**Writing Excuses**

# Season 3 Episode 1 World Building History

* Brandon: We're not going to talk about historical accuracy, that's a completely different podcast. We're going to talk about what you do -- what we do to get a feeling for the reader when they are reading our works that the characters have a history and that the world has a history, that things have happened in the past.
* Howard: That's really... the distinction that you drew there is that you do not have to write an entire history book before you can sit down and write a novel. Anyone who has been to college can compare the thickness of history books with the thickness of novels and determine where more writing would be involved. You need to create the illusion that that history exists.
* Brandon: It is the smoke and mirrors. Depending on what you're writing and what your goals are, there can be a lot more there. We talk about the iceberg. People like to talk about the iceberg a lot in writing, that you need this big weight underwater to support the peak. That's true, with a caveat. Sometimes, you don't want to put all that weight under there, you just want to make the reader feel that you do. In other places you are going to need to. The distinction is what are you going to use later on, how big of a work are you working on, how important is the history to the setting, all of these things.
* Brandon: One piece of advice I would give to readers is to decide what you are trying to do. There is a continuum here. There are people that work like Tolkien did. Connie Willis doesn't write a book every year. In fact, she has a book come out every three or four years or maybe every four or five years. She spent a lot of time researching them and a lot of time working on them and then finally releases the book to much critical acclaim. That's one end of the spectrum. The other end of the spectrum are the people who will remain nameless that are writing a book every two or three months. Obviously, if you are going to write a book every two or three months, you can't do any of that. I like to fall somewhere in between. I like to have a lot of weight of world building and planning, but I do want to be able to write a book every year. Because I want to be able to release a book every year, and I want to make a living at it yearly. If you're writing one every five years, that book's got to earn five times as much as the one I'm writing every year. I try for balance. I use smoke and mirrors in some places and I simply do the work in other places... For me, what I'm doing is... I will world build that sword. I will know the history of the empire, I will know the history of the sword, I will know the people who have held it. What I won't know are the histories of the other swords that don't appear in the book that I can mention. Since I've done all of the work on this one, you will assume smoke and mirrors that they all have that history too. That's what I'm doing, if that makes any sense whatsoever.
* Dan: One thing that I want to point out here that ties into that point, is in the actual study of history, one of the worst things you can do is what they call monocausationalism, which essentially says never assume that one thing caused something else. When you look at the Civil War, don't... we no longer say that that war was fought solely because of slavery. There's actually dozens of reasons that it happened. A piece of advice for listeners is when you're building a history, don't go the monocausationalist route. Have it round enough that you don't just point at one thing and simplify everything.
* Brandon: I want to jump in on this, because one of the notes I wrote down when preparing for this podcast is something that we have a problem with in fantasy is that. Not only will we often say there was one cause, but everyone in every nation all across the world knows… That's the cause. There is one history for the entire world. Remember also that history is defined by who is looking at it and who writes it down. Different people are going to interpret differently. You are going to have wildly different views on events that happened in the past. Now I wanna do say. This is tough to do. I've tried to do it... very hard to do. To have a small segment of characters and get across to people that the world is viewed in so many different ways. It's very difficult to do.
* Brandon: But I want to take one step back and say when you're world building history, ask yourself, "What is the purpose?" I am very goal driven when I write, and maybe this is why this helps me. But what is the purpose, why are you working on the history? I come up with two answers. One is to give the submersion, to make it feel like the world is real, and the other is to provide conflict, to set up conflicts that reach back through time that are now influencing the characters and making your main conflict here. When you are world building your history, looking at those two things and saying, "Why am I doing what I'm doing? How am I using this in my story? What is it going to add?" If the answer is it's not really going to add that much, it's just fun, that's when you stop.
* Brandon: One thing that... during the break... that producer Jordo brought up that I think is worthy of mentioning. Early on, the first half of the podcast, I kept wanting to ask the question and we never got to it, of how do you decide what is important enough to spend your time world building it, how do you pick these elements that you are going to put in? The advice he gave, which is great advice, is just write the thing. Then figure out where your points of conflict are. Or, as you're writing, you will come to a point and say, "This sword is becoming really important to this story. I'm going to need to know so that I can give the hints that I need to." At that point, you can stop and world build the sword. It's always okay to go back and fix it.

# Season 3 Episode 2 Keeping It Real

* Brandon: What about setting? How do you keep it real with your setting?
* Aprilynne: With Google maps. I like Google maps. I have never been to the little city that my book is set in, but I have seen it on Google maps so many times, I have done so much research into the city, it has some really cool landmarks, and I have seen a lot of photos.
* Dan: Let me offer a different take on that. My series is set in a very small town that does not exist. But it feels very real because I have lived in a lot of very small towns and been to a lot of very small towns and kind of distilled their essence. This is what tends to happen in small American towns -- there's usually one major industry that most people work for, there's usually nothing really fun to do if you're in high school -- all these different things that you take and then people can recognize that and go, "Oh, that feels like I know what that is. I recognize that." Even though it's a completely imaginary place.
* Brandon: That's like what Dan often says to do. You make the small details really important and really concrete, then you can get away with some of the larger scale vagueties.
* Dan: Again, a nice grounding in reality is a great place to start. The supernatural monsters in my books, I wanted them to feel very real, so first of all, we started off with serial killer behaviors. I knew that's how they were eventually going to be tracked and found by the protagonist, so let's start there. They act like serial killers, even though there's a supernatural reason why. Then I took the bad guy and I said, "Well, he's an evil monster that steals body parts and stuff. I'm going to give him a house and a family and a job and make him deal with that." There's reasons behind everything and you can look past the weird... the handwavium and you can say, "Well, I'm more interested in how this monster is trying to live in society then why he has to steal legs in order to do it."
* Brandon: And we're back. We've covered character and setting, let's talk plot. How do you make it feel real? This is a difficult thing with plot, because we're writing essentially... all of us are writing thrillers in a way, we're writing adventure stories. Things get pretty ridiculous in adventure stories. You have fairies that are plants, you have... People that jump because of shooting off of magical coins and stuff like this and the plot just kind of scales. By the end, if you were to read just the last chapter of a story like this, it would seem ludicrous. So how are you making the plot feel real and keeping your readers going along with all of these increasingly strange and ridiculous events?
* Aprilynne: I think the key to making a plot real is having your characters be real. It's the one that leads to the other. Because, like you said, in fantasy the plot is going to be overblown and huge and absolutely unbelievable. But if you have these characters who react in believable human ways, then it becomes a ground. It's like when you have a tent and you stake it down, you have your tent of fantasy staked down by your real characters.
* Dan: In our writing group, there is a great author named Eric James Stone. We've been going through a book of his. We ran into a great situation with this. In one of his books, he had this guy who was visited by this ghost. This kid had this ghost show up in his room at night. The very first thing he did was Stranger, Danger and he screamed for his dad and he ran. Incredibly plausible reaction. I've never seen a kid like that react that believably. That's how I think a real smart kid would react if a ghost showed up in his room and he didn't know immediately that it was a ghost. He'd say, "Why is there this weird LARPer guy in my room at the foot of my bed?" He would scream that it was a sexual pervert and try to get his dad. Things like that. Try to get those reactions as real as you can.
* Howard: Realism in plot, as Aprilynne said, it all comes down to character reactions, characters having believable motivations. Your characters have to be driving your plot. You can't say I want to have a galactic mega epic in which the good guys triumph over the bad guys and so on and so forth and have that feel real if the characters are not motivated to do that for you. The characters have to be doing that. The characters have to be deciding I'm being oppressed and I don't want to pay Lord Vader's taxes anymore and I'm angry that he blew up my planet. Their reactions have to be real. That will drive the plot. If the characters aren't driving the plot, you as the writer are driving the plot, and that's boring. I've got bad news, that's dull.
* Aprilynne: I had an instructor in college who said, "Don't mistake the plot for stuff happens." You can have all sorts of stuff happen, but if you don't care about the character and you don't know any of the history and everyone is acting like a moron, you don't care. You can have 12 things blowing up and still be yawning.
* Dan: I want to talk about research again because research can be very useful for plot in addition to character and setting. As you research, as you try to learn about these things, they will suggest plot hooks that feel very real that you hadn't seen coming. If you decide that you want to have plant-based fairies, and you start to research what the ramifications of that would be, that will suggest ideas to you. In the book I'm writing right now, I knew I wanted to have a schizophrenic character so I was studying a lot of schizophrenia. I studied the treatment, I studied the medication. The medication and the side effects thereof suggested a lot of ways that I could tweak the outline I had to fit much more into this real world application of the medication. That in itself made the plot, which is very crazy and weird, a lot more real, because of the research I did.
* Brandon: I'll add something else of my own on this. I would say baby steps are important. It comes back to the author is illusionist, again, which is one of my favorite metaphors. You'll notice that a lot of times the illusionist will step up, step by step, small tricks to larger tricks. Same thing with hypnotists, getting people to do small things and stepping up to the larger, more grand scale sorts of things. When we are building a plot, it's nice when things start rolling. You want to have an exciting hook, you want to have an exciting opening. But you want the believability to be stretched a little bit more and a little bit more and a little bit more, rather than trying to get them to swallow the whole thing at once. This is particularly true, I would say, for the urban genre -- or I guess the rural genre. If you're taking this world and stepping it into the next world, little baby steps. Piling them on top of each other and making sure that your foundation of characters is strong.
* Aprilynne: Specifically for dialogue, which is something that I'm good at -- pacing, not so much. I read my books out loud to myself. If you read them out loud and the dialogue sounds a little off, it probably is. But if you can just read along and your tongue doesn't trip over anything and it sounds like you're having a conversation, it probably is working.

# Season 3 Episode 3 Q&A, Also Stump Howard

* Audience: How do you deal with issues when you have a character that you want to be sympathetic but they believe things that you seriously disagree with?
* Dan: My main character in my series is a sociopath who obsesses over serial killers and thinks he's turning into one. That's not really me. I hope everyone understands that. I was able to make him sympathetic even though he is very creepy and very scary by making him funny. That was the very simple trick. People can identify with someone they laugh with.
* Brandon: I think also if you make someone consistent. Readers want to believe that this character is real. If they stick to their guns and they make good arguments that you disagree with, I think that will automatically build sympathy for them. So I would suggest don't make them a strawman. Meaning don't make them make weak arguments. Make him a strong character who believes what they believe and sticks to their guns. I think the readers will respect that, just like if you... think of people that you maybe respect that you disagree with. How do they act? How do they treat their views and try to do that?
* Eric: I think you give them some characteristics that people admire. You make them honorable. Or you make some very competent at what they do. Something that readers can identify with and say, "Okay, this is a good person even if they have some ideas I don't believe or agree with."
* Audience: You have a story. The story has a scene that is absolutely essential to the story. You as an author find it so distasteful to write that you come up against it and can't get through writing it. How do you deal with that?
* Dan: I had a scene in my first book which was very difficult to write. My sociopathic serial killer protagonist at one point pulls a knife on his mom. That was very hard to write. I was messed up for a few days before and after. The way I was able to get through it was just always keeping in the back of my mind why he was doing it, why it was important for the story, and trying to portray it as... this sounds weird, but as sensitively as I could. That's something that was very important to him. It was not very important to me. It's not something I hope I would ever do.
* Brandon: I've found that scenes like this tend to go one of two ways. Either they are one of the most powerful scenes in the book because the author has to struggle so much to write them. I would say in Serial Killer that's one of the most powerful scenes in the entire book. Or they fall completely on their face. I've written some like this that were really hard. I tried to write them. The reason that they were really hard, I realized after the fact, is that I'm just not equipped to write this scene. In that case I cut the scene and do it a different way. I've had someone listening outside as an argument happened and put it inside someone else's head reacting to it or I've used a different character viewpoint to be experiencing the scene or I've changed whose head I was in for that particular scene, these sorts of things. I juggle it up. I always try and write it first the way I think it should be written in case it's the Dan experience, which is it's just a hard, powerful emotional scene to write. When you get done, those are the scenes that are going to shine in your book, if it works.

