

Drawing Maps Audio 13 - April 2020

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AUSTIN: Hello, and welcome to Drawing Maps for April 2020, that's how far back we are right now. If it is not one thing it's another thing in this year, it's filled with other things, unfortunately. Let me know that you can hear me okay. Looks like I'm coming up on my side at least, and it's at the right volume on my side, and we just have to hope that it works. I might boost myself a little bit, because I'm notoriously quiet, um... You'd think a podcast host would project more, but I spike a lot if I do that, and it's bad for the audio.

So, hey, how is it going? Like I said it is Drawing Maps for April 2020. Always on the hunt to try to catch up. My guess is as we... as we, you know, start to figure out the next season stuff there'll be a big rush of these, and there may—I said this on the most recent I think Tips episode—there may be like a whole Patreon rework coming at some point in terms of just like... what the tiers... And not even what the tiers are, but what we're doing with the time, etc. We're like even further back on Mapmaker stuff, for instance, and part of that is just like: it's... it's been very hard for me to do that style of work from here, from my home, and I'm only allowed to work at my home anymore. So, so that has been a real problem. Part of that is like, get over my bad habits, and learn different work routines, but I'm struggling to do that because... mental health is terrible. And it's very difficult to do that.

In any case, that's not why we're here today. We're here to do Drawing Maps for, for PARTIZAN. And to look ahead and do a little bit more—if this is your first Drawing Maps steam then please know, that this show is real session prep, along with kind of discussion and insight into episodes that have already happened, recordings that have already happened. It's about various games and shows, today we're gonna post on PARTIZAN, and then also I think there will be a chill kind of actual prep sequence around, um, what I'm calling Tableau, or Grand Tableau, I haven't finalized the name yet, which is an upcoming series of Live games that is... When I say “a series of Live games”, a series is even too... too serious a name for it. And it will literally be me doing busy work, like... and taking some questions from chat, and just kind of hanging out for a little bit.

But first we're gonna go over the *Kingdom* game, answer some questions, etc. What the show isn't is unchecked and unannounced spoilers, it is... nothing here is permanent or unchangeable, it's always important to know, that like... I could say a thing here, and tomorrow have a better idea, and like, throw the thing I said here, you know, out.

It's not an explicit tutorial, I'm not here to say like: And this is how you should be running your game. You know, obviously answering some questions leans in that direction, but, you know, it's not a... It's not like “Here's how I interpret rules as written” or like “Here is how I...” You know,

“This is how you do it.” I think there’s infinite ways... There are infinite ways to do just about anything we do on the show, and, and... I wouldn’t ever hazard to say “This is the one true way.”

And also it’s not complete. Maybe I get a call and I have to end the podcast today, or I get a... I have to, you know, go take care of something, or I get really hungry for dinner, or something, and decide: “You know what? I’ve already done enough, I’m gonna wrap it up.” There’s... It is neither a thing that will necessarily be completed, nor is anything I do here, you know, necessarily the final product. Don’t get like... If I say a thing, and it sounds great... Like I said earlier, don’t expect that to be like the final version of it between now and when it shows up in an episode, for instance.

Today’s agenda is to review my goals and principles when thinking about them in relation to the *Kingdom* game, which is interesting, because it’s... In some ways, the *Kingdom* game should have it’s own goals and principles.... Kind of set of, you know, beliefs, or, again, principles, goals and principles. And maybe I should kind of grade myself off of those a little bit. But I have the *Beam Saber* ones still written down here, because I think of those as more kind of season-wide goals and principles.

Then there’s some Q&A, people sent in some good questions, and then, and then the kind of quest prep chill stream after that. So.

Going forward, I’m gonna talk really openly about PARTIZAN episode 00 to 28, with spoilers, there’ll probably be some discussion of past holiday specials. I’ll be very broad there, I won’t just, like, stumble headfirst into saying a thing that happened in a past holiday special, what we call holiday specials, these kind of midseason break games. Um... And I don’t think I’ll spoil any past seasons, but if I was going to I would give a heads up, so heads up for that. But everything from PARTIZAN, this season I would say is... is up for grabs is probably the way to, to say in terms of... in terms of spoilers.

Alright. Our Goals, My **Goals** this season have been

- to ensure everyone at the table is safe;
- to fill the world with detail;
- to convey the world honestly;
- and to play to find out what happens.

That was... I think we did a pretty good job at those, I think—and I’ll talk about some of them when I get to like the... Wins and Losses, the kind of things I’m happy with, things I’m not as happy with. **Table safety** was like a su— a big concern, and not just safety in the sense of... “are there lines being crossed?”, but safety as in the sort of positive, the positive... And I don’t mean “good”, I mean, productive sense of safety, which is: when you feel safe you can be creative. You can be... you can put yourself out there. And so, I think that there was... there were definitely some points— we’ll talk about those in a minute—at which it was important to

kind of reemphasize the importance of the... the table as a space for safe creative expression. And I think we did a good job of that once we... once we kind of zeroed in on the situation.

Fill the world with detail, I think one of the things I'm... we did well, or one of the things that I think was at... One of the things that I think the sessions did was fill Partizan the moon with some extra spaces, paint a few great word pictures, conjure up some like interesting events and ideas, and stuff like that. I think that post-Kingdom Partizan feels so much more filled out than it did previously. I still think it's a sort of a bubbled world in the sense that like, "Here is Oxbridge, here is Cruciat, here is... you know, Vigil City", and it's very difficult to imagine what's in between those places to some degree. But I do think that just broadening out how many of those are on screen... "on screen", or air, definitely helps make the space feel a little bit more filled with detail. And I think we really worked well in the kind of major moments to... to emphasize detail.

To convey the world honestly... There are repercussions and opportunities, and both of those things are at play, and *Kingdom* is a great game for doing that.

And **play to find out what happens**, again, absolutely.

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—I misspelled "too" there, I'm just gonna leave it;
- Make the pilots feel small and the mechs feel POWERFUL;
- Consider the risk;
- and Hold on lightly.

