

[Drawing Maps Audio 12 - March 2020](#)

Transcribed by Ril @kaorukeihi

AUSTIN: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Drawing Maps for March 2020. I know that it is April, but, as always, a little bit behind on Patreon stuff. I will say in this case it's largely because I didn't know when I should sneak in another Drawing Maps. And the last one the we did was after the first SBBR mission, before the Rapid Evening mission, um, of the last set, the... Um, God, I guess it was the Sable Court on the SBBR side, and then before the Prophet's Path arc on the, the... what do you call it side, the... Whew, why am I..? Why am I struggling with my words? Because it's 10:15 PM. That's why, I just had a whole long day, I was on the phone for four hours, and a million other reasons is probably... is *probably* why I am a little tired, that would make sense to me.

So, I didn't know if I should sneak one in right now, if I should try to wait until after this next Rapid Evening stuff, and so, for the first, you know, for the last few weeks I was like: "Oh, I'll wait until the Rapid Evening stuff is over." And we recorded that, and that's probably gonna be another three episode arc, and I didn't want to wait three more weeks, 'cause then it would be May, and I would be doing the March Drawing Maps.

And so what's probably gonna happen is I'll do this one, and I might do another one after the next Rapid Evening one, even if it's a little shorter, whatever. Like, I should try to get this... I want to get on to a set where I'm doing... I don't know, obviously, the goal is monthly, it's just that sometimes it doesn't break out that simply.

regression says "Rapid Evening" and I don't know what that was in response to. But now... Was that me trying to find the words "Prophet's Path"? 'Cause that's the mission that I was trying to remember.

In any case, um, the Drawing Maps if you don't know—I'll do the introduction, as always... This is a show in which we kind of go over my real prep, we talk about a coup... you know, different shows season to season. Right now we're pretty much a 100% focused on PARTIZAN. It's a discussion about what my prep looked like, about what worked and what didn't work in any given set of episodes. Hopefully, some insight, hopefully, some stuff that you can take as, like, learnings, but it will not be an explicit tutorial. It will not be designed by committee, this is not like a back and forth thing, except for specific instances where I'm like: "Oh, does anyone have a good idea for ____?" which has happened now and then in these streams, especially...

I, like, I think about the finale Twilight Mirage stuff in which someone gave me a fantastic word that I'm now forgetting the name of... I'm gonna check it really quick. [typing] "Twilight Mirage Futura Free"... I don't know why am I wasting time on this... Um... I think it's just that the word was sick, and I don't remember what the word was. Here's all my fucking prep... Um... God, what was the..? Here we go... No, scratch sheet is gonna be wrong. Um, you know what, I'm not gonna be able to find it in here, this is a fool's game. Someone gave like

a dope name for, I wanna say, the... the name of like a mass produced... a certain type of mech. I almost spoiled something and I was like "Uh, let me not...", pump the brakes and not actually spoil this thing.

In any case, there have been instances where I've asked people for help, or asked for, you know, insight, or a cool name, or "Hey, what's a thing I should look into?" But in general it is not design by committee, it's not unannounced or unchecked spoilers, and for this episode obviously we're going to be talking pretty openly about the events of PARTIZAN up until the most recent episode, which is 15. I will say we'll talk thematically, more broadly about the entirety of Friend at the Table. I probably won't... I'm gonna do my best as always to avoid actual spoilers, but, you know, today we're gonna talk about things like faith and war, and these are topics that have come up before, and so there's... it will be useful for me to say like: "Oh, hey, you know, in COUNTER/Weight, blah, or in Hieron, _____." So, even then, if we get into any sort of real spoiler territory, I promise that I'll signpost it as best as I can.

Yes, yes, yes-yes-yes, yes, the Sublunary system. Thank you to **Morgan** in the chat. The Sublunary system, which, now that I know that, I can quickly check was written, or was suggested by {Pam R}, who was in the chat while we were doing that prep. Good catch, Morgan!.. who says, "I relistened to TM & watched all the drawing maps recently". Good catch!

Finally, the stuff that we do here is never permanent or unchangeable. I could say something today, and then in a week have a flash of inspiration that takes me in a completely different way.

We're not gonna be doing any forward-facing stuff today, we're not doing any downtime prep or any—what do you call it?—any, um, faction rolls. I think I'll save those for the next... for before the downtime, and maybe we'll do one after the Rapid Evening set of episodes, where we do some faction rolls. ...Which, which, if you've listened to the most recent episode of PARTIZAN, you know we're getting into it, we're getting into like things making moves, factions, squads making moves. So, so... and as always, you haven't even heard the fucking Rapid Evening side, which is wrapped at this point. Not *wrapped* wrapped, but like the next arc is done. And so, so.... Whew!

I will say, briefly, like last time there may be some vague spoilers about the next set of episodes, in terms of where my interests are. I will certainly talk in certain instances about ongoing Rapid Evening stuff and some of that... in talking about it I'll indicate that it will continue to come up, but I will not talk about specific outcomes or, you know, "Hey, here's how rolls went!" or anything like that.

I think the one... There's like one element that I might talk about more directly that's extremely mechanical and it's at the top of the next episode, and actually reflects something at the end of the previous episode... A previous recording, that was not in the actual downtime episode that came out. So, I'll... that is not even a plot thing that I'll talk about, it's a mechanics thing.

So, **today's agenda**: to review the GM goals and principles, and talk about how those went, and, you know, whether or not I'm happy with the way we pursued those. I'm not gonna go over each one... each of the principles, especially, one by one, necessarily, but I wanna call out a few things. We'll talk a little bit about the downtime for SBBR... both downtimes, and the Post Mortem, what worked, what didn't... And then I'll get to Q&A.

So, **Goals and Principles**. One... Let's go over these... Let me go through the whole list of goals first.

- Ensure everyone at the table is safe
- Fill the world with detail
- Convey the world honestly
- Play to find out what happens

The first one here, I think, is probably of special interest, given that this set of episodes came out along with the... Or not along with, but while these episodes were coming out, the recent episode of Far Verona hosted by Adam Koebel aired, in which... I don't know if people have followed this conversation and this issue, but in which a player... not just a player, but the players at the table and audience very much so, I think, were put into position where their boundaries were crossed with some content that was not just problematic, not just offensive, but dangerous and irresponsible. The word "negligent" is probably a little too soft. There's a sequence in which sexual assault is breached in a way where there are no safety mechanisms at place, where a character and a player was put into position where they did not... or they were not comfortable, where no one at the table was comfortable, and people watching were not comfortable, and then the fallout from that and the kind of conversation that followed included a kind of a hit list of Do Nots in terms of how to handle fucking up. I say this as a person who has fucked up, and who'll fuck up again in the future, but... This is something that I think is extremely important to kind of address directly.

We mentioned in the... I wanna say the text description for the most recent Tips at the Table episode, that as a show we were very much letting everyone's statements on Tw... on public, on social media, their kind of public statements there speak for themselves. I wouldn't want to say like: "Here's the show! This is what we all believe." Because... I even cleared that by everyone on the show. But I do think at this point most people on the show at least have tweeted about it, you can go look at what we said. I think first and foremost for me as a GM... I've spoken a lot about the importance of safety, the most... the most... not the most frustrating thing, the most frustrating thing about that situation is what happened and the way it impacted the players at that table. The... A frustrating thing for me is that I learned about some safety mechanisms from Adam, and have had talks with him in the past because they were not deployed safely in play with me, and had to have that sort of after the fact conversation, which makes it so much more frustrating that this happened here and in front of a live audience again. And so I've been thinking about this stuff a lot, and I've been thinking about this stuff a lot in terms of our own show and the ways in which we try our best to provide not just safety mechanisms, but produce a... a table in which there are... there is an attitude of openness and collaboration is such that agency is held sort of sacred. That does not mean that there are not moments—we talk about this in that Tips episode—where the GM gets to make hard moves, but it does mean that there need to be opportunity

constantly for affirmation, for the player to say “Hey, wait a second!”. Or for the GM to say “Hey, wait a second!”. ‘Cause we’ve hit *those* moments before too, there have definitely been times where I had been the person who’s like “Let me draw a Veil on this sequence, I don’t want to know the explicit details of what’s happening here because I’m not comfortable with it.” There are obviously GM/player dynamics that are different power dynamics, but that does not mean that consent only goes one way, the whole table has to consent to it, and with an audience you wanna do your best with content warnings, so they can consent to what they’re about to listen to or watch.

For me, one of the things that came up recently in our set—there’s a number of sequences here in which a lot of what safety looks like can be... Not just playing an X-card, not just setting up Lines and Veils, not just saying at the top “Hey, I’m gonna veto this topic from coming up”... but as a facilitator at the table which is not always the GM, sometimes a facilitator... there’s obviously GMless games in which there are facilitators that go beyond a GM role, or games that don’t have a GM role, GMless games, or you can sometimes have someone who’s facilitating the game, but who is not GMing that game necessarily even with games with GMs, someone who like, know the rules really well, or who is kind of in charge of keeping track of, you know, numbers and stats for the player side or stuff like that. And I think a big thing for people in that role is to make space and keep your foot on the brake a little bit, so that consequences and the stakes are *extremely* clear. I’ve seen people say that we do that to a fault, they don’t use those words regarding the specific concepts of like “Here is triggering material, and the show, you know, handles it with kid gloves.” or, you know, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, but what I do see is definitely people who say things like our show is very slow about action, that sometimes, you know, I will interject and say “Okay, wait, if you do this then X, Y, Z.” whereas at other tables it’s often the case that a GM like is looking to almost trap the player in their words, if that makes sense, where it’s like “Aha! But you said you’re inviting the person before you asked if it was a vampire! And obviously you have vampire sense, but you didn’t say “I wanna use my vampire sense!” and so now the vampire is in your house, ha-ha-ha!” And I’m not saying I’ve never done that, but that to me is an interesting play, that to me is a kind of combative mode that doesn’t do what we want to do—which is tell stories together safely and critically—particularly well.

And so when I think about things like the surgery sequence in the most recent Rapid Evening game, the... the... um, it was very important that I both manage to make that sequence feel threatening and scary—and it was easy to do that, because I was scared, and I’m sure you can hear that in my voice as the rolls come in—but also to make sure that we as players think about what we want to show on screen, so to speak, visually, descriptively, textually, but also where we want our stories to focus thematically and where we want to spend our energy. Thankfully, this was a situation where everyone was pretty well-aligned. And I think that we did a good job of pulling back the curtain in important ways, I think Keith did an incredible job of locating a way in which the reduced harm was still affecting, and was still clearly something that Clementine would have to live with, but that was not gruesome and not, you know... what’s the word I’m looking for? Like, visceral, right? We didn’t want to stay in the world of deep physical wounds, where you’d have to stay describing that stuff. So, when Keith suggested Ill, or Infected, or something like that, I think it was Infected—it was Infected and then it dropped later to Ill—that was like a really really smart quick

response from Keith that would've been better than whatever I could come up with. And again, we... you need to have that table sense that someone can submit an idea like that, otherwise you run into trouble.

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I'll say also, like—and we'll come back around to this in a bit—but, you know, there's a lot of violence in these episodes, specifically in the SBBR side. Characters being shot at, characters deploying weapons that—and I'll say this now, actually, I'll put this in the text description when I'm done and will make a note of this... "Add content warnings for conversation about chemical warfare, choking and depictions of sexual assault", that way people who see this episode later will know that that stuff is there. The sequence in the most recent set of SBBR games in which Broun like deploys what is basically a very intense tear gas that, that borders on, you know, something much, much worse, you know, it borders on torturing a number of people, including civilians, with... You know, you say like "less than lethal" but of course we all know that less than lethal... We say "less than lethal" rather than "non-lethal"... Or, sorry, not "less than lethal", "less lethal" because there's no such thing as a non-lethal weapon—something we raised in that episode. And that was a situation where we paused, we had that conversation, we... always do my best to give people the opportunity to step away from the microphone. Sometimes, you know, that happens and we cut it so that it just flows smoothly, I think about that in terms of lots of big decisions, in terms of "Okay, what are we gonna do?" Sometimes we end an episode, we straight up end an episode before a decision gets made.

In the case of this set of episodes, one of the places I needed to def... I needed to get a break was with Valence going into the second room, because I knew it was coming and was not confident... I knew basically what was coming which was the possibility that Valence who is not a combat-focused character is going up against someone who is ready to kill. And I was not in a place at that night to do that in a way that I thought was going to be, like... effective and safe. And so, knowing when to pause is important... I'll say also this is one of the reasons why the main show will never be a live stream show. Because I need space to fuck up. I like working in the medium that is recorded and edited so that we can take chances, pause, and come back around.

I will say, there's an example of this from an upcoming episode, which, again, I will not get into specifics, 'cause I felt like, for a moment, there was a moment where I stepped on a character's arc a little bit. I was like, "Oh, wait, we kind of pivoted in this other way, and we came to this other thing". And we ended up talking after the episode "Oh hey, how do you feel..? How do you feel when I like..." What I actually said was like "I'm sorry if I stepped on this thing. I didn't mean to step on this arc, I didn't mean to like fuck up here, if I fucked up." And the player in question was like "No, you're good, I actually have *this* idea coming off of it, but blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." But all the way through that conversation it wasn't just "I'm sorry that ____." It was "If you want to we can go back to the table and rerecord." And this is one of the things that this mode of storytelling is... like, offers us. It's still actual play. We're not gonna go back to the table and rerecord a three-hour episode because rolls went bad, and an outcome that's different from the one we sketched happened. But when it comes

down to are players at the table happy? are players at the table safe? Do we stand by the content that we've... that we've... that we're putting out? Do we stand by the storytelling? In the biggest big picture sense, I like having this ability to go back to fix things, to cut things, to rearrange things. And that is for me part of the safety mechanism.

And that's not a moral judgement on live shows, I've done live shows, we do a live show once a month. But we would never do the main game in that... or the main show in that way, because doing it as a recorded show gives us a lot of benefits. One of which is Jack's music which is incredible as you may, as you may know from the episodes that just came out. But part of it is definitely this idea of giving us the space to be risky. And I'm not—I wanna be a 100% clear, I'm not talking... I'm not saying that what Adam did at the end of that game, at the end of that Far Verona game was risky, it was bad. But in terms of difficult content that people consent to exploring at the table, I wanna have that wriggle room for exploring it in a format and then throwing in out if we need to.

And I'll say we've only done this once, I've talked about this before, it happened one time, where we literally threw out an episode, and that was... that was the first episode of Twilight Mirage's ground game that we threw out, explicitly [Austin laughs a bit] ..And this is like, the thing, right? Like, this... In fact, I hadn't even made this connection. It was literally one character stepping too far in the realm of kind of analogous ignoring someone's consent, and you know, completely discarding their autonomy. And what we decided there was like, no, we're throwing that out, we're going to start over. That whole episode was ruined by that, we're not going to pretend that that is something we want to cosign. And I'm so thankful that we do a show that is recorded, so that that was something we could do without, you know, putting the audience in harm's way in that way. And again, I wanna say, like, this is not about "And that's why you don't do live shows!" This is me saying "And that's why when you're doing a live show, you have to put *even more* effort into making sure there are safety mechanisms at the table, put even more time into talking ahead of time about what is on the table, what is off the table, where the lines are, where people... what are people interested in, like, genuinely excited about doing, and keeping focus on that." And so, that is, that is kind of...

1) **Ensure everyone at the table is safe.**

Apologies for like going off there. I promise, I have like 12 words written here as like things to say there, but obviously, I wanted to talk through it a little bit.

The second thing here is: **Fill the world with detail.** I was really happy with this set of episodes, with how much Orzen felt like a real place, maybe even more so than like Logos City or the Isles of Logos. I feel like Logos is a bad sketch right now, I think there's a couple of really cool things there, and I'm really happy I got like Apparatus Aperitif in, I'm glad we got the image of Thisbe kind of doing a battery recharging sprint—which by the way, I didn't point this out at the time 'cause I didn't wanna be that person... [Austin pauses] Excuse me. But I know that's not how... If Thisbe is running to recharge her own battery that means that she's like a perpetual... She's like more than a perpetual motion machine, because not only is nothing being lost, not only is that effort staying, it's actually recharging a secondary

battery type inside of her, and what I didn't wanna do was be like "No, that's not how the physics works." Because I don't know. She's like a robot from the era of this setting where things were weird, and was dug out of the ground, and has like a cool crack down her face, like... I'm not gonna... That's... Okay, you're good. Like, that's it. You got it. Like, that sounds like a dope way of doing it.