# Season 3 Episode 4 Nonlinear Storytelling

* Brandon: Why do we use nonlinear storytelling?
* Howard: There's a zillion reasons to do it that are fun and that are also wrong. Doing it right, I believe, is because the pacing of the book... you want the book to have a big climax towards the end, and if the unfolding of the story is such that if you told it linearly, the climaxes are in the wrong place. In medias res allows you to put those climaxes together, so for instance if we have a flashback story and a current story...
* Dan: A fantastic example of this is Pulp Fiction which is told completely out of order. Yet when you watch it, you can tell every scene is in the order it should be in, even though that order is not chronological.
* Dan: Even Tolkien did this. The way his books are written, at least The Two Towers and Return of the King, you get a huge chunk -- half the book from a couple characters' point of view, and then the second half of the book is the same timeframe from somebody else's point of view.
* Brandon: Which is kind of a soft way to do nonlinear...
* Brandon: My answer to the question of why do we do it... I think it's more challenging, and makes then for a more challenging read, and if it's done well, there is a greater payoff. But the big danger is, since it's harder, you can do it poorly... And fall on your face. There is something to be said for taking something manageable, tackling that and doing it really well. There are a lot of stories that turn out really well when you do that. An example -- Mistborn. I decided not to do The Way of Kings. If you've heard this story, I had a contract for a book called The Way of Kings. I thought it was too ambitious a project for me at that time. I told Mistborn instead. Theoretically, no one could tell that I was taking something that was a little bit easier to do. Because you handle it really well, you get the same payoff, you tell a really great story. I tell beginning writers sometimes you don't want to bite off more than you can chew.
* Brandon: Let's talk about the follies first. We've talked a lot about them. What do people do wrong, what mistakes do they make?
* Howard: They use flashbacks to give you backstory about a character which isn't necessary. They show... they tell instead of showing.
* Brandon: You can really get lost in the main story using flashbacks. When I was a teenager, I wrote a flashback story. The story was essentially... I thought it was really deep and poignant... it was a guy walking across the desert. We would cut to him walking across the desert for a few seconds, and then we would jump into a dramatic flashback of his past, and then the guy in the desert, and then a dramatic flashback from his past and things like this. The thing was, the exciting story was all the flashback stuff. By framing it with this boring stuff of a guy walking across a desert, I made the exciting story boring and confusing. I sent it to a magazine. What they wrote back is we couldn't follow it, we were lost. By couching this exciting story in a boring story, I ruined the exciting story.
* Dan: The counter example to that is an episode of Firefly, which I believe is called Objects in Space, which is the same thing. Except it works because the frame story has a lot of tension. It has a time bomb... not an actual bomb, but there's a time limit, there is a deadline we're counting down to and that made the frame work.
* Brandon: My big problem was having a boring story and an exciting story and not telling the exciting story, telling the boring story. My other problem was not being able to cut in and out smoothly enough. I could say a big folly of using too many flashbacks is the whole not knowing how to weave in and out properly to keep people understanding what's going on.
* Brandon: In medias res... well, what is it?
* Dan: Into the midst of affairs. That would be the exact translation.
* Howard: So the question you're asking, Brandon, is how is in medias res different from in late, out early? And the answer is, with in late, out early, you are coming in late on the action, but you are beginning the story. With in medias res, you are coming in in the middle of the story. You may be coming in late on the action where it's more interesting, but you are going to go back and fill that gap that's come earlier.
* Brandon: Or just assume that people will catch on. Beforehand, I explained it like this. In late, out early is a guy walks into a bank and then a bank robbery happens. Too early is we see him get up, have breakfast, get in his car, drive to the bank -- all that boring stuff. In late is we get in and then the bank robbery happens. In medias res is you start the story as the gun man is shooting somebody. There are three people dead on the floor. The bank robbery is right in the middle.
* Howard: There are... I've seen... I think every television show out there has done an episode where we come in late on the action and then it goes to 24 hours earlier and you start seeing the pieces come together. Done well, you don't feel like I already know how this ends up so I don't care. You feel like well gosh I didn't get quite enough information when I saw that bank robbery, I wonder...
* Brandon: Done poorly, it feels like yet another gimmick. That every... like you said, we've all seen every TV show do.
* Dan: One of the tenets of writing suspense -- it's actually an Alfred Hitchcock quote which I'm paraphrasing. He said when a bomb is under a table and it goes off, that's action. When it's under a table and it doesn't go, that's suspense. You can use flashbacks in this way to build that. By showing us that there's a bomb under the table and even perhaps showing that it is going off, but then jumping back in time and letting us worry about it for a long time.
* Brandon: Another thing to remember though is not every in medias res story has to be tied to flashbacks. You can start in the middle of the action and everything be picked up through character dialogue and these sorts of things, where we pick up what has happened before and we know we're in the middle... it's essentially you're launching us into act two or the end of act one rather than starting at the beginning of act one.
* Dan: And I think what this is also illustrating... something else which is that a flashback can often be used instead of an info dump. But rather than having characters sit down and tell the story about the old pioneers or whatever, he actually shows the scenes with the old pioneers and that makes it work.
* Brandon: That's not appropriate for every story, but it is appropriate for some. A big warning. I was going to get into this earlier, I should say it now. Remember that in science fiction, fantasy, horror, we are writing in genres with steep learning curves already. When you add in medias res or you add a wealth of flashbacks, you can spike that learning curve up so fast that it can be very dangerous. When you use it correctly, it can give a much more fulfilling, a much more enriching story...

# Season 3 Episode 5 How to Take Criticism

* Brandon: That was insults. There is a difference. Kirkus Reviews, insults. Writing group... I'm joking, Kirkus. I love... no, I don't. Let's do some broad general questions first. What do you do to steel yourself to take criticism? How do you deal with it? How do you... whether it be a bad review or whether you are giving a book to someone and hoping they love it and when they come back, they say, "I liked it, but..." How do you deal with the but?
* Dan: One of the things that we mentioned when we did our writing group podcast is that you should not defend your work in a writing group. I think that applies to pretty much any criticism you get. You cannot take it defensively. Someone who is giving you criticism... and again, we are not really talking about insults, we're talking about... although I guess you could apply this as well to insults. They are telling you their reaction to your work. You can take that or leave it. You don't have to believe it. You don't have to accept it or change what you are doing.
* Brandon: They cannot be wrong in their reaction. Meaning their emotions are their own and belong to them. You can disagree with their reaction, but they have a right to their reaction. I think approaching it that way is a very good mindset to be in.
* Brandon: Not reading them. I'll tell you honestly I used to read all of my Amazon reviews. I used to do the whole thing where you Google yourself and go see what people are saying about you or things like this. I stopped doing it in 2007. Because every time I did, I either wanted to defend myself and felt that I was... it would ruin the day. Because if there were a 100 good reviews and one bad review, I wanted to take that one reviewer to task and explain how they were wrong and I am the font of all wisdom.
* Brandon: How are they going to have to steel themselves? They are going to start collecting rejection letters. How do you deal with the rejection letters? Because you can't not read them, or not pay attention to getting them. How do you do that?
* Howard: Rejection letters come in three flavors. There's the form rejection letter that basically says we got your thing. We didn't have time to write your name on this piece of paper. But here's a piece of paper that says we got your thing and we don't want it. Then there's the personalized rejection letter where the editor actually said something to you about your story. Then there is the rejection letter that says this isn't what we are looking for, but several of us liked your writing, and we want you to submit something else to us.
* Brandon: Or kind of the here is a bunch of stuff that's wrong with it -- hint, hint -- fix it and we'll look at it again, but we won't tell you that because if we do then it implies a promise.
* Brandon: Let's bring it personal to ourselves. Let's each talk about a time when we have gotten some feedback -- some constructive criticism on a piece -- and we have used it. Talk about why you decided to use it, why you ignored what you did ignore, and how it made your piece better.
* Howard: We talked about in medias res last week. I started the in medias res story, and understand, I've kind of got this outlined through the end, but I'm still writing it. Somebody posts on the forums, "Oh, this is a disaster. This is the end of Schlock Mercenary. I have never seen this done well in webcomics. It can't work in a serial format. Mister Taylor, you should just give up now."
* Brandon: Wow. There is that one guy we were talking about.
* Howard: There's that one guy. I remember reading that and I responded. I said, "If you're willing to stick around, I'm willing to prove you wrong." The only thing that changed was my determination to see this through and to do it right. Because I had looked at web cartoonists who have done it wrong. I had looked at books that had done it wrong. I had decided I need to tell this story and I need to do it right. All he did was tighten me up.
* Brandon: The example I've got... I have the luxury now of working with professional editors which is pretty nice because they tend to know what they are talking about quite often. Occasionally we have still disagreed. One of the biggest battles that my editor and I had was over Warbreaker. Which, by the time this airs, will have just come out. Maybe we should do a Warbreaker ad in there? Anyway, my editor wanted it to be funnier. Now, this was an odd comment. Because it was quite amusing. People had already talked about -- on the forums, as I posted chapters -- how much they liked the humor in this book. It was rather witty, it was doing well. There was a character who was... everything was working, just fine. Then my editor came to me and said, "I think it could be funnier." I said, "But everyone likes it." He said, "Yeah, but I think it could be funnier." This is the sort of problem that you run into is the it's working well enough, do I want to try to make it even better?
* Howard: It's also a problem where you look at your editor and you start wondering, "Well, what's wrong with you? Everybody else seems to get it."
* Brandon: Everybody else... that's exactly it. In fact, I remember posting in my blog saying, "Hey, everybody, my editor hates this character -- well, you know I'm exaggerating -- what do you think?" Everyone was like, "Oh, we love him, we love him, we love him. Everything is great. Peachy." My editor is like, "I don't care. I think it can be funnier. I think you can do better. It's good, it can be better." We had to talk for a long time before he said, "Look, just give it a try." I sat down and gave it a try. He was right. I was able to bring it up a notch. I think for me what I learned in that was the concept of "Hey, let's give it a try." It did turn out better. I could make it funnier.
* Dan: We've talked in the past about how my endings tend to be horrible on the first draft. Brandon can back this up. Every book I have ever submitted to a writing group, we get to the end and invariably they will say, "Seriously, that's your ending? That's horrible." They just don't work. I've been trying to work on that. It has gotten to the point that in my writing groups when I submit the last chapters, I just brace myself and say, "I know they are going to hate it, but at least by the time they are done with it, it will be good." I'm pleased to say just today my writing group did the last... the ending of the third Serial Killer book and they loved it. So hooray, I finally got it right. On the flip side, I consider myself to be pretty good at beginnings. I think that I do those very well. There is one person in my writing group however that doesn't like my beginnings at all. Thinks they are too slow, thinks that the arc of the story and the arc of the character is not present enough in the beginning. I struggled with that for a long time, because I thought that I like the way this works. It's fast enough, even though it seems slow. Eventually what I realized is that this person and I just have very different styles, very different needs, very different ways of viewing writing.
* Brandon: And neither is wrong, because there are so many different types of writing and readers.
* Dan: It is perfectly fine now for me to say, "Well, yes, thank you." I'll write it down. Then I don't need to worry about it because we just think different ways.
* Brandon: I'll share another example, a more disastrous example. Something I don't think I've talked about in the podcasts before. There was a book I was working on called The Lyre of Artinell [sp?].  This is one of the books I was working on when the Wheel of Time mountain fell on me. I was putting it through my writing group. I had done this book very exploratorally. As soon as the Wheel of Time came along, I had to take all focus off of this book and start working on the Wheel of Time. Although I got a draft of it done, it was a pretty uneven, bad draft. I started going through the writing group. The writing group had all sorts of terrible things to say about this book. That just piled up on the book. Every week it was this stuff is still terrible, Brandon. The problem was I wasn't going back and fixing any of it, so of course it was still going to be terrible. It became such a distasteful experience that I eventually had to pull that book from the writing group. Eventually the writing group fell apart without me submitting and things like this because I couldn't submit The Wheel of Time. The whole reason behind that was that they were telling me things that I already knew. Which was very difficult to hear, which is stuff I already knew that I couldn't fix. What I really needed to do was get that book into better shape before I solicited criticism. If there are already problems with it that I'm already aware of, why make the writing group tell it to me? In that case, it was Brandon, what were you thinking? Why did you do it this way? Anyone else got any final words?
* Howard: Yeah, one thing. Remember that when people are criticizing your writing, they are criticizing your writing. It's a reaction against your writing, it's in a reaction against you. The moment anybody starts criticizing you for your writing, you are allowed to start ignoring them completely and utterly forever.