And... And, yeah, I think... I think more or less we've hit most of those things here. I definitely think that there is a degree to which we addressed... I've talked through these principles before, and like how I think they apply more broadly to PARTIZAN. If you don't remember that you can probably go back and listen to the first Drawing Maps of this season, of the actual season when I first brought these up. But I think one of the ones that we did pretty well here was **Fill the world with inequality** because of the focal point on both representative democracy and also just like... How is this hitting at some of the places in the world? How is this war echoing out the focal point and what the... What Millenium Break will do with refugees? But also just like... Here are the spaces that are... that are burning. And bit by bit one of the things that's interesting is like... it's not just like... you know, it's not just that the war acts on the people. Eventually—I think this was what was so exciting to me about the Kingdom game—was like: here are the people acting back on the war. Here are the people acting back on the status quo, pushing back a little bit, making demands of their own, as embodied partially by Millenium Break, but also just through what we kind of saw as a sort of organic movement across Partizan.

As I think, you know, it's interesting to do fight scenes in something as freeform as Kingdom... or differently-structured, it's not a freeform game. But differently-structured, and there are moments where we kind of break into ordered free play, and we still manage to have, I think, some really fun descriptions, people had great ideas for describing their mechs as powerful and their pilots small in the face of dangerous odds, you know.

And we definitely held on lightly!

So, here's my **what worked, what didn't, what was left on the table** stuff. Um... I clearly left something out here. Whoops.

One, **Big Wins**.

Pacing. I... We... It took a long time to record those episodes. It wasn't like finale levels, you know, we paced ourselves well, and made sure we just like punted to do another day instead of just trying to put... cram everything in. But we definitely looked at a lot of... we had a lot of tape on our hands, let's say, at the end of the season, or at the end of the arc. And I think Ali and Jack and I looked at it and were like "FUCK, like, is this good? There's so much of it, is it going to sustain itself? How do we break this down?" You know, there's a version of this that's five episodes instead of... instead of a... what we looked at, you know, the first two are in the same thing, the first two Crossroads are in the same episode, then I wanna say maybe fourth and fifth were in the same episode, something like that. Or the fourth and a downtime, or whatever. Like, we were really trying to figure out how to cram it into a tighter thing. It was like: will it sustain eight episodes? This is the longest by far a special season thing that has happened. I think that that's true. Let me just double-check really quick, I think that the only thing that would come close in my mind would be the Spring in Hieron finale? Or epilogue... But that was only six parts, yeah. I think that's it, I think everything else, the COUNTER/Wright, you know, Kingdom game was what, three episodes? [He laughs a bit] I think that's right, three episodes, yeah. The Twilight Mirage finale is four episodes... And let me be clear, those were long episodes, like, I think by hour count it might not even out that way, but it was still a big risk to be like: "Yo, let's try to do... Let's split this up by, you know, the... the Crossroads and just hope that it paces right." I think Ali was the first one who was convinced of that—so shoutouts to Ali for pushing forward on that. And I think it works, I think it genuinely works. I think it helps that there was already a lot of buy-in for these characters, I think that that like... the fact that people care so much about basically every player character, or at least cared enough to at least have their hearts open to care, you know? No one was written off, or very rarely is I think a player character this season has been written off by the audience, and that gives the... this means there's a lot of opportunity for stand out, you know, scenes. And... Which in turn means that every episode can feel kind of like... momentous because someone is gonna do something cool.

2 Big Wins. **Big moments:** the Courage reveal, the Vigil City fight, the final... you know, the entire end, I think, starting from... I think the entire final episode is kind of a big moment, but

ranging from the invasion of Cruciat some of the final kind of sequences there... And obviously the Gur and, and Clem confrontation on the top deck... All of that stuff like... I...

I think the Courage one was the one that was scariest for me because it's the thing that I've been sitting on all season. I was sitting on that reveal from... from before the jump, right? It's teased in a way in the Road to Season 6 intros, I knew it by the time I introduced Cymbidium as a primary, you know, character, a kind of a table-setting character this season, that, that he was in relation to Mourningbride and that he would reach out to her, and that she would be in the situation that she was in. And the execution on that felt really good, but like it was weird because... I didn't know... I knew I would reveal it during this Kingdom game, because I knew that this was like the... this is the choicest shit, right? Like, if you're the undercover cop, if you're the spy, this is the thing you want to set dynamite to and blow up, this is the... This is in some ways the evidence that your deception... that proves your deception to have been worth it. Up until now Mourningbride had been like hanging out with a bunch of, you know, ex-soldier-witches in the woods who, like... They're not... they're not NOT heretical [He laughs] but that's not really a threat to society writ large, whereas by the time Mourningbride shows up... by the time Millenium Break shows up—two MBs there which was not intentional, but it does work out like that sometimes. By the time Millenium Break shows up Mourningbride gets to be like: "Look, here's the thing I was hoping for, I was hoping for this group to come together, so that we could take out every enemy of the state at once." if that makes sense. And the... uh... the... knowing that that was the trigger I wanted to pull but not seeing the opportunity was really stressful, and I knew once Dre let that box in...

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There's a sequence early on where Dre is like: "Something is gonna get onboard. We don't know what." And then he sets it up with like... a crate gets onboard. I think he set it up, or maybe I did. I think it was him because it was his prediction. That was fantastic, because I was like: "Oh, that's Courage arriving." But even then I wasn't sure 100%, and then there's that... there's the downtime bit... I think it was like a downtime or a time passes... I think that's when it happened. Maybe it wasn't, maybe it was... No, I think it was also a prediction, right? There was a prediction about someone getting hurt or something? Or something being missed? I don't remember the exact details, it's been months now. And... the fact that that popped off there was I think really well timed, and I was really happy the way Keith brought Apparatus Aperitif's Perennial magic to bea in a really really visually descriptive way, a really really cool and interesting, you know, method of talking about the way that Perennial's gifts worked for Apparatus. And it was just a tense fight even though it wasn't... there were no stakes in the sense that like... outside of a player suggesting that their character gets wounded or dies that wasn't going to happen.

The... the other thing there that we got to pay off was the Mourningbride deactivation code for Thisbe, which... which was, again, something that Janine and I thought up months... months before the game started. Hm. She and I just recorded a Pusher update where we talk about

Thisbe, the creation of Thisbe and kind of the background of Thisbe, and we were just... I was just looking at some of this stuff, and the inspiration for this sequence is... There was this viral video going around last year, there was like a play on the Boston Dynamics robot videos... In the Boston Dynamics robot videos are where it's like a humanoid robot or a dog-like robot picking up a crate, or climbing onto a gymnastic horse, or doing some feat of traversal or whatever. But the viral ones were, um, that basic setup except then the scientists or technicians around the robot were cruel to it, and would like hit it with a hockey stick, or you know, yell at it, or throw stuff at it, or push it over, and then there's a sequence in one of the viral videos where like one of them hits it with a stick, and then it grabs the stick out of, out of the technicians hand, and the technician says something, or makes a statement, or hits a button or something, and that ends it, and the robot just stops into place. And I remember sending it to Janine, and I think it was Janine who was like: "Oh, we have to make Thisbe T-pose, we have to make Thisbe just like completely shut down in that way. Why wouldn't the Principality or forces inside the Principality build something like that into one of their labor robots?" And being able to pay that off was extremely good. And there's like... that whole sequence was great.