But, but... those details were cool, but I think Orzen really came alive in a real way, because... One, because it was... One, because sauce names are funny. Two, I think it went to show that a good... Good locations are not about city streets, they're not about, like, layout. They can be about layout, but they're not necessarily about extremely detailed details. They're about kind of... almost like checklist details, or like, um... what's the word I want? There's like an impressionistic quality that you wanna give places, that I like to give places here. And so it's like "Yes, there's a quartz mine. There is a theater district that's also a market district. Here is the big residential zone. Here is the statuary in front of a cathedral. And it's all in a box canyon." And that's it, that's Orzen!

And after that episode ended... I think it was like, you know, a couple of days after the first recording, the first set of recordings, is when Ali was like: "One, Orzen is a dope name, two, I really like this city." And that made me feel so good, because when my players are excited, or when the players at the table are excited about something is when I get to be excited about it. When other people are hyped, I get hyped. And that is... that is like... That felt good. I'll also say, this is a good arc. ...Oh, other stuff that I wanted to shoutout was like small fun detail. Like give the world detail: wave fried art, the kind of Columnar like glitch art stuff. I'm so excited I got that in, these little details mean the world to me, they make the space feel like they're alive. The Cadenza as a mech is sick, and... I'll talk about this a little bit later, but I definitely fucked up the way I described it, we'll talk about... there was a bit of a production mishap, and it isn't a big deal, but in terms of the way I described it—and we'll talk about what the mishap was later, but I'm still glad that was in, I thought it was pretty cool mech, it's a fun mech. We got some... we got some fucking cool mechs coming, so stay tuned.

And finally the last thing here on details that I like, I get to shoutout two of my big inspirations in this... Or not even shoutout, but like, adapt or bring stuff in from two of my big inspirations here. The first one in terms of when it happens... I guess they're kind of like very connected, right? There is The Memory... A Memory Called Empire, which is a book by Arkady Martine, which is a fantastic book, very much in line with something like the Imperial Radch trilogy, if you've read stuff like Ancillary Justice, you should definitely check out A Memory Called Empire. That's a setting that is very big on a big empire that is driven by like poetry as one of its kind of core units of political speech and even some security measures and stuff. Though in that book it's much more like secret coded messages being sent by poem, but, but A Memory Called Empire is great. And I was like "Let me just, let me just lift this little bit", and it's just a little nod, in the same way that I think A Memory Called Empire has a bunch of nods towards the Imperial Radch trilogy.

And the second thing that I haven't even thought as A Memory Called Empire reference, but I saw somebody mention this is the perspective bleeding stuff which... that is a core thing in

some ways in *A Memory Called Empire*, there's an idea around, um... having multiple people inside of the same mind... But the real thing I'm lifting there is from *Strange Days*, the Kathryn Bigelow film from the early 90s, the cyberpunk film, in which this concept literally of What if there was an illicit market for, um... One second, I have to hang up a Discord call, I don't know why I'm being called on Discord, but it's ringing my actual phone... Please, stop! Um... Anyway. In *Strange Days* there's literally an illicit market for other people's memories. And it goes to, again, I would say look at content warning for that film, I think that film is... I haven't seen that film in probably a decade, but the last time I saw it, I really really liked it, it's vision of dystopian LA at the, you know, at the end of the... It's from the early 90s, I think it takes place probably in 1999 under a kind of oppressive regime that's taken over the United States. Hm. And it has some great performances. It also has really upsetting stuff around the idea of this sort of memory sharing that is *very* triggering. But it's triggering in a way, and Roger Ebert has written about this, and it's intense in a way that gets at something terrible about the depths of human cruelty. And this is an era of Kathryn Bigelow as a director where she wasn't just making US war propaganda, and I miss that version of Kathryn Bigelow a lot. Oh fuking well.

Um, one second. ...Uh, yeah, it's a typo. Sometimes I have typos. Sorry that there's a typo in principle #6. I may've... you know. You know, it happens.

The third goal is **To convey the world honestly**. And this is the one I think we're gonna come back to a lot here. To convey the world honestly—and this is from the book—“when you need to tell the players what their surrounding look like, what the NPCs do, and what happens because of all of this, speak with honesty. Don't lie to the players, don't favor anyone over others.” This is a huge part going back up... looking back up with “ensure everyone at the table is safe”. The other... the other way in which, uh... I think it's important in this set of episodes is moments like when I tell Valence “This is the god that you worship”, right? “This is... Here is the truth. This is not part of the mystery of the story.” There are mysteries tied to that sequence, there are mysteries we'll definitely be exploring... [Austin laughs a bit] I've said this before, I have now a 21 or 22, you know, note list that is like outline, part outline, that is like “Here is the core mystery of this season, here is like the order of events and how we got to the first SBBR game at the beginning of the season.” And the stuff that happened with Valence in the last episode is definitely tied into that.

But the... what needs to happen along with that though, is clarity around whether or not players can trust what I'm putting in front of them, so that they can respond adequately, and with investment. I think there's a great degree of trust needed to do the sort of storytelling we love to do, and what really deflates all that trust is if someone... is if I deliver a big speech about something, and then I say five episodes from now “Ah-ha, got you!” I didn't give you a chance to roll to see through it, I deployed a great deal of expertise and skill in convincing you that it was Thing A, when actually it was Thing B. It's so much more interesting to me that it is... to say outright “And you're not sure if this is real”, or to say “I don't know that you know that you can trust this person”, or to say outright “This person is lying to you but you believe them.” That's the juice, that's the stuff, that's what gets me moving. And that's the stuff that's in fiction in general, and I want to see more of it in these spaces.

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Another part of this is that to tell the world... to convey the world honestly means... making hard moves. It means sometimes surgery goes wrong and someone gets a level 4 harm. It would have been dishonest about the stakes and tone of the game we're trying to make, to say "Don't worry, someone who was already on death's door when surgery happens for them from someone who isn't a professional, not in a place that is... you know, not in a cutting edge medical facility, not surrounded by people who have been trained to do this..." When it goes bad, it goes bad! And that to me was really important, and I think a great illustration of the power of failure, and the power of hard moves. Which is not me saying that you should be a mean or combative GM. But it's again about knowing what your players are interested in, and especially in a system like *Beam Saber*, like *Forged in the Dark* games, recognizing that there's a lot of space, mechanically, for players to wield agency themselves.

In this specific case, I gave a level 4 harm, knowing that either Keith or Jack could resist that harm, that either one of them could say "You know what? I'm not ready for Clementine Kesh to be dead yet. I'm going to like dial this back just a little bit. I'm going to spend the resources to do that." And we can see what happens from there. There is no world in which that level 4 harm stayed a level 4 harm. And maybe someone else got a scar trying to resist it, but what couldn't have happened was it stayed at level 4. Because of the pure mechanics of the game.

And that, that kind of like back and forth, that sort of... tug-of-war almost over authorship is one of *the* most interesting things about *Forged in the Dark* games. It's something that I think you've seen in a lot of games that have come out since *Blades*, and even before *Blades*, this is the core thing of what we do, this is like what tabletop games are, it's kind of passing the mic back and forth to some degree. But this specific thing, that the action roll is not final until the player consents to its outcome is a key thing of why I love these games for telling stories that have stakes. Because there's always a way to pull back on those stakes. I'm not saying that that means that like there are not, again, dynamics... I don't think that this is a safety mechanism, for instance. I've seen that argument get floated, I get where that comes from, but I think the fact that this still has like... there's a limit to how many times you can resist something in this game. You could theoretically have to turn your character sheet over, and more importantly, as a GM you shouldn't rely on mechanics to make sure your table is safe. And I know I keep coming back to this, but I don't know how not to, given... given this scenario.

But I do think it's worth calling out here around conveying the world honestly and making hard moves is that *Forged in the Dark* almost enables the GM to do this more readily *because* the players can say "That's not in line with what my character is, my character is this, my character wouldn't let this happen." Um... And also, the other thing... I will say, the other thing here is: there's not that many scars around the table right now. I'll say... There's a lot of characters who just don't have scars yet. On the... on the *Rapid Evening* side, what... let me take a look. Let me take a look and also try to remember what's happened in the last little bit. It's Clementine is obsessed, right? I think that that's it. I think that's the only

scar on that side, right? So I knew, even if it took someone to take a lot of stress to stop this from happening... that would just mean one scar on the table, right? SBBR... I don't know how to talk about SBBR scars. SBBR scars... much much much more deep.

Finally, **play to find out what happens**. This is the goal that brings everything else together, right? This is... this is... There is so much in these episodes that were this for me. The kind of big transcendent finale of the group action that doesn't technically make sense but is exactly what I mean when I said "When magic happens this season it's going to be big and dramatic and weird and almost unexplainable to some degree." And it's not going to be "I cast Fireball", it's not going to be... you know, "I have an AR display", it's going to be more dramatic than that. That moment that has just this tinge of mystery is great... and, and you know, sort of like irreducibility... was so fun. And it comes from playing to find out what happens, there's no way we sit down and write that out. The surgery itself — no way we write that out. We say... In the book version of this story what would have happened is... the Winter Doctor shows up and patches up Clem, and maybe, you know, reports back to Crysanth, and tells Crysanth some shit, you know? Or something, right? But what doesn't happen is Exeter Leap does the surgery instead. Because it's almost unbelievable. But when it happens in play... there's an additional degree of buy-in from the players and the listeners that this is a reasonable outcome. This is a reasonable thing to do inside of the genre that we're playing, because the genre is not just war fiction, or mech fiction or, you know, light Regency drama.

It's... it's play. Play is the genre. Play is part of it, and so, one of the kind of generic element of play is that players get to do things, and that there's a gravity towards the players, there's a... The camera will itself towards the players more than towards the non-players, meaning both the setting, the NPCs, physics, you know, um, reason. All of that stuff kind of is secondary to "Then the player does something. Then the player acts." We kind of explore some of these ideas thematically, I think, in Bluff City, right? Where does that weight come from? what happens when you have a world in which the camera... there's a camera that has decided that people that are important are the ones that are in front of my frame. So I think, again, we've hit those pretty well.

And side of **the Principles**:

- Be a fan of the pilots
- Address the pilots
- Address the players
- Fill the world with inequality
- Make the War the enemy, not the soldiers
- Make the War too big to defeat
- Make the pilots feel small and the mechs feel POWERFUL
- Consider the risk
- and Hold on lightly

I'm gonna go over I guess three of them here... I just... One is **Be a fan of the pilots**. Which, immediately, I think... I mark out for my players... for the players all the time. I mark out whenever... "Mark out" is a wrestling term. A "mark" is someone who like in a... in

carnival talk, or con artistry talk is someone who you have identified as someone who like will buy the con, will buy in, will... will be someone whose money you can take. And in wrestling terminology "marking out" means I'm normally a well-reasoned, you know, smart... to use another wrestling piece of terminology, I'm a smart fan, I know that this is all choreographed and written, but when you know, "when my favorite wrestler climbed to the top ring... to the top rope, and did an incredible 360 splash, I marked out". And I mark out whenever the other players at the table do something incredible. And stuff like the... Like, every way that they've handled that whole sequence was so great. So many cool maneuvers, so much good visual storytelling in combat. I talked about this I think at Tips, the last, most recent Tips, about trying to be better about having dynamic on-screen action, dynamic, you know, audio action, telling stories about... in which there are fight scenes that are fun to listen to, or that you can imagine, or that communicate something about the space. And I think so much of that... I can do some of that, but so much of it comes back on the players, and everyone has done a great job, everyone has kind of figured out that part of this style of fiction in a way that's just incredible. And so, things like Thisbe, you know, destroying... jumping up and destroying the head of a statue, or dropping Moe from a cliff face down into a warehouse near a mech. Or the stuff with the Cadenza and the Three Cheers — all of that stuff was so fucking good. Um, so that's already... The Be the fan... Love these pilots. God, I love these pilots, love these players, love these pilots.

The second one I'm gonna call out here is **Make the War the enemy, not the soldiers** which I've talked about before as one of those things that's like... difficult in some ways, because... there are times when soldiers are the enemy. And that's a lot of the time! I think that in the real world, you know, in years when we know that fascism is on the rise, where it's easy to talk about, you know, imperial might and imperial armies being fundamentally evil parts of the world... You don't wanna just say "No, it's not them, it's the war." And this is a core question... but nevertheless... nevertheless, I have three uncles who were in the military. And this is kind of... I'll wrap back around to that in a second, when I set up what I think how we did this right this season, or in this episode specifically. Um... One of... one of... How do I wanna frame this? Okay, I know how to frame this. Back in the pre-PARTIZAN Drawing Maps episodes I talked to Em Marko. Em is a friend of the show, they are the co-host of Abnormal Mapping's game club, and the Great Gundam Project, a bunch of other great Abnormal Mapping's shows, please go listen to Em's stuff, Em and Jackson are great, all the other co-host on the Abnormal Mapping stuff are great, like the... it's an incredible network, go support Abnormal Mapping, I think it's twitter.com/abnormalmapping, and if you search for Abnormal Mapping on Patreon you can find their... their Patreon feed. I've been on a bunch of episodes with the Great Gundam Project, it's great.

Anyway. They told me that their favorite, their problematic fave was Stel Nideo, of the stels. That they... their pitch was like—and, Em, I'm sorry if I'm butchering this—was basically that... there was something attractive about the idea of the ease and kind of freedom of thought that comes with living in a society that has functionally convinced its citizens that it's the best thing in the world, living in a society in which the propaganda completely works, and there is no escape from ideology, because you don't have that weight of criticality, and knowing that there is something else and that there's a way to push back, it's so... So, Em, to be 100% clear, a leftist podcasts, who does incredible deep reads of media, you know,

that, that are incredibly thoughtful, and who I think understands personally—you know, this is me as their friend speaking—the exhaustion and the kind of despair that comes along with that work. And so it was really interesting to hear that, and I was thinking about this a lot while prepping this season, or this arc specifically, which... I really wanted to get people from Stel Nideo on screen and to frame them in the way in which it was clear that their belief was unshakable, and use the language of heroism really distinctly, and use that commanded a sort of heroic presence.

That they were not... Everyone there is part of the empire, right? They're part of the Principality. These are heroes to them, so when I had to think about Amber Haze, and when I had to think about the militia, I wanted to draw on two, two elements that are influences for this season, but not think about them as villains, even though they were the clear antagonists in this sequence. The first were the local militia in, in Orzen—very much me trying to bring to mind for my players the opening levels of Valkyria Chronicles, in which the main characters are young people who are part of a local militia in a peaceful town. And they kind of fight against an empire that's marching through their city streets. And they're outgunned, but they manage to pull it together anyway. Unfortunately for the people of Orzen, that did not happen here. The second is a character from an anime, unsurprisingly, which is Suzaku from Code Geass. Suzaku has this just hot-blooded pure-of-heart to a fault quality, and there's a lot of Suzaku in Amber Haze who is the kind of leader of the rearguard of Imperium's Plume. And this idea that like, she would show up, and she would be able to be like "I'm here to save the day! I'm here as a symbol of justice, I'm here as a symbol to rally around me!" Right? Like... Amber Haze probably spent her entire life in that town or towns like it, people know her face there. You know, she's stationed there as a local celebrity, she probably does volunteer work there, she probably loves the theatre, she probably has a partner who lives in town. She's also the agent of a terrible empire. She's also a living symbol of the greatest perversion of the good, given that Imperium is clearly a perversion of Empyrean from a past season, if you know you know. And I needed to... I needed to figure out how to put *that* in a conversation with the big thing that we have at the heart of this season. Which is like: What do you fucking do inside of an empire? You know it's bad, right? You know that it's fucked.