# Season 3 Episode 6 Dramatic Breaks

* Brandon: What I'm talking about with dramatic breaks is learning how to break your story into scenes and little pieces in such a way that... Particularly, this is relating to our old adage of "in late, out early." Specifically, the out early. We're going to talk about ending scenes. What do you look for from ending a scene, how do you do it well?
* Dan: The easy answer to that question is something that will make the reader want to go on to the next scene. How do you do that? In my genre, horror and thriller, that is often with a cliffhanger or some other kind of tense lack of resolution.
* Brandon: I'm going to put you on the spot then, and ask you a couple of things. Number one, how do you keep it from getting old? When I read thrillers that I think are poorly written, it gets old very quickly for me. I keep thinking, "Oh, yeah, another cliffhanger. Another..." Bam, bam, bam. I get tired of it. How do you keep it fresh?
* Dan: What I did in the Serial Killer series is, I would try to pick two or three emotions that I wanted the reader to have. One of them being anxiety, one of them that I used was, "Oh, that's sad." Things like that, and then vary them. So at the end of this chapter, "Oh, no, I'm very anxious, I want to get to the next thing." The other one is, "Oh, no, that's a horrible way..." Fear is another good one, "I'm very scared." Picking those different things and just aiming for the different... there's not a lot of difference between fear and anxiety, but it is there. It's enough of a difference that it doesn't get old, it doesn't fall into a rut.
* Brandon: When people do this poorly... I think new writers do it poorly, I think sometimes they overdo it. I think that they feel like they want to have a cliffhanger so badly, that they always end on the exact same emotional state or exact same level of tension, not letting their book go through a natural progression. If you're always at a ten, the ten becomes a five. It becomes the average.
* Dan: You become very desensitized to the tension.
* Howard: The other new writer mistake... and I see it from old writers as well... is to substitute "and then something happened" for a cliffhanger. Where you're moving along and all of a sudden at the end of the chapter, something happens.
* Brandon: You're actually giving them a bit of the next scene.
* Dan: The big problem with that is that the dramatic arc of your chapters will not work. No chapter has a good arc when you do that.
* Brandon: Exactly. And that makes it unsatisfying. In fact, one of the things... my response to my own question would be, and I write in a different genre, listeners, keep this in mind... but I am looking for the last page of a scene to be satisfying, usually. Rather than... I don't cliffhanger as much as Dan does. It works very well in his genre. But for me, I have big chapters. I'm writing epic fantasy. I'm wanting to leave you with a sense of satisfaction that you are learning to know these characters and learning to understand the world and the situation so that you have a sense of enjoyment. Occasionally I will cliffhanger... But, yeah, I do want to give the sense that, "Wow, I am really enjoying this." That's the sense I got... someone who does this very well, this more epic sense, is JK Rowling. When I was reading the Harry Potter books, very rarely would I... a chapter in her books has a big arc, and usually between chapters, you've got a big time jump. So you're not jumping immediately to bam bam bam. You get to the end of a chapter and you just say, "Wow, I'm loving this. I want to keep reading." The goal is always to keep people reading, but there are different...
* Brandon: Something I'm seeing here is something we've talked about before which is the sense of progress. If what you want to do... you need to go into a scene wanting to accomplish things. Either subconsciously or consciously, you are accomplishing progression in character or plot in some way. When the reader gets done with that scene, they say, "I am further along than I was before." If you aren't giving them that in a scene... it doesn't really matter how long a scene is, I've noticed. If you do that across a very long chapter, sure your demands on how much satisfaction you're giving may be more. But in the long run, if someone gets done with your chapter, they hit a break point, and they say, "Wow. I felt like... I feel like I know the characters better or I felt like something has happened," you are successful. Just simply spending time enjoying the characters or enjoying the writing only can take you so far, I think.
* Brandon: One other thing I wanted to bring up. For me, when I am writing the end of a scene, I'm looking to bring the character out of the scene. I want to give this sort of subconscious cue to the reader that the scene is done. You usually find a short denouement in each of my chapters, which is something that I'm doing that I don't think a lot of thriller or horror writers are going to be doing. You'll get this arc, you'll get conflict, you'll get some sort of working within that conflict, you get introduction of other problems and mysteries. But as the scene ends, it'll slow down and the characters... I don't have the boring parts where they're going and getting into bed usually, but I will say, "And they walked out the door, intent on going and accomplishing the next task."
* Howard: And they stepped into the noisy street.
* Brandon: And they stepped into the noisy street. It's a cue that we're done.
* Dan: One of my favorite authors is Bernard Cornwell. He writes historical fiction, historical adventure fiction. One thing I've noticed with him is that most of his chapters will end with... I don't know whether to call it a conclusion or a thesis statement, but it's usually just a one sentence thing where he either sums up what just happened or he says, "And that's how I became this..." or "And then we started off to do this..."
* Brandon: I think there's a lot more to talk about on this topic. We probably should do a podcast sometime later about bringing satisfaction to the reader. But we are out of time today. I'm going to go ahead and ask Dan to give us our writing prompt.

# Season 3 Episode 7 Genre Blending

* Howard: When you take your genre and then do something with it that is outside. We talked about how that works better in YA.
* Brandon: One thing I've noticed recently. A friend was talking about the Star Trek movie First Contact which is my personal favorite Star Trek movie. He mentioned to me "that movie is just a zombie apocalypse movie with the Star Trek characters." If you're not familiar with this movie, there is this alien race -- The Borg -- that are slowly taking over the ship, one person at a time, dragging them off and turning them into one of them. It's very dark. The Borg don't use guns, they're marching toward the people zombielike... it really is a zombie apocalypse movie. I realized what Star Trek was doing for that was it was drawing tropes from a different genre and hiding them within its own genre.
* Brandon: The idea was J.A.G. in space. Lawyer books mixed with military science fiction. In the middle of space and these great SF settings and things. He said, "I think the problem was that the people who like lawyer books picked these up and said oh, lawyer book meets science fiction. I don't read science fiction, I'm not going to read these. The science fiction people picked them up and said oh, I don't read lawyer stuff and didn't read them." That's your danger with mixing genres.
* Howard: Let me give you an anecdote that's from a completely different medium. When StarCraft One was being beta tested at E3 -- it had to be an early beta, it might even have been an alpha. One of the kids who was watching the game looked up and watched the game and said, "Oh, cool, Orcs in space." One of the game leads was standing right over his shoulder and heard him say that. He went back to his team and said, "We have to start again. Because this is not supposed to be WarCraft in space, this is supposed to be something new." They went back and they retooled the game so it wasn't Orcs in Space. What they came up with was a lot more interesting.
* Brandon: The question is how do you avoid those problems? How do you genre blend without alienating both audiences?
* Howard: Don't let one of the audiences know they're invited?
* Dan: That's actually, as snarky as it sound, really good advice.
* Brandon: We do this all the time as writers. We do it a ton. I think you hit it right on the head. If those had been billed just as military science fiction books, people pick them up, read them, aren't really getting the lawyery vibes, they're just enjoying all the things that lawyer stories do without actually realizing they're reading a lawyer story.
* Brandon: I wanted people who are reading epic fantasy to read my books. These are the people who are going to love my books and are going to enjoy them. Between those pages, I am borrowing from the heist genre and I am borrowing from hard science fiction in creating my magic system. But when you pick up that book and look at it, what I want you to say is, "Wow. I love epic fantasy. I'm going to read this." What I'm trying to do is create epic fantasy that takes some cool things from other genres and adapts them to epic fantasy. That's one of the big things I had to do in revising Mistborn was not make it a heist novel. I had to make sure it was an epic fantasy that used some of the cool things.

# Season 3 Episode 8 What Star Trek Did Right

* Brandon: Let's get into it. We will break this down as we've done before to plot, setting, and character. Let's start with plot. What did the new Star Trek movie do well with plot   
  that our listeners should try to emulate?
* Howard: It took our expectations and our understandings and used them against us to surprise us.
* Dan: In what way?
* Howard: We went into this believing... now understand this is something that many writers won't have to deal with... the expectations of the audience going into this is, this is a prequel. This is where I learn how Kirk and Spock and Chekov and all these people came to be. What they did instead was they said we are going to focus on an event that changed the universe, changed history, because... and this is purely mercenary... we need to reboot the franchise because Paramount accidentally killed it.
* Brandon: What can we learn from this? Our listeners aren't probably going to be rebooting a major franchise...
* Howard: No, but they may have expectations...
* Howard: going into what they are writing. If you are writing epic fantasy, there are Tolkein-related expectations or Eddings-related expectations. Working with those, leading somebody...
* Brandon: Not undermining them, but building upon them.
* Howard: Not undermining, but leading somebody along and then surprising them by doing something that forces it to be different. I don't know, I can't think of an example. But obviously how Star Trek did it was they said, "And there's time travel, and the following things have changed. Look who's alive, look who's dead."
* Brandon: One thing about that, that I noticed that they did that I liked was they brought it up front pretty early. If our listeners are trying to twist a genre and do something really cool with it, one of the problems with that is, you're going to have to expect your... the way that a lot of people try to do it, you expect your readers to read an entire book of the sort of thing that they don't like that looks cliched so that at the ending you can say, "Aha, I'm not cliched." There's a danger there. You laugh, but I've seen published authors doing this.
* Dan: Here's another reason that their plot was so good, is that it focused on character climaxes more so than on plot climaxes, action climaxes. It's ostensibly the story of scary villain comes back and start blowing stuff up. It's really the story of Spock and Kirk becoming friends. That's what made it resonate with audiences.
* Howard: When events were conspiring to make them not be friends.
* Brandon: So it made that emotional connection. Which, depending on your genre, you may or may not want. I always want it in my books because I feel that action is only as valuable as your emotional attachment to the people...
* Howard: Characters need to drive the story, not the plot driving the story.
* Dan: That's probably a comment that we need to make going back to the first thing we were talking about of subverting genres. They didn't set out to subvert this so much as to expand it. To make it more accessible by adding stuff and taking out a few confusing things rather than... it would have played very differently if they'd gone in and said, "We're going to take Star Trek and totally mess it up."
* Brandon: I read an interview with JJ Abrams where he said, "I was a little bit worried because we are using the Star Trek world. We're not pulling any punches. This is not Star Trek like. We are using still a lot of the technical jargon. We are using this pre-built world." But what they did right was what Dan said, is that they focused on characters and had a very shallow learning curve for the characters even though the world has a steep learning curve. Which drew us into them and let us enjoy watching the movie.
* Dan: Each of the characters... and this was partially helped by the fact that they were dealing with iconic pre-existing characters... but each of the characters had very interesting hooks for the audience to latch onto. Here's the doctor who's bitter and distrusts technology. Here's the guy who has a weird accent and can't say his name.
* Howard: Here's the captain who is a bossy maverick. Here is the aloof, driven by logic, highly cerebral character. What they did instead of starting with these pre-existing conditions, they said let's talk about how that happened, why that happened, why that's important. We see those characters growing into that or at least [inaudible] it. That's how a good writer is going to need to do it.
* Dan: They didn't start with those, but they didn't end there, either. They didn't leave any of those characters as stereotypes. They just gave them identifiable hooks that we could all identify with and recognize who they were.
* Dan: Now you defined Spock's starting point as logic at the expense of passion. Kirk's starting point was the exact opposite. Passion at the expense of logic. He wanted to do whatever the heck he wanted to do, even if it was stupid and even if it would hurt him. Both of those arcs crossed each other as those characters gave the best of what they had to the other one.
* Brandon: So we're talking reversals. Actually, I think what we're talking about a lot here also... listeners can learn from this... is the characters are in conflict with themselves.
* Brandon: And then they put them directly in contrast with themselves... directly in conflict with that archetype, which makes them a fascinating character because they are against themselves.
* Dan: It created conflict within the character. Kirk obviously had to change. He had to learn more logic, he had to learn more self-control in order to become a good captain. That allowed the plot to work better because those two characters could butt against each other, help each other, and change each other as well.