The Vigil City stuff was fun because we've been teasing it through postcards. For people who've been getting the postcards — that city is where the postcards are, that's where Aerie Izz lives, and in fact the... if you remember, there's a very specific detail, which is like: there's one person there who has a cool mech, who gets kind of pulled away, and who brings the E.D.I.C.T. system out of town basically. That person is Tess, Quintessence Rey who is the... kind of older sibling figure for Aerie Izz, the character inside of the postcards. And getting to like paint that picture for the... for the show was actually really fun. And some of the future postcards will continue to reference that space and you'll see like where these stories inter... not interact, but overlap. It's really... it's really fun to see how those two things, like, came together.

And we had this idea of the kind of underground housing projects basically, I've had that for a long time, and figured out that the Columnar... The Equiaxed underground place was like such a good... such a clean metaphor for... or maybe too on the nose, but for this group of folks who are forced to live underground, and kind of under the noses of everybody else. Also drawing on like lots of particular... um, descriptions... I'm trying to remember if we... if I said this somewhere else. Um... Let me see if I can find this act. Uh... The exact line I'm looking for. There's a rapper named Leikeli47, and she has a track called—let me find it, one second, let me find this lyric... This is podcasting to me. Um... God, is it off of Acrylic? Acrylic is the name of one of her albums. Um. Is it in fact on the song Acrylic? Let's see. No, it's not. It's on the song Tic Boom... Um... No. Where is it? This is important! ...It's like extremely unimportant, but I wanna get this reference right. Um... [typing] Lyrics. Oh, yeah, it is. It is on the song Acrylic. It totally is. Um, there it is. There's is this... just such a good... All of the song Acrylic is like just a love letter to the space that Leikeli47 like is from, where there's just like this... um... verbal picture painted first of just like the neighborhood, and places where she's kind of like buying stuff, bootleg basically, and some places around the way, and then there's this great verse that's just like:

White tees, two for ten
I get my hair from Mr. Wen
Extension cord across the hall
Is how we keep the power on
Brown gel, spades game
Tax time, they all claim
Up in my hood
Proud to say it did me good, huh

And that like, image of, just, you know, getting your hair done, and then across the hall there's like literally an extension cord being run from someone else's apartment into yours. And that sense of shared community under the nose of people who have you pushed down, is something we really wanted that space to capture. And that's what's like... The thing that's nice about the postcards is that it can really... That's really emphasized on the postcard side, and here to put that under threat was like really scary in some ways. [Laughing a bit] But, but also felt like such a great moment for both Leap and Sovereign Immunity, for opposite reasons. It's first where we see Sovereign Immunity shift back into revolutionary Sovereign Immunity more, and second, is where we see Leap get excited about helping someone, genuinely. [Austin laughs a bit.] And both of those are character growth moments, right. And that's... I think that whole segment worked pretty well.

And then finally the end stuff, and I'll save some specific answers, because we obviously got a lot of questions about the Gur and Clem stuff, but, but I think it went really well, I'm really happy with the outcome, I'm really happy with the way it resolved a bunch of stuff. And, again, I'll save some other comments there. I will answer a question from the chat really quick, which was: Dakota asked if I would... having regretted... would I regret having killed Gur Sevrak during the Courage reveal. No, not at all. There are like... I.. I can't, it's not... I don't ever... What I regret is feeling like... there's a better show... There's a better episode of every show I've ever recorded. There's a better one. We could have made better choices in every single thing I've ever done. Choices I would be happier with. It's impossible not to imagine that world, because the expression is, is endless, and because I'm a different listener now than I was a creator at the time, a different writer than I was at the time, of anything, literally of anything. I could redo the Kingdom game differently. We just did it, I could redo... There are things that we could do differently. And I think it went well. So I don't get caught up in the like... would I have felt bad if I had done it that way, because... I know that I have done it... Even THIS way has alternatives that are better than what happened, and so that's like an important thing to make peace with. That doesn't mean that you can't be critical of your own work, and in fact what it means is that I reserve that right, I reserve criticality not for "I should have gone A instead of going B" and more for "Did I interrogate this theme well? Did I address this topic with focus? Etc. Did I fuck up in representation? Did I fuck up as... in terms of pure writing craft, did I not nail something well in terms of like description or vibe?" But the story stuff... It's like so silly, because I take it... I obviously take it very seriously, but there is no right answer, there's just an infinite list of wrong ones. And so you make the best worst one you can make, if that makes sense.

And someone in the chat does say... uh... let me see... Brendan says: "I was gonna say, you're doing this at quite a remove from when you actually played the game, right?" In terms of this episode? Yeah, this is... I mean, obviously, this is months after we recorded. But it's still very fresh, because I edited... I edited the last episode, which means it's all very very very fresh in my mind, even though that episode came out a few weeks ago. But I was like, you know. It turns out editing a thing means you listen to it A BUNCH, and it's really in your brain.

And then, millenomi says: if I recall right, or "If I recall correctly it was your prediction that it would be too late that got thwarted." Yeah, that makes sense. That makes sense. I predicted that something would be too late, and that makes sense, absolutely.

Alright. Third thing that I thought was a Big Win was just **momentum**. I think we were coming into this with good momentum, and there's a real risk of shifting games and focus that you would end up pumping the brakes. And there's a little bit of that at first. I think that you lose some of that like drive coming off of stealing Fort Icebreaker, Icebreaker Prime, coming off of some of the kind of high-intensity missions with SBBR, and coming with the shift in focus away from a game about military action and toward a game about whether or not a kind of community is going the direction it wants to be going in. And that's just... that's just... the kind of... um. The risk that you have to take when you make a swing like this, and when you think it's time to shift that focus. And I think what we did is... I think we managed to keep that momentum. I think, I think, again, there was kind of some coasting in the early midgame, but then there are these huge spikes of energy, almost like catching, almost like catching, you know, an updraft of wind that would push us a little bit further. And now coming out the back half, having recorded a few sessions, let me tell you. The momentum has not stopped. We're, we're, you know, full speed ahead. It ended up being almost like a momentum multiplier. If we were at 10, you know, or let's say we were at 50 going into that thing, my fear was that we would drop back down to 40 by the end of it, and maybe that was like worth it in the long run. Instead I think we kind of pushed up to 60, and in the time since we're probably at 80 or 90. And we're just going, going, going. And that feels great.