And I say this as someone... Let me explain the uncles thing now. I have three uncles who were all in the military in the last 30 years. My... And, content warning here for discussion of mental health and suicide. And just discussion of empire, which is going to always need this. I'm gonna make a note again to add suicide also. "Mental health and suicide"... My uncle Rick served in the military, served in the army during the late 80s and early 90s... Mostly the late 80s, I think he finished his duty towards the end of Gulf Wars, the first Gulf Wars, and then spent 20 years falling down the hole into conspiracy theory, into the worst sort of like End of Days branches of Christian extremism. Like, you know, is the person who made me... who I've gotten into a fight with so bad I had to leave Thanksgiving, you know, multiple times. Like, that's the sort of a relationship I had with my uncle Rick, a person with a big heart, a person who loved me greatly, who was so proud of me, and also someone who spent time learning how to shoot guns for an imperialistic government. My uncle Jeff fought in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11, and was maybe the biggest hearted person I've ever know in my life, and wracked with depression after those wars.

[00:45:00]

Unable to find... secure the help from the VA that he needed, and seeing his mental health degrade over years was terrible, and... and yet, also, I know... I know that he was in a foreign country to enforce the will of the state, the will of the foreign state, by hurting and killing other innocent people. And my uncle Larry was an Air Force engineer—an Air Force mechanic, rather—for over 20 years. And I'll note, two of these three people I'm talking about are black, which, there is a racial component here for me, and maybe it's clearest of my uncle Larry, who now runs a spaghetti warehouse logistics job. That's his job, he's in charge of logistics in a spaghetti factory, basically—well, not right now, because of the queranteens. And he lived a life in which he was proud of me my whole life, and was the person who would pull me aside and say: "Listen, Aus, you're a role model for your little cousins, you gotta understand..." You know, "Here's a 100 bucks, because I'm your Godfather, I need you to know, that no matter what I'm gonna take care of you, because you're the light in the eyes of the generation, you're the oldest of your generation of our family, you've shown them that there's another way. You know, for me and your dad, and your uncle Rick, we couldn't get out of the house we were in, right?" And, again, like... I would need to lay out like, content warning, content warning, content warning to talk about what my parents... both of my parents went through as kids, but on my father's side was a terrible, terrible, terrible experience with them growing up in the house that they were in. And so this is a situation with like: here is someone who served from the 80s through the mid 2000s, though, again, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, worked on, you know, the planes that would bring people to kill iraqis, to kill, you know, people in Afghanistan and elsewhere throughout the Middle East.

And it's like, this is like one of the most big-hearted people I know who I know joined the military to escape a terrible situation in his home life, who came out of it, of the three of them, healthy and secure, and has been able to start, you know, families, and, have, you know, an adopted son, and have a wife, and have, you know, be active in a family... And yet was enabling this sort of violence. And what do you do? Right? It's so easy in the abstract. What do you do when it becomes particular?

And I think this is also what is at the core of the sequence in which Valence sees... um, sees their god enact justice. And there is a little bit of vagueness, I think, that was—and I'll get into this, you know—that was not intentional in that sequence in terms of what was happening. And I'm gonna lay it out as clearly as I can at the top of the next downtime, because it was just not as clear as I wanted it to be in the actual moment of descr... moment of description, and I didn't realize it until after the episode came out, and by that point Jack had already made music timed to what I just said on the spot, which was all of the stuff around the ships showing up and the, you know, god's cool laser, or whatever.

And so, that's a sequence where, unequivocally, what is happening there is that the Pact of Necessary Venture, whatever that is, has breached the Partizan Gate, has gone past the Portcullis that it's not supposed to into, you know, into the, the Scutum-Centaurus Arm where the Nobel are, where a number... countless other cultures presumably are—we have not

talked about which are there yet, but you know, there's a bunch of other people there, um, of alien cultures... In order to do harm. We know that they were there to do harm already once. I'm saying now, and will make it even clearer, they were there to do harm again. Um, this is a... for me, this is me imagining a world in which the Europeans who would colonize North America, South America, Africa, parts of Asia... what if they couldn't? What if they..? What if something drew the line there, and said "No"? And then what comes after that, right?

And so, from this perspective of like, here are a bunch of people, whose... who you wouldn't even... they haven't been colonized yet to be called indigenous peoples, but once the empire *gets* there, they will transform them identitarily so that they are forced into this, this subcategory in which they are demeaned and marginalized. And in this moment there is this bright light, there is this presence that eradicates them. I think that's an unequivocal good. I think... And if I'm echoing some Ta-Nehisi Coates cadence here, I apologize, but I found myself that's the voice I think of in these things, right? They... Yeah, they are through the Partizan Gate, that's exactly right. They're beyond the Partizan Gate, they're on the other side of the Partizan Gate. The thing that I was... the thing that I tried to say and I got distracted talking about a different angle of this was that—and again, this is what I'm gonna correct when we get to the next downtime episode—is that Valence sees the stars that they saw before they got here. Which is like, that is "Oh shit, that's what's beyond the Gate, that is home." Like "That is my space." So right, yes, exactly, exactly, yes, yes. But we didn't see a world, we didn't... I didn't talk about there being a planet in that shot, necessarily, 'cause I don't know where the Gate opens up necessarily, but it is close enough to where Valence recognized it.

And where I should have been a little bit more clear, but again, it's actual play, it's imperfect, and in this case it was something that no one at the table caught, necessarily, until people caught it and were confused by it, right? Yes, that is where I was leading to in terms of the stars, exactly. And so, and so... Sorry, I'm just responding to someone in the chat, and if you're listening to this podcast you can't see the chat. And so, one of the things there that's so interesting to me—and to me that is the same question as Make the war the enemy, not the soldiers, this is the same thing caught up in... The people who were living full lives in Orzen are completely immersed in ideology, are completely contributing to an empire that is about to... That, if not for historical happenstance, would have *already* conquered that arm of the Galaxy, would have *already* oppressed all of those people and moved on to assimilating them, as they have with the Hypha, as they have with so many other cultures. I wanted, I—and thanks God for Jack's music! I wanted to pull some of that onto screen in such a way, or into the show in such a way, that... it halts you into tracks a little bit. That like these dedicated colonizers were stopped, hard. This is the sort of justice many of us *do* pray for. I'm not someone who prays, not now, but I prayed when Iraq happened, but I prayed when 9/11 happened, I'm talking about all of this today, I was talking about the fact that mine is a generation that thought that 9/11 was going to be the big defining feature of our American generation and that now we're living through this, and I'm like "Hm. I guess stuff... I guess history doesn't stop, I guess things keep happening." And she was saying, "The first, um, you know, right away I remember you were so sad after 9/11, because you had a sense that things were gonna be really bad for other people." And I was like: "Yeah, that sounds like my ass, that sounds like me at 16. I mean, I was sad anyway." But that, you know, like

that is something that, that in the situation I was in... I wish—and at the time I was still very very very Catholic—where I prayed that things would not go the way that they did.

And, and... you know, those are real prayers that do get made, and YET here's the situations where you know those prayers are being made, because people on the other side of that Gate are praying to the god, the same god that Valence prays to, are hoping that someone will protect them. And at the same time, when we render it, when we render that style of power on screen that, like, impossible authority, I don't know how you do anything but shake. And, and, we'll talk a little bit later about the additional context, because obviously indigeneity isn't the only angle by which you can talk about that story, and what happened, and I'll talk a little bit about that in a moment, but THAT is one of the core concerns, by which I mean objects of inquiry of PARTIZAN, is: If you could snap your fingers and obliterate oppressors, is that the outcome? Or not "Is it?" but... HOW is it? How do we shake it out? And I say that because in the calculus we are the oppressors. If you're watching this on YouTube right now, if you're listening to this on your podcast player, like, it's... you know that we are contributing, right? That, like... we are part of the system that destroys lives, who can't even... who don't even know that we... that you and I exist. Or they know that we exist, and in fact, look at the lives that we live in some cases and go like "...These motherfuckers." And rightfully so. And so like, it's tagly, it's a mess.

And so we're engaging with some of this, and I think this was a good episode in which that makes the war the enemy. Here's almost like... not just Make the war the enemy, but make... make justice difficult, because this is not a fairy tale, like we are out of the age of fairy tales at this moment in the history of the Divine cycle or whatever. And we're into the moment where even justice, even necessary justice feels difficult, and feels troubling, because aesthetics themselves have been colonized, because aesthetics themselves have become the tool of the oppressor such that justice is made to look scary. And that is the way it is in our world also. That is the way it is in our world because when someone raises something as simple as affirmative action, suddenly it's impossible, when someone raises something as necessary as decolonization, it's impossible, because "what will it do to the markets? How will things recover if, you know, an oil company pulls out of... Listen, they create a lot of jobs in that country." etc. Right? These things are not just systems, they're also aesthetic. And so, this season is VERY much interested in tangling with that stuff. And I don't know if we're gonna do... Like, who knows what happens at the end of it, right? It *is* actual play. I hope we do well by it. I think that this was a good episode at pulling those ideas out, or at least it was for me a very useful episode for doing it.

A much less complex thing that I love is **Make the pilots feel small and make the mechs feel powerful**, another one of these principles, in which... This was actually a principle that came after I talked to Austin Ramsay—[gasps a bit] Excuse me— about this. Which, by the way, congrats to Austin Ramsay and the entire *Beam Saber* team, this game is out of Kickstarter now, congrats on blowing past a number of stretch goals, I'm so excited and so happy that I could be a part of that in any way. I'm doing a short story for that book, so look out for that, I have to figure out what it is, that'll come next. [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] In any case, this principle was added to the game when Austin Ramsay I think messaged me once

and was like: “Do you think there’s anything missing in terms of principles?” And the thing that I raised was—and this was coming off of... this was last year, but it was me thinking about stuff that was in other mech games... I think that maybe something like this is just straight up in *Armour Astir*... or it was certainly something that we put into *Scum & Villainy* I think, it was this idea of Make big things bigger and small things smaller, Make the sense of scale real. And the thing I love about this is, in this set of episodes, is that principles are not... infallible, or immutable. And so I think what we saw examples of here was kind of... We saw the principle twisted a little bit from the way it’s normally deployed, we saw it extended in an interesting way, and we saw it inverted.

When it was twisted was when... You know, this whole season what we’ve seen is a lot of medium-scale mechs basically of the same scale. Mow is the, the one that is not that, Mow is... I guess Valence’s mech is also... or vehicle, is also light. But comparatively, that doesn’t come up that often in terms of scale, because they mostly use it as a sort of transportation device and not as a combat vessel. Mow is BIG. Mow big. And so that we’ve seen some scale differences there, but in general we’ve seen a lot of what we call medium-scale mechs, and so, one of the things that was interesting was—what if we could play with this a little bit and talk about not the... pilots feel small and make the mechs feel powerful, but make a SMALL mech feel powerful.

[01:00:00]

And so the Cadenza is this quick, light thing up against the heavier medium mechs of Mow and the Three Cheers!. And the moments of like the Three Cheers! rapidly trying to gain distance as the Cadenza comes swinging in on top of the theater and like trying to close distance and get up in the face of this thing that’s built for long-range combat? [AUSTIN does a chef kiss] Love it! Incredible! I love that sense of, again, messing with the sense of scale here.

The second way in which we inverted, let’s say, is the inversion of “the pilots feel small and make the mechs feel powerful”—what if we make the pilots feel big, because Thisbe is big? Mow big, Thisbe big. And in fact she’s so big, that she’s able to move with the degree of power and speed that lets her just completely compete with this thing directly, right? Like, actually run at it at incredibly fast speed that can keep up with it. I think this is all really interesting too, because mechanically speaking the... the way the mechs work in this game, and the scale works, is that light mechs are supposed to have an advantage against medium mechs and especially against large mechs when it comes to effect or positioning or magnitude, or... the other ways in which you kind of can calculate an effect and position, because they’re so much faster and can move more quickly. And the exchange there is that they have way less in terms of what they can carry, their load is only 3, versus the load of a heavy mech being, what, 6? And I’m definitely of the mind that I’m not... I’m not quite sure it works? We don’t have anyone who’s doing a light combat mech, so I haven’t been able to test it, but... You really have to allow it in such a way that... you really have to like really have a player who’s able to leverage the speediness of light mechs to take advantage of it. But, regardless, I loved that we had this moment where the player character was so big that the disadvantage between the two was reduced.

And then finally, the kind of extension of Make the pilots feel small and make the mechs feel powerful is: what if you make the mechs feel small and you make the True Divine, Autonomy Itself, that which they believe they worship, even bigger than that? That set of scale. And then you loop it, because you say: “What if that person, instead of talking to the military, instead of talking to the state, talks to someone who is a devout believer, and who wants to help people? And who, nevertheless, has been part of many instances where people get hurt?”

And just to wrap back around to that question—or you know, I’ll save this thing, we’ll get back to it some other... at some other point.

Consider the risk, Hold on lightly. I wanted to... The big group roll at the end is holding on lightly. That’s not in the rules as written, are you kidding me? Rules as written don’t say you can let people roll different actions as a group action. There’s no... there’s no like an Emp... a thing on the Empath sheet saying: “You just do a Newtype blend thing, just do it! Just roll whatever, let’s see.” That’s holding on lightly.

And I’ll contrast holding on lightly there with something that comes up in the next arc, but again is a mechanical thing, and this is... I’m gonna spoil a very very very simple mechanical thing, which is that at one point I let Keith move a point out of Destroy and into Battle, because, again, we get this thing where he wants to use Destroy where he should be using Bombard or Battle. Because of what Destroy is. There’s just no... He didn’t have clarity on the fact that Destroy is fundamentally about hurting stable buildings, buildings and areas, and not about fighting things. You can do it, but at a much lower effect or position, because it’s much much more difficult to do that thing. And so there was a moment there—where this is also holding on lightly in a sense, where it was like “Fuck it. I know that this is what you wanna do. Move the point. This is the thing... You want this other thing, you imagine Leap doing this other thing, take the point there instead, because that is what you... that’s how you imagine that.” And so that’s holding on lightly, but what isn’t holding on lightly would be saying: “You know what? Fuck it, roll whatever you want, roll Destroy when what you’re talking about is Battle or Volley... sorry, Battle or Bombard.” Because that is... a situation where you’re almost punishing other players who’ve put the points in Battle or Bombard instead of putting them in Destroy. Because if you have it in Destroy then you can use it all... and you let that happen, then that player gets to use it for all of them. So, again, that’s about treating... again, conveying the world honestly back in the Goald, but also about holding on lightly in interesting ways.

So, let’s go to the next page. We’re going to talk about what worked, what didn’t, and what was left on the table. We’ve already talked about a little bit of this, so I’m gonna move kind of quickly through, I wanna get to your questions and we’ve already been going for—let me check here... A little over an hour. Whoops!

So, **Big Wins** for me this season... or this set of episodes:

Doctor Leap—great sequence, the idea of Leap as a doctor... Incredible. The gloved hands with rings on them.

The USO Show. Number 2. The USO Show was fantastic, the kind of officer show, the kind of like pre-war show is a fantastic visual of the nation ready to send its people to die for some shit they shouldn't.

In general, number 3, Gur Sevraq, I feel like has been very effective. I'll say that there's some Gur Sevraq stuff coming up that I think is really really good. I... Gur Sevraq was like the character I'm most... I was most unsure about coming into this season. A big important character, clearly, didn't know if I would get them on screen, didn't know if he would have the sense of presence, wasn't convinced about the voice I was going to use, has probably my favourite of the Road to Season 6 intros—if you haven't listened to those, you should probably go listen to the Road to Season 6 intros, especially as this stuff continues. In general pay real close attention... In general, I've seen... I think if you're a theory crafter, if you're someone who's like "What's really going on with _____", Gur Sevraq has been... You know, when I was like... to, to Dre, I was like: "This is your god." Gur Sevraq is—this is me telling you—Gur Sevraq has said some true shit, and there are some fun—if you want to theorize—are some fun things to go back and listen to things that Gur Sevraq said not only in the Road to Season 6 intro, but in the appearances that they've made so far in the season. And in general, stuff like Gur Sevraq in the downtime preaching in the... in the halls of the... in the secret hallways. Gur Sevraq... I almost spoiled a thing. I'm not gonna do that. There are sequences that have been really strong with Gur Sevraq, including some you haven't heard yet.

