

**Christian Kelley-Madera**

Hey all,

Today's Bonus content is the next in our series of Showcase episodes. Zach had a chat with Gabe Alvarez about Gabe's Space Opera STARCALLED. It's a really interesting conversation and a really cool show, and I hope you enjoy the Showcase.

But first!

I wanna tell you about Tavour. Tavour is THE app for fans of beer, craft brews, and trying new and exciting labels. Once you sign up in the app, you can choose the beers you're interested in (including two new ones DAILY) and add them to your personalized crate. Pay for the beers as you add them, then ship whenever you're ready. The shipping price will not change with the size of your order. Tavour only works with independent breweries around the world, and if you like trying new beers it's much more cost-effective than buying and shipping one-offs. So download Tavour on the apple or google store to try it now. Use code TOAFN for \$10 off after your first order of \$25 or more, that's Tavour on the apple or google store, discount code TOAFN.

Also, there are more links in the show notes of places you can donate to. I think I'm just gonna keep doing that for a while. As always we encourage you to seek things out on your own, figure out where you're most passionate and most useful. But if you're understandably overwhelmed and don't know where to start, we aim to give you some places to start.

Okay. Enjoy the showcase for now. And keep an eye on this feed, with any luck I will have something cool to announce...quite soon. Talk to you then.

**Zach Glass**

Hello everyone. Today we are lucky enough to be joined by Gabe Alvarez, the creator of Starcalled podcast. Gabe, welcome. Thanks for being here.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Hey Zach, thanks for having me.

**Zach Glass**

And to our listeners who that name may sound familiar, in our last interview with Jordan Cobb, Jordan spoke glowingly about Starcalled and about Gabe. And it's really an incredible show. So why don't you give us a little pitch of the show in your own words?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Sure. Starcalled is a sci fi action space opera audio drama. It's musically driven, and it's striving to be a cinematic epic experience in the greater galaxy at large.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, and you mentioned the music. I should point out You are the writer, the director, the producer, but also you compose all the music for the show and it's fully scored it. I mean, the music is cinematic, it's, it's big. It's huge. It's very cinematic is the best word I could think of it and it's really incredible.

**Gabe Alvarez**

That's what I'm going for. That's 100%. That's like what I'm all about.

**Zach Glass**

It's really amazing. So what, what sort of sang to you about this story? What made you really want to make this podcast?

**Gabe Alvarez**

I mean, I've always really, it's such a weird thing I guess, I've always really loved like film scores and the ability of music to tell a story and take you through these experiences, you know, even now, like I'll sit and I'll listen to like The Empire Strikes Back soundtrack, you know, and I'll sit there and you know, there's just a passage and I'll just start bawling. I'll start crying. I'll just, you know, I'm just overwhelmed by the music and I wanted to create an experience like that, that was my own, you know, something that I could put back out into the world.

**Zach Glass**

Mm hmm. So so it was really sort of like the music drives the story for you?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Definitely, but also, I mean, who doesn't want to be like a cool space action character and we're flying and spaceships and we're yelling all the time. You know, there was also like a huge appeal in that, you know.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, definitely. And everyone's dream is to be the star of their own space action movie, right?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Exactly, you know, and I was like hitting up my friends and be like, Hey, I have this idea that we could make like a cool sci fi show. And they're like, a sci fi show like aliens and crazy voices? Like, I want to do that, I want to be a sci fi action person. I can, let me do it. Come on. Like, ya.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, that's awesome. And so like, as we all did, as we did with our show, too, but you basically just sort of reached out to your friends and said, Let's go make this a thing?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Exactly. Yeah. 100% everybody who shows up in the show is somebody directly in my personal life. And I don't know. I mean, there's so many aspects that went into like making the show and one of them was like, I have all these friends who are I think they're so talented. I think they're so funny. You know, I play music with these people. I goof around with these people. And I want

to, I wanted a way to crystallize that, you know, to in a way like immortalize those friendships and say, you know, this is my, this is my family that's doing this, and I love them and this is gonna be like this forever. You know?