Four. Big Win. Forth Big Win. **Some small characters got great scenes**. I LOVE Eiden Teak / Sovereign Immunity scene, I LOVE the Tes piracy scene, incredible! Love it so much. I think Janine's focus as a player of Gucci was really really good. And I think that like Gucci's obviously not a small character, but is certainly smaller in some ways than many player characters are, right? And so I think that that is a thing that was like well done. I think stuff like Gucci... Gucci and Clem... Gucci painting Clem's nails is like an all time good, it's like... Okay, good, we got the thing. We got the sequence that was like IN this, IN this set of characters always, from the jump, and we kind of pulled it out of this pairing. And shoutouts to Janine for that. I'm not sure if there's any other tiny small thing... I think every episode had some smaller thing that was... that was... um a nice little bit of characterization for someone who previously hadn't... I think the stuff with Cynosure Kesh and Clem is just like top notch, I love that stuff SO much, I'm like so happy with it. And I was like listening to that when I was doing the edit, and so I was like: Okay,

how was this? This is the first time we'll see a Princept on screen. And it's obviously the less charismatic or at least the less impressive of the two Princepts, but by God I love that sequence so much. For sure.

...Um. One second, sorry. I need to... Why is this not working? Why would this..? Why is Discord like this sometimes? [Thinking noises, typing.] ...So there, and then this, and see if that pulls on. Uh... Alright.

The next one is that we **identified and resolved some table pressures both micro and macro**. I mean, to some degree, a lot of what this arc was always going to be was about getting the tensions... the kind of bleedover tensions, but also the clearly fictional and important and obvious tensions, worked though. Right? We didn't know going into it what was gonna happen to Clem,

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but we knew that part of this was going to either end up with a shakeup or a... um, oh yeah, a party shakeup or betrayal, death, who knows specifically. But we did know that there was going to be some degree of resolution that would make it so that specifically Leap would no longer be in a group with Clem. Keith had made it very clear that like he just couldn't do it anymore. He had no interest in continuing to be... to exploring those elements. And when I say he made clear, I mean we were pretty sure going in, and by the end it was... it was fairly clear that okay, we have to pull the trigger here, and make some changes. Which could have been a lot of things. That could have been just Clem becomes an NPC, it could have been... We definitely... I think I said this somewhere, I don't know where... We went into it I think assuming or imagining the most likely outcome was going to be: Leap and maybe Millie go and join Valence and Thisbe, Or maybe just Valence. Or maybe it's like Valence, Sovereign Immunity, Millie, and Leap, and the other party would be Broun, Thisbe, and Clem, as Clem recruits up for like Rapid Evening times... you know, second go. Rapid Evening Mark 2. And... uh. The fact that it didn't happen was kind of a big surprise to us all. And I think a lot of it was Broun buying in. But, but it was also Leap buying in to some degree. There was a lot of stuff there that was a little bit of a surprise to us.

What ended up being a point of tension though was the bleedover from Keith's... Leap's frustrations with Clem, also Keith's frustration with not understanding why characters would give Clem the time of day at all, to a bit of restriction on Jack as a player. And that's something that we identified. I wish we'd identified it a little earlier, but we identified it, we talked through it, we did the thing that you're supposed to do at the table, and, you know, the reason that this is not in a recording is because most of this is post-recording or pre-recording conversation, mostly done in text, which... that's a tool that you have as a GM—if you have like a group chat with your people make sure you use it. Or privately talk to people.

But it was one of those things where it was like... we have to really emphasize the difference between making sure the players are... that you're playing honestly about what your character would do regarding someone they don't like, and what you, the player, want to close off to another player at the table. Because it is one thing to say "I think we would keep this person in... I think our character would keep this character under lock and key." or "under careful observation" or whatever. It's another to say "...And as a prisoner you have no agency. As a player playing the prisoner you have given up your agency." And I'm talking about this for Clem as a prisoner in this, but also retroactively one of the things that I think helped even things out was to remind ourselves that the whole first half of this season Clem is a terrible, you know, literal slave owner, you know, prison warden war criminal. But Jack never utilized that power in such a way as to make Keith, Art, and Sylvie not have the ability to do scenes during downtime, or force them to clear everything. And there was a way to walk that line as co-writers that'd make sure that everybody was able to participate in an interesting and fun way. But that required a lot of discussion, like, that was, that was an important step to take. And it took multiple steps, like, it's not... It's one of those things to remind yourselves as a GM or at your own table, that a single conversation does not necessarily like fix things or make things smooth. But so, if you see a slow shift in the way Clem is featured—that's a reflection of actual ongoing conversations inbetween episodes. And as a reminder, again, that like, we do this professionally, we hit the same shit that every table hits. And so it's worth reminding ourselves that like the solution to this is not... is not "roll the dice and hope that it doesn't come up", it's that you should try to identify it and address... and find the language to address it as soon as you can.

And finally, the last thing here is a **strong edit**. Every week, I think, has some small... Maybe not EVERY week... You know, there's pickups throughout, small corrections or trying to be a little bit more evocative with language... And there's a few big scenes that no one knew [Austin laughs a bit] were edits or pickups that, you know, were tied to edits. One second, I need a drink of water. I could hear it in my throat. [Austin takes a drink] Mhm.

At some point... And probably for the full season Post Mortem we can go deeper into this stuff, and that also we'll have to revisit some of this for the wider audience, this is only for, for patrons, obviously. But, you know. That last episode has a ton of pickups in it, and I don't think that they are that noticeable. The entire Cynosure Kesh thing is a pickup.