Number 4, squad progression - will they ever tier up? This was a Needs Work last time, this is now PAYOFF. SBBR tiered up. And I will spoil this, again, tiny mechanical thing, the Rapid Evening at the beginning of the next session also tiers up, thank fucking God, we're in the Tier I. The difference is so monumental, because the leap from Tier 0 to Tier III is incomprehensible, the leap from Tier I to Tier III is situational, right? Like, it's: do you have the upper hand? Do you have the right position? Do you have the right sense of surprise? Do you know their weakness? How can I as the GM play honestly, but also allow them to fight above their weight? And as a reminder, and it's important that they fight above their weight, because that's a way to get experience points, it's encouraged that players, like, punch above their weight a little bit, they're the heroes in this story. And so, I always allow it a bit more than I disallow this sort of action, but it will be felt still. And the fact that they're at Tier I is really fun, because now those Tier III squads that previously were color, or background, or like: "Ooh, you gotta be careful, as that Tier III squad will fuck you up!" Now is: "That Tier III squad is coming to fuck you up, what do you do?" And I'm so excited to see more of that, you know? Imperium's Plume was an example of that for sure.

Uh... Let me see here. Number 5, MORE MECH FIGHTS. Last time this was just Mech fight. Now it's MORE MECH FIGHTS, [AUSTIN laughs] because the stuff with the Cadenza, again, was really fun.

Number 6, Stel Nideo is finally on screen. I'm so relieved to get them on screen, they are this group that is so important, and so central to the concept of what the Principality is, that it was hard at first to separate them from Stel Kesh, 'cause they both seemed so fundamental to

the Principality. And yet this season they've barely been on screen, we haven't seen them enact power. Which is part of how they work, of course, right? They delimit the entire board, they make the rule of play, and so... And all play is... They're the GM of the game so to speak, right? They're the designer, and so anything that happens is within them, there's almost a... um, an... God, why am I blanking on this important version of omnipotence that Leibniz talks about?

One second, I gotta look up Leibniz's definition of omnipotence. Pantheism, which is... Yes, pantheism is right, and I'm thinking of, I'm thinking about the ways in which Leibniz basically says that God... for Leibniz God is a... God is omnipotent in the sense that God—and I'm butchering this 'cause it's been years—is the universe, right? And so all action possible is possible through God, and through... and in such, God is the root of power, God is the root of action, and therefore, God is omnipotent, right? Which, if you dig into like Leibniz's monads, and stuff, you can get a bunch of shit there. Anyway, we can't keep going down this path, it has been... too long, I cannot... I cannot wield my Leibniz knowledge anymore, clearly.

In any case, in any case, Stel Nideo is... was really fun to get on screen, it was really fun to see them kind of... do all the stuff we talked about before, around not just propaganda, but owning... owning heroism, right? Being the source of good, the thing that people point to. Again, this is their... Their long-term project is about restoring that idea that they are the good guys, that Stel Nideo, they are the good ones, they're the ones who understand right from wrong in this world. And that you're gonna see more of that as we continue in this season as one of the things that Stel Nideo is really here trying to do.

Number 7, a thing that I think is a big win is, previously I had said that SBBR is platonic slow burn. I really liked in the SBBR downtime episode as the group is starting to kind of sort of come together, and here we got some payoff—they finally come together in a spectacular way, protecting their undoubtedly most harmful member from getting a scar, or worse, from being harmed, from being hurt. They come together to protect Broun who had just done something pretty terrible. And the payoff, again, of the double-bind there, of like, here's a character you care about who you know has done some shit, but who also... Yay, friendship! That moment is so, so, so good.

Number 8 is the A-Plot, um... um, actually moving? The A-Plot did something. There was A-Plot happening here. Not that there hasn't been, Gur Sevraq stuff is A-Plot, the A-Plot is whatever the characters do in a real sense, but stuff like finally revealing the Pact of Necessary Venture, which has come up... And someone correct me here. I know it comes up in a Road to Season 6 episode, because Rye is a signatory of the Pact of Necessary Venture, and Rye is... was name dropped in that intro... Rye delivers an intro about the.. about Stel Orion. I think, I think that it's the intro in which Rye is like "We don't be... we don't wanna be the piece of art, we wanna be the canvas, we wanna be the museum that the piece of art is hung in." The "if we do our job well enough you'll never know we're there" type shit. But I thought also there was another mention of the Pact of Necessary Venture recently, and I don't remember where that is, and the transcripts aren't there yet. I think it may have been... it may have been... Like, again, this is, this is... Someone says "the sign that

explains the painting”, no idea what you’re talking about. Would love to know what you’re talking about. Um...

Regression in the chat says: “It was super cool dissecting the dilemma within Brown in real time to figure out whether those actions are in character.”

...It may have been Crysanth? I don’t remember, I have to go back and like listen to multiple episodes, because I was pretty sure coming into this episode that the Pact of Necessary Venture had come up for sure.

Morgan says “Gur Sevraq’s stories to Clem.” So you know what episode that was in? Um... I’ll have to look it up. Maybe it was... Was it the Rapid Evening downtime? It must have been the Rapid Evening downtime, then. I’ll probably just go back and listen to that tonight or tomorrow, and try to locate where that was. In any case... “No elaboration on what they are, involve the phrase...” Okay, so I’ll look up the Gur and Clem stuff, which makes perfect sense to be... given, given, you know, the truth, given this set of twenty one notes that I have in front of me. Um... So, very happy to get into some of that stuff, the... the players are... Morgan says “The most recent Rapid Evening downtime.” The players have gotten into the stuff where like, “Hey, the Pact of Necessary Venture is a big deal that’s going to be an A-Plot thing going forward.

[01:15:00]

Hey, the stuff that’s going on with Gur Sevraq and what Gur Sevraq has said to Clem, and the kind of imparting the visions of the future, the Future being the Divine that Gur Sevraq has.” You know, and kind of showing those possible futures to the Rapid Evening crew, that stuff’s been really fun, and has been part of the kind of A-Plot advancing. And in general this sort of slow relationships being built across the table, the fact that this episode ended with the possibility of all of these kind of... you know, groups that are sometimes oppositional, sometimes revolutionary, sometimes, you know, simply rebellious, sometimes simply alternative, not oppositional, not trying to take anything down, just trying to live their own lives over here... getting... opening the door for those groups to come together is really exciting, I cannot wait for where we’re going with some of that stuff, ‘cause I don’t know how it’s gonna change... I don’t know how it’s gonna shake out! There’s been a lot of conversations internally that’ve been like: “What the fuck is gonna...? What’s the rest of the season look like? How do we..? Who..? Huh?!” So, we’re gonna, we’re gonna talk through it some more, and then we’ll see, we’ll go from there.

Alright, onto the stuff that **Needs Work**.

The first one here is better signposting, uh, caution, care, and criticality. I need to... So, the big thing here is definitely—and I didn’t know this until last night... Well. Let me pause. The episode that came out this week, Episode 15, came out in the middle of Passover, the most important—as far as I know, correct me if I’m wrong, but—the most important of the Jewish holidays, and, one, fictionally clearly draws, at least partially, on Passover, right? This is an episode in which God tells Valence to mark the just so that, so that their God’s judgement or gaze... attention, attention is not given to them. And that is obviously 100% me being like: “Yes, here is an instance of justice... divine justice and someone who can protect those from

it whom... whom are deemed to be, you know, just themselves.” And that’s like... there’s no doubt that that was intentionally, you know, drawn from Passover, though, obviously, again, divine retribution is a broader thing that has other influences, and I don’t... In talking to Dre about the character I will say that neither of us intended Valence from the jump to feel anything like a Moses analogue. I think very very very importantly, Valence does not come from an oppressed people, Vale... I think it’s part of why you see Valence make so many big moves, is that Valence is literally from outside of the ideology and the ideological pressures of the Divine Principality. Of the player characters, Valence is the one who knows most that another world is possible because they lived in it. And because the... the arm of empire threatened it. And so that is the important distinction there.

But what is true is that—and this is why I say I need to better signpost caution, care, and criticality—is that I should have paused after that sequence and said: “Hey, I know we’re dealing with big ideas that are very important... that are... that resemble, and in some cases are tied to real beliefs real people have about their faith. I hope that you will trust us to do well by that, I hope that you know that I’m not going to just repeat these stories one for one, I don’t attempt to, I’m not a scholar of Judaism, and also it’s not the story we’re telling. We’re not fundamentally telling a story about... you know, that is trying to replicate that story, though it would also be... it would have also felt...” You know, I’m just gonna read what I wrote last night, which is.... Let me find it here. I’ll also note really quick—the reason a lot of this came up was, it was Passover this week and when this... when this thing happened by chance, the folks who I talked to, who had seen, who had recognized that coincidence—that was not a planned thing in any way, this is... the episode happened to come out in the middle of Passover, there was absolutely no way that we were attempting to line that up, when we record the episodes, I never know how long each episode is going to be, Ali cuts them into what she thinks is the best length, and we’ll talk more about this in a little bit, because of one of the questions we got. And then it happened to come out this way. And when I first talked to some people about it, I read, and probably misread, that it was almost like a lucky thing, and so later in a conversation I said it was lucky, and that was like, deeply thoughtless of me to take what I thought was a representative conversation and then assume that that reflected something else, so apologies for that.

And then here’s what I said in this conversation on the Discord last night was: “I’m not Jewish, and though I was raised by very open-minded and progressive Catholic and Christian sets of parents, I’m not aligned there anymore either. So even though stories of divine retribution aren’t unique to Judaism (or to the Abrahamic faiths at all, there’s lots of other fascinating divine retribution stories and beliefs out there), I definitely still want to move with care here.

Two things struck me while prepping for PARTIZAN that led me here. The first is that we just haven’t had this style of faith in our show since the beginning of Autumn in Hieron, where we know that some sort of god has power, but we don’t know much about them, their interests (if they are “interested” even in that way), etc. Given that this is a game drawing on various medieval and early modern histories from around the world, the question of faith and reason (and the limits of BOTH of those things) felt like something I couldn’t just... ignore? Faith in general and the interlocking and conflicting relationships of religions specifically is important

across just about every major historical period that influenced PARTIZAN.” And here, obviously we’re talking about, again, medieval and early modern Europe, but also I think Art and I have said that like we definitely had our big phase of being interested in feudal Japan, people know I’m a big fan of the Three Kingdoms era of history. These are moments where religion and belief and faith are part of the quilt of those times, you cannot talk about the Sengoku era of Japan without talking about the ways in which Christianity was tied to politics and to warfare, right? Like, one of the reasons that Christianity was allowed in was because the opening ports allowed there to be a place where you could get guns to fight your war with. And was often hand-in-hand with “We’ll give you guns if you also let us give you moks to come proselytize”, right? “If you let us build a monastery, if you convert like Nobunaga did, then you’ll be given a greater deal of, you know, martial power, because we’ll provide those things for you.” And so, you can’t... for me, I don’t know that you could tell the story without trying to dig into some of these things.

The second thing that I thought a lot about—and we talked about this a little bit already—was, and this is, I’m now back to reading from my thing from last night on Discord:

“The idea of divine retribution itself. Would we know it to see it? Would we want it if we could have it? When we are subsumed by evil such that every small motion we make furthers that evil, regardless of our intentions, how ought justice be brought to bear? The thing I love so, so much about Jack’s new music is that I think it really brings out a lot of the uncertainty in these questions. On paper, the thing we saw in the last episode is unquestionably just: An invading empire has its fleet crushed before it can do more harm than it has already done. But there is something scary in seeing justice brought to bear so swiftly and simply.

Which isn’t meant to undercut it as justice, even, but it is meant to raise those questions from a different angle than some of the ones we’ve already been exploring (and will continue to explore, again and again, from different angles!)”

I suspect that a number of people already believe that this is the sort of questions that go into having a scene like that. But I also know, because I’m marginalised in other different ways what it’s like to be hurt, and that... there are people you trust who fuck up, and there are people you trust whose expertise are limited such that a little bit of thoughtlessness goes a long way towards doing harm, and that they can perpetrate the sort of... the sort of myths, and the sort of... um. They can. they can...

I mean, this is again, core to the principle of the season, the idea of the season, that you don’t have to be malicious to do harm when you are inside of a space that is, in this case antisemitic, or that is, you know, a space that is imperialistic, a space that is antiindigenous. These are the things that you can... best of intentions can still stumble into that stuff, EVEN best of intentions plus education can still stumble into that stuff! Do you know what I mean? Even, EVEN part of the group and stumble into that stuff. As a black queer man, trust me when I say, there are black queer people out there who’ve made my life worse, right? And I know that if you’re a part of a marginalized group it’s very easy for you to also identify the people in your life or in the world who you’re like: “What? You’re fucking— WHY are you

doing this?!” So it is not even enough to simply be part of an identitarian group, or part of a marginalized demographic to then handle the subject with care or to do it well.

And so, this is not even me saying I have to do better at doing that. What I need to do is make it clear when we go down these roads: “Hey, I know how important this is to people here. I KNOW that this is tied up with real belief in the same way that depictions of violence are, in the same way that depictions of, you know, sex and love can be for some people, in the same way that some of the other topics that we’ve talked about over the years around politics have. I think about the stuff like the end of COUNTER/Weight that is like... really tough shit happens there, that can not only be triggering, but disappointing, or can feel like... I think a lot about the way Aria Joie’s story goes, and the way that that hits different depending on who you are and what you imagine kind of the... what is the best version of a queer future, right? And it hits different depending on like what you would prioritize. The same thing goes with, with the end of Hieron, there’s stuff in there that is like... FUCK. And all I can do, and what I SHOULD do is... when telling these stories, is take the breath not only for the people on microphones but the people listening at home, to say we’re gonna do our best by this. That doesn’t mean that we’re impeccable, or, you know, perfect, but it does mean that we’re going to try to do it as best as we can.

And I’ll note a thing here that I don’t know why it didn’t show up on my screen, because I did... I went in and edited this list, this big... Let me go back one really quick. ...There it goes, now it’s in there if you take a look. Jesset City is another big win here. And Jesset City was an example here of us previously fucking up, doing a bad job around particular elements of representing disability on screen, and then working with consultant... with a consultant to develop like... Jesset City SPECIFICALLY comes out of conversations I had with Kevin Snow who is great, you can find them on Twitter [@bravemule](#). Kevin is a games writer, I’m very excited to see what they do next, they... I... I’m saying stuff I shouldn’t say, but they told me about a project they’re working on soon which is sick, I’m super excited. Kevin, if you’re listening, shoutouts to you, you’re great! They are a fantastic collaborator, and helped me... when I pitched Jesset City, they were able to talk to me about things that they wanted to make sure that Jesset did on screen, and a big one was not to... not to—and this is one of the difficulties of doing a game like this—is not to put Jesset on the bench, right? Or to go the extra distance to... to pull them off the bench.

By that I mean that I have a roster of NPCs that could show up, right? Apparatus Aperitif is one of them, right? Like, oh wow, I’d love to get this person on screen, Apparatus Aperitif seems sick, I just want them to show up, you know? They’re really cool. Alise Breka, the writer who, who is currently, you know, interviewing Exeter Leap, right? That... Those are characters like “Huh, I really want to see more of them on screen.” And then you— It’s one thing for those characters to exist in downtime where you can just kind of like—yeah, there’s a scene that’s happening. But what ends up happening with—especially with disabled characters who are in combat roles in stories—is that... maybe because of unintentional bias, maybe because of thoughtlessness, and often because of ableism, writer will bring a character up and say: “They used to be a hot shit pilot, they used to be a really cool soldier, and now they are in a tactical command position.” And obviously there are people, real people who fit that role, but that move from hero to management, or from frontline to

rearguard or whatever, it has... You know, a lot of it is tied up in a lot of ableist tropes and a lot of ableist kind of representation in fiction. And so, one of the things that Kevin and I talked about with that character was like: "Go the extra mile to, when it's time to fight, get Jesset in there." And this was a great arc for Jesset, I think, because Jesset came across as capable, but also still disabled in a way that did not ignore his disability. One of the th— And sometimes that means going an extra step and hitting pause on the pacing so that you could give space to a story. And so the... the... the example there was talking Jesset going to buy... or having multiple different prostheses. Which, again, I was very grateful Kevin messaged me after an episode and was hyped on that...

