get into this, I wanna open it up to questions so that people have a chance to talk, 'cause we only have five minutes?

**0:57:54 JL:** No, no, no I mean five minutes, we can have questions after you're done. We have time, we don't have to leave the building.

**0:58:00 AT:** So yeah, so the other idea here is I wanted to weave a cosmology, so most games will do this thing where there's a laundry list of spells and the spells basically becomes this mechanical thing. I shoot a fireball, I shoot a magic missile, or I do a [0:58:15]   persistent killing attack or whatever depending on the game you're playing. I wanted something that was again about the story of the world, and so I looked back into my own tradition, looked at how the world is represented. In the Lakota we've got all these things, in many cases, people kinda misunderstand but they come together with this idea that everything is in relationship with everything, and that things are built on top of structures, that are built on top of structures and you can't unravel one thing without affecting stuff around it.

**0:58:46 AT:** So, Wakan Tanka isn't just the great mystery spirit, it's not like God, like a Christian



God, it's this combination of everything. Takushkanshkan which is WhatMoves, it's the motion of the world, it's the motion of the existence's creation, it's a force that unifies and creates and keeps us moving and staying alive in it's stasis is more the death knell. If you aren't in motion, if you aren't finding a way to keep going forward, then you're dying, you're disappearing. And then there's the way spirit is represented, the spirit of the person, the spirit of the breath, the things that connect you to the great mystery [0:59:27]   which is basically your connection to the motion. All these things I wanted to represent, and they came together in the idea of the mysteries.

**0:59:36 AT:** So, these are big dangerous powerful forces, this is the magic of the world and everybody is magic, everything has access to the magic, and it's in you, it's around you and it's in places you can't see. People who actually learn to wield them can do all kinds of stuff, they can heal people, they can control nature, they can push their bodies beyond human limits. There's actually a process, the more you get into the mysteries, the more... There's kind of a sense of apotheosis that you are becoming like one of the spirits, and eventually, you are one of the spirits that the people look up to.

**1:00:09 AT:** So, these are the four of categories that we have that constructs the world, the natures, the elements, the principles, the essences. Natures are things that are inherent to every person. It's about your manifestation in the world as a being. And as a being, you've got a body which is your physical self, your mind which is your mental self, your spirit which is your ability to affect yourself upon the world around you, and your soul which is your connection to ancestor, it's your connection to this reoccurring soul. And people who have access to natures are able to control the self. It's about who you are and knowing how to manipulate you to through world. The elements are the manifestations of the world itself. The physical stuff, the matter that makes up existence, and that's very traditional earth, air, fire, water. Allows you to control, shape these forces. People who do this stuff are a lot like benders in Avatar. I'm sure many of you have seen that kind of thing.

**1:01:10 AT:** Then we have this idea of the principles where relationship is a thing that manifests in the world. And so there's life, there's love, there's honor, there's destiny, and having control over them allows you to affect the bonds of relativity that connect people to each other and connect people to living things throughout the world. And last but not the least, is this idea of the essences. This is where existence is self manifest, the concept of existence. And there's weave which holds all of existence inside of it, moments which is the thing that we count as, we perceive existence and move forward with time. Space which is the stuff that is contained inside the weave. The weave itself is this kind of structure. And truth is our perception of it. And if you can control these things, you can do some really bizarre stuff. You can control reality itself and weaken the barriers between worlds and the travelling lands. So, how am I doing?

[chuckle]

**1:02:05 JL:** You're headed up on an hour.

**1:02:07 AT:** Okay. So, this idea of how the world is built also flows out into relationships amongst the peoples, the tribes. Everything is a relative. And not relative like, "This is my brother or sister." People aren't really sitting around talking to stones unless you have the power to talk stones. But this idea that there's very little that you can do to you that doesn't somehow or another affect the rest of the world around you. So it allows for a wider range of possible stories without excuse. You don't have to justify who you are, why you're there in Ehdrigohr, you just are. That's your story. Your

story puts you there. Now, play your story, own your story, and move through it. So, you begin to do things like explore how cultures grow and explore the meaning of roles of gender within the culture. There's four recognized genders within the world of Ehdrigohr.