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, that's incredible. It really gives it so much more meaning when you can make such a project like this with people who you really care about. That's really awesome.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Exactly, it's so it's so personal it's so intimate.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, and so I know I know you compose a lot of the music are you and your friends performing it too?

**Gabe Alvarez**

I wish. I just, I do the music on my own. It's that's just a passion that kind of self taught orchestration and composition and stuff like that. But if there was a way to perform it live, that would be pretty cool. But no, it's really it's just me in my bedroom with a MIDI keyboard going to town.

**Zach Glass**

That's awesome. That's actually really amazing that you can do that such a wide scope with just a MIDI keyboard. It's amazing what we can do nowadays.

**Gabe Alvarez**

I know it's it's really spectacular.

**Zach Glass**

And so, obviously, you mentioned watching Empire Strikes Back. What were some of your inspirations when you were making this show obviously there's you could hear the John Williams influences in your score but what what else was going through your head as you made this podcast?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Obviously there's a huge John Williams, there's a Danny Elfman influence in the music, you know, Star Wars, Star Trek, Babylon Five, those really formed my childhood watching these cool sci fi movies and shows and really getting steeped into it. But what really catalyzed everything for me was this weird Australian show called Farscape.

**Zach Glass**

Ooh!

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah

**Zach Glass**

Farscape was great!

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, it's all puppets. And yeah, 1999, this weird turn of the century, just utterly bizarre and out there, just whirlwind of sci fi bizarreness. And that really, that hit me at such a critical stage of my developmental formative years and that was really what set me off on this journey to make this show. Maybe it's not obvious, you know, you watch Farscape and it's so zany and it's goofy, and it's weird and all that and there are not probably not a lot of direct elements that you would see in Starcalled coming out of that, but I, you know, 100% promise you it's there somewhere bubbling up. It's coming or, you know the elements are starting.

**Zach Glass**

And it doesn't need to be like, you know, in every single page, but if that's what sort of inspired you as a kid to want to get into sci fi that's amazing, like that's incredible. And I imagine if you, whenever you mention that show you either get a blank stare or a very excited gasp the way I did.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. 100% I mean, you're probably the only- only person I've ever spoken to that's been like Farscape, are you serious? People are like, Oh, cool. It's like some Australian, sounds cool, puppets? Hmm, cool. Like Sesame Street?

**Zach Glass**

That's part of the wonder of the internet, right? You can make a podcast for like your niche of culture and someone will, someone will vibe with you. Excellent. Like I said the the story, it's so it's so big and expansive. The music is big and very, you know, like you said, John Williams, Danny Elfman, I feel it all. I know you you brought a clip for us to share with our listeners. Is there something you want to say about the clip or sort of set it up so our listeners can know what they're they're listening to?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, exactly.

**Zach Glass**

Excellent. Like I said the the story, it's so it's so big and expansive. The music is big and very, you know, like you said, John Williams, Danny Elfman, I feel it all. I know you you brought a clip for us to share with our listeners. Is there something you want to say about the clip or sort of set it up so our listeners can know what they're they're listening to?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, you know, I actually, I struggled to pick a clip that I felt would be really representative of the show, you know, maybe the first few minutes of it or you know something from another part, but in the production cycle, it was kind of, you know, I was just kind of doing it. And as soon as I would finish editing an episode, I would just throw it out. I had like taken a couple months break and I came back with Episode Four. And that was, I had taken some time to reflect on the first three and what I had done, you know, I'm just trying to figure out how to do the production, the you know, how I was handling and managing everything on my end and I felt like I came back out of the gate sprinting. You know, if I had been running before, this was the sprint. And so there's these opening sequences that are that started to reach, you know, 10 minutes straight through of, okay, it's scored the entire time. And it's all action cues, and it's all intense. And here, we're just, we're just going it's a marathon. This sequence really, really represented what I was going for in this series. And it's a good I think, overview of all the characters and when we pick up all of the main characters are kind of split off into their own different storylines. We have the colonials, which are sort of a Space Police military force that's kind of out in the Galactic frontier doing their stuff. And so we have three different parties of colonials, all working in their own directions at the same time and it's it's sort of a montage of experience as we travel through this. Yeah.