[01:30:00]

...which made me feel like, "Okay, good, I'm glad this worked out, I'm glad that that worked out." Because in my mind one of the things that I thought about it was: Jesset was part of that first mission in Obelle, kind of survives it, gets a name, gets a promotion inside of the Oxblood Clan. It's like, what do you do with that if you're someone like Jesset City, who is a tinkerer but also a soldier, who is a pilot and also a poet, and it's like... Well, if you had a little bit of spending money what if this is someone who decides: "I'm gonna buy myself a new prosthetic arm that does one of the things I like to do a little bit better." And that was like a fun element of showing Jesset's expressivity and interest, but also making sure... It's one of those weird things, which is like: yes, if you're out there buying a second arm, if you NEED to have a different prosthetic for different things, you're indicating fictionally the REAL limits of prosthetics, that these are things that help you but ALSO have limitations, and have their own, um, capabilities that are different from one to another.

And so I think Jesset came across really well. My favorite thing about Jesset City is his enthusiasm, I try my best to play Jesset like a Keith character in the sense that Jesset knows what's right, and Jesset is going to do what is right, even if long-term it gets him into trouble a little bit. But that is like the... the heart of Jesset City, is kind of... In Gundam terms Jesset is a Judau Ashta, not an Amuro Ray, and not a Kamille Bidan, is very much the sort of like... hot-blooded, believes in justice, is going to do what is necessary even when outgunned, you know? So that was another big win for me.

Um... Let me go back to what needs work. And again, I just wanna underscore again that I apologize for not being clearer about... about what our intentions are with that stuff, which is to explore all of the stuff that we've talked about here today, it is not to take light of anyone's faith. You know, I said this in Discord again, the sort of atheist I am is SO not the new atheist, you know, Dawkins, Hitchens shit... Like, that stuff INFURIATES me, because it dismisses a history of value in faith. I would not be allowed to speak into this microphone to you if not for people of faith fighting for my civil freedom in this country, right? There is a history of civil rights caught up in churches, in temples, in mosques, in all manners of, of... of religious worship across the world. And I— Even though, also, churches and, you know, people in positions of power inside of religions across the world have also been able to wield that power in means that hurt people, I'm not someone who says like "Throw the baby out with the bathwater." I understand it because my family... 'cause faith is so important to basically everyone in my family except for me and an uncle of mine, and my mom, I guess. I know the

power that... that faith brings to people and what it means to them in their lives, and even to some of the members, to people on the show. I haven't said it yet, but there's an upcoming Pusher update that is me and Dre talking about Valence and Valence's history and stuff, and Dre talking about his experience in, in churches, and his relationship to faith and religion, and what his goals were. And so, and so... look forward to that if you're at the Pusher level, I think it's a good conversation.

Um, other things that needs work is prepping under quarantine. I don't know that it comes across, but the first half of that mission is so much worse than the second half. That is because it took me two or three times as long to prep and I got half as much good stuff. [laughing a bit] Not being able to go to a cafe to do this prep is SO hard for me. There's types of work I can do here in my room at my desk that is easy, and ironically that's very very light work, like research, watching stuff, playing stuff, taking notes while doing those things. There's heavy work I can do here. I can... You want me to write 30 pages? I'll knock it out, let's go, let's get it. I might be up until 6 a.m. doing it, because that's... my best work hours are from midnight to 6 a.m., unfortunately for the brain that I have, but that's... that's doable. It's that middle tier of work: prep, outlining, harder research, like digging through pdfs, reading Wikipedia pages, watching more complex documentaries and talks, reading tabletop books and taking notes, designing encounters, designing locations—all of that is SO hard for me to do from in my room. It's so easily distractible work for me for some reason. And... So I'm really missing that, and some of the things that needs work for me is just... I need to be... I NEED to get to where I can do that prep, with the speed and focus that I used to be able to do from going to a coffee shop down the block, but from my living room or from my bedroom, right?

The third thing is understanding what comes next, which is... Just we're at that part of the show now, where like I know we're in the second act, I know what pieces are lining up on the table, I know where the curtain has been drawn back—not to use a pun about the Curtain—but I know where like... what is in play now. But I don't quite know what— I know what the mystery is, and I know what the facts are that I need to unveil, but I don't necessarily know what the rest of the show looks like or what the relationship between the Rapid Evening and SBBR is going to look like, or what happens after the next arc... And even the next arc I only kind of know in my head. So we'll see.

The fourth thing here is stumbling over big moments. This is specifically me talking about a thing that needs work, is like... And I think it reflects... goes back to number 2, where the prep under quarantine is bad. normally in a situation like... um, Valence goes in and sees the stuff on the feed, and sees God, and the stars, and blah-blah-blah. I would have had like: "Valence sees the stars and recognizes that this is from their home system, or from the other side of the Gate, that was the last place that they saw before they came through the Gate or whatever." Or I don't even know if they came through the Gate, like, there's stuff that I just straight up... That's a, that's a Dre question. [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] Um, but that is something that I stumbled on, and I fucked that up, like... Ah, I didn't stick the landing on that, and I didn't even notice I didn't stick the landing on that until it was already out, and that's frustrating, and that's part of just like not having the prep where I wanna have it.

And the fifth thing is production stumbles. I don't know if you noticed this, but there's like repeated stuff at the beginning of the most recent episode and the end of the last episode, and that's because the—and this is also stumbling over the big moments—the original ending to the first episode of the arc was cut and replaced with parts of the beginning of the second recording of the arc, because I just TOTALLY bombed the description of the Cadenza coming, I didn't even remember—I like did the lead-in one about the violin noises, like at the top of that fight, or right before it got there, I was like: "Oh, and you can hear violin noises in the distance, and then it showed up and I forgot that it made violin noises. I forgot that. Or I just didn't say it, it was written in front of me, but I was so tired, I was so out of it that I, like, stumbled over what should've been a really cool debut, and, thankfully, when we did the next episode recording we... I was able to reiterate that stuff. But then—number 5, production stumbles: part of that... uh, when I slid some of... I, like, handled the edit to the end of episode 14, and when Ali handled the beginning of episode 15... it wasn't necessarily clear I think when we were supposed to come back in. But also we wanted to include some of the... some of the... um, summary of what had happened in the previous time, 'cause it's good to have summaries, so it's messy. And I wanna get that stuff going better. And again, a lot of that is... the ways in which the coronavirus have changed in a negative and frustrating way. So. So yeah.

Next page, **Q&A time!** Q&A, you can send your question in to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Please, use the subject "Drawing Maps", just "Drawing Maps", and it'll make sure that we see it and it's in the right folder, so to speak, for me to answer. Let me take a sip. Mm. Alright.

Chris writes in and says:

"Could you talk about why you've been releasing longer episodes this season? There's been a pretty noticeable increase in average episode length from Spring."

[Laughing a bit] The answer to this is like fascinating to me. And the answer is: because the arcs are shorter, and many of the missions have been single episode— or single recording sessions. But that means that the breaks are such that... they... the break gets longer. So, here's a way to think about that. Something like COUNTER/Weight, there are arcs that cost us... there are arcs of COUNTER/Weight that are—I actually have a list of transcripts in front of me, so let me just look really quick... Let's take a look at a mid-season arc. A Thing You Know About Nightclubs to We've All Killed People, that's episodes—good titles—11, 12, 13 and 14, right? Let's do some quick maths as they say. And maybe this maths is gonna be wrong, and well, look, I guess I don't know what the fuck I'm talking about. Let's find out though. 97 minutes—episode 11, 56 minutes—episode 12, 67 minutes—episode 13, 81 minutes—episode 14, that's 312 minutes, divide that by 60 is 5,5 hours, right?

5,5 hours is longer than what some of the arcs have been this season, where they've been like 4 hours, right? When you... Previously what would happen is we would get into a call, and we would do a 3 to 4 hour call, and an arc would be three of those, right? And so you end up looking at... Um, 2 to 3 of those, I guess, you know, sometimes we do two of those, and then do one more recording that was like, you know... And this is SUPER true for

Twilight Mirage, where we would do a 4-hour recording, a 4-hour recording, and a 2-hour recording, or something like that. And some of that would be... would end up being on Clapcasts, some of that would be just like nothing, it would be maths, or like, book—checking up book stuff, or taking long breaks, or whatever. But that's like, what ended up happening, and so what you end up doing is like: "Well, I have THAT much material, I can break those up into 60-minute or 90-minute episodes." When all you have is 4 hours of content, you know, that is 240 minutes, right? And so you're like "Okay, I'll do one 90-minute episode, then I'll do another 90-minute episode, and then you have this like little 60-minute episode as your kicker, or in the middle, and it's like, it just doesn't, it doesn't feel like it flows as well. And so, in general Ali—Ali is the one who decides these lengths most of the time, she'll come to me and say: "Hey, I'm thinking this, does this...?" Or also, mostly it's like me saying "Wait, where is the break point?" so I can do an intro that only talks about stuff that has happened in this episode so far, or that specifically is meant to tease something in the next episode.

And so, you know, what she said to me when I raised this question with her today was like "Shorter missions missions mean that things get cut up in two instead of three, and then the other half of this is that downtimes are just best in their whole form." And downtimes are long because we like doing character scenes. There's a version of downtime where it's just like an hour in and out, and someone goes like, someone comes with their list of things that they do, and they say: "Hey, I'm gonna do an Enhance, an Enhance, and a Cut loose, me and... it's me, Sovereign Immunity, me and Millie are gonna go to the movie theatre and watch a movie together, that's our Cut loose, we have a good time." Like, that's... You can play this game that way. And we don't. [AUSTIN laughs a bit] And so, instead of breaking those up into multiple episodes, that's a big thing.

I'll say, and I've talked about this before, that like, Twilight Mirage was SO many episodes, and it made a lot of people drop off when... that we stayed on one side for too long. There are... A 100%, like I know... If you're... if you're someone who supports the Patreon, and watches Drawing Maps, or listens to Drawing Maps, you're like "Well, this just doesn't make any sense." But there are people who are like: "All I want is Keith episodes. That's it. That's all I care about.", "All I want is Art episodes.", "All I want is Sylvia episodes." Or, "All I care about is the Rapid Evening." Those people exist. And I know they exist because numbers are different, right? [AUSTIN laughs a bit.] And what often happens is someone like only listens to their favorite side and then will go back later and listen to the other side, or they'll skip every other week until the end of the season, and then they'll go back through and listen... or until there's a crossover point, and then go back and catch up. But it's weird, and what we've learned is that getting a full arc out, if you can do it in only two weeks, is one of the ways that you keep people listening and keep people from falling off, which is especially important right now, because podcast listening is down across the board in the industry in general, because a lot of people aren't commuting anymore. So, you know, worth giving some context there.

Next question comes in from **Guz**, who says:

“Can you talk at all about the process you and Dre went through in terms of fleshing out Valence’s relationship to God? Did that clip where you talked about it in the ep come up just after the vision or was that edited in?”

The ONLY thing that gets edited in there—and here’s another big moment flub—is I forgot to mention... Is that I wasn’t convinced it was clear, so that message, the message that... the message that, uh... uh... that Gur Sevraq and Valence get includes the phrase “Friend, assemble our exemplar”, and then “Wolf, heard your flock.” And I, originally, was like: “That’s it, that’s how I’m communicating that the True Divine is talking to Gur Sevraq, Friend, “I’m your friend, you just don’t know it yet.” and the Wolf, Valence. But then I was like: “That’s not enough.” And here is—I mean, this is actually a production process working right—and so the moment where I’m like “Oh, there’s another person there in the white curtain that you see, and it’s Gur Sevraq, and what do you do?” THAT was edited in, that was a pickup that we did a couple of days after the recording, but EVERYTHING else around it, around Gur—around Valence’s faith, was all just in an episode, a 100%, none of the description was pickup, none of the like, stuff around the ships showing up...

[01:45:00]

...none of the stuff around knowing that it was their God was a pickup, that was... that was all just, like, live actual play.

But to talk more broadly about the process that we talked through in terms of fleshing out Valence’s relationship—again. not to plug something that isn’t even out yet, but the next Pusher update will include a conversation with Valence about... sorry, with Dre about coming up with Valence. If you’re at the Pusher level you know we’ve already released one with Clementine about that, and then one with... I think the one with Broun and Millie is up now too... I believe, and if it’s not, yell at me if you’re at the Pusher level, and I’ll go make sure that it gets up very quickly. But the next one will be Valence and another character, and those are conversations where we just talk through that stuff. But to summarize a little bit for people who aren’t at that level: the... Dre... Let me get the order of things right.

What Dre kind of tells me there—and I’ll note, again, if you wanna hear the whole thing you should just wait a little bit and it’ll be up—is that he wanted to play a character who is not violent, coming off of... coming off of playing Even, coming off of playing Throndir, character who have a great... and playing Siege, right? These are three characters who are extremely violent characters, who are defined by their mastery of violence and their relationship to violence, and the ways in which they change, their relationships to violence change in some ways. And so, he was like: “I want to play a character who is not violent.” Or who avoids violence when possible. And so Valence starts there. And then bit by bit, I think it was after the *Microscope* game where I introduce Logos Kan’Tel and the idea of God, the idea of a monotheistic God, that there was a larger conversation there that was like “What if I’m part of that in some way?” And it’s also ended up being like how we ended up into the stuff with being an Empath, and you know, in that big conversation that we have we talk a lot about that stuff.

But then from there—you know, I kind of... I will say there's a moment basically where I told Dre before the beginning of the season, there's very much a moment where I was like: "Hey, let me... Can I... Can I bring you in on a thing? Let me bring you in on a thing." I'm trying to see if I can find that exact... uh... here it is... Um... You know what, I can't quite find it. Hm. Basically, I brought Dre in on the fact that the True Divine exists, right? And basically said: "Hey, [sighs] I think your culture probably..." ...This is that research shit again. This is all last November, right? Um... I think last November, it began early, early November. In fact, actually, some of this is even before that. Oh God, okay. Some of this is from July. So, as far back as July. Uh... Dre talks about a couple of other influences, including... including, of all things, the Marvel comic series "Secret Invasion" which apparently has a God angle that I don't know about, but that's interesting. Um, as far back as July, looks like, was where I first raised that stuff. ...Oh, this is great! This is actually it. Dre says to me: "I guess I want to ask. How far in advance did [player] know that [character] was a ____?" referring to a character in COUNTER/Weight. And that was one of the earliest parts at which we started talking about like: "Oh! Are you tied to something much bigger here?" Dre very much wanted to start playing in that space, and then I was like: "Okay, well, let me tell you about the True Divine. Let me tell you about like this big idea that's gonna be core to at least some of the mystery of the first act of PARTIZAN." And we ended up talking through what it meant to be that style of character a lot there. And then what we've done is since the show has started, come back around to it a number of times.

For people who don't remember there's a whole—if you look at... I wanna say it was episode 05... Let me see if that's true. Um, I think it's episode 05. In the description... Yes, there's a Nobel Fable of the First Wolves that was written by Dre. And, like, this is a topic that Dre's put a lot of thought into in terms of his understanding of what the Nobel's belief is, and the ways in which... and the reason that like Valence wears the wolf mask, what it means to have this particular understanding of... You know, the story as it's told there is kind of about how... [sighs] It's sort of taking aim at a very popular binary that's deployed in, specifically, a lot of Christian religious kind of storytelling, around having, you know, the herd, and the shepherd, and ALL of that stuff is Dre. And so for me it's about guiding that towards something really interesting, making sure Dre and I are on the same page, not necessarily about like "What's up with the True Divine?" or what the True Divine's motives are, none of that has been made clear to Dre, Dre just knew that like: "Hey, there's this force out there. God is here, at least something that your people call God." You know, I think that there's been a lot of conversation that, going as far back as the *Microscope* game, as to like whether or not God would ever be on camera, or whether or not miracles were real or would happen on screen. Which we... I kind of knew that they would immediately because the *Microscope* game indicated that it happens, right? And we'll continue to kind of play with that... in that space I think, but we... I will say right now, like, I don't know that there's a clear, settled game plan about what will or won't be on screen, partially because some of it will be guided by players, and so like...