Earlier in the season, or earlier in the Kingdom series, Art... Sovereign immunity being arrested and setting up shop in like the commissary? That's a pickup. There was another different scene that we had to cut because... We... No, we didn't HAVE to cut, we'd recorded it, we sat with it, we slept on it, we didn't like it. Art specifically felt... I guess I should say it outright—Sovereign Immunity almost died. [Austin laughs a bit] Sovereign Immunity, for a moment, dies in this recording, and, and that's because he refuses to go when he's arrested. And it ends up being kind of an interesting moment, but, again, the kind of bleedover between player dynamics and character dynamics was, was tough. I think a lot of it reflected the sort of like... you might

remember the scene where Sovereign Immunity tries to make a play to become the leader, and I have to step in and be like “Hey, remember, like... he has his priors, like he has his CV in order in terms of what he’s tried historically. We haven’t seen this Sovereign Immunity on screen, but he is like... one of the rare figures known intergalactically... Or not intergalactically, but known galactically as someone who stood against the Principality, That doesn’t happen. Like, period.” And there was a degree to which that boiled up in that arrest sequence, in the first attempt of that arrest sequence, that I think made people dig their feet in. And it ended up being a resolution that didn’t feel honest to the characters, it ended up feeling honest to player emotions more than the sequence, and Art wasn’t happy with it, and so we walked that back and did an edit there.

And then finally, yeah, the whole, you know... Throughout the final episode much of the Clem stuff was pickup. You know, as it stood... including stuff that was fine, but that I wanted to go again. The first... The overthrow, the first overthrow scene that I did was just trash, like it was just... And so that one we went back through and just did it again. I couldn’t find words as Gur Sevraq, I was SO tired, and like it would’ve been fine for... for... it would’ve been fine, but given the opportunity, given that we were already going back to do the Cynosure stuff AND the final confrontation... we should redo the overthrow, because I’m like fucking up my entire like... I’m not finding good metaphors, Gur Sevraq sounds like... doesn’t sound like he has a perspective. And it’s okay for them to get stuff wrong, I think one of my favorite things that I didn’t list here about this was seeing Gur Sevraq on their back foot, one of the things I love seeing Gur Sevraq play off Valence was is that Valence gets to be right and Gur Sevraq gets to be wrong and vice versa. Like they both can make the other one look a little foolish and I love that about them, because either one of them alone on screen would be... would be really really, um... what do you call it? Like, sanctimonious, I guess? And I’m really curious how we’ll see Valence, like, change with Gur Sevraq off screen now. Like, there’s a degree to which... It’s like with that absence we’ve already started to see Valence change, we already saw Valence pick up the gun, watch... you know, storm the city alongside other people. Does that mean that we see Valence internalize some of what those Gur debates had been about before, you know, Gur fell off the top of the fucking giant fort into the frozen sea?

And then the... the whole final sequence was something... again, I’ll go deeper into it when we get to the Q&A, but was, was I think... I think it worked really well. I think that it came across... in the moment. I had a very clear vision of the transition from We Will Leap... Or not We Will Leap. but whatever the final... oh, Look Sick As Shit, and everyone laughing to the final bit, Jack saying like: “Okay, wait a second. What about Clem?” And I think I must have looked at the... I must have moved that sound clip a thousand times—not really a thousand, probably a couple dozen times—to line it up just right to where everything is as triumphant as it can be before Clem raises her voice again, so to speak, right? Before Clem reenters the, the moment. I made like tiny little, TINY little edits to make it feel like just your... you’re coming over the top of the rollercoaster, right? Like, “Oh wow, I can see the whole park from here...” And that was... that was really really fun.

Uh, no, Gur Sevraq is dead, Guz, sorry. Gur is dead, I should be very clear. So. The... Sorry, Matthew Guzdial in the chat says: "Eyes at this ambiguity around Gur's fate from you right now". No ambiguity, Gur Sevraq fell and died. Um. It is what it is. [Austin laughs a bit]

Uh... So, those are the things I think I liked about this arc. What needs work?

One, **focus**. One of the things that was difficult about the Kingdom game is that the... The focus is always going to be on the parts of the Kingdom that aren't working. And that means you don't see the day to day of the Kingdom, 'cause that's not the point of the game. And so my, for example here is **"Why haven't we done any Revolution yet?"** And that was something that came up, I don't remember if that made an episode or even if that was on recording or that it was just behind the scenes like in our group chat, but it was like... All we've done so far is bicker about who does what. And whether or not we're doing arrests, and whether or not we're doing trials, and duh-duh-duh. And the thing is that those are the interesting bits of conflict for the Kingdom that was otherwise unified on what to do outside of the Kingdom. The game is just not built for showing people doing a thing unified and successfully. And so there was a sense, I think probably for the first three or four crossroads, that was just like... what do we do? Keith raised it the most, I think, I think it ends up really characterising some of Apparatus because of this, and another small character who got great scenes with Apparatus, obviously. And, and I think that's a difficulty with a game to emphasize... in the way it emphasizes the difficulties of a place and not the successes, because it meant we had to really slow things down to paint the picture of... And this wasn't a pickup but I think it was like a... "Okay, when we start the next episode I'm gonna slow down and just talk about what's happening behind the scenes... Or not behind the scenes, but behind the... you know, outside of the frame of the camera, outside of the frame of play." Because otherwise it will look like, like all we're doing is internal politicking, but in fact we know that Millenium Break is at the forefront of a, you know, an international or a kind of moonwide revolution. And so there's a degree to which that... that was a difficulty for us for sure.

I should've **prepped more for internal antagonism** that... that I talked about a moment ago in terms of the Keith and Jack stuff. It can be very hard to know... for me I think I went into it thinking we're so close to an exit valve here that it won't show its head, but I should've... I should've prepped for it in such a way that would have... I could have spoken to both of them about what their intentions were before the arc started, and aligned us all in terms of like strategies and behaviors and like how to make sure that no one gets boxed out and no one feels like they aren't able to participate, and stuff like that. So, always, always important to think about table dynamics in that way.

The third thing is like the opposite of the small character scenes. Like... **Some of the small characters just got lost in the shuffle**. I'm like bombed we didn't get any real Agon Ortlights. Agon continues to be just kind of backgroundy character, and I hope that we'll have time in the second half of the season for more development, but we'll see, right? This was like the moment in the spotlight and it didn't really come together. And a HUGE part of that is just Kingdom isn't

meant for eight players, like it just ISN'T. I almost didn't play Gur, I almost like didn't play a character at all, but people, the people on the show were like "No, you should play, you should be here as characters. I think it's important that you get to... duh-duh-duh-duh-duh." I was about to just facilitate and let those characters be background characters, but... Unfortunately, that didn't go that way, and I think that helps contribute to the fact that you end up having Tes with one very good scene, one or two very good scenes and that's it, you have Agon who's barely in it at all. And it was easier for players who had their secondary characters be their Beam Saber PCs, because then you got Thisbe at the debate, and that's just like "Okay, Thisbe showed up", you got Thisbe in the fight, okay, cool. It didn't feel like there was the necessity of Thisbe at the forefront.