# Season 3 Episode 9 Attending Cons

* Brandon: We have WorldCon -- World Science Fiction Convention -- coming up that all three of us are actually attending. We've spoken of cons before, about how, particularly for Dan and I, they were very instrumental in getting us published. So we thought we would do a podcast talking about how to use cons and conventions as an aspiring writer to further your career.
* Howard: And what not to do.
* Brandon: I want to lay a little groundwork because I've come to realize that when I say cons, I know what I mean, but a lot of aspiring writers aren't sure what cons are because there is a whole lot of stuff going on out there.
* Howard: There's differentiation... when you start differentiating conventions and conferences. One, conferences are professional associations where you are buying a fairly expensive membership for training. Conventions are things for fans which are usually broken down by genre -- anime cons, science-fiction fantasy media cons, sci-fi literary cons, horror conventions, costume conventions -- they are all very genre specific. You see some of that genre stuff bleeding over into conferences where you'll have... what is it, the BYU Writers for Young Readers...
* Brandon] Let's go over these four. We're going to spend the podcast talking about different types of people -- what they're trying to get out, different archetypes and how to use these various different conventions and cons. Just to run down the list, we've got literary con which would be WorldCon, or World Fantasy Convention, or World Horror...
* Brandon: A conference is where you pay money up front to go and learn from specific instructors for a period of time. So Orson Scott Card's Writing Boot Camp, or Maui Writers Conference...
* Dan: The Clarion workshops.
* Brandon: The last one will be tradeshows, like BEA for industry.
* Howard: Tradeshow/Expo.
* Brandon: Let's just take what I think a lot of our average listeners are. We have a person who is an aspiring science-fiction fantasy author who has written some, maybe even finished a couple of books, or is working on them. This person... if this person were going to attend one of these, which one should they attend and how do they make the most out of it?
* Howard: I'm going to put a stake in the ground and say don't bother with the media cons. The reason why is that if there is an author at a media con, the author is probably there doing a signing and is in and out. Because of the scheduling of a media con, is not in a position to answer questions. You're not likely to see an editor there. You're not likely to see an agent there. Your heroes who are there -- the Patrick Stewarts and the Hulk Hogans and whoever else happens to be at these media cons -- they're not interested in talking to you about your career. They're interested in talking about themselves and selling you a $40 photograph.
* Brandon: OK. Dan?
* Dan: I would agree. I would say what you need to be looking for are the first category that we talked about, the kind of literary World Fantasy... In fact, when I was at the World Horror Convention at the Stoker banquet, that's what David Hartwell said when somebody asked him this very question. He said World Fantasy is the first one that should be on your radar. Because it is a great con.
* Brandon: It was the first on ours.
* Dan: It's the first one Brandon and I went to. It's small. It has a ton of editors from every genre. They call it World Fantasy but it gets sci-fi guys. It gets horror guys. It gets everything.
* Howard: Why are you picking literary conventions instead of literary conferences? Because the education is going to be better at a conference, right?
* Brandon: My answer to you is that I'm not picking one over the other. I think they both have their value. We should talk about both of them and what to do at both of them. The reason Dan and I went to World Fantasy as opposed to Clarion is because we were dead broke. Clarion as I understand... Clarion and Odyssey and some of these... Orson Scott Card's Writing Boot Camp... David Farland does these and they are very effective. We got lucky in that we took Dave's class when he taught it at BYU, so it was just part of our curriculum. We didn't have to pay out of pocket.
* Dan: They're very different things, though, as I understand it. If you are going to one of these writing conferences, you're there for people to teach you things about writing.
* Brandon: It's like taking a class.
* Dan: Yeah. Whereas if you go to World Fantasy or one of these other cons, then you are there to try to meet people and network. So they have completely different reasons.
* Howard: I'm going to try to answer my own question. The investment is lower, and even if the event is a bust for you on meeting an editor or meeting an agent or selling a story, you're likely to have a good time because those panels are fun. There are fun things going on, and it's a little broader. Especially if you are new and you're trying to figure out what you like, what's your interest. You can network, you can make friends, you can figure out whether you are going to do Clarion or Maui or one of these others...
* Brandon: A lot of these... Worldcon and World Fantasy will often have panels given by the people who run Clarion or Odyssey. I've seen them.
* Brandon: You can go and ask them questions and determine if it is worth your money for you to put up the $3000. I've never talked to anyone who's gone to one of these that hasn't thought it was worth every penny. But getting six weeks off of work that you can go and live somewhere and take these things...
* Brandon: There's a few things that I've written down that I think we need to make note of that we skipped over. First of all, media cons aren't necessarily a complete waste of your money. Remember, these places are filled with fans, they're filled with aspiring writers. DragonCon has writing tracks. It'll have teach-you-how-to-write tracks.
* Brandon: Exactly. I walked into my first World Fantasy and Stephen Donaldson was speaking to an editor at Tor right there in the lobby.
* Howard: My first Worldcon... Worldcon is a little bit less exclusive in that the membership runs between 2500 and 7500, I think. When I was in Los Angeles, I think it was around 7500. I was walking around, running into my heroes. Every science fiction author I loved was there. I was amazed. I didn't know yet that I should be looking for editors. One of the things that happened to me at that convention was, instead of going to the Hugos and cheering for Brandon and I went out for sushi with Phil Folio. Phil and I... I saw him in line for something and said, "Hey, Phil, you want to have dinner together?" We talked for two hours. I learned more in that two hours than I learned in the previous two years.
* Brandon: I went out for dinner with Kevin Anderson and did the same thing. Plying him with questions and things. This sounds like, "Oh, you guys are name dropping." The thing is that first World Fantasy that we walked in, we walked up... I remember walking up to Stephen Donaldson and saying, "I love your books." He's like, "Oh, great" and he brought me into the conversation. I sat there and chatted with him and the editor and people because this con is very small. He could see I was there for the con, he's a nice guy, this sort of thing can happen. We do want to... we will spend next week talking about this too.
* Howard: Name dropping in the other direction. I have had people come up to me at Worldcon, we've conversed, I've realized, "Oh, you've got books that are being sold electronically. That's fascinating, tell me about them. Oh, I want to read them." I go home and I blog them. Suddenly their books are on the top of that epublisher sales list because I drive a blog that's got a lot of readers.

# Season 3 Episode 10 Do’s and Don’ts of Attending Cons

* Howard: So you are attending a convention as an aspiring professional. You see your hero whose ear you want to bend, whose time you want to spend, sitting at a booth. You walk up to him and introduce yourself. There are right ways and wrong ways to do this. Being overbearing and creepy and I'm your number one fan... never say number one fan... The guy that you don't want to be is the guy who walks up to the booth, introduces himself, and then stands a little bit off center for 25 or 30 minutes just staring.
* Brandon: That's fine if you're a fan. But I think what Howard is pointing out is, you want to present yourself as a professional if you are an aspiring professional. People tend to think of you how you present yourself. But the question is why are you going out and talking to your hero in the first place? Can you approach that as a professional, what can you get from it, what are you looking to get from it, what...
* Howard: Let me tell you about my first meeting with Steve Jackson at ComicCon. I walked up to Steve Jackson's booth. In front of me was my friend Richard who has been a fan of Steve Jackson forever. He said, "Hello, Mister Jackson. I don't know if you remember me, but you and I talked at a convention 15 years ago at BYU." Richard kind of went fan boy gushing. Steve went glassy-eyed and slack-jawed. "Oh, one of these guys." Richard turned around after he had done this and looked at me and said, "What have I done? Usually I'm very articulate, and I just went all fan boy on my hero." I stepped past Richard and reached out and shook Steve's hand and said, "Hi, Mister Jackson. My name is Howard Tayler and I've been anxious to meet you." Steve and I had communicated via e-mail. He shook my hand and said, "Oh, I've been meaning to talk to you, too." "Well, Steve, I've got some time right now, can we go talk?" Steve said yes and it was awesome. We went and sat down and talked about all kinds of things. What grew out of that was the publication of Schlock books. He was hugely helpful -- instrumental in making that happen. Richard is a marketing genius, and didn't understand that that fan boy moment will creep up on you and make you say dumb things. I've said exactly those dumb things. I said them to Larry Niven two years earlier, which I hope Larry doesn't remember, but I remember it. "Hi, Mister Niven. I'm a huge fan of yours. I think I've read everything you've written." He looked at me, straight in the eye, and said, "I doubt it."
* Brandon: Whenever someone says, "I've read your books," I love them. I am flattered. I don't mind if people come up to me and say, "I've read all your books. I think you're a wonderful writer." Hey, that's great. I think it's the next step. I think what we're looking at here is you as an aspiring writer approaching one of these old pros are hoping for advice. This is what I... at least that's what Dan and I were looking for. When we would go and talk to an author, we would want to know a couple of things. We would want to know who their editor was, who their agent was. How they got their editor, how they got their agent? Why they decided to pick that editor, that agent? If they had any specific advice for aspiring writers, that sort of thing.
* Howard: Getting those answers out of them at the booth might be tricky. That's why the question I would lead with... because this is a question they are prepared to answer and want to answer... that is, what panels are you on that you think I as an aspiring writer should absolutely attend?
* Brandon: That's a great question. That's an excellent question. Though we do have to point out there aren't going to be any booths at WorldCon. Well, there are, but...
* Dan: We're talking about a signing or a reading, I think. Meeting them at a table...
* Howard: If you see them at a signing or a reading, or at a media convention, you might see them there... if you bump into them in the hall, that's a good opening question.
* Brandon: Dan and I would often lead with "Do you have a few minutes some time to sit down and chat?" What we were looking for was not... we want to demand your time right now... we were trying to be schedule conscious. If they gave us five minutes some time that we could sit down and chat with them at their own leisure... A lot of them would, especially at World Fantasy. They'd say, "Yeah, sure, I'm going to be at the bar getting drinks between these two...
* Brandon: Here's what we can say about Tom Doherty. Tom Doherty, we didn't realize, is a publisher, not an editor. We were looking for editors. We found Tom Doherty, the head CEO publisher of Tor. We thought let's talk to him. What we didn't realize is a publisher generally hires editors to do the acquisition. Tom was not going to acquire or read our books, he would have editors to do that.
* Dan: What that experience taught us is that we needed a better plan. The next time I think it was that same day we said we're going to target people. We're going to know who we need to talk to, we're going to find them, and we're going to talk to them. That's how we found the editor that we have. We were talking to... I don't remember who said, "There's a new editor at Tor who's currently acquiring books. His name is Moshe Feder. You should find him." We spent two straight days looking for him. Finally found him.
* Brandon: But at that same con with Tom, I think it was Ginger Buchanan. After the Tom thing, we thought, "Wow, we approached that wrong." Because it was stopping him in the hall and he was trying to get away. That's when we said let's just ask them if they have time sometime. We went to a panel that we knew Ginger was on. We sat and we listened to her panel. Then afterward we walked up to her and said, "We are aspiring writers who would like to have you answer some questions. We don't want to hand you a manuscript. We just want some advice. Do you have a few minutes sometime?" She said yes. She gave us a few minutes. Happened to be right after that panel. Let's break for a commercial. And then let's come back.
* Brandon: And we're back. I want to say a few things about what's going on here and I want to add some caveats. The first thing is, Dan and I were aggressive. We're not necessarily saying that you need to be aggressive or that you should be as aggressive as we were. We are both outgoing types, very bullheaded, and very go-get'em types. We had spent the money on this con, we researched the editors who were there, we got a list of them. We had Peter do a lot of that because he's better at it than us. Then we sought out these editors specifically with questions to ask them.
* Howard: And you both now have writing careers.
* Brandon: We both now have writing careers. But let's add some caveats here. We have the type of personalities that works for. Number two, we learned very quickly not to be belligerent. I don't think we were belligerent at the beginning, but we were a little bit too much.
* Dan: We learned how to do it right, and a little later we'll talk about some easy...
* Brandon: Talk to it. Go for it.
* Dan: Right now? You want to go for it now? By the time we found Moshe, we knew what we were doing. I'll just walk you through that process. First thing we did is we found him because we all had name tags. We said, "Oh, Moshe." We did the standard introduction. "We are aspiring authors. We would like to talk to you. We would like to get some advice." He said sure, I've got a few minutes. The first question was, "What are you working on right now?" That's a great question for an editor because they are there to sell stuff just the same way you are. They love to talk about what they're working on right now. It gives them a great outlet for that. He told us for about 45 minutes about some mathematical thing that he was working on. Then at the end we said, "That sounds great. We've got some books of our own, we'd like to send them to you. Would that be OK?" He said sure. That's pretty much all it took.
* Brandon: We sent them to him. Later on, he told me, he said, "I didn't want to reject your book without actually reading it because you seemed like such a darned nice guy." He said that specifically to me after he'd bought me... bought my first novel.
* Howard: Can I point out something that both of you... I wasn't there, but I'm sure both of you did this right. You had showered that day, and you were not dressed as storm troopers.
* Brandon: No. There's nothing wrong with dressing as a storm trooper, but it's the... what... present yourself. If you want to go to one of these cons and do cosplay, that's great. Do that for the masquerade. Set aside distinct times when you are going to be going and talking to editors. When you go to the parties where the editors are, go dressed... don't get drunk. Go dressed looking like a professional. That does not mean in this business white shirt and tie. This is relaxed environment. Business casual.
* Brandon: Something like this. This sort of thing. You're looking to present yourself as a professional. After the last podcast, Jordan said something that was very lucid, I think. He said to us, "This is what happens at all conferences in any professional career you're in. People go to network." People go to Worldcon and World Fantasy -- editors and authors -- often go to network. That's not exclusively why they go. Editors will also be going, and authors will be going, to promote themselves or the books they're working on. They will go to have fun and meet their friends. They will be doing all of these things. But they are also there as professionals in their professional environment. Authors generally want to talk to you because they want to convince you to buy their books. Editors are willing to talk to you because they are there looking for people to acquire a lot of time. You are not imposing upon them. Though, let's take a step back and give the reminder... we've said this before I believe on the podcast... these conventions are run by fans, nonprofit, who love fandom and are throwing these bashes to celebrate fandom. The industry professionals are there as guests. We've talked a lot about the industry professionals using these conventions, but remember that you are a guest. These things really exist for the fans to go and have a panel where they discuss why Firefly is awesome or how to create a storm trooper costume. But the industry has started to jump on these, particularly Worldcon and World Fantasy, as places to congregate to chat. World Fantasy -- there are no costumes, it's only a professional convention. But Worldcon... if you're going to Worldcon, don't go with some sense of entitlement that it is for you. Worldcon is a place for people together and have fun. A lot of them have very different motives. Your motive can be I am going to go meet these specific individuals, and get their advice, find out whose agent represents whom. Remember you can also have fun. Howard talked about this. Dan and I didn't do a lot of it. Now I do much more of it. You can go and have fun.
* Brandon: Sitting and chatting with Moshe that night at the party... where, after he agreed to look at our stuff, we still chatted with him for an hour about our favorite books. It was a blast.
* Dan: Yeah. And it was just hanging out. That's the kind of thing that you can do at these. One thing I want to point out because Worldcon... by the time this airs... is going to be just a couple of days. Worldcon is especially great because like we said editors are there in part because they are trying to sell their own books. Each major publisher does its own panel where they basically just do a slideshow of everything they've got coming out in the next six or seven months.
* Howard: You can learn a lot.
* Dan: You can learn so much. That is an opportunity for you to sit there for 50 minutes and listen to the editors you want to sell to talk about what they love.
* Brandon: Yeah, and what they bought.
* Dan: What they've bought, what they're looking for, what they focus on. I have met so many editors that way, just sitting in the back and going OK, I really agree with her, I really think that guy would like this particular book I've written. Then you go up after and you do your standard little soft approach. It works great.
* Brandon: Two quick don'ts. Don't have a manuscript in hand to give to them. You can bring one to the con if you want. In your room. Don't carry it around with you. Just in case, the one in a billion chance someone says, "Yeah, go ahead. If you've got one right now I'll take it." Say I'll have it delivered to your room, or go run and get it for them and bring it to them at the next panel. Don't carry it around. It's intimidating.
* Dan: I would say don't even offer to give it to them. Because most of them aren't going to want it. If they ask for it, sure. But for the most part...
* Dan: Most of what you are going to be doing after you get that golden answer where they say, "Sure, I'll take a look at your book." You make sure to get their contact information. You go home, you print it out, you stick it on an envelope, you write "Requested Material" on it. You address it to that editor personally. Another thing David Hartwell told me is that if you address it to an editor, the editor will read it. If you address it to a publishing house, it gets read by the high school interns who are working there for the summer. You send it like that and then it goes to the top of the pile because it says "Requested Material" on the envelope.
* Brandon: Don't number two. Never go up to them and ask them, "What are you looking for?" Don't ask that. So many people want to ask that.
* Dan: That's an awful question.
* Brandon: The reason it's an awful question is because they're looking for great fiction. They're not going to say, "Oh, I only want this or I only want that." Now through conversation, you can sometimes get out of them that they are very interested in teen girl romance vampire books or they're very interested in this and that can help you. But don't just... that question's like a call of death. Do go planning to take notes. Understand if you're not one of the people... and we're going a little bit long, but I think we can on this one?
* Brandon: If you're not one of the people that's like Dan or Howard or I that's very in-your-face, understand that you can go and you can network without networking. Meaning you can go listen to panels that editors are sitting on, that agents are sitting on, and write down the stuff that Dan said.
* Howard: I need to link to it in the sidebar... or not in the sidebar, but in the liner notes. I think her name is Diana Rowland wrote a fantastic list of how to work a party for writers, for introverts. Something that said this is how you act like the sort of person who... because if you're an introvert, and... I am an introvert. I don't sound like one...
* Brandon: Next thing. Look for blogs. Meaning go to the con. If you talk to an editor and you're scared to ask them anything else, you can at least say, "Hey, do you have a blog? A professional blog that people can follow?" A lot of them do. These are wonderful ways to make a contact that you can follow and read what this editor or agent is talking about and see what they're interested in. Do go planning to listen to panels on writing even if there is not an editor sitting on them. We've focused a lot on editors, but you can learn a lot just by sitting and listening to Terry Pratchett and Stephen Donaldson and John Ringo and these people.