If Dre is like: "I want to keep going down this path where I have a personal relationship with God in some way, I'm really interested in exploring what that might mean, what it might mean to be someone who has that sort of relationship." You know... And I wouldn't necessarily blame him for wanting that, given that that's like the sort of thing that we've done

with... If you go back to *Animal Out of Context*, that's like literally the game that Jack and I were building at the time, it was about that relationship as an interesting element of, of, you know, religious mythical storytelling. And so, and so I can imagine Dre wanting that. And if that's the case, that's a direction the story might go. Or if we decide like "Hey, we really actually wanna like... Everyone is really more interested in the metal gear side of all this shit, let's leave... Let's leave a much more heavy mystery angle on what's up with the True Divine." We'll do that, right? But all that stuff is one thing at a time, and so... or one episode at a time, and kind of what ends up feeling right for the show. I definitely have my blueprint and my interests, but those all will come second to what players end up feeling and wanting. And it's certainly the case that we've done the situation in the past where we've made a big reveal, you know, in an episode, and then I had to pause, "Wait, this isn't right for the show, let's dial that back." There's episodes in *COUNTER/Wright* around stuff that the character Nataly... Natalya Greaves, not Nataly Greaves, Natalya Greaves learns that we ended up dialing the clock back on and changing, because we didn't think it was time for that to be revealed in the show. So it's not like we never do that or something like that, so. Good to think about that.

Trying to think if there's any other stuff that came up in that conversation around Valence. I mean... I think one of the big things that Dre was kind of putting forward was very much the idea of someone confident in their faith who has a sense not of like holy mission but like... certitude in their belief, and that is something that I'm not really interested in challenging, that's like not the story for me. There are other stories. There are other ways in which, you know... Stories of prophets, and stories of those who've worked with God across cultures and across religions, there are moments of tension, and doubt, and concern, and disalignment, and I will say that there will be... There will be like, big picture ideas around like "Is this the faith for me? Or is this the..." whatever, but I... But what I don't wanna do is be like... There is no trick, necessarily. What there might be is moments of reflection about... about what is best to... what road is best to walk, but it's a different thing than like a "Gotcha!", right? There's such a big difference for me between this and something like... *Samoths*, and some of the unfolding stuff around *Samoths*, partially because the intention is different for the player. When Art made *Samoths*... or made—well, Art co-made *Samoths*—when Art made *Hadrien*, one of the things that he was interested in was playing a character who is loyal to a god who he couldn't necessarily trust, and whose story he didn't necessarily know, and whose history we knew was more complicated than the official version being talked about. That was a huge flag for Art for me to follow. That isn't the flag that Dre has raised, and so it's not really something that I'm interested in. What I am interested in is unfolding all of the complexity of what Dre's flag... of what is inside of Dre's flagged kind of area, right? You don't need it to be about betrayal to be complex, you don't need it to be about like "Aha! You were wrong about this!" It can be the classic *Friends* at the Table things, which is like: "You were right about this. AND... how does that make you feel?" And that is complex and difficult, right? Um, so... Yeah. You know, we'll see how it goes. Again, I... I... What I will say, again, I do have a game plan for this, this is... There are things... Or I do have a game plan for the tr— I know what the true about the world, and this is probably the season I most have a good understanding of the sequence of events, why things are called what they're called, what is yet to be revealed, who the players at the very highest meta layer are, what their interests are and how they interact. You know, I... I know

what the Curtain thinks of the Pact of Necessary Venture, right? I know what... what... etc., without going in too deep here.

Um, alright, next question coming in from **Morgan**, who I believe is Morgan in the chat, but maybe I'm not sure, maybe it's a different Morgan. Morgan says:

"I'm writing in to ask both about the most recent SBBR arc and more general advice for navigating *Beam Saber* and similar games. Specifically, how do you work with particularly reprehensible actions by the PCs, and what thoughts do you have regarding safety tools regarding them? The sequence where Broun sprayed the drowning gas over a lot of civilians seems like a pretty serious moral line to me." Fucking fair enough. Uh, one second, I've lost my thing. Here we go. Okay. Um... "I had a similar-ish situation in my *Beam Saber* campaign where one player, on her character's quest for personal vengeance, showed up at a civilian's house and attempted to murder him in cold blood during downtime. We all knew that this was a bad thing to do, and I tried to frame it as such as the GM, but we were still pretty shaken by the end of it. Do you have any advice or even just thoughts on handling moments like this without defaulting to "wow cool war crimes"?"

Yeah, definitely. Let me pull up... let me pull up whatever note I was looking for before. One second. Um... I mean to get to opening this in a different tab. ...So, I think there's a few things. One is to, if you get the sense the table is about to walk into... to difficult terrain is to pause and have... and have the conversation that you're not supposed to have, which is: "Hey, before you do this, let's break character, right?" You say it outright. "Let's break character. What's this look like to you? What's the version of the scene you're interested in having? Do we need to see scene by scene of you breaking into this house to try to get this? Is this... Is that what you want to depict? Is that what people at the table are interested in depicting?" You don't have to just do this at the table, you can also do this away from the table. We... I've had ongoing conversations with Keith and Jack especially, but everybody in the Rapid Evening, about Clementine as a villain, Clementine as a warden of like a prison that is terrible. And the fact that we're making a show that is trying to walk the line between telling an interesting story about bad people, representing the fact that imprisonment, forced labor, this style of like... you know, not just regular imprisonment, but political imprisonment where there is not a... there is not term of...

You know, imprisonment isn't even a word that is used for the folks "detained" in Guantanamo Bay, right? They're "detained", they're not "in prison". Because to say that they are "in prison" would indicate that there was a crime, and if there was a crime, that would mean that they would require a trial, so they're not in prison, they're just detained. They're just detained. I got detained on my way to Walmart today, you know, but then I'm fine. That is not what's happening to them, they're in fucking prison, right? And so, these are people who, in Clementine Kesh's private prison, they don't have any charges against them, right?

[02:00:00]

Exeter Leap is someone who hurt the enemies of Kesh, and who wound up being caught on a warrant in the doing, right? Or at least rivals of Kesh, if not enemies. And is now being put to work because he's useful to them, right? He isn't even, he isn't EVEN someone... And, you know, likewise, Millie. Millie's literally hurt Apostolos, on the way out of Apostolos gets captured by Kesh, is to work by Kesh, right? Literally the enemy of Apostolos. So this is not EVEN a regular prison scenario, this is this other secondary layer of fucked. And so, away from the microphone we've had lots of conversations about what's that mean to represent Clem as like a bumbling, you know, ineffective warden, or leader, in the Officer. Does that undercut the horror of the situation? How do we wanna remedy that? Do we want to show Clem like... putting her foot down more? Do we want to show Clem being, like, aligned with state violence more? And also, do we want to make a show in which it's difficult to get away from... from not ust imprisonment, but more broadly, this sense of... of... do we want freedom to seem impossible, right? Or do we want to make, do we want to see it as something that's hard to get? And I think one of the elements of *Beam Saber* that's so fascinating to me is— is the drive clock, right? We obviously are a show that believes that those in bondage should be freed, that, you know, I think... I think to some greater or lesser degree we believe in rehabilitative justice and in restorative justice, right? And we're not here for punitive measures, we're here for community-level addressing... addressing, you know, misdeeds, helping people to get better but also protecting those who have been harmed, and I think it's a very complicated and emerging, you know, space for discourse and study and practice. But I... that's basically where we align.

And yet we wanna make a show, and maybe it's actually because of that belief that when we do render a prison on screen for instance, when we do render violence on screen, we don't want to handwave it and say, "Oh yeah. Broun released like knockout gas, don't worry about it." like it's an episode of *Lupin III*, or something, right? We don't want to treat it like it's a comedy cartoon, which is a way to handle it at your table. And it's OKAY to handle it that way at your table if ahead of time everyone has come to terms and said like: "I think where we are is less... You know, we're is less *Zeta Gundam* where, you know, there's questions of genocide and of terrorist attacks where civilians get harmed, you know, en masse. And we really want to be more like *Transformers*. Where like, yes, characters die in combat heroically, but where, like, civilian costs aren't brought into it."

And so, one of those things is just having a big tone conversation early on which we did, and this is the stuff that is literally interesting to some of the players. Like, I talked to Ali about this TODAY—or maybe it was late last night—about what the future of Broun is, and where Broun is going, or what Broun is interested in. And one of the things that she said was like: "Hey, the thing that is exciting to me about Broun is that they're kind of a jerk, and that they're mean, they're selfish, that at this point they don't see beyond themselves, they don't see a thing to fight for, or a reason not to do what they did." And that is... like, that is worth... That is the interesting space for Ali to play Broun in right now, and so we needed to make space, we needed to show them on screen, right? It isn't just that... it isn't enough to say: "Yes, I'm playing an immoral mercenary" and then on screen just see the face turn, right? This is super important to me with Clementine too, and again, conversations I've had with Jack about Clementine. Clementine hasn't earned a fucking redemption arc, Clementine hasn't like gotten to a point where like, you know, her moral have been opened up because

she had two conversations with a prophet she kidnapped. [AUSTIN laughs] And so, for me the first step here is having that sync up with your players.

Likewise, with—and I've started saying this, I'm gonna wrap back around to it now—with Keith, and with Exeter Leap talking about the idea of imprisonment being so hard to overcome. Like, one of the things that's been interesting in conversations with Keith and the drive clock system is that like, on paper it's not... it's equal... It's just as easy on paper in the rules, for Clementine Kesh to become ruler of Stel Kesh, as it is for Exeter Leap to escape prison. And I think you can kind of hand—you can be like... You can do a couple of different things, one of the things you do is you could say like: "Yeah, that's right, it's easier for the powerful to become powerful than for those in prison to gain freedom. And that is the fucked world we live in." And I think that that's one, like, step 1. Step 2, more importantly, is to say: "Is that the story we want to tell? Do we want to change that?" Because one of the things that the drive clock system does—and this is FASCINATING in terms of design elements—is that the player... When you choose a drive what you're almost telling the GM is, um... you're almost saying: "I want this thing to be harder to get if it should be easy, or easier to get if it should be impossible." It's a kind of double-sided flag that says something like ruling space, ruling an empire... The GM can always say "No, it's too big", but they can also say "Yes, you can do that if you spend two drive clocks, and to do it... and if you do it, you get to do it, and guess what, you're in charge of Stel Kesh now. But you only spent two drive clocks, and that means that it's basically the same as it ever was, nothing changes, you lose control of your character, you become just the next figurehead of Stel Kesh." Right?

That's what would happen today if Clementine Kesh... if Jack and Art pooled together two drive clocks between them and said: "We're gonna pay out, we're gonna do this thing." I'd be like: "Alright, well, let's talk about how... Let's talk about what that looks like." And what it basically is going to mean is "You get put into a position of figurehead power where you get all of the clout and none of the power", right? And yet at the same time that makes that still feasible as a possible outcome for the character.

Meanwhile, Exeter Leap has all of the skills to escape from prison if we were doing an... If Leap's drive was, you know, "Get revenge on such-and-such", it would, in canon, IN PLAY, make it EASIER for Leap to break away from prison because he could do it without spending drive clocks. And so the drive clock is this really fascinating thing that makes... that is a player saying: "I'm interested in struggling towards this thing." And that is... that is so fascinating in terms of design, and it helps in a situation like this, because those drive clocks, which, like, in your situation, quest for personal vengeance, is indicating to you immediately as the GM and also the rest of the table where the camera is going to go, what type of action is going to be critical for a character's arc. And so in that case, in your case specifically, Morgan, I think there's... The second that drive clock hits the table is to talk about how you want to frame that quest for vengeance, and whether or not it should feel uncomfortable. And I think if everyone at the table is like: "You know what, let's go, let's... throw into the dark and feel a little... feel some ways about this." Tabletop roleplaying games are... should be allowed to have people who are consenting to tell those sorts of stories. Film does it constantly, novels do it constantly, video games do it constantly. Trust yourself to be able to

tackle that, and feel okay about leaving the table a little fucking shook, you know, that means you may have done the right job there.

Now, the second part there is leave the table shook, and then check in on everybody, make sure that everyone is okay, make sure that you didn't unintentionally cross lines, and that if you did, own it, talk about what to do next time, re— Sometimes you realize, like: "Oh shit, I should have held a different line here, I should have said: 'Hey, home invasion is off the table. I'm cool with vengeance quests, I'm even cool with you finding someone in a public place, I'm more fine with that than home invasion.' Right? 'I didn't realize it at the time.'" It's never too late to add your list of lines and veils, it's never too late to say: "Hey, just a quick safety check, that last session... It's not a big deal." or "Hey, it really hit me hard, I didn't think it would, but... can we not go down that road again?" You need to have those sorts of conversations, and be willing to have those sorts of conversations, and make a table where those sorts of conversations can come up. And as a DM sometimes you also need to be the person who initiates them or who learns how to see when there is discomfort at the table. Again, this echoes the Far Verona shit, like, I don't... I don't know how you don't see how uncomfortable the people are around you, and hit the breaks. So... So yeah, I think that's a big thing here in terms of handling moments like that without defaulting to "cool war crimes".

Another element here is just... repercussions? The world doesn't stop just because the moment has happened. I think a conversation you could have with your player here is like: "So what do YOU think the repercussions of doing something like that should be? What's interesting to you in terms of, you know, when the next day comes, when a week from then comes, when this catches up to you? What type of situation do you want it to be? Do you want to be hounded, do you want someone else to turn this around on you? Do you want this to be something that makes you feel guilty? Can we talk about what that guilt feels like? What's that feel like? etc. Do you want to have that conversation?" And I think those are the ways in which, for me, we go down that path, right? So for me, one of the things I have written down is, in the next... in the next part of the... the next downtime, like, Jesset is going to talk to Broun and be like: "Listen, I didn't wanna bring it up at the time, but like if you're in this with us, you can't do shit like that again. Those are the people we need to bring to our side..." etc. Right? And kind of like take, you know, take them to task over it. ...If I just fucked up Broun's pronouns, I apologize. I don't think I did, but I may have, I don't know... It's very late, it's 12:26 a.m., I may have fucked up and apologize if I did. But if, if... In fact, in some ways it's kind of what we saw with Valence, we saw... we saw Gucci doing this with Valence, and trying to force Valence to talk through what the repercussions of those actions, and the lack of correcting that action has done. And I'm very curious to see what that... what that does. Like, don't be afraid to just directly voice critique of player action from characters that the players care about. That doesn't make it like... that's not necessarily enough, you need to have kind of an ethos of criticality, and an ethos of understanding what happened there. But, but... It runs through.

I think it's the other half of this stuff, too. Like, no session is a campaign, right? You're going to have other opportunities to address what happened and to continue to build... which is... which is frankly difficult as an actual play podcast, because sometimes it's like... if... I think this is true for Twilight Mirage, I think Twilight Mirage is so much better now than it was... so

much better to listen to as a big unit than to listen to it week to week, where week to week stuff that... that I think ends up paying off in a really interesting way can feel like “These people don’t know what the fuck they’re doing”, like, a 100%. And sometimes we didn’t know what we were doing, we figured it out along the way, and sometimes we totally knew what we were doing, but we needed time to build towards it, and hoped that people would trust us to do that, and so I think that... you should remember this as a GM that like, just ‘cause a thing happened last session doesn’t mean it’s off the table now, it’s not like you’ve cleared that dungeon and then that content disappears because there’s no more like quest dialogue that can be activated for it, if that makes sense.

Alright, a question came in here from **Michael** who says:

“I hope you’re doing well all things considered, and thanks for an awesome last bunch of episodes.

I know “The Prophet Logos speaks to God and performs miracles” has been part of the timeline for the entirety of the show’s recording, and learning what significance that will have on the game is super exciting! I’m wondering basically how this particular version of the story got written, what hand the players might have had in it, and what pressures or ideas you were responding to or exploring in the development? Even in this short time, the experience as a listener, and I guess the apparent experience of Valence within the text, of a story containing God is so distinct from the way Divines have been discussed narratively and politically up to this point.”