[00:45:00]

And I think by the end there's enough differentiation between Apparatus and Leap that it's clear that Apparatus was worth being a major character. I guess some insight into that: one of the things that the book says very clearly is... Let me find it really quick. "Make your characters..." One of The rules, one of the only rules about the... making a character is: "Your character must be a part of the Kingdom. Do not make a character who doesn't care about the Kingdom or who'd be unaffected by what happens in the Kingdom. You can make a character who hates being a part of the Kingdom, but simply walking away should not be an option."

Keith read that and was like: "Leap doesn't care. Leap DOESN'T care. Leap can't be a major character because walking away IS an option." Um. And so that was... That meant that Apparatus had to be that person. Um. And so I think that Apparatus ends up getting more screen time there than some of the other new characters, because Keith was probably thinking very very strongly about Apparatus as someone who would want to be involved. And in that way like there's some overlap between Apparatus and Leap in terms of their politics or whatever, or like... their desired outcome. The difference is that Leap wouldn't hold prayer meetings, Leap wouldn't build anything at that point, to try to get what he wants. He would leave. Or he would put up with it long enough that he gets to leave. [Austin laughs a bit] And I think that like, that's an important distinction between those two characters that maybe got lost in the shuffle with some people.

Um, 4 is **rules clunkiness**. Like, we played that game a lot, and there's still things that we stumbled over in terms of... overthrows or challenges and stuff like that. And I think that's a fantastic game, that's more on us than the game. It's just that... it became difficult to... And again. We were playing with 8 people, the game suggests... Let's find out, let's see, let's remind myself here... Um... Uh... I'll do a search for "players"... Uh... I don't see it here. But I think it's like 4 or 5 players max. To the degree that I've seen Ben Robbins say: "If you're doing... if you need to do something with more, play a different game" basically. Let's see... Yeah. here it is: "Kingdom works with 2 to 5 people, but 3 or 4 is best." We were double that. So, what do you gonna do? Um...

[Austin takes a drink, sniffs.]

Excuse me, taking a drink.

Uh, “did anyone want to play Gur?” No, no one.. No one wanted to play Gur. I mean, that’s part of why... They were like, Gur needs to be here, and someone should play Gur, none of us want to play Gur. It’s very rare that anyone wants... like... Jack is like... Jack is probably the char... the player who most is willing to step over and take control of a character. Art was eager about AO, Janine was, like, interested in Gucci specifically, specifically because she’s so different from Thisbe, but no one I think...

I think people... are intimidated by the characters who have a lot of... clear history or whatever. Or like... It’s one thing to be like... I mean, even that’s not true, I forget what it was, but there was definitely a situation... at some point last season or the season before, where I needed Janine to play a side character for something, and it was like very intimidating, and I remember being like... I need everybody to sit down and realize that like my job is to jump from character to character, like that’s what I have to do. Everyone else’s job is to get into their one character as best as they can, and that is it. And so what... It feels very easy for me to just be like: “Yeah, just throw me whoever, I’ll jump into that role”, and for a lot of other players that’s just not appealing even, that’s... it’s not a skill they’ve been developing over the years of doing this show. And so... Or it is in the macro sense, like “Okay, this year I’m going to embody this person.” But it’s just not, it’s just not the thing here, for sure.

Emily in the chat says: “Were there any thoughts about wanting to play a game other than Kingdom if having 8 would really break the rules?” We looked at a bunch of stuff. We... no one makes games for us that aren’t like LARPs, and none of us are in the same place. [Austin laughs a bit] You really have to go to like con game LARPs to get something that’s built for people... for a situation as big as us... as far as I’ve seen. I looked... we looked around. But like, 8 people is just too many. It’s just, it’s a truth about the show, and will continue to be a truth for the show, like, we’re not... I have no plans on leaving the show, and I don’t think anyone else does. And so that means we’re stuck with 8 people going forward. And we... you know, we’ve tried things before where we say like: “Oh, we can do a season, or do a bit where like only certain people are in the spotlight or whatever.” It gets frustrating, people want to be part of the show. You know, I have... I have the lucky position of being in just about all of it. [Austin laughs] With the exception of like a couple of Live at the Table games at this point. But when we did Marielda, you know, people who only did the Quiet Year in Marielda were itching to play a game again. Like, they were seeing that Marielda was happening and it like... thought it was really cool, and saw the response to it, and didn’t get to be part of it. You know, they got to be part of the worldbuilding, and the fun stuff with Quiet Year, but that was it. And like, I can imagine that it was frustrating, and so, it’s one of those things, where like the reality of Friends at the Table is we’re going to be a multi-party show unless... unless players, unless, you know, players decide: “Hey, I would love to be in a different type of role this season.” Which I’m always open to, you know. I’ve pitched, I’ve pitched things like that before. But it’s not a... You have to soft-pitch that stuff. You can’t go to your party and be like... or your players who in my case, again, are my

friends, are like good friends of mine, and also co-own the business, and be like “Oh yeah, do you want to not be in the show for 6 episodes? Or do you wanna do like a slightly... Do you want to be just like a background thing?” That’s like not... It’s really like insulting in a way. So, so, of those kind of three options, which was: play this game, this new edition of the game specifically, which is much more streamlined than the original Kingdom; play... try to find something else, which we did try, we didn’t find anything else; or ask people not to participate... We just... we picked the one that was the best. Again, take the best of the worst options.

I’m trying to see if there’s any other... Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta... **Brendan** says: “I was kinda curious about Thisbe being a member of the Kingdom in the same way as Leap — she seems to be there because Valence and Braun care about it, not because she’s super invested.” Yeah, which is why she was a minor character and not a major character. Your minor characters can be... can be less invested. But Thisbe is invested in anything that her operants are. That’s what it means to be... That is what it means to designate someone your operant, is to say: “I am now prioritizing what they prioritize.” For sure. So. So yeah.