**1:03:02 AT:** Exploration of adventure, that's much about community as is about growth of individual character. So you're not just getting stronger, you're making everybody around you stronger. And you get stronger by getting more story. The more stuff you do, the more people know of you. The more people know of you, the more people tell stories about you, the more you are able to affect your scenes and the reality around you. An exploration of emotional well being as affected by role and culture. And we're talking more about these interconnected sets instead of these binary pairs. It's not like a this versus that. Everything is kind of in this dance with each other.

**1:03:38 AT:** So, I'm actually gonna talk a little bit about my big why's. Personally though, when I came to making this, my world was changing a lot. My kids were all over the place, I hated my job, I wanted something that was mine, I wanted to feel like I could give something back. And the things, the places where I enjoyed to play, there were limited voices in how I got to manifest in there. There were limited lens that told me where I was in there. And I wanted something that spoke from my voice. I feel like I have all this stuff that I wanted to share with people, and I wanted to find a way to let you kinda play inside of me. And so... And all my fears. And so the shivers are my anxieties, there's sorrows, there's all this stuff going on.

**1:04:26 AT:** And then, there's also this other thing. There's this big trouble that I noticed as a youth worker amongst the kids I was working with and native people that I was interacting with, and that was sorrow which I mentioned before. Sorrow is this thing, is this force that is there in the world, and it's a big central theme for Ehdrigohr, is this fighting and sorrow. And sorrow is this thing that works to constrain and diminish us. The game has, as an undercurrent, this metaphor of the exploration of depression. It's the fight against depression. There's this stuff that tells you that you're not worthy, that you're not worth it, that you can't, and we want you to think about ways that you can.

**1:05:08 AT:** So, a lot of my kids were affected by this. I could not get them motivated. And even my own children, we had a big battle with depression, and I've had my own battles with depression. I found that as I played role playing games, this weird thing happened. I had a memory of being awesome. I had points where I had done these extra ordinary things, and then when things were getting weird and tough, I was able to... As I was trying to figure out how to get through them, I can pull on these memories of when I fought that dragon. And as weird and strange as that sounds, it was a real thing for me. And I thought, "Well, what if I could actually mindfully make that into something that people can play with?"

**1:05:54 AT:** I feel like people are struggling so hard to be seen, and being seen is part of this, that they tend to stop seeing themselves. They forget whole sections of themselves, they lose connections to their story, they lose the capacity to dream, they become undone and they're eaten alive from the inside out. There's this thing that kind of swallows them and that really sucks. Because there's all these wonderful people who are, their magic isn't making its way out into the world. And so sorrow is what I name that force and it's the great debilitating force and it's more frightening than death in Ehdrigohr.

**1:06:29 AT:** Let's talk very quickly about how it works. So in Ehdrigohr the things we do against

sorrow, sorrow can infect us. We ask you to do things where you gather tribe, you gather people around you to help witness you through these troubling points. So sorrow's actually... Just like we have faith points we have sorrow points. And the sorrow points do this thing where as I have this aspects that allow me to change the world. Where when I have enough sorrow built up, the Game Master, when I try to change the world, the Game Master can say no. If I'm gonna say, "Well those guys can't defeat me because I'm the strongest man in the world." And the Game Master says, "No you don't really believe that anymore." and take that away from you for a bit.