I think I basically answered this one, Michael, throughout the course of this long episode. I definitely think you’re right, that it is distinct in many many many ways. I’ll say in terms of having the hands of other players in it... You know, I didn’t have the prophet outside of “The prophet shows up and does a miracle”. Dre told me what the miracle was, the creation of the sea. Dre is the one who took the lead on, you know, progressive... or rather, progression, and sketching some of that stuff out in the *Microscope* game. There’ve been really good talks with Jack about this stuff, because... Jack sometimes gets advanced ideas... Like, Jack knew that the True Divine would show up at some point this season, and that was important so that they could... so that they could address... start thinking about how to reflect that in the music, right? And so, the way to reflect that in the music... Or the way to make sure that happens is that I have talked to Jack about, like, God. You know, like, what’s up with God? I don’t... I can’t say... I’m not gonna tell Jack: “Okay, here’s what’s up with God. Here’s... what’s up with God. Here’s what’s up with God, and also, here’s why that’s not the end of the story, here’s why there’s like 30 other things that branch off of this in interesting ways.”

What I CAN say is: “Here are the types of things that I want... I would love you to be able to evoke when we hit the True Divine. When God shows up on screen, here’s some stuff.” And then Jack says: “Ooh, what about this? What about that?” And I say: “Oh shit! That’s really interesting, I haven’t even thought about it that way, let me go over here and type some notes, and mix it up, and change it up, ta-da-da-da-dah.” You know. I think this week especially had me feeling like Jay-Z in Timbaland where there’s that back-and-forth where

there's a building and like a... a... not just camaraderie and respect for each other, but new... but synthesis happens, right?

[02:15:00]

It's like, my ideas, and Jack's ideas, and they don't always line up exactly, and then they, they kind of contradict each other in certain ways, and then in that contradiction there's a spark, and new stuff shows up. And so... Like, God. Music in this past episode was so good, and I think part of... part of what happens is, the text changes when the... when the music comes in. Because the music is a speaker, the music is an element of... is a narrator in a real way. And so, for instance, now that we've heard what the Pact of Necessary Venture sounds like, there's character to who they are, that didn't... that would not have existed without that music. That sort of like... the breadth of their strength, and the sound... the grimyness of that sound, just that REAL shit... just wouldn't exist, and they wouldn't have been characterized in that way previously, right? Or when I reversed Gur Sevraq... when I reversed parts of the Road to Season 6 theme for Gur Sevraq... during the Road to Season 6 intros, that produced something from... in the character of Gur Sevraq that was always there from the jump which was about—and this is definitely a key part... this was a conversation that I had with a lot of people when that episode was happening, because I thought it was important was like... I want Gur Sevraq specifically to feel like he's cheating.

I think the... God, let me talk about that, this is a fun one. This is the shit that's SO good. Let me see if I can find it. Uh... I go back to... um... this is so good. Uh.

At some point I say... uh... [AUSTIN laughs a bit] So. We're talking in this— this is in a Spring in Hieron internal chat, and... and I say: "Oh, I forgot, everyone is about to hit character _____ doing something to" character... a different character... Character X doing [verb]... Character X [verbing] character Y. ...That makes it sound dirty, I'm not being dirty, I'm being sad. Sad stuff happens. And then I said: Big Sreb hours." And Art in that moment notices that in ROT-13 "e" and "r" are just swapped. Sreb is a... is a ROT-13 version, cyphered version of a character. And Art says: "Oh, e and r are just swapped, I love words like that, I've developed a lot of opinions on the aesthetics of ROT-13." ...I guess it's [rō,tj]-13, 'cause it's rotating 13 times, but [rôt] sounds good, [rôtj]-13 sounds good.

Anyway, I write: "At some point I'm going to name someone in ROT-13." This was written on July 26 of last year, and I say: "Like a haunting. Like I want someone to put a character's name into ROT-13 for the first time, and have it scare them when they see it come out." You have to hit the right window, right? Because I couldn't have made a late-game COUNTER-Weight character named Vork, because everyone knew that Vork was Ibex by then. But maybe it's like ROT-13 and then backwards, like Krov, which would've been Vork backwards. And then I, like... I cracked it with Gur Sevraq, 'cause it sounds so... Like, that's a name, that's totally a fucking name, right? And I realized like I need this character to sound haunted, or sound like a cheatcode is being entered, to sound like... like they're breaking the fourth wall, but maybe they're revealing a fifth wall and they're breaking that one, right? And, and... so like, part of that ends up coming not just from conversations I have internally with people that I talk about this as an element about... tied not only to the literal text, but also to

the theme of... the thing with power that Gur Sevraq has because he stole Future is that they can see outside of the Principality's vision of, of what culture is. They can see alternatives in a real way, in a way that's comprehensive and not just local. And he... Uh...

Going to Jack's song, and realizing: "Oh wait! If we literally flip this, it's going to make this sound completely haunted, and it's going to produce an element of what this part of faith feels like." Because that was... That Gur Sevraq intro... You have to remember, for people who hadn't listened to the Road to Season 6 games live in the Patreon feed, THAT'S the first taste of faith in this, in this season, right? If you count the Road to Season 6 games, the Road to PARTIZAN games as part of PARTIZAN writ large, which I do the same that I think about Marielda as part of Winter... Then, then I think it's the *Ech0* and *Dusk to Midnight* games, I'm pretty sure is where that intro is... I'm double-checking... Yes. This is like literally, LITERALLY the first time God comes up for someone who's not a Patreon member, someone who's not listening to the Road to Season 6 games, someone who's not heard *Microscope* yet, is the Gur Sevraq intro to the February... is the Live at the Table February episode that also ends up being Road to PARTIZAN 05, where he says... um... I mean, this is the intro, right? This is the... the secret to PARTIZAN is: this is the intro that has the real quote in it. Like, I think the... "We make our own gravity" quote is solid, but the real thing, the first thing that I wrote down... one of the first things, I don't know for sure it was the first thing, in my Season 6 notes—because before that was like a quote about, you know, a quote from Civilization and Its Discontents, a picture of the windmill on fire... But one of THE first things that I wrote down was this bit here:

"We believe we have mastered history, learned to draw its shapes in beautiful arcs of our own design. We have spent eons changing our bodies, our minds, our culture. We made flesh into hard metal so long ago that the return to soft tissue became novel. We flattened the apparent heights of our hierarchies, we twisted time to our ends, we colored our skins into skies, turned skies into seas, made sea solid and thinking.

But from the wide perspective of the Future, each of these changes was superficial, a decoration on the line of history. Whether crystalline or chrome, towering or dispersed, whether drawn in gunpowder black or the blues of heaven: We only ever sketch one shape: The shape of Empire.

And God has whispered to me: *Learn another, before I erase this one.*

I am Gur Sevraq, and I have stolen the future. Walk the prophet's path with me, or suffer God's attention."

Which we now know is a message sent to Cymbidium, the now-dead Excerpt—not Excerpt, Elect—of Past. Like, that is what those messages are, the two messages from Live at the Table, or the two Gur Sevraq intros are messages being sent to "who listens", who is the Elect of Past. And for that listener it's like: Holy shit! This is not anything we've ev— that Friends at the Table's ever done before! Friends at the Table has never had a character say: "God has whispered to me". And that is incredibly, 100% intentional, and part of the bigger discussion around... internally, around like, the feeling of this season, because so much of the season is about whether or not we can escape the constraints of history, whether or not

we can learn how to... you know, disarm and disassemble empire from inside of it. And one of the ways in which historically people have done that is through religion, because religion produces an alternative to empire in the sense that it demands that the rule of men is not the rule, right? It gives a degree of authority to those who are speaking from positions of faith because they can say, they can build a structure that says: "Actually there's a higher law than the law of men."

And you can see as I speak now exactly why 12, and 13, and 14-year old Austin wanted to maybe become a priest. There's a lot of me in Hector Hu in this way, right? That was like a 100%, the like, 13-year old me was like: "I think I might want to become a priest." And 23-year old me was like, you know: "I can't pay my rent. And also I don't believe in God, I'm 23." That's my impression of me at 23. But that is, that is powerful, and so that perspective, the, you know, religious as... religion as a POTENTIAL place of justice, explicitly because inside of it is the possibility of something that goes beyond human law and demands us to consider morality on a different level.

Now, this is also why Stel Nideo was so terrifying, 'cause they KNOW that, and what they did was like: "Yeah, totally! Yeah! That's SICK, you're right! There IS a higher power, and the higher power is like the god above the state that's kind of also the state. Isn't that cool? That's us! That means we work for god too!" Because that's the—I wanna be clear, that's the other thing is: there isn't one... there isn't... This isn't... In some ways not the only monotheism in this, in this season. There is also the monotheism of Asterism which believes the state is god, right? That believes that HISTORY is god. That believes that progress and the obliteration of time and space, and that like... progress in their terms, not progress in Logos Kan'Tel's terms, is... IS god. And literally, the... the... At least some of the Progressive Asterists do believe in a monotheistic god for whom the Divines are aspects. There are already multiple monotheistic gods here, and we know that one of them is... sucks, right? [AUSTIN laughs a bit] And I guess we...

A thing worth saying is: we don't even, we don't know that they're wrong! We don't know that the Progressive Asterists are wrong about their version of god for whom the state is a projection, or the state and the Divines are aspects is not real! The Divines DO have incredible power that is inexplicable! Where does it come from? And THAT is a mystery that has been there since the jump, right? The Divines have always been these things next to gods in terms of a much more mythological sense of... you know, deific power. And so, and so like that's always been in the mix in a real way. But, but yeah, there is also, there is also... This is, this is...

Regression in the chat says: "It's a huge thing! It's why I think I said that what God 'feels like' in a tactile way is so unique given that Divines have (at least to me) such a functional role within Partizan." That's exactly it, right? Like, I think the difference... one of the things that is being called a difference here, is that the God of Gur Sevraq, the God of Valence does not FEEL like infrastructure, and the gods of the Divines, of the Divine Principality EXTREMELY feel like infrastructure. But also... But also, infrastructure is really important. And so I think there's... This is why I love this stuff, and this is why I like taking the... This is why I wanna walk into the messiness of this, is because it's all so potent and so... it layers so neatly... and messily! Right? There's runs in the thread, there's problems here! We

stumble over this stuff, and we do it all day anyway. Like, I have been driven for so much of my life to try to untangle the knots that show up in my head, or at least to make them pretty. And so this is the season for me. So much, is like, getting into the messiness of this stuff, recognizing that the experience of those who are caught up in it is a complete human experience, an experience that might make them arrive at a different understanding, but that is grounded in, you know, in history. And then asking "What do you do?" if two people have come to different ends who both think that they're doing the just thing, and you KNOW that one of them is not, or you know that, for instance, hundreds of millions of them are not, then what do you do?

And so that... that to me, I think, speaks to a little additional conversation here I guess around where this question brings my mind, at the very least. Again, I'm sorry I'm rambling but... But... you can tell, a lot of this stuff... I've been excited to get to this part of the season SO I can talk to y'all about this stuff a little bit, and give a little bit more context about where my head is at, and speak to... When I say... when I say that I didn't just like, throw this out there, that I'm thinking about a history of justice, a history of retributive... storytelling around retribution, that is often not as simple as it seems to understand both the desire for the immediate justice and the fear of the power that would be able to enact it, and to respect that power, or to... I'm trying to think about ways in which you can, instead of invoking that power, build structures that do not need to leverage that degree of destruction.

All of this stuff is in the air right now, and I don't mean that in the air of the season, I mean in the air of the world right now, in a moment where we know that, for instance, as the coronavirus, you know, sweeps through mine... through North America and through the United States of America, those who feel it the most are black and brown people, those in places like Rikers Island and other prisons in the country are at an increased risk of catching it, because those are places are not... those are places in which people are not just culturally marginalized, not just materially marginalized in the sense of having resources denied to them, or having spaces...

[02:30:00]

...not having safety presented to them, but are ACTIVELY put into additionally worse scenarios such that they are exposed in a way. And all of that is tied up in an understanding of justice as being punitive and not being restorative. Because, because culturally, if you're a criminal your job is to get punished, you're supposed to be punished for your crime. That is like the decision that was made, culturally, many many many years ago, and that, though many of us fight against it, is still the sort of cultural norm.

So like, these are questions that are in the air every day right now, and so, for me, I want to make work that engages with those things as best as we can, even if it doesn't necessarily... There isn't like... We don't get to run the game so long that then we get the answer, do you know what I mean? There is a big difference between this and like a dissertation, and the difference is that at the end of a dissertation you should come away being like: "Okay, I have actionable information, or I have a different perspective that I didn't have before, or I have language to put to use." Well, we can kind of give you some of that last, I hope that we've done that here or there, but even that isn't always the case. And what I hope we give, maybe

more than anything, is an object through which you can think through your own perspective on things. You know, we... I don't think that we make a show that attempts to be definitive, I think that we make a show that attempts to produce... that attempts to bring ideas into the vernacular, that attempts to produce... stories that you can come back to, and try to bounce your own stories, and your own life off of, to see if... if it resonates. You know?

I think a funny one for this—dark, the darkest of funny, this is not funny, it's not funny—"Remember you've beaten your worst days. Tomorrow you'll wake up, and you'll cut down more trees." is something that I think has been one of the most disputed lines of our show in terms of it resonating differently than how Jack and I intended that line. That was a line from COUNTER/Weight that, I think, for us, had this terrible energy, because it insisted on productivity over care, because it insisted that care was only valuable in relation to productivity, and because it failed to recognize the possibility that tomorrow might be worse. If failed to consider that. And now we have demagogues on TV saying: "Remember, you've beaten your worst days. Tomorrow you're going to wake up, and you're going to go back to work. Yes, the doctors and the scientists say we shouldn't open up places of business again for another four months, but the economy really says we need you to wake up tomorrow and go back to work. So... remember, you've beaten your worst days." And I... seeing that happen in real time, seeing people deploy that rhetoric was this just like... FUCK, man, this is the thing! This is the thing we were terrified of, this thing we already saw in minor happening all the time, but Rigor is real, and Rigor is the thing that insists that it's important that you go work at Gamestop during a pandemic. So. You know. Yes.

Morgan says: "the gang solves leftism." Listen. Listen. I don't know what this next arc looks like necessarily, but I LOVE the idea of getting some good old-fashioned leftist in-fighting on screen.

Alright, I'm gonna advance to the final question, because I've now been going for probably two hours, right? Is that where we're at? 2:35... I swear to God. Ugh.

Juliet writes in and says:

"Given the morally grey nature of both squads in this season, and the setting of an interminable, inescapable war, how do you draw the line on where a squad's actions and consequences cross into "war crime" territory? I'm thankful of course that the Friends are considerate, reasonable human beings and that we're not going to get scenes of graphic violence done to civilians, and any glimpses of torture have been proactively veiled. But the thought still lingers... as some of the actions we're seeing the PCs do stray into the capital-e Evil territory, how do you balance telling a story about the horrors of war without triumphing in them?"

(I imagine you've given this a lot of thought and this isn't an indictment, just something I struggle with a lot in considering a Beam Saber campaign.)"

I hope that everything I've said up until this point helps answer that. And I, instead of going down this rabbit hole again, and giving another 40-minute... 40-minute conversation about the stuff I've already kind of hit. The thing I would wanna raise... There's two things.

One is... Let me pause, actually, and, again, give space to this idea, which is: you should, first and foremost, have this conversation with your players. The players of the game, including the GM, need to determine what is on and off the table. That's a weird conversation to have, it can be an uncomfortable conversation to have, 'cause everyone wants to seem cool, everyone wants to be like: "Yeah, I'm cool with everything, don't worry about it!" Don't... You have to have that conversation. And that means that as a GM you might have to be like: "What happens if torture comes up? Do we sort of veil that? Hey, how do we feel about having characters who hurt civilians, whether directly or indirectly? How about... What if we have characters who explicitly DON'T want to hurt civilians? Does that mean that I as the Gm should threaten civilians indirectly, so that you have the drama... Are you interested in the drama of being someone who doesn't want to hurt civilians?" And THEN you also have to have the conversation that is: "If no to any of those things, do we REALLY want to play this game that is about war? IS there another game we would rather play?" Because... And this is the... kind of two places I want to go with this.