# Season 3 Episode 11 Trimming

* Brandon: This is a revision podcast where we are going to talk about perhaps the most important part of revision which is learning to trim. Learning to cut down your stories. Let's just start with the blanket question of why? Why do we want to cut down our stories? Do we need to cut down our stories? Dan?
* Dan: As a rule of thumb, you can look at any given manuscript and assume it probably is longer than it needs to be. It usually is true.
* Brandon: Is it ever not true? That's a loaded question because I have met the very occasional author who is too sparse in their writing.
* Howard: If you're William Faulkner or James Joyce and you're writing literary fiction that you don't really want to be read during your lifetime, but you are just so in love with your prose that you are going to use these words and you are going to use them in abundance, then trimming is anathema. But even then there's going to be wordsmithing and finding better ways to say it.
* Dan: Trimming forces you to cut down, to take out the fat so that what's left is lean and mean and effective. That you say what you need to say in the best possible way. Without any bloat. That usually has the effect of making the pace go a little bit better, of making the writing snappier...
* Brandon: Clarity. It helps with clarity a lot.
* Howard: When you say trimming the fat... we had a podcast where we talked about killing your darlings. Trimming fat and killing your darlings are two different things. Killing your darlings is when there is something that you loved that's in that book that's hurting the book or it belongs in another book, it needs its own story, and it has to go. Trimming the fat is when you have a whole bunch of 20 word sentences that should be seven word sentences.
* Brandon: Hopefully not all of them are going to be cut that much.
* Dan: I was talking to F. Paul Wilson at the Stoker awards. He said that when he sent his first manuscript to an editor or agent, I can't remember which, he sent it back just bleeding red. One of the things he noticed on looking at that guy's edit of it was that he had a strong tendency to say things twice. A lot of authors do that without even knowing that we do it.
* Brandon: I do it a lot. A lot of writers do it. One of the things that we tend to do, and I've mentioned this before, is often as you are learning and getting better as a writer out you will start showing instead of telling. But you will then still tell because your old instincts say, "Oh, maybe they didn't get it." You'll do this wonderfully showy paragraph where you're showing a lot about this character and then tell us the same thing in the next sentence.
* Howard: Now the problem for me is that I can’t get to that new first line of dialogue without writing the crappy old one. Don’t plan on writing and not having to trim.
* Dan: That's why we're calling this the revision podcast. This is what you do after you have written the first draft.
* Brandon: It would be great if we could all learn to write just perfectly concise right as we're going along. But that doesn't happen for a lot of us. If it does, it happens late in our careers. Because... I am... there's so many things to juggle when you're writing. Keeping track of plot, setting, and character. Giving clues for your mysteries and foreshadowing and character depth and all of this. Generally, my strategy is to put too much in and then read through it again completely and see what can come out. Oftentimes I will restate the same thing chapter by chapter... not even in the same chapter, but it has been three weeks since I've written a scene from this character's viewpoint. I'd write myself back into the character's viewpoint. Yet the reader... there's only one chapter in between. They don't need that all restated for them. It's me trying to feel the character...
* Howard: Jerry was talking about Mote In God's Eye. He said we needed to shorten the book by 10%. Each page was about 500 words long. He and Larry Niven sat down and said, "Well, we need to remove 50 words per page." They kept a little chart. They go through the page and remove words, shorten sentences, tighten up paragraphs, and keep a log of how much shorter it got. If one page was 53 words shorter, that was great because the next page might be hard to trim and they would only get 47 words out. They went through the whole book that way. He said it was very tedious but it also tightened up the writing enormously. The point that he made during that panel repeatedly when we talked about crispy crunchy writing was that book continues to earn him and Larry very respectable royalties every year because it's an easy read, it doesn't take itself, and...
* Brandon: The writing is snappy. I love that book. It's a great book. I like that story because this is the strategy that I use. When my editor came to me on Elantris and said, "You really need to trim this, Brandon. I want it shorter by 10%." My logical mind said, "Okay, I'll trim every page by 10% that way I'll know." I did the same thing. I said this chapter is this many words long... I did it by chapter, not by page. Said I have to read through and trim this chapter until I've got it down by 20%.
* Dan: First of all, writing group is extraordinarily helpful for me in this. Because I can give it to them, to people who have never read it before, and they can point out things that are too big, unnecessarily big. This is a place where the plot is slow -- it usually a big key for me. The tension here is slowing down, the plot is slowing down here, and it doesn't feel like it should. There are places where you want it to slow down and be a breath. But if it's not one of those places where I want it to be slow, I go, "Oh, okay. Obviously it's too long or this scene shouldn't be there at all. I need to trim this down."
* Brandon: So you're spot trimming. You're looking at specific scenes?
* Dan: U-huh. I have never gone through percentage wise and tried to cut out words like that. It's mostly just a scene by scene... does this need to be here, is this saying what it needs to say, is it saying too much?
* Dan: Another piece of advice. This sounds kind of artsy fartsy, but I've talked about poetry before. I think studying poetry and writing poetry really teaches you how to use words better. Not necessarily because you want your prose to be more poetic, but because it's going to give you more facility with words themselves, and saying things in a different way.
* Howard: A couple of weeks back, when I mentioned that prose trick of word matching between the end of a chapter and the beginning of a chapter... that's the sort of thing that poetry does all the time. Those sorts of tricks will serve you well in tightening up your prose. You communicate more effectively. It's not just using the words to describe things. The words have... words have more attached to them than just meaning. They have shape, they have texture, they have sound. You need to explore that in order for your prose to really snap.
* Howard: But usually when I'm trimming things, the first thing I look for is do I need the adjectives? Are the adjectives there to convey emotions or are the adjectives there because that's the way I said it the first time I said it? So I'll go after the adjectives first. Mark Twain said never use the word very. Go through your manuscript and replace the word very with the word damn. Then your editor will edit your document and remove all the obscenity. Your document will have improved both times.
* Dan: A great trick for prose is dialogue tags. Look for dialogue tags. See if you've got the little Tom Swifties in there. See if you even need them. On a second read through, it might be obvious who's talking. You don't need to say he said after every single line.
* Brandon: Another one, good places usually to trim, and I say this because it's very close to my heart and it's something I do a lot, is navelgazing. Navelgazing is the phrase they use in editing circles of the character sitting around and thinking about important stuff. Stuff that's important to them. You can get a lot of character depth and a lot of character conflict through a very personal scene with the character doing introspection. But the longer you do that, the more bloated it's going to become and feel.
* Brandon: I'm a big proponent of the character taking a moment to consider their problems. These are the scenes I'm talking about. Now maybe you want to approach that scene as a dialogue scene instead. It's one of the basic ways to show versus tell.
* Brandon: I do navelgazing. I like navelgazing. But usually it can be trimmed by about 50% as opposed to 10%.
* Dan: When people talk about how a story is too angsty, that's because the navelgazing hasn't been properly trimmed.
* Brandon: Let's see. We've talked about repetition in paragraphs. Keep an eye out for that, repeating yourself in or across chapters. The passive voice. If you don't know what the passive voice is, we probably don't have time to explain it and we would probably sound like dufuses trying to do so. But it is a really big problem. One of the really big reasons why we say don't use the passive voice is because the passive voice generally takes extra words. That you don't need.
* Howard: It takes extra words and it sucks up the energy from the story and makes it go slowly.
* Dan: It doesn't read as quick and snappy.