**1:07:14 AT:** And here and there it's not a problem, but when I get enough of it, it negates every single piece of narrative that defines me, then I have nothing to change the world with, I have nothing to affect the world with. And I begin to get more and more diminished, in the game, the character can't enter a dream where we refresh ourselves and then they have to be witnessed by people around them. Other people have to look at you and say, "Yeah you're good, you exist." And when you're infected with sorrow, if you go to sleep, you're not able to get into dream and if no one is witnessing you, you fade away, you become a spot on the ground just a black stain and it's called sorrow stain. So I wanted to give people the capacity to play with that. To say, "Hey, there are ways to get around this, I can touch this thing, I identify this thing, I can win against this thing." And then just have that as a memory in the back of their minds.

**1:08:09 AT:** So aspects are what was defining me, I just kind of jumped ahead of myself. Aspects are what was defining me and the sorrow is the thing that pushes back against my aspects. The game itself puts you in situations where you have to reach for your aspects to be effective in the world and if we say no, then you have to stop and think and say, "Well how can I get back to this thing? How can I reconnect them?" And part of that is reaching for the community you built around you, part of that is finding special places in the world where you can refresh yourself, part of that is taking the time to be still and ask yourself questions and have conversations. If you've stopped believing in yourself you can't do very much. So maybe I should stop there and let's talk a little bit if there's anything to be said.

[applause]

**1:09:06 JL:** Any questions or comments from the audience? Yes?

**1:09:13 Speaker 4:** Not a question but just a comment. I've played a number of table top games, and this just looks like a completely different world in a way that could really help me pursue healing. And just the fact that it is actually about stories, it's not just about loot and action is just amazing and I'm actually kind of welling up with tears, so thank you.

**1:09:40 AT:** Thank you.

**1:09:45 JL:** Go ahead.

**1:09:47 Speaker 5:** Yeah, I echo that, I actually, I found this so moving I think because what you're talking about, anyway, it echos supposedly my own experience with gaming, why they've been such a formative impact in my life probably a lot of us feel that way. I have a question about... So my strong feeling right now is that I really, really wanna play this game.

**1:10:09 AT:** Yay success!

**1:10:11 S5:** Right now, and I'm wondering how people can do that and also I'm wondering about playing it, I don't know if this is a good question 'cause I know it's accessible, you made a point of making it accessible. But if I wanna play with a whole group of non indigenous people, do you have any advice?

**1:10:31 AT:** Yes.

**1:10:31 S5:** Okay great.

**1:10:32 AT:** So like I said, I wanted this to be accessible but I also want people to own it. So things that you can do are a push back except the big major lenses of relationships and family and community and these kind of multi layered interconnectedness. But then reach into some of your own traditions and cultures that you're familiar with. And replace some of the tribes that are there, replace some of your themes with things that resonate strongly for you. So like there are groups that have kind of a Celtic taste, there's kind of like this weird Nishnaby, Yoruban, Celtic mix in there. Push back on the Celtic portion of it, push back on that one group that feels a certain way, if you like their shtick, change the cultural bit and foundation of their shtick and own it. It shouldn't be about you trying to play native, it should be about you trying to play people, it should be about you trying to connect to this kind of tribal important space. My partner and I had this conversation once where she talked about how there are, the people who are of the earth religions and then there's all these others, there's the people who don't have earth religions and said, they're all earth religions, I mean they all come out of us trying to figure out how to survive.

**1:11:53 AT:** And some of the stuff is more aggressive, some of the stuff is more passive but from the people of the earth, on the earth. They're all earth religions, so figure out how you connect that to this world and then make it real for you and your players. When you're doing your winter counts, your winter counts are gonna do a lot of that for you already. 'Cause you're gonna come up with all these problems and issues that are gonna carry on through your campaigns. That is ultimately what becomes more important is, the pre-history and the truth of your group. As opposed to the bigger truth of the world. You may never get outside of a village but you can still have all these great experiences. Someone once said to me, the thing they liked about Ehdrigohr is it's a world where they could play a peaceful character and it's actually a meaningful thing to do in the game. Just a thought of being somebody that goes from town to town, delivering babies. [chuckle] Who does that in a role playing game? Just the thought of having delivered the baby before, terrible things happens. Life is important here. So it's, yeah. Just find your own connection to it and go with it.