The first is: are there any war stories where this isn't happening? There are war stories where you don't see it happen. There are war stories where you don't see war crimes happening... And again, war crime specifically is a term that's not really particularly useful in this scenario, because there are specific laws in our world around what a war crime is, and that's different than what colloquially we mean when we say "war crimes". Um, but... but I know what you mean. Point to a war in which... Point to a just war, where even though it is just, the innocent aren't hurt through it. What I can point to is lots of stories where that is alighted, where the cost of even a just war is hidden. And at that point, does it become propaganda? At that moment, are you deciding to tell a story about violence that has softened what violence is? Because violence is messy, because... Because physics makes violence messy, and harmful. Because violence doesn't have to be cruel to hurt innocent people.

I think a lot about what K. A. Applegate, who is the author of *Animorphs*, I think a lot about that quote at the end of... the end... that she wrote into a letter after *Animorphs* was over. And the part of it that I excerpted here is—and I'm not gonna spoil *Animorphs*, so I'll say ____ character names—but she says:

"So, you don't like the way our little fictional war came out? You don't like ____ dead and ____ shattered and ____ guilt-ridden? You don't like that one war simply led to another? Fine. Pretty soon you'll all be of voting age," you know, she writes to her 16-years old readers, "and of draft age. So when someone proposes a war, remember that even the most necessary wars, even the rare wars where the lines of good and evil are clear and clean, end with a lot of people dead, a lot of people crippled, and a lot of orphans, widows and grieving parents."

And I think about that quote a lot, one, because I love that Applegate trust her young audience enough to tell them that sort of story, and not to... dress it up, not to... not to deploy a softer version of war, but I also... but I do also understand that desire to tell that sort of action story that doesn't necessarily dig into that stuff. And I'm not gonna reprimand someone who wants to do a "wow cool robot" campaign. What I AM going to do is ask you to

tell yourself: “I’m gonna do a “wow cool robot” campaign.” And to consider, that if any of your influences are such that they don’t have characters who produce collateral damage... to consider that those may be compromised influences. And you can love them as compromised influences, trust, fucking BET that I love me some anime bullshit where action heroes get to do action hero shit, and we don’t pause for two episodes to talk about the consequences of, you know, of drone warfare or whatever. That stuff is in my... is in the mix, because some of it is really stylishly done, some of it can be influential in other ways, sometimes there’s just a dope soundtrack, do you know what I mean? Cowboy Bebop kicks ass. It is very rarely pausing to talk about what happens when Faye misses with her big rocket launchers [AUSTIN laughs a bit] equipped to her spaceship. She’s out there blasting shit!

And so you can tell that story! COUNTER/Weight was that story! COUNTER/Weight... you know. There was a couple of moments of serious violence in COUNTER/Weight in which innocent people get hurt, but there’s also LOTS of moments of violence where the camera just doesn’t go, and figure out what happened. There’s a... I take... I take our criticism extremely seriously, and I know that that’s like a... like, maybe that’s obvious, but... But I... I think a lot about a letter we got after... after COUNTER/Weight, from someone who said that they were extremely disappointed with us, and they were done listening to the show, because one of the things that they loved about Hieron was that everyone had a name, that there was never violence done in a way that included unnamed people being hurt or dying, and that COUNTER/Weight was filled with it, and that that was not the story that they signed up for, because they came to believe through Hieron that we had different priorities as storytellers, that we were interested in telling a story where everyone felt like a human, there was no such thing as a background character, who would be hurt by, you know, by a misfire. And I think about this a lot, because it was important to tell COUNTER/Weight in a way, for me, where that could happen.

I think a lot about a shot in Mobile Suit Gundam F91, a movie that was adapted from a sort of... scenario that was originally supposed to be an entire season of the show, and so the movie is just a nightmare, ‘cause it’s like... 26 episodes of ideas couldn’t be reduced down into a 2-hour anime movie. And there’s a shot in the first 15 minutes of the movie, in which there’s like kind of like a parade... Or not even a parade, there’s like a... Almost like a Miss Americ— there’s a pageant. There’s a pageant at like a county fair, basically, inside of a space colony. Space colonies are allowed to have county fairs now. Deal with it. ...And there’s an attack. These mechs show up in this town inside this colony, and there’s fighting. And there’s this shot of every— And it’s like the most terrifying mechs had been in Gundam, I think, through... up until that point, not until this movie came out, because scale is communicated so clearly. They’re so big! And there’s this moment where... the shell of a single bullet falls and hits... hits a woman on the head, and she falls to the ground. And it’s clear that she’s died. And, you know, she... it’s the most exploitative thing in the world, she had been carrying her baby, her baby is down on the ground crying... And that moment is so illustrative of what is at stake, and this is not a moment... This isn’t a fridging of a character. This is not “and then we get... we learn that the husband of that woman is now going to go to war, ‘cause blah-blah-blah-blah”. She’s one of MANY innocent people hurt in the pursuit of what the... in the pursuit of both protecting those people and invading this colony. I’m not

even sure where that round came from, where that shell came from, in retrospect. That shell could've come from one of the mechs DEFENDING those people. And the underlying truth of what that sequence wants to bring to bear is: when you fight on this scale, collateral damage is... on the table the second you're willing to do that. The second you're willing to bring bombs to a fight, innocent people are gonna get hurt. There's not a version of it that doesn't.

There's another thing that goes into my... in my notes, my season notes VERY early this season, is... Let me find the exact quote here. Uh... This is one of my all-time favorite philosophical like imp... This is the wrong, this is the wrong— No wonder I couldn't find my shit before, I was at my faction prep sheet, instead of my general brainstorming sheet. That is why none of my stuff showed up! Now I'm just searching Google for "brainstorming" instead of actually doing a thing.

Yeah, **Thomas** in the chat says: "that fucking shot". Shoutouts to Thomas who saw F91 with me and some other friends recently in New York.

Paul Virilio, who is a kind of Deleuzian scholar, who I think it's fair to say, has like a lot of great work to... I guess it's... you know what? I'm gonna say it's not fair to say that Virilio was a Deleuzian scholar, I think of them in relation to each other. Really, it was much... Virilio was a contemporary of Deleuze, and is writing in the same spaces as Deleuze, I wouldn't... I wouldn't... I should not have reduced Virilio to a Deleuzian scholar, that's rude. [A short laugh] "That's rude." I'm saying this to like 12 people listening to this who give a fuck about how I categorize Virilio.

Virilio writes: "When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash;

[02:45:00]

and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution... Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technological progress."

And this to me is so key... We talk a lot about mech shows as being about bodies, but "about" is not exclusive, mech shows are also about technology, and about war, and about violence, and obviously all of those things have to do with bodies too. And for me, I don't know how you run a game of *Beam Saber*— I, Austin, couldn't run a game of *Beam Saber* that wasn't interested in the ways in which normal people are forced to live through war, even when they aren't participating.

None of this is to handwave what Broun does, to be clear. None of this is like: and that's why it's okay for Broun to have done it, duh-duh-duh-duh-duh. No. But it's about why... part of why I'm interested in purs— in showing that. And I think what is true is: *Beam Saber* is interesting in this, because it's mechanized such. There's a reason why there is... why there are Rules of Engagement, right? There are reasons why characters have drives. There are reasons why that... there's a bunch of different types of weapons available for characters

who do wanna do violence. And all of that stuff is about the scale question which we go back to if you go back to the list of principals, that idea that mechs are big in such a way that they are harmful, like, necessarily. The invention of nuclear weapons is such that you cannot... you cannot put that toothpaste back in the tube, it's out. We now have the ability to destroy the world, we didn't have that ability a hundred years ago. We now have the ability to completely ruin the Earth, and it turns out we didn't even need nuclear weapons to do it. Regular old technology has given us that ability, and we've said "Yes, we're gonna use that instead." And I think that that it is an important element that *Beam Saber* wants to bring out.

So... I mean, here's the other thing here in terms of how do you balance it. One way to balance it—and this is a little bit more practical advice—is to be really hard on Rules of Engagement, is to talk to your players about like: "Listen, a version of this I want to play is I want you to be thoughtful about this. We're not gonna pretend that there's such a thing as a perfect soldier, or a perfect weapon, or a weapon that doesn't have, um, lethality, or a weapon that doesn't have potential to hurt or kill someone it didn't mean to. But what we are gonna do is play characters who are interested in fighting for what's right without... you know, while doing their best to keep innocent people safe, or something like that."

But again, this is the complexity of PARTIZAN is... What's an innocent person? And I think that's like a huge moral question when it comes to citizens of empire, right? What's an innocent person? Is an innocent person someone... Am I an innocent person? Someone who's being paid for doing the thing I'm doing now, and who's going to pay taxes on this, and some of this taxes are gonna go to a missile, right? Is that..? That's okay? Is the person working in the missile factory okay? Is the person who designed the missile okay? Where do you start drawing those lines? Is Broun the person who is, like, evil here? Is Broun from a year ago, who was designing that weapon, evil? When is it that they become evil? Is it when they pull the trigger? Is it when they...? And again, you can end up connecting this to discourse around guns, discourse around... None of this stuff is, I think, simple, and all of this is... is thematically, and politically, and morally dense. And so, to say, you know, we've thought a lot about this is, you know, an understatement, certainly. For me, I wanna play a game that engages with that stuff, and for Ali as the player of Broun, um, you know, Ali wants to engage with a character who... Ali really wants to play the character who is so embedded in this culture that it's not even a thing to them. You know, it's enough of a thing that—and I think we did talk about this a lot during this episode—that they didn't... that there are things that they don't wanna do.

They've drawn their own lines in their head about what counts as "good violence", what counts as acceptable violence, and what counts as like direct "bad violence", and I think we've... I hope we've done a good job indicating that we thought that those lines were bullshit given what had happened, given that like the... the drowning gas incident happens, and THAT they're okay with, but the pull the trigger on the real weapon thing, they're like "No, that's... I don't wanna do that." It's complete bullshit, and I hope this indicates what we think of similar discourses around things like taser, things like rubber bullets, things like the sorts of devices the American military uses to torture populaces in cities that they want to invade, things like sonic weapons... Even, even types of surveillance which are aggressive to the point of being weapons and not being, you know, just surveillance equipment. The

knowledge that you're being surveilled is a sort of... you know, indicates a sort of violence, and militaries, imperial militaries around the world deploy that stuff. You know, colonizing militaries, militaries that are either invading or are... have already invaded, use threat of violence as a violence that disrupts your daily life.

And so I think, I hope that we come across as conscious about that stuff, and I think the best advice for you is to have those conversations at the table, find out what your players are interested in, and find a game that... that fits that, or to make sure you pay attention to the parts of the game that are about that. In the case of *Beam Saber* for me that's Rules of Engagement, that's drives, that is gear. You know, the Technician, which is what Ali is playing, it's what Broun is, has a lot of tools at their disposal out the gate, look over those, maybe add them. You know, if you see... if you see something like... You know, Ali didn't... An important thing to note: Ali didn't invent that... that weapon, Ali saw that on the sheet and was like: "You know what, I haven't used this one, this one is rough. I think this is the moment in which they would use this."

And... and that's a thing where you as the GM, and then your players... you could look at the equipment that's at the table here, or that's on... on... on... in play, and say: "You know what? I am not... Let's get rid of... Let's get rid of that particular one." Maybe you're like: "Hey, let's get rid of the one that says 'become calm and enters a suggestible mental state', I don't want ANYTHING to do with mental... what's the word I'm looking for? You know, I don't want to do... I don't want anything that can even get into the realm of consent, or of... of compromising consent, I don't want ANYTHING at play that could cause a character to be more suggestible than they normally are." Or you could straight up just have someone who says like—another one here is "cloud of smoke that stings the eyes and is difficult to breathe"—you can have someone who says: "I can't do that, I don't wanna go down that path. That just... it makes me feel bad, I don't wanna do that." And so, go over your players' abilities, go over what they have available to them as gear, talk about that stuff ahead of time, if there's anything that you think could be a problem, encourage them to bring it up to you, so that you can work with them to come up with alternatives, right? So like, if Ali had come to me and said: "Hey, I really wanna be the Technician, but I don't wanna be someone who can have the ability to make someone feel that bad, can we come up with some other alternatives that are cool?" We... I'd have happily sat down and like, gone over that stuff with her, and come up with some other alternatives for Broun. So.

So, those are all things that you can do at your table to ensure that you're on the same... the same wavelength in terms of what your player wanna do. And again, I just wanna underscore again the importance of that being a constant part of your conversation... to the degree that it's not about... it's not just about check-ins, it's about having a relationship that is collaborative, safe, and honest, so that players will come to you and say: "Hey, I would love to do this scene, but I'm afraid XYZ might come up. Can we..? I'm cool to do this scene, but blah-blah-blah." The other half of it is, like: we have to dispense... we have to dispense with the idea of like, the shock, the surprise, the like "I'm gonna get my players, I know what will surprise them." I think there's a degree— obviously, degrees to which I like to deploy surprise and shock, but when it comes to what's happening... what's happening TO their

characters versus what's there... what's being revealed about the world, or what their characters are surprising the world with, or surprising me with...

There are lots of different ways that that could go wrong, and so, likewise, here a thing with... in terms of violence and civilians the stuff is: I never want... I never want to be like: "A-ha!" I never want to do a thing that happens in fiction sometimes, like, you thought you were doing the good thing, but you were doing the BAD thing the whole time! If we want to go down that route instead what I wanna do is say, before we go down that route: "Hey, is this a situation like from that one vidoe game, where you thought you were doing a good thing but you were doing a bad thing? Is that something you're interested in?" And then the players will say like: "Yeah, totally, let's do that!" or "No, I'm not really interested in that." There is so much power, there's SO much power in doing the collaborative thing of saying: "Hey, what if we did a scene about ____? Is that interesting?" And then have a character... and then have a player say like: "Ummm... Not really, but what about this?" And then you go like: "Oh wow, yeah, that's cool, let's do that scene!" You don't have to feel like the magic's been broken because you out of character said you wanted to do a scene together. That is... that is storytelling, baby. Like, that is it. Like, you're allowed... That is part of it. Lift... lift everyone at the table up to the degree that they can say: "I would love a scene with _____. I wanna do a scene where _____ happens." And when you build THAT environment, a lot of... a lot of the safety mechanisms will work better, AND you're gonna add a degree of safety, and add a degree of buy-in in everything you do.

So, I think maybe that is probably the best place to wrap that up. On that note, this is a 3-hour long episode of Drawing Maps. A very funny thing is that I... some friends of mine had a nice dinner today in Animal Crossing, where I swung by the beginning of it, and they were like: "Hey, do you want to just do it after you do Drawing Maps?" And I was like: "It'll be past dinner time by the time I've done Drawing Maps." And they were like: "Even on the West Coast?" And I said: "Even on the West Coast." And here it is, at 1:12 a.m. Eastern Time [laughing a bit], which would've made it quite a bit after dinner time on the West Coast. I'm glad I... I'm glad we scheduled that around... not... not me finishing this quickly, 'cause I knew this would be a long one given the thematic depth of what is at, you know, at stake and all that.

As always, you can follow me on Twitter [@austin_walker](https://twitter.com/austin_walker), you can... at least we started the stream early, right? I was supposed to start it at 9, and instead I did this Animal Crossing dinner, and had to do a pick-up, and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and I didn't start it until 10. It's how it goes. Um... You can send questions for the next episode of Drawing Maps, or for the next episode of Tips at the Table, to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. If you're sending them for Drawing Maps, put "Drawing Maps" in the subject line.

I hope that this was... better than rambly, or like, I hope that it was useful. This is an extremely...an extremely weird holiday episode for sure, but so it goes. I hope everyone has a great remainder of their night, and that the next week is good all said. I hope everyone is staying safe. Please know that you're in our thoughts, you're in our hearts, and we hope that we can provide a little bit of escape for you, or a little bit of the opposite of escape as we go for three-hour long discussions about God, faith, and politics, and... and war. It is what it is, I

guess. This is the show we signed up to make, and I'm glad we can have these... these conversations here.

Alright, everyone! Have a great one, I'm gonna play us out with Jack's music, because Jack's music is good. Peace!