And yeah, if we’d found a digital LARP, if we found something that would’ve worked for that, I think we would’ve gone for it, but again, an important thing to remember with us is we don’t use video chat, because players, a number of players just don’t want to use video chat with us, so that limits what you can do in terms of that stuff. And there’s no private communication, like... We... It’s a... There isn’t like a “come talk with me in a corner” situation, or “let me DM you a thing”. The show... one of the core rules of the show is to put everything in front of the camera, in front of the... on to a microphone. And so that’s like a distinct difference in a real way that prevents us from doing certain types of games. Especially the games that are about that sort of like embodiment and secret information and private communication and stuff like that. You know, believe me, it’s something that... if someone put a different game across my desk, I would have loved to, but I think I probably spent a month on and off looking at games for something that made sense for how to do this.

There was definitely... you know, there was definitely a version of this that was all the way about negotiation. But no one cares, right? Like, this was a thing that was so interesting about this circumstance. Like, the players don’t... the players care about Millenium Break now, and cared about it in an abstract way, but none of them except Valence and Clementine previous to Millenium Break—maybe Sovereign Immunity, but only maybe—had that sort of political perspective. And wouldn’t have enjoyed the process of like negotiating from the perspective of Agon Ortlights, and Tes’ili Serikos, and, you know, the Sable Court. And you know what I mean? They just... When I say that I mean I asked: “Are people interested in this?” And everyone was like: “No.”

So like, part of the reason why you jump ahead to Kingdom instead of staying focused on “Hey, here’s the conversations, here’s the negotiations about ta-da-da-dah...” is that no one cares about it. They care about their characters, and they care about character work more generally. And so it’s important for me as a GM to follow that stuff. Never ever ever to say: “Well, the story

is that there's this negotiation, and I need.. And I'm casting players in the roles of Agon Ortlights and Gucci Quarantine, and they're gonna debate and negotiate out who gets what control in this new group, and blah-blah-blah-blah-blah." They just 100% just don't care. And if they... But if they did care we would've done that and it might have been dope, because they would've cared about it, right? And that's not to drag on them, I sit with the worldbuilding side of this in a completely different way, and so for me the goal as a GM is to bring out the best things in them and to focus... The same as it is for me, like, we're all players at the table, right? And it's to find the thing that excites all of us and push us in that direction, versus... They, [Austin laughs a bit] you know, they're also not making demands on me like, "Austin, we really need a mission where duh-duh-duh-duh-duh... or else." It's a very collaborative process, I suggest stuff, they suggest stuff, we come together on what excites everyone the most. So, so yeah.

Um... So that's rules clunkiness. I wrote the fifth thing, the fifth thing is actually very important and I was in the middle of writing it when I got distracted and then went live, and it's... it's the fuckup with **the depiction of Gucci and her condition**. Like... I made a big statement in the discord about this, it's one of those things that's tough because we... It's something I talked with a disability consultant and chronic illness consultant Kevin Snow about before the season started, and then we've checked in a few times, and... it's something that I should've pulled the trigger on in a very distinct and clear way earlier in Gucci's onscreen appearance. I'll just read what I wrote here, which is in response specifically to, um...

Symphoneers in the chat says: "Gucci's autoimmune related arthritis really isn't foregrounded in how she interacts with the world." Which is part of why they're suggesting it may not have come up previous to this.

And what I wrote was "That last point was a point that Kevin Snow and I talked about a lot before this season: The goal was always to have someone's disability, chronic illness, or other condition show up on screen artfully and materially. Not "Oh, also they have X" as an element on a checklist. The risk there, Kevin suggested, was that it diminished the lived experience and could be felt as reductive or even pandering. But when..." But when... Hmmm. I've very... Oh. "But where both they and I struggled was "invisible disabilities" in NPCs who are not going to get the screen time of an PC, where you'll get the scenes of them managing that part of their lives. And what we decided was "hey, foreground it immediately, try to utilize the benefits of playing in SFF setting to visualize it without fetishizing or stigmatizing it, and if it comes up in play naturally, all the better." That's what we did with Agon, whose chronic fatigue syndrome was established in her introduction in episode 0, then reiterated at the top of Kingdom, but that didn't really come up because of the lack of focus on minor characters."

As a reminder, Agon has chronic fatigue syndrome, and has like helper robots, and stuff like that, and Sylvie and I had a long conversation about it, I linked Sylvie a bunch of inspiration stuff for me for the character in case she did come up, so that Sylvie would be ready to play that stuff. And the Agon just never really came up.

“With Gucci,«I continue, “failing to foreground that was a mistake on two parts. First, I just didn't know when I first made her. I wanted to include a character with vitiligo, and when I created her I was drawing on a personal relationship with someone who I grew up with with vitiligo,” my friend Nicole from grad school, who I was like a close friend with and who... there was this very interesting... Without going into like too many personal details growing up, I'm biracial, and I was in like primarily black spaces growing up, and that meant that to some degree there was some extra tension there. I was not like the lightest skinned dude there, but like my mom, my white mom was coming to pick me up from school, right? And so my friend Nicole and I very much bonded to some degree over that degree of like... here is... there are the ways in which you're outsiders. You know what I mean? In any case, I was drawing on those relationships, those personal relationships, “and then reading accounts from folks who had lived with vitiligo. Those accounts focused on stress, therapy, overcoming self-hate, facing a culture that will other you from every direction. What very few talked about were the often-attached medical conditions. So fuck up number 1 was just not digging more deeply. Mistake number 2 is that once I did read about the conditions, I didn't solidify her situation immediately. Janine was eager to highlight the cost of combat. I saw an opportunity to finally address Gucci's condition. But it should've been done by the time that happened.” I add: “I think y'all are right to identify a sort of unconscious bias of primacy of other characteristics here.”

“All of which is to say: Yeah, this is a fuckup. Sorry for that mistake, and I'll continue to work on it. This is obviously a weak spot, and I hope that talking through my process here helps clarify how it happened to begin with, (and also for others who are trying to address similar issues in their own work how that sort of mistake happens despite best intent and effort).”

So, I thought it was important to add that here, that's also something that is like very much at the forefront of my mind this whole season.

[01:00:00]

It's a difficult thing and I'll do my best to keep... to keep doing my best with it, if that makes sense.

Um. Alright. Let's get into some questions. If you have questions for future episodes you can send them to tipsatthetable@gmail.com. Make sure you use the subject “Drawing Maps”, otherwise they go in the bucket with the regular Tips questions, and that's not where they're supposed to go. So.