**1:13:09 Speaker 6:** In your observations of people playing this so how has it made, how has playing the game made them reflect on representations of culture?

**1:13:18 AT:** Oh. That's a good question. In some cases, they've made me reflect [chuckle] more than the people. But the biggest experience I have had has been sitting down with native people and playing the game. And having them immediately see themselves in the world. Instead of looking around, trying to figure out where's the native character? Are people of color saying where's the colored person? The presumption that everybody is kind of brownish in Ehdrigohr is a big deal. Because there's this idea that the tribes are... They're nations but they're not necessarily determined, there's not like a phenotypical ethnicity. There are commonalities within a nation but people are transient and they move around. You don't have to really make an excuse for being where you are.

You just have to have a good story. Where you don't have to justify being the black guy in London. [chuckle] That's just what has happened as a course of moving around. And so, I've found that people were moved by that.

**1:14:23 AT:** They were like, "Hey, I don't have to wrap my culture up in this thing and then just kind of mimic being what is expected of me. I can just start with what I know and then move on from that." The biggest point of that was, think I mentioned this to Jason in the interview yesterday where I started this game off and the first thing that happens. The characters are going off on an adventure and the elders smudge the people before they go off. They can bless them and they have this aspect of smudged against evil. It's something that they can pull out if bad things happen. Well, when I did it with some non-natives, it was just a tag. It was just a thing. So it was there and they used it and it was gone.

**1:15:14 AT:** And as soon as I did it with, and this was a group of native kids. The first thing they did is said "Oh wow. That's right. We have to smudge. We have to protect ourselves before we go out." And there was conversations about who was gonna do that. Where it was gonna be and there was no question of, what is smudging? [chuckle] There's no question of why. It was more of an, "Of course. That's what we should be doing." There's this opportunity to kind of bring a traditional ideal into play. It just became mechanic that they got to practice inside the play space and not have to justify it with rules. They didn't have to justify it with any special mechanics or outcomes. It was just something that was okay to do. When that happened for me, that made me feel good.

**1:15:52 JL:** And one of the things you said too was that they, that group would return to the smudging throughout the game.

**1:15:57 AT:** Yes. Throughout the game.

**1:15:57 JL:** Whereas other groups it was like, they check the box in the beginning and the smudging was done. Then they got on with it. Yeah. Other questions? Yes.

**1:16:12 Speaker 7:** Thanks for that presentation. As a role playing gamer, I've kind of come across something like this, at least not as systematic. You mentioned that the world is kind of like weave and under construction inside Ehdrigohr. Is this idea of like being a weaved world? Is it the same as being an enclosed world?

**1:16:37 AT:** Sort of, I guess. Cosmologically the idea is there's a great hoop. Inside the hoop, which is turning, there is a spinner and a weaver. The spinner is putting out these threads and the weaver is weaving threads together to make the web of creation. Those threads slowly, more and more occupy the empty spaces in between. As they do so, new concepts kind of fall into the world. The world can expand infinitely within the construct of the hoop. If that makes any sense.

**1:17:11 S7:** But is there an outskirts then the world? Like, when you mentioned the story of the spirit that could absorb the sorrows. She lived outside the world.

**1:17:20 AT:** Yes. She lived outside the hoop. Outside the hoop is pure, unadulterated possibility. Anything that could be anything can be anything out there. It's beyond the beyond. But it's not a space that anyone can exist in. It's a space waiting to be made manifest. It's an idea but it isn't substance. The process of creation makes things into substance. It keeps expanding so think of the

hoop like the difference... There's zero and there's one, it's a real number. [chuckle] So there's like this infinite number of fractions in between the 0 and the 1 and we're just figuring out what those numbers are and that's what creation is doing, it's just filling up that space between 0 and 1. Does that help?