# Season 3 Episode 12 Subplots

* Dan: A subplot is a secondary plot... another thread of story that runs along parallel to the main story. There could be lots of them. They might last the full length of the main story or they might come and go, depending on how big of a story you're telling. Sometimes they relate directly to the main theme and sometimes they don't. Just an extra little story in there to flesh out the main one.
* Brandon: That launches us into why. Howard? Why subplots? You are very good with subplots in Schlock Mercenary. Why do you use them?
* Howard: Because the main plot is usually only developing maybe two or three characters at the most. If there isn't something else happening, everybody else feels like a cardboard cutout. Everybody else has to have something interesting. Everybody else... everybody in the book feels like they are the hero of their own story. For that to be true, they have got to be doing something, even if they're just sweeping.
* Brandon: Reason number one, to flesh out other characters for the express purpose of making the world feel more real. I would add, another reason, depending on your genre, can simply be to keep the tension high. Sometimes you've got a large overarching plot where it doesn't feel really tense because you're taking little steps towards something huge.
* Dan: The scope of your main plot is usually so big that especially in the early scenes when that is still developing, you need something else in there to add that tension or add that emotion or whatever it is that the current phase of the main plot isn't doing.
* Howard: One other reason is the whole explain-something-small-in-great-detail and then give something big a wide miss. In the most recent Harry Potter movie, the subplots of confused horny teenagers was brilliantly executed, brilliantly acted. I believed that those 20-year-old kids were 15 and 16 year old teens. They had me completely convinced. That sells the rest of the story. Those subplots had me firmly embedded in a universe in which you can dip your head in a fishbowl and see somebody else's memories.
* Dan: That's a good point. Subplots can provide realism in that way. If you buy into a little subplot about a character who is sad, or depressed or angry or whatever he is, then all of a sudden you are connected to that story and you are connected to that book and that's going to make everything else feel more real.
* Brandon: Another reason for subplots I would say is your learning curve. With a subplot you can introduce an element of the story or world before it becomes important to the main plot which allows you to play with it a little bit, show what it is so that later on when it becomes vitally important to the main characters as part of the main plot, you've foreshadowed it. It helps with your learning curve.
* Brandon: I'll reiterate also the keep-the-tension-high thing because I think we got distracted from it. Your characters are making this long march to this distant point and that's very important. Them running out of food for a couple of days and having to go hunting or this sort of thing can give us an immediate threat that can be overcome quickly which gives us a sense of progression because we're accomplishing things and it makes our characters protag as Howard puts it.
* Brandon: Do's and don'ts of subplots. Howard?
* Howard: Don't make the subplot more interesting than the main plot.
* Brandon: This is a big danger.
* Howard: It's really dangerous. I think the most recent Harry Potter film did that. I watched Harry Potter, I came out, and I thought wow, I was totally sold. The main plot in the book of Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince was who is the Half Blood Prince and how does this tie into the horcruxes and all this other stuff. In the film, all I really got was confused horny teenagers and oh, cool wizard fireballs at the end.
* Dan: I read that in countless reviews that the revelation of the Half Blood Prince really felt tacked on because they let the subplots overwhelm their main plot.
* Brandon: All right. Why not? Why is this a bad thing?
* Dan: It's a bad thing... first of all, it's a difficult thing to do. Because as we talked about for a certain amount of time you often want a subplot to be more interesting because that's why you put it there in the first place.
* Brandon: It's a difficult thing NOT to do?
* Dan: Yeah, it's difficult not to let that subplot take over because part of the reason it's there is because it's supposed to be cool. Why is it bad to let it take over? For the same reason that you don't want a minor character to be more interesting than your main character. Because that's what they need to invest in, that's what the reader needs to invest emotionally in order to make it all the way through your story. They need to be completely fired up about your main plot, they need to be loving or hating your main character. If all these other things keep distracting them, then it's going to be an anti-climax when they get to the end.
* Brandon: But the reason... getting back to my original question, I like what Dan said. Let me break it apart. He said number one I think he was talking about your ending will feel flat. That will partially come because your reader will get bored of a subplot pretty quickly because most subplots are not intended to be the overarching plot.
* Howard: A subplot doesn't resolve with triumph. A subplot results with a measure of satisfaction or disappointment.
* Brandon: The characters are hunting for food in our example before. If you stretch that into the main plot or let it overshadow the main plot, they are always hunting for this food. It's going to be boring because that's not a book dominating...
* Dan: It could be, but then you have to focus on it very specifically and it would be a very different book.
* Brandon: Or if you're reveling in hunting and you're so good at it that it's dominating... it's the same sort of thing that I think we said with side characters. Why not tell that story? Why not build a proper plot for that story? Let it be it's own book. Give it its own three act, try-fail cycles, all of this sort of stuff that makes a really great plot line. Write a book about it.
* Howard: That's really good advice. If you're sitting down and writing for the first time and you are worried that a subplot is taking over the story, write it as interesting as you want to write it. When you get to the end of the book, hand it to somebody else and find out what they thought.
* Brandon: Yeah. If it's distracting, then you can cut it. If it's fascinating and they want more and they are annoyed that all this other stuff is going on, you could make that either the focus of a new book or you could revise the book so it becomes the focus.
* Brandon: I'm wrapping up. But what I'm saying is, it depends on the book you're trying to do and what you're trying to accomplish. The Wheel of Time... one of the things people like about it is... for re-readability, when you read through, you can then pay attention to some of these smaller subplots and latch onto them. Also, the sheer weight of it... large numbers of subplots are what make it feel epic. But I think your advice of keeping them smaller particularly for newer writers is great advice. One of the things I pointed out before, if you look at the Wheel of Time, it starts with two or three. Then it starts to add. Then it adds more and it adds more and it adds more, until what's really going on is that you have 3 to 5 main plots and a dozen subplots.
* Dan: One of the reasons that that is possible in Wheel of Time is because it has so many characters. When you are looking at how many subplots you want to include, how many characters you have and especially how many viewpoint characters I think will give you a good idea of how many to include. If you've only got one guy, and the entire book is from his point of view, you probably don't need that many because it would just overwhelm that character.
* Dan: Certainly for first time or early writers... I don't even use more than three or four subplots in a book because it's very difficult to give them all the attention that they deserve. As you mature and as you become a better writer, you'll be able to do that more effectively.
* Howard: Last minute question. Plot twists... our whole podcast on plot twists... do plot twists apply to subplots?
* Brandon: Yes. Because a lot of times your subplot becoming part of the main plot is a great way to have a plot twist.
* Brandon: How do we make our subplots feel real and three-dimensional instead of it being just filler?
* Brandon: I think... the answer that I would give would be try to make your subplots either advance character, advance the main plot somehow by the end of them, or reveal something about setting.

# Season 3 Episode 13 Dialects and In-World Jargon

* Brandon: What in fiction generally we are talking about is when you are changing the words to emulate the way that someone speaks or sounds. If you read Huck Finn, you will see an excellent example of someone using dialect.
* Dan: An excellent example that I am not necessarily going to want anyone to follow. Because even Mark Twain, who was very, very good at it... it's still very difficult to read.
* Brandon: Name of the Wind has a section where he lapses into dialect and he does it strictly in the same way that Twain did. I loved it. But let's get into what Dan said before. What are the dangers of using a dialect that way?
* Dan: The danger is first of all that it's going to be hard to read. Mark Twain in Huckleberry Finn, in the preface, he says that right out front. He says first of all, yes I did these all right. I'm smarter than you. Don't tell me they're wrong. Second, he said a lot of you aren't going to be able to read them and I'm sorry about that. For example, in Name of the Wind, that section where he lapses into dialect, that was the section where I almost stopped reading the book because it was so hard for me to get through it.
* Brandon: Why is it so hard?
* Dan: Partly because like Howard said, they only really work if you read them out loud. Once you start deliberately misspelling things in order to reproduce a sound, then it has an aural complement that doesn't work on the written page. It only really comes into its own when you're saying it out loud, for the most part.
* Brandon: The reason I would say that we're having problems when we read with these dialects... a lot of us are striving for what we've called... we've talked about translucent prose. Storytelling... there are different types of storytelling. People are trying to achieve different things in their prose. Generally, in popular fiction, we are striving to have our prose be invisible, so that you can see through the book and see an image, a scene unfolding. When you have to stop and figure out what the words are, it's like the director freezing... the movie theater freezing the frame and popping you out. You have to cock your head and figure out what's going on again. It drop kicks you out.
* Dan: Now, there are other ways like we talked about. Deliberate misspellings to reproduce a sound is one way to do it. A less obtrusive way is stuff like taking off the "g"s, using words like ain't. Changing the word choice is often all you need.
* Brandon: Let's talk about that.
* Dan: For example in our writing group on Friday, there was one guy who submitted a chapter where there was a Russian character. I don't think he spelled any of those words differently. But because of the words he chose and the order he put them in the sentence, that Russian accent came across really, really strongly.
* Brandon: How do you do this? What are some specifics we can tell our listeners about how one can reproduce an accent without kicking someone out of the story?
* Dan: First of all, you have to know the accent really well. You have to do your homework. You have to research it. You have to listen to it. If you're going to try to do Irish, if you're going to try to do Eubonics, if you're going to try to do any of those things, you have to listen to it really closely.
* Howard: When you say accent, there's the sounds of the words which are important to an accent. There's also aspects of dialect where...
* Brandon: An accent and a dialect are separate.
* Howard: They're separate things. Word order... when you're speaking Spanish, the order of the verbs and the nouns is different than it is in English...
* Dan: When a native Spanish speaker then speaks English, that comes across and you can tell.
* Brandon: The first level... the most drop-you-out-of-the-story level... would be misspelling words in an attempt to re-create the sounds. The next level would be changing word order and maybe dropping words and maybe the occasional letter drop in order to emulate the dialect without exactly emulating the accent. One thing I might suggest for this would be to go and watch a movie or listen to someone where they are speaking in this dialect. Then transcribe it. Transcribe it with the actual words. Drop all of the accent. Then look and see what are they doing. What patterns are they using? What articles are they dropping in order to create this dialect?
* Dan: One of the most famous dialects is Yoda. All they did for Yoda was they just changed the word order. He constructs his sentences differently than we do in English. The funniest one being in Clone Wars where he says, "Around the survivors a perimeter create." That's just "create a perimeter around the survivors." But he always puts his words in the same order. It is reproducible, it is very easy to do, and it's easy to understand.
* Brandon: Something else that we want to talk about also though is in-world jargon. We can start out talking about this as well.
* Brandon: They did this in Firefly, they used shiny. We use this a lot in science fiction or even fantasy. They come up with fake swear words and things like this. How effective do you guys think this is?
* Howard: I've seen it done well and I've seen it done poorly. I loved the... I can't remember the characters name, but it was in a Ringo Weber book. One of the characters... all I can remember was his profanity, and his profanity was "pocking." Pocking this, and pocking that. You know exactly what word has been dialected, but it just worked.
* Dan: Battle Star Galactica of course did frak. I thought it worked really well. I know it didn't work for a couple of people. One of the reasons it worked really well is because we all knew what frak was supposed to mean and they gave it the right weight. One thing that they did, for example, is it was the rough characters who would use it and... I remember one episode where one of the pilots said it in front of the president, and she like went white. She had to apologize for saying that word. That let the audience know this actually is a big deal. It's not just somebody...
* Howard: I'm not throwing that word in order to be able to use profanity all the time in my book. I am throwing that word in order to establish that this character is profane and is going to get called on it sometimes.
* Brandon: Personally, I... pet peevy sort of thing, I don't like it when the fake swear words are obviously replacing a swear word we have, particularly when they're doing something like frak where they're just replacing a couple of the letters. That bugs me...
* Howard: The thing that I liked about pocking is that it wasn't that it was replacing the swear word. It was that he was speaking a different language where he came from, and that was that swearword.
* Brandon: The best uses of this is where it actually illustrates the world. I loved it when Anne McCaffrey did it in the Dragonriders books. Because she had world elements. She'd say shards or things like this talking about the shells of dragons and things like this. It was part of the world. It wasn't just a we don't want to get a TV MA rating, so we're going to replace a couple of letters.
* Dan: In Mistborn, you did the same thing with Lord Ruler. People use Lord Ruler as an epithet all through the series, even long after there's not a Lord Ruler. That in itself became a story element. Because characters would occasionally say, "Why are you still swearing by the Lord Ruler?"
* Howard: Wheel of Time. Blood and bloody ashes.
* Brandon: Wheel of Time does a good job with a lot of this. Suan Sanchez [sp?] with her fish metaphors and things allows him to illustrate her background and the world a little bit through coming up with all of these sorts of things. Is this dangerous? Are there problems with doing this?
* Dan: Definitely. Like I said, for example, with frak there's a lot of people that hated it. I know a guy who stopped watching the series because he thought frak was such a stupid euphemism. You can get und... people can think that you're just pussyfooting around. People can get sick of hearing it.
* Howard: I love the way Firefly handled it, where... shiny. Shiny is the one that we all remember because it fit so well.
* Brandon:But, goram.
* Dan: Goram.
* Howard: Goram this, goram that.
* Dan: And the Chinese.
* Howard: And most of the time, when they really wanted to swear, they would swear in Chinese.
* Brandon: I thought that Firefly was one of the best examples.
* Dan: One of the reasons that I think it worked so well is that it was different every time. You didn't get sick of hearing shiny and goram and frak because it was a different little rattled-off Chinese phrase any time they wanted to swear so it didn't get old.
* Dan: All right. I, Armando, obviously I know all of this already, but I have a question for Brandon. As we said, in Mistborn, you do this. You have a lot of fake swear words. We have talked about sometimes it is wrong to use them, sometimes it is wrong not to. Why did you choose to use the fake swear words that you used in Mistborn?
* Brandon: OK. I chose to use the fake swear words that I did because I wanted to tie the characters more deeply to the world. I wanted... when I look at, sit down to write, I'm not generally... this ties into dialects too. I don't want to do dialects usually. Usually, when I'm looking and saying, "Am I going to replace a swear word?" my general instinct is to not to replace it. If I don't want to curse in my books, I'll just... I'll have him say he swore. If I do want to have them curse in my books, I'll have them use actual curse words. Unless I feel that that person would use something in-world. I usually want to have... a lot of our curse words are tied either to scatological events or to religion. Religion is very powerful in my works, so I try to do this. When I sit down, I actually do it by character a lot of times. I'll let how a character swears build partially his race and his people. When I'm doing a dialect, I'm not usually looking to replace words or even drop words. I'm looking for what the word choices, what diction choices will this person make that will give us a feeling of their world. When I was writing Sazed, I didn't... I tried not to do the average things. A lot of people to give a dialect will have someone stop using contractions. Which is kind of overused, I think. I think people do speak in contractions. Even literate people speak in contractions a lot. And so... But I'm looking... to take Sazed for instance and show his entire culture by showing how he speaks and I make it polite. That's what I do. Because people like that, that tend to be of... the scholarly class that he is, I thought would be very polite. That's what his dialect is. He is extremely polite with occasional little word phrases from his world... from his culture. I try to do that with all of my characters.
* Dan: I think that that is the best answer... is not... grab... definitely have all the fake swear words or definitely don't. Do whatever is honest for the character. If they are speaking in such a way that right when they say this, they would swear there, then that's what you've got to do. If that's an in-world swearword that works, then great. It's not, then...