First one comes in from **Morgan**, who's in the chat now.

“Hey Austin!

First off, congrats on a fantastic run of episodes — this Kingdom game was an absolutely incredible miniseries. I have two questions about it:

1. You mentioned in the discord “choreographing” the final scene of Partizan 28 with Jack beforehand. I was wondering if you’d be willing to elaborate on how you did that with them! How much did you communicate about the outcomes of the scene before recording it?”

At some point in the near future we’re going to upload an entire Pusher episode that is like the 90-minute conversation between Jack and I, talking through what the hell we were doing with Clementine Kesh. As it stood, the end of that episode was Clem in her room crying... not the end of the episode, but you know, the sequence is still there... Clem gets overthrown, at th time, that overthrow happens on the top deck, which is where I already started thinking about the ideas of ways that could have gone even worse.

We ended up shifting that conversation to be in the chapel instead. Um, because we wanted to save the top deck for this big fight. Um, and so, at the end of the original recording, it’s Clem stuck in bed, you know, depressed, it’s Gur, still alive, stuck in bed depressed, because of the realization of having missed the opportunity to focus on the Exemplar of the last few months. And... that’s kind of it? Oh, and Leap is still... Leap is still going off to form the fleet, the pirate fleet, that I’ve internally started calling Leap’s Fleet. Just cause it sounds good on the tongue. And that was Keith... Leap gets retired because Keith doesn’t want to be in a game with Clementine Kesh anymore, right? But then, once we start working on Keith’s new character—who I will not speak about openly here but who will be in an episode soon enough—Keith ends up really liking that idea. So even after we decide to kill Clem, the... Keith is like: “Okay, I’m still gonna stay this other character.” There was an opportunity there for Keith to walk back leaving Leap, it was not like, it was not like a... a gift of the Magi situation, is that the right one? The one where like, you buy this and then it duh-duh-duh-duh-duh? Okay.

So yeah, there was a world in which... the original version of this is: Leap goes off to start the fleet, Clem stays a player character, stays alive, stays on ship, or on, you know, in the group. And then the back half of the season Jack is just playing Clem as... like... I don’t know, sort of like a pure reversal of fortune, right? Like, “now I am the one who is working under... under difficult pretenses.”

But then we realized, we realized a bunch of things. One was there was no dynamism to that. And that ending would’ve been fine without it, but like... we needed... we did need a little bit something extra, but two... It didn’t feel... What happens to the prisoners who have been taken? Oh, they get traded away. So why would Clem still be here? Why wouldn’t she go off to go... go back to Kesh in a POW exchange? And like there answer there is like cause Crysanth doesn’t make that trade which is very fun. But it’s also just like: why wouldn’t she leave? Why would she stick around at this point? Why wouldn’t she take the first boat out? Why wouldn’t she... Or! Why wouldn’t she do something so bad she ends up killed, right? So, so aggressive or whatever.

And when Jack and I talked through it—and again, I think we’re gonna upload some of that brainstorming stuff—and what we came to was like, there should be an encounter, a really messy encounter. This is the moment we pull the trigger on these characters. Um, I’m really excited to see Valence without Gur Sevraq, which I already have suggested. And Jack felt like Clem has had like a good run. And so... And had started coming up with a new idea for a second character, which I guess I’ll spoil here, and just say: Jack is not playing an established NPC. Going back... Re-echoing what I said before about players really not loving the idea of taking over an NPC most of the time. Most of the time they like to play their own characters. So they are playing a new character who I think is dope, who I loved in the first arc featuring that character.

Um, and the... the conversation around like what is this thing was both a long call... it was also about a very tight period of time, because Jack was about to go into quarantine... Without getting into the specifics, Jack was about to go into quarantine, Jack is fine, Jack was spending time with their partner in quarantine who was coming to visit them in, in England. And that means Jack wouldn’t be able to record anything for two weeks. And so we had like four days between the realization that we didn’t want Clem to live and that we needed to change the end of the episode to Jack being unable to record anything. And we had to record... that Sunday to record stuff for... I mean, Bluff stuff was happening, music was happening, there was a bunch of other stuff that we had to sneak into that same time period. In retrospect, because of other scheduling difficulties some of that stuff just isn’t out yet anyway. But. But at the time we were like: “Oh shit, we have to fucking cram!”

And so we ended up having—I was like so stressed about it—we ended up talking through it one night... one day, then that night we got on all and just talked through the entire process, and identified basically what the variations were. Do we want both of these characters to die? Do we want both of these characters to like... do we want bodies found on the top deck? Do we want like a shootout? Do we want to go back to Beam Saber? Like, we talked through all of this stuff over the course of this like, you know, multiple day period. What we ended up with was a really bad argument in the rain, looking out onto Cruciat, which was actually more like a recut of the original confrontation and overthrow sequence—because the original version of that, again, was on the top deck, was Gur pointing out to Cruciat and being like: “You keep saying that this belongs to you...” And redoing that stuff, finding the energy from that that was very hostile and confrontational...

You note here that I said in the Discord that it was choreographed, that’s Jack’s word, Jack basically said like: “We need to choreograph this,” which was the right call. And what choreography meant here was... and I think that to some degree this shifts maybe some of the magic of that scene towards acting and not towards, you know, pure improv. Because here is what I know... knew going into that scene: we would argue, Clem would poke at Gur and Gurr’s religion, and would... um, insult Gur, would find an insult.. And I gave Jack, you know, a day before we recorded Jack was like: “What is a thing Clementine Kesh could say that would hurt Gur enough to push them to violence?”, and we did... we had no answer, [Austin laughs a bit]

From that original brainstorm for another like... [extremely doubtful] "I think it's something like this?... I don't know." And then like, you know, I think a few hours before we recorded I was like: "Oh, it's this. It's something like this." And I... you know, Jack didn't quote me, because the way this stuff happens sometimes when you do these moments, which are very rare on the show, you end up with like a very, very lightly, like... "Here's an idea of what we want." And so what we knew was: the insult ... an insult so bad would come that Gur would snap, it would be raining, it would be... Gur would push her over the edge, Gur would feel bad about that and look over the edge, she would jump up and there would be a messy fight scene. And so you have all of those pieces, and let me tell you, the thing that's fucking wild is. You get to the moment, she says the thing, and I