**1:18:12 S7:** Yes.

**1:18:13 AT:** Okay.

**1:18:17 Speaker 8:** Thanks for the [1:18:17] [redacted] and the day before. I was struck more you were in the play session but even more so now that it seems like a fundamentally optimistic game especially given like the genre, survivor horror.

**1:18:32 AT:** Yes.

**1:18:33 S8:** It's almost the exact opposite of the script [1:18:34] [redacted].

**1:18:36 AT:** Right and I'm glad you caught that because that's totally what I want. I want you to feel like you can win it's a horror game but I don't want you to get caught up in "Oh, damn the zombie's gonna kill us all" It's about the human drama and pushing against the tide it's about overcoming it's not about being overcome.

**1:18:54 S8:** That itself I think is amazing my other question was just you've sort of mentioned cool things before that but I do play tests for a living essentially. I'm curious if there were any other kind of like unexpected or just interesting stories from when you were play testing the game?

**1:19:09 AT:** Oh yeah.

**1:19:11 S8:** What you learned from them or what you incorporated into the...

**1:19:14 AT:** Man, I've learned so much, there's so much that I would do differently as I move forward but there's a story I shared again with Jason initially where I went out, so I've been called out to play the game in various places around Chicago. Play within the native community and then people in the library system, the Chicago Public Library System got wind of it and there was this movement to bring games into the library and last December they reached out to me and said "Hey, would you come and do your game?" and I said "sure" and fool that I am.

[laughter]

**1:19:49 AT:** And so they give me a bunch of libraries I was designated to come out to and I went to them and most of those libraries were on the north side of Chicago which is kind of very gentrified. There's a range of people but there's this, Southside of Chicago there's an area of Chicago where it gets kind of dark and dangerous. I'm sure you've heard all kind of terrible stories about the billions and billions of people that get killed in Chicago every day.

[laughter]

**1:20:17 AT:** This is one of those neighbourhoods where billions die.

[laughter]

**1:20:20 AT:** I think of it kind of as Mordor of Chicago and so it was the last place I was gonna have to go and I called up... I had to reach out to the head librarians and tell them that I was coming and ask them if they had gotten together a bunch of teenagers or older for me to play with and I called this woman and she's like "Oh, yeah we got kids out in the homework area ready to play your game" It was obvious they hadn't done any prep work and it sounded to me like she was talking about little kids. I'm like "ma'am this is not... This is a horror role-playing game, it's not really for little kids so it's supposed to be teenagers and what not" she's like "yeah we got those"

[laughter]

**1:21:08 AT:** And there's always some kids will get somebody to send in there and so I show up and sure enough, there was all these little kids sitting out there. They're like 10, 11, 12 years old and I'm like "Oh, this is going to be fun" and so she sends me into this room and then she ushers the kids in and so I'm sitting there in the room. I've got like maps and I've got posters and I've got the game and these kids come in and they're led by this one little girl. Little girl sits at the end of the table she looks at the stuff on the table, she looks at me and she goes "You got any snacks?"

[laughter]

**1:21:42 AT:** And I said, "Awww no, I don't have any snacks I'm sorry" and as the other kids were coming in she's like "hold on he ain't got no snacks"

[laughter]

**1:21:51 AT:** Then she... Everybody went back out because I didn't have any snacks. I was like damn well nobody told me I had to bring snacks.

[laughter]

**1:21:57 AT:** And so I'm sitting there and I look around and there's this one little girl who's left and she's sitting there at the table and I said. "I don't have any snacks" [laughter] and she's like "that's okay" and she's kind of paging through the book and I said "do you know the role-playing game, do you know what this is?" And she was like "no but it looks kind of cool" and so we start talking and she's maybe like 9, 10 years old and I'm trying to figure out a way to engage her and bring this thing down to a level that wasn't terrible and frightening and this other little boy comes in and he's kind of like you know very proper he's got his little vest and he's got his little tie and he's like the little church kid.