# Season 3 Episode 14 WorldCon with Mary Robinette Kowal

* Brandon: We are going to talk about using theater and film to... learning from theater and film as we write... or kind of adapting theater and film... what can we learn from theater and film? Okay, another five minutes of explaining the topic. Mary, you pitched this topic, tell us what you mean.
* Mary: For me, one of the things is that I'm a professional puppeteer. So one of the ways that I approach it is using the vocabulary that I picked up as a puppeteer.
* Brandon: So, you apply what you've learned from puppeteery to writing?
* Mary: Yes. For example, one of the things we talk about with puppetry is focus. There's five principles. Focus indicates thought. What the puppet is thinking about is what it is looking at. The same is true when you're writing. Because as a writer, you can only show the audience one thing at a time. You have to rely on their imagination to build that picture based on that one thing at a time you can show them. So when you are showing them something, you're controlling what they are thinking about. So what you are having them focus on needs to be what you want them to think about. And it's the same for the character, what my character...
* Brandon: In puppetry, you're saying you point the puppet at something, and the audience focuses on it. It's what the public is focused on is what the audience is focused on. Is that what?
* Mary: It's both. Humans... there is this form of puppetry called overt puppetry which is where you can see the puppeteer. The puppeteer is in full view. So the puppet is looking at something. Humans are trained to look at what someone else is looking at. Like if I'm talking to you and I keep looking over your left shoulder, you are eventually going to turn around to see what the heck I'm looking at.
* Mary: So as a puppeteer, what I'm looking at is what I want the audience to look at. I am controlling what I want them to look at by what I am focusing on. I am also, as the puppeteer, controlling what I am saying about what my character is thinking about by what my character is looking at.
* Brandon: Can I embarrass you?
* Mary: Sure.
* Brandon: That's brilliant. That is awesome. I have never heard writing described that way. That's brilliant. That really is.
* Mary: This is the puppetry training.
* Brandon: So the first one is focus. I want to hear what the other four are now. I'm not going to let Howard or Dan talk because I want to hear the other four.
* Mary: The second thing is breath. Breath or rhythm. So we say that focus indicates thoughts, breath indicates emotion. And breath can be... this is a... sorry, some of this is going to be difficult because I normally do this with a visual... but the speed at which you do something tells people how you feel about it. The easiest example is with breathing. Tell me, if you... I'll do very aspirated breathing so it picks up. If someone walks into a room and they're breathing like this [panting] you know what's happened. They've just run in. If they walk into a room and they go [sigh]
* Brandon: That means they just left Howard behind.
* Mary: Yes. But it's not just... what you're doing is you're getting signals from the speed of the breath. So when you're writing, one of the things... everyone talks about pacing. When you're writing an action scene, the sentences should be short and choppy. The reason, I think, is not because action is short and choppy. It's because writing was developed to convey the spoken word. When you do short, choppy sentences, it mimics the sound of someone talking very quickly in rapid breaths.
* Brandon: That's very clever. A lot of readers don't pay attention to this. Even a lot of writers don't. But a lot of studies have shown that when we read, we hear the words in our heads. That's how we do it. We're actually imitating, we're playing it out in our head. Speed reading, generally, what they're teaching you to do is to ignore the voices in your head, so to speak. To not hear it. It's actually, when I tried to learn speed reading, it ruined reading for me, because it was no longer... so I abandoned it. I didn't want to learn any more of that. Because when you're reading fiction, you really are playing it out. Up until modern years, people when they would read, they would always speak it out. Even if you're just sitting in your room reading by yourself, they would read it out loud because that's what you did. Only now do we do it only in our head but even still we hear those words even if we don't think we are.
* Mary: Exactly. It seems so obvious when you actually start talking about it. I think that what happens is that people get focused on the word and like, "Oh, I'm writing words." What we're really doing is, we're storytelling. The writing is just a way to capture it so that we can share with people that we are not in the room with. It is a form of telepathy in many ways.
* Mary: But it is. It's taking a thought that's in my head. Then I'm handing it to you and I'm not in the room. Then you... if I've done my job... get the same thought in your head.
* Mary: Number three is muscle. Muscle is the idea that the puppet is moving by itself. Even though it's obvious that a puppeteer is picking it up and moving it, you need to be able to create the illusion that it is moving of its own volition. This also ties into focus. For instance, when a puppet jumps up into the air, you have to bend the knees because you can't jump without bending your knees. When you go up in the air, the puppet looks up because it's thinking about looking up. When it comes down, it looks down because it's thinking about landing. The difference between a puppet landing like from a jump and a puppet falling is a puppet landing looks down because that's where it's thinking about landing and a puppet falling thinks about where it's come from. So you're using the two things we've talked about before -- focus and thought -- with muscle to create the idea that the puppet is moving by itself. The same thing happens with a book. If the audience can see the puppeteer, which is the author, moving the characters, then they are going to lose all interest. They will stop believing the book. It will break...
* Brandon: We want narrative to be translucent. People don't to see the man behind... the Wizard of Oz hiding back there making everything happen. It's... I often describe writing as like smoke and mirrors. It's much like magicianry. But puppetry sounds kind of the same way.
* Mary: They are very similar arts.
* Dan: It sounds like... this same principle is that you want your characters to have solid motivation. That if it's obvious something is happening because the plot required it to happen rather than because that's what the character would naturally do, it breaks that illusion of muscle that you're talking about.
* Mary: Exactly so. And also making sure that not just the character but that the world also makes sense. Like the number of times that you read something and clearly someone has not thought... like there's a tannery in the middle of the city. A tannery could not physically be in the middle of the city because the neighbors would go insane from the uric acid that's being dumped into the streams. I mean it just wouldn't happen. So that's a type of muscle where the author is like... but I need the tannery in the middle of the city, and they aren't thinking about the natural physical consequences of those.
* Brandon: So the fourth principle of puppetry that applies to writing?
* Mary: Is meaningful movement. That idea is that with puppetry, you generally speaking don't have facial expressions. Everything that you've got is body language. So it has to mean something every time the puppet moves. You'll see a lot of bad puppeteers who walk into a room and they bobbed the puppet's head up every time it says something. We call it head bobbing.
* Brandon: Very descriptive. Very nice.
* Mary: Thank you. Most puppetry vocabulary is in fact just that blatant. The problem is that it's conveying no information, so you're just putting a lot of mud on the stage. My feeling is that when a character... any time a character is moving... again, because I can only show the audience one thing at a time, that movement has to convey meaning. If my character decides to pick up a water glass, there has to be a reason that it's going for that water glass at that moment. So that it's conveying either an emotional content, plot content... that there is some meaning that that is conveying.
* Brandon: So no extra words is what you're saying?
* Mary: No, I'm not saying no extra words. I'm saying... well, maybe it is no extra words. I don't... it's not so much...
* Brandon: It's more than that, but when you said the head bobbing thing, I thought of sometimes... in writing, we talk about, don't use adverbs and don't use said bookisms and things like that. But I think one of the reasons we say that is because if you use them too much, when you do use them, they lack power. Is that kind of what...
* Mary: No. A lot of times, again, you know that there needs to be a pause in a piece of dialogue. So the... it'll be something like... the main character is talking and she says, "I don't like what you're saying to me." She looked away from him. "I don't understand it at all." Okay. She looked away is largely meaningless. Because there are many... what is she looking at? So, what you do is... "I don't like what you're saying to me." She fiddled with the knife on the table. "I don't understand it." That fiddling with the knife on the table immediately starts to tell you what she's thinking about, because she's... if she's going from "I don't understand what you're saying to me" to I need to play with this knife...
* Brandon: Yes. Put that knife down, please.
* Mary: Yes. The two things that I've done there is that I've given you some emotional content and I've also set the scene. So I'm using that one thing I can show you at a time to do two things and I've made that meaningful.

# Season 3 Episode 15 Q&A at WorldCon

* Audience: I think if you want to write something, the first step is to come up with original ideas to use. How do you guys come up with yours?
* Dan: And how do you make them original, I think is part of the question.
* Mary: I actually have more ideas than I have time to write. So for me, what I try to work on is not so much the idea but what idea is going to make a good story. First it's coming up with the geewhiz factor. Then after that it's who is this going to hurt? Seriously. Is there pain someplace involved in this? And I mean emotional distress, not physical. Once I figure out who it's going to hurt, then I can start writing... then I can come up with a story. But you can write a story about... you can make an interesting story about almost anything if you've got an emotional through line.
* Dan: I have said this before on the podcasts. A lot of my ideas I tend to incubate for at least a year. Rattling around. There's five or six right now that... I can tell when they're kind of getting done and when I just need to poke them with a fork and turn them over. Eventually what sparks it is that idea in my head colliding with all the others and colliding with whatever else, media that I'm looking at in the news, whatever... it will eventually generate a hook that jumps out and grabs me and says, "Oh, that really cool political noble house lion in winter story you've been working on? Combine that with teen wolf and you've got something." And I think, okay, that does work. That's when all the ideas start to come. And I think, okay, there's two completely disparate ideas that could combine a very interesting way that I've never seen before.
* Brandon: I would say that that's one of the big factors for me, too, is the combination of two ideas. People have written a lot about creativity... I've talked about it on the podcast before... the concept that... human beings... the way we are creative is in recombination, generally. We take two disparate things and we put them together and make something new. We don't imagine a color that has never existed before. We imagine putting a horn on a horse's head and making something that is part horse and part goat or something like this. That is imagination for us, that is creativity a lot of time for us. For me, that's where my books,, my stories come from. It's this idea plus this idea. It's not... that's also where you can make them original, is where you combine them and when together... instead of two cliched ideas, you've got one new idea. I see this a lot in my writing, I see this in other people's writing. Elantris, my first book, was essentially me wanting to write a story about zombies. And I'm like, well, too many people have done zombies. So I'm going to do a prison for zombies. People catch this disease, they toss them in, they live there. Those were two ideas. Prison story -- done before. Zombie story -- done before. Prison for zombies -- not done before. Of course, I never once mention in the book that they're zombies, because it became something completely different. It became the magical disease. But essentially, they're zombies in prison. We did a whole podcast... I'm not sure if we've aired it yet, because we aired them out of order... but about genre bending... or about doing genres and hiding genres inside of other genres...