**Zach Glass**

Awesome! So without further ado we'll play that for our audience and to our listeners. We'll be back in a minute with the rest of the interview.

[A selection plays from STARCALLED Book1 Chapter 4. The transcript for that whole episode can be found at <https://www.starcalled.space/book-1-chapter-4-the-sands-of-edari>]

**Zach Glass**

Awesome so you were speaking right before we jumped in about how you chose this clip because you felt like you've really hit your, your stride or your sprint on this. Um, we at The Once And Future Nerd we feel felt that too, sometimes you need that, that pause or that break for a minute to really like center yourself and find yourself. So what, what was it like about this clip and I guess about restarting after that break that you were you were sort of beginning to speak about earlier.

**Gabe Alvarez**

I felt really energized, you know, I, it's uh, when you're doing it all by yourself. It's a it's a really cool and unique opportunity, right? Like, it's you as a creator, as a writer, as a director as a composer, having a direct channel of communication with your audience, you know, there's no dilution, there's no different perspectives. And, you know, obviously, there's a huge value in working with a team and being able to do that. But also, I think there's something really cool about saying, hey, when you listen to this show, it's me and you. And I am telling you a story to the best of my ability, and I am stretched thin and I was feeling stretched thin for a while. I mean, it's it's a lot of juggling. It's a balancing act constantly and I have a tendency to get in the

lab and work myself to the bone. You know, I'll be up for 48 hours, just going straight into the music and I gotta get to the sound design and all that, and I stepped away for a minute after finishing episode three. And you know, you need that time to process and figure out is what I'm doing, is it working? Is this where I want to be going? Is this how I ought to be doing? Is there a better way and being able to come back to it fresh and you know, feeling like, Oh, I hit it, you know, I finished writing out this season and this is it. Like, mmm, I'm full throttle, like, you're gonna go crazy for this because I'm going crazy for this. You know, every second I'm listening back. I'm like, Yes, yes, this is the sound. This is exactly what I want. Oh, this epic space, that spaghetti western standoffs like, this is it, trust me, like we're going places now.

### **Zach Glass**

And that's one of the things I love about music. I mean full disclosure, I'm a music nerd too. And like, when you get that feeling in a soundtrack where you don't, you don't need anything else, you don't need any words you just have that emotion in the soundtrack. It's really It's a feeling like nothing else, isn't it?

### **Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah it's powerful. I mean, it's so raw really music more than anything else more than dialogue more than sounds it just, it gets you it goes straight to your heart before anything else, you know?

### **Zach Glass**

Yeah, from a production standpoint as well, I'm sure when you're first starting a podcast like you're worried about that sound, but you're also worried about how do I do this? How do I make this format and once you're a few, four episodes in you really like, you could sort of let that go on autopilot and just tell the story you want to tell? I can imagine right?

### **Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, yeah, you know, you've you've done the work and you've you've gotten past like, Oh, I worked my muscles and now they're sore, but now they're strong. And now I can really, now I can flex like I can really hit my stride and hit my speed and, you know, I'm comfortable in my element. You know, it's maybe it's not 100% this is, this is it, but, you know, it's always a journey, right and you're always getting closer to that perfect voice. I'm still on, even finishing this season, I feel like I'm still on this journey of like, I'm chasing, I'm chasing it, you know, like I'm on the, on the, hot on the tail of some spaceship and I'm, I'm almost there, you know I'm just dialing in all the little instruments and I'm flipping all the switches and you know I'm going to hit that target, it's so close.