**1:22:37 AT:** So I wind up with three of these little kids who are sitting there and they're interested in the game and I'm sitting there trying to explain to them the ideas of the game, what a role-playing game is and what character types are and I'm using all this language that is just not connecting with these kids at all it was all the language that worked with the kids that I had, all the gamer type kids that I had been engaging with and even with the native kids they were native gamer type kids so they got this.

**1:23:01 AT:** These kids weren't those kids and so this fourth kid comes in and he must of been like 14, 15 years old and he sits down and he's got this total thug street urchin thing going on and he's like all kind of sprawled out like Fonzie and he was like "what's this?" And I'm like "it's a role playing game" and I explained it to him he was like "Okay, that's cool I'll play" and so he picks up some dice and he starts looking at things and so then I'm describing characters to... We had these pre-generated characters, I give the Storyteller character to the little girl and I'm explaining to her what a traveling Storyteller is and you know that you've got these abilities to kind of bring people together and you sing songs and you do all this stuff and she's looking at me and she's kind of glazing over and then the older boy leans over to her he says "you like Tupac" [laughter]

[laughter]

**1:23:52 AT:** I said "Hmm, yeah I guess, that works"

[laughter]

**1:23:58 AT:** And then I'm describing this way warden type of idea where these people who protect the roads in between towns and kids just like mher... And the older boy leans over to him and says you got the authority. Okay, you got the authority, yeah I guess. Yeah, you're kinda like a cop. [laughter] I forgot what the... And then there was one that was like, who was this water witch who went around pulling water up for people. And so I was using all these "Harry Potter" references and I was using "Avatar" references and he comes out of nowhere and cites some, I forgot what the name of the book was but it was this book there's all these kids who are children of Greek Gods.

**1:24:40 JL:** Oh yeah, "Percy Jackson."

**1:24:42 AT:** So he's like you're like a "Percy Jackson" character. And they're like, "Oh, I get to be like Percy Jackson? I want that." And then suddenly, I had this interpreter.

[laughter]

**1:24:52 AT:** I had this kid who wasn't caught up in the language that I had been using to move the game around and it made me stop and realize that even as I'm shopping the game out to people and explaining the game to people, there's still this tendency to speak gamer and other people don't speak gamer, they don't have these assumptions, they don't have these abbreviations, they don't have all this lingo and you have to talk to them in ways that speak to the culture they're coming from and recognize that culture's valid. So I coulda said no you're not like Tupac, 'cause Tupac's a rapper and this guy is a travelling storyteller [laughter] but that makes sense from where you're coming from and so it became about being a yes in their descriptions and allowing them to connect to it from a point of yes that made sense to them. And then they were enraptured, they were there for the whole thing and the little girl who played the storyteller, eventually there's a point where they have to bring the kids that they were looking for into a safe place. And I say well, you need to tell the story to keep the kids focused and she was like how do I do that? I'm like well, you tell the story and I was about to tell her to roll the dice, to make a check off of this and use an aspect and she just gets up and starts to orate this story about unicorns and rainbows and I'm like you go girl, do your thing.

[laughter]



**1:26:12 AT:** So really didn't need a dice anymore, forget it. And then when it was over, the owl jumped up and the little girl, goes running out, to tell her friends "I saved everybody and I told the story and I was cool". And then the two boys who were playing the fighter type and the water witch type person and the warrior people went outside and they were play fighting the characters that they were playing in the game and that just made my heart just kinda go frggghh.

**1:26:41 AT:** And so that wouldn't have happened if I got caught in ego and said no, it can only be in a certain way, it can only be described from this verbiage. I let them make it their own and then I kinda became their own at that point, so that felt good. And I've had more experiences that where people just kind of fell into the world and they kinda dragged me into the world, they showed me new versions of it just 'cause I was playing with them through their eyes.

**1:27:11 JL:** So I think that's a good one to end the evening on. Thank you very much Allen for a wonderful evening.

[applause]

[pause]