# Season 3 Episode 16 The Anit-Mary Sue Episode

* Brandon: We're going to talk about Mary Sue. Or... well, Dan, tell us what a Mary Sue is.
* Dan: A Mary Sue is... that is where the author puts him or herself into the book as a character. Blatantly. Not necessarily by name. This can happen with this character is actually me but I changed the name or I changed something else to throw you off but not really because it's obviously me.
* Brandon: A Mary Sue is more of a... usually, if someone says, "Hey, that's a Mary Sue," it's an insult. Meaning what they're saying is they're pointing at one of your characters and saying you are inserting yourself sneakily into this book as a form of wish fulfillment. Instead of having a real protagonist, you just want to go on all these adventures. So you change a few things, you give this character too many things, you make them all powerful, omnipotent and this sort of thing, just to fulfill your own desires.
* Brandon: This topic is actually a little bit broader than that. It was asked for by a listener who said all of my characters sound like me. How do you keep each character from sounding just like they are another part of the same person or that they are the same person?
* John Brown: I think this is interesting. I do have to say though that when I'm looking at my characters... My wife for example just read a draft of a book and she said, "I could hear you here, here, and here." For me, that isn't necessarily a red flag, to say I can't be in there because I don't know how to not be in there. But I do know that with the characters there are two things that I try to do. The first is, if it's a voice that I'm looking for, I need to steep myself in the voice. I wrote a story set in... back in Croatia and I wanted a Yiddish voice. I had to get steeped in that voice and that kind of culture and go outside myself to get it. That's one thing that I do. There's a couple of other things. But at the same time, have you guys not had people say, "There you are. I see you." People that know you. I see you right there.
* Dan: Like you said in the beginning when you introduced the topic, an element of you is going to be in every character you create. One trick that I use, and this is kind of a cheap hack, but it is fairly effective is I will just have someone else in mind when I am writing a character. I will think of a friend that I know really well, or a famous actor or other movie personality, and not try to make them sound like that, but just keep that in the back of my head. Some of those mannerisms will start to creep in. Ideally, not to the point that you will read my book and say, "Oh, that's obviously Jack Nicholson" or whoever, but ... it will change the way that character talks enough that it won't sound as much like me anymore.
* Brandon: Okay. You do this, too, John?
* John: I do. I have... when I'm developing my characters, I'll often either have a person that I know that I'll say kind of like this person but then I change... I'm going to change some significant things about them. Or sometimes it's an animal. This guy is wolf. What I'm trying to do is, I'm trying to get a dominant impression in my mind. Because... I don't know... maybe I just don't have the brainpower of other writers, but I need a dominant impression. So it's... sometimes it'll be a picture. I'll have a picture of a guy and he invokes something in me. That's something that helps me.
* Brandon: And we're back. I wanted to repeat what Howard just said, because I think it bears a lot of repeating. If you can really get inside your character's head and you can really find a distinctive voice for that character in-world, I think that can anti-Mary Sue. That's the real trick. We're writing genre fiction for the most part. Even if you're not, your character is going to have a certain set of circumstances, history, thought processes that are distinctive to them. When you identify what these are and say whenever I am in this character's viewpoint, I'm going to look at the world through this character, you will naturally stop doing this. I think of... Robert Jordan is very good at this with cultures. Someone who is from a different culture thinks very differently in his books. I tried the... Siuan's boats and fish. I've tried to do it... with profession is another good way to do it. I've got a character that I'm writing who is a surgeon. I'm trying to think what is he going to notice when you meet somebody? He will notice the faint limp that person has because they broke their leg when they were four years old and when it got reset, it didn't quite get reset right. He'll notice that, someone else wouldn't. When you start doing these things, you pull away from the Mary Sue.
* Dan: A nice side effect of getting into your character's heads and voices that much is that it will reduce your expository narration a lot, I think. Because me telling my story... most of us telling our own story... we're not going to take time to explain how a sink works or how all of these other things function because they're entirely familiar to us and they will be to your characters as well.
* Brandon: That's always a hard balance to walk. I may have to can of worms that. I think we've talked about it a little but... learning curve is just... but this wraps up in all of these things. You were going to say something, John?
* John: There's a technique, I mentioned it before, but I'll just plug it again. I think it's J. Gregory Keyes... Calculus of Angels. He did this incredible series with Ben Franklin and that... I remember writing him and talking to him and saying, "How did you come up with some of these words and the phrases?" What he told me was he just steeped himself in original journal entries and original writings from that period. I think... this is part of that getting into character... if you're looking and you steep yourself in some of these things, it's naturally going to come out. A lot of it is mimicry and we're acting. I mean, when I do my writing, I feel like some of the time I'm acting. What would he do? How would I play this? I think that acting and just getting into that role and steeping yourself in it is incredibly important. In fact, that's how some of my best stories have come about because I've gotten into the role of a farmer and a hick, I've picked up a voice from somewhere, or I've gotten into the role. In this novel that I've got coming out, this hunger character, it was getting into that voice and just trying to steep myself in it and then just let come what may. But not thinking so much about not anti-Mary Sue... avoiding Mary Sue, but just what is that guy... thinking positively, thinking forward.
* Brandon: Right, although I do think once you get to our point, you start to have a different problem, which is repeating yourself. I think I need to can of worms that so that we can do an entire podcast on it. Because I think the more you write, the more you are in danger of telling the same story. We'll talk about that. I do want to mention that as I've considered it, I do something else Howard does. Which is I fix a lot of this in post. Meaning sometimes it's too hard to keep all of these different characters straight and all their different voices straight and they will start to sound like me or like one another. In a later revision, I go in and say, "Okay, this is the character who is very left brain and wants to organize the world and think about organization and puts things in lists." Let's do this chapter again, looking through to see what contradicts that and how I can nudge it more toward that character.
* Dan: Things like that... I'm sure there's a lot of people listening out there to the talk about acting and all this stuff and they say, "I don't know how to do that." Things like you're talking about, we are let's just go through this dialogue again with something else in mind, with lists or whatever. I think setting little rules like that is a great way to simplify the process a little. One of the rules I set for John Cleaver for example was whenever he is detecting an emotion in somebody else, he describes it physically on their face. Like you say, fixing it in post, I went through the books again over and over and any time he did that, I would change that. That changed the way I wrote his character whenever I would write new stuff.
* Brandon: That's a perfect example. We do this all the time. In fact, I, in doing drafts of a book, will often times get a list of things and say this is something I want to do with every chapter. I want to have a character feature, a feature of the setting, a feature of the past that I know I haven't done enough in and I will go and I will just check mark for each chapter. Okay, do I have something in this chapter that evokes that? Do I have something that evokes this other thing? Keep a list of 10 things and go through the chapter as many times as it takes to make sure that I can check off all those things on the list. We're running just a little on time.

# Season 3 Episode 17 More Q&A at WorldCon

* Audience: What is your standard plan of response if the characters revolt and start taking over the story?
* Brandon: This is something that writers often ask about... aspiring writers... you hear talked about... what to do when you're writing along and your characters... people will describe to me, "Oh, my characters decided that they wanted to go this direction instead of this direction" or "my characters decided that they wanted to do this." How do you respond to that? Mary, what do you do?
* Mary: My feeling is that if the character is doing something that's not good for the story, then I've cast the wrong character. Therefore I need to go back and reconsider it. I don't think that I'm only going to ever come up with only one brilliant character, so I can just save them for another story that's appropriate.
* Brandon: I've noticed... and I've asked this of professional writers a lot. A lot of them... the pros don't ask this question as often. They actually back up a few steps and say, "Okay, why is this character trying to deviate?" That means there's a problem. Either the wrong character is cast, which you've mentioned, or you've gotten bored with the story. You haven't built a story that's exciting enough, so you're trying to throw spice into it. You want to say... It's a deeper problem a lot of times. Another problem could be that you're not an outline writer and you're trying to force yourself to outline write. Some authors don't use outlines and they don't work for them. Stephen King, as we've mentioned before, never outlines. If you are trying to force yourself to use one, then maybe you shouldn't. You should try it different ways, maybe you should free write. For me, my characters don't do this. Either I've come up with something really interesting that I want to fit into the story and I say, "Oh, this would be better" and so I just move from my outline. But I'm always in control, personally. Dan?
* Dan: When this happens to me, it is usually a dialogue problem. I like to write dialogue very organically and make it flow. When it starts flowing the wrong direction, I can immediately tell. I think, this scene is not going to end the way I wanted it to because now the characters are talking about something else. However, it is still interesting. The thing I do is just ride it out. I will write that scene I now see where the characters want to go, if they eventually get back on topic, if where they are going is more interesting. By the end, I can tell, "Okay, I need to kill this, I need to go back and I need to tweak the beginning so that this conversation will go in the right direction" or sometimes I'll think this turned out better than I expected because it went in a different way. Sometimes you just keep going and keep going and the problem might fix itself or suggest its own resolution.
* Brandon: This also might go back to the concept of killing your darlings sometimes. We did a whole podcast on that, you can listen to it. I've been in writing groups with Dan for a long time. Sometimes Dan has sections that are pure genius that don't belong in the book. They'll be brilliant and he'll be writing along and it's going completely the wrong direction. That's what happened. Dan is very good with dialogue, very good with language, he gets on a roll and the scene turns out brilliant. But you can have a brilliant scene that's wrong for the book. Sometimes you have to write those out and just cut them. Use them later.
* Brandon: When you became a writer... first started writing, what things surprised you in their difficulty?
* Dan: The most difficult part for me of writing has been moving on. I know this is not a question that our aspiring writers are going... not necessarily going to speak to them. I sold a book that turned into a trilogy and everyone wanted it. I wrote books 2 and three knowing that they had already been sold and that those characters and the world had already been accepted. Moving onto a new project terrified me. It was the hardest thing I think I've ever done since I started writing. Because I was writing something new that I didn't know if they were going to like me anymore.
* Brandon: That is surprisingly hard. I'll say that that surprised me. Even though it didn't... it wasn't as hard for me, because I like moving on to new projects. Every time I release a book, it surprises me how anxious I get about, "Oh, now they're going to hate this one." I guess that's the artist's temperament. I would say though that the thing that surprised me most was revision. I was not anticipating revision being the hardest part of writing a book. It's easier for me to plan a book and write a book than it is for me to revise a book. I would much rather write a completely new one than revise the one I'm working on. Particularly once the 17th draft rattles around. We did, on the Wheel of Time books, 17 drafts.
* Audience: My question is, one of the most important things in each book is the world it's set in and the history that keeps popping up throughout the book. You learn bits and pieces. How do you build that world and the history?
* Brandon: How do you build the history for your books or your stories? This applies even when you're writing non-science fiction and fantasy, when you're writing mainstream, the characters are going to have history. The setting is going to have history. How do you devise that? How do you make it real? Mary? Why don't you go ahead?
* Mary: Boy, that's a... the thing that I do is I cheat and I look at existing structures. I look... if I'm trying to create a truly unique and original world, one of the things that I've done is that I did a survey of different cultures across the world to see what common things exist because that gives me a basic building block. It's like I can believably interpret that someone is going to have developed glass because it arose in several different cultures. Then I start looking at how things connect together. If I have got glass, then I also have to have quarries, and if I have quarries, then stone building is also going to be important. I try to build out from that, and look for... look at the lenses that people will view the world through. If a baker walks into a room... into a kitchen, the first thing they're going to notice is if the counters are clean. If an artist walks into the same kitchen, they are going to notice the color the walls are and if the paintings are crooked. It's the same thing in the world. If I've got a Temple that's got a goddess of swords, those people are going to view things through the metaphors of swords and blades and things like that. I could have actually made this much easier. When I teach puppetry and we're doing adaptation the thing I talk about is if you change one thing, it changes everything. Everything is connected.
* Brandon: I use the grand old writerly tradition of stealing like a thief, particularly from history. History books work wonders for coming up and developing your histories. I use them extensively -- honestly, that's the best thing I do. But it's also goal driven for me. I will decide okay, what's important to this story? In some stories, the religion is going to be very important, so I'll world build and build the history of the religion a lot. But the language is going to be less important, so I won't develop how the languages happen. I talk about this a lot in the podcasts, but I decide what are my goals and how can I flesh out those goals and make the history like another character.
* Mary: I remembered three things, and I can't remember who mentions them, but three things that have been really fabulous tools for me when dealing with new magic or new technology in a world. That I should look at how that magic or technology affects the poorest class, how it affects the richest class, and how it can be abused?

# Season 3 Episode 18 How to Not Repeat Yourself

# Season 3 Episode 19 Emotion in Fiction with John Brown

# Season 3 Episode 20 The Difference between Character Driven and Plot Driven Story

# Season 3 Episode 21 Pitfalls of Self-Publishing

# Season 3 Episode 22 Idea to Story

# Season 3 Episode 23 How to Write without Twists

# Season 3 Episode 24 Writing Comics with Jake Black

# Season 3 Episode 25 The Business of Writing Comics

# Season 3 Episode 26 Nanowrimo

# Season 3 Episode 27 Mixing Humor with Drama and Horror

# Season 3 Episode 28 World Building Gender Roles

# Season 3 Episode 29 Antiheroes

# Season 3 Episode 30 Unreliable Narrators

# Season 3 Episode 31 Tragedy

# Season 3 Episode 32 Collaboration