### **Zach Glass**

Yeah, I love that analogy how like you can see yourself like in that spaceship while you're making the show about the spaceships. That's that's really awesome.

### **Gabe Alvarez**

That is what it feels like! I feel like a mad scientist or something here at my workstation here. I you know, I when I'm putting the episodes together, I feel like I'm a conductor of an orchestra and especially when I'm, you know, doing the music obviously, it has to have that organic feel, but every aspect of production every sound like it, it has to have the right cue and everything and it's, you know, I'm pouring in all the elixirs, and I'm mixing the potions, And I got the Bunsen burner going and 100 different aspects at the same time and-

### **Zach Glass**

Yeah, so can I ask you since you bring it up, like in your creative process like, obviously your storyline you have so many different, you know, factions and little like side plots going on and then you also have the score going on, what- what comes first? Did you write your script first and then score it or do you have like the musical scene in mind and you write the dialogue to fit it, like how is your process work?

### **Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, you know, it's, it's fluid, it's dynamic. Yeah, a lot of times when I'm writing the script, I'm hearing the music in my head. So, I'll write, and I can, I can just visualize so to speak, you know, oh, it's going to have this sound, it's going to have this feel this, this specific line of dialogue. If they deliver it this way. The music is going to come up in this way like, Okay, I got it. This is how it's all gonna work. And that's, that's before I've written any music, and then you know, on the flip side, If there's like a super intense action sequence, you know, in the script, I'll just write, you know, "they fight" or, you know, spaceships fly around or something. And then I'll spend like a week just meticulously beat by beat note by note, okay, it's gonna be this, this, you know, here's five beats of this, here's four measures of this. I'll add in like a half measure of this, and then we'll jump into a new time signature and stuff until it ends up being this super complicated, intense, very, very puzzled out piece and then either fit the dialogue to that or record the dialogue, kind of direct the actors with the music that I have in mind, trying to explain that to them, and then score it later on.

### **Zach Glass**

Mm hmm yeah, and I think that's really amazing because I think it's really unique in the podcast world. There's a lot of amazing podcasts out there and a lot of them have good music but I can't really think of any that really center the music as strongly as you do and it's really incredible.

### **Gabe Alvarez**

Thanks, I mean yeah, that was always my goal. You know, you go back and you watch Star Wars and the music is such a core part of its identity. You know, Star Wars without the John Williams score is just, you know, it's cool. It's pretty good.

### **Zach Glass**

Yeah, honestly, I think when I was growing up, my parents had that album of the, was it the London Symphony doing the Star Wars score.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Oh, yeah. Wow.

**Zach Glass**

And I think I listened to that CD before I saw the movie.

**Gabe Alvarez**

I love doing that!

**Zach Glass**

And I loved the music of Star Wars before I saw the movie. And of course, obviously, once I saw the movie, it's incredible too. But the music is just, it's so integral to the plot, and it's really cool how you could bring that to podcasting.

**Gabe Alvarez**

That's such a cool experience. Man. I can't imagine having listened to the Star Wars score before seeing the movie. What a cool, what a cool flip. That's really cool.

**Zach Glass**

And like, for me, I was young. I didn't know, I didn't know any better, right? Like, in my mind, I didn't know that was some special or unique experience. It was just like, an album sitting in my house growing up,

**Gabe Alvarez**

That's awesome. I love that. I love that story, man.

**Zach Glass**

You know, I don't think I've ever actually like, consciously thought about that before this moment. But that's -that's the truth.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah.

**Zach Glass**

Well, anyway, it's been really awesome speaking with you. Tell people where they could find your show where they can support your work, support you?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, you can listen to Starcalled on, you know, Apple podcasts or Google podcasts or you know, wherever you listen to your podcasts. If you want to find us, check us down on Twitter,

we're @starcalledradio, you can check out our website starcalled.space. I'm really proud of that domain.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, that's amazing that you got that by the way

**Gabe Alvarez**

I was scrolling through it and was like dot space. Hang on, like forget everything else on here, like absolutely. We have a Patreon as well. I don't know if I could name the URL off the top of my head. But it's it's on the starcalled.space website and everything.

**Zach Glass**

And we will provide links and everything in the show notes. But yeah, so everyone go go check out start called, it's really it's really an incredible piece of work. In closing, we're trying to use this as a platform to really sort of broaden everyone's horizons to the scope of podcasts out there. So are there any other audio drama podcasts that you'd like to shout out to our listeners that you want to talk about a bit?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, I you know, I had trouble kind of zeroing in on one if you don't mind I just like to shout out a couple of them real quick one.

**Zach Glass**

Oh, sure. Of course.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Great. One that I really enjoy is called Aethuran Dark Saga. It's just one dude, Phill Usher, he's a really cool guy. He just he makes this incredibly deep, grim dark fantasy story experience, and it's an it's an audio drama, it's somewhere, it's like a dark fairy tale. It's super intense, you know, demons and knights fighting off these horrible creatures and, and striving to save the world and do right things and they're thwarted at every turn by these horrific entities working against them. And he does it all himself. I mean, the guy, he's got a full cast of himself.

**Zach Glass**

Oh wow

**Gabe Alvarez**

And I just I think that's so amazing. You know, that's the great thing about indie podcasts and audio dramas, audio fiction is that, you know, you can get away with doing stuff like that. And it's a platform for anyone to do that. I just think that's so cool.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah, that's that's amazing. I hadn't heard of that. Can you give us the name one more time?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, it's called Aethuran Dark Saga , A-E-T-H-U-R-A-N.

**Zach Glass**

I'm absolutely going to look that up right after this. That sounds really interesting.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, it's a really wild journey. Another show I've been listening to a lot lately is called Flyest Fables. It's by a creator named Morgan Givens. I'm not, you know, I'm not like, I haven't finished listening to it. I just started up within the last couple of weeks, but it's a really nice, warm hopeful anthology story, really hopeful, really upbeat, really calming and peaceful. I've been listening to it while I'm riding my bike around the neighborhood. And it definitely, you know, Aethuran is a dark show, Starcalled has a lot of dark elements to it. And this is maybe the polar opposite. I think it's uh, it's really healthy for me.

**Zach Glass**

Some, sometimes in this world we need a little bit of positivity and calming nature at times.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, exactly. It's, you know, something to really lift you up and, and make you feel good. Because, yeah, I mean, I'm sure you know, like, we have characters who start in low places.

**Zach Glass**

Right

**Gabe Alvarez**

You know, these are, we're calling them heroes in title, but in deed, you know, like, I, I don't like you very much. You're, you're horrible. You're horrific.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah

**Gabe Alvarez**

And, you know, and it's sort of this promise to the audience that the only place that they can go is up.

**Zach Glass**

Right

**Gabe Alvarez**

You know, the the only thing that we can do with them is redeem them because we want them to be redeemed. We want to see them grow and become good. And you know, that's a nice

journey. But sometimes, sometimes you just want something nice. You want to be nice to your friends, and you want to have something nice and light.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah and to give them that redemption arc, you're like I'm really sorry but things are going to be terrible for you right now just to give you that space.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, you know, I hate you. And I'm writing you. I made you. You're despicable.

**Zach Glass**

Yeah so so sometimes you just want that that happy place So what was the name of the happy one again?

**Gabe Alvarez**

It's Flyest Fables.

**Zach Glass**

Flyest Fables, awesome. Well thank you so much for your time, thank you for for your work on Starcalled, and thank you for these these shout outs. the audio drama community especially these like solo indie products, like you know, we got all stick together and build each other up right?

**Gabe Alvarez**

Hey, thanks so much for having me Zach. This is such a is such a cool thing that you're doing

**Zach Glass**

Awesome, It's been a pleasure. I've really enjoyed speaking with you.

**Gabe Alvarez**

Yeah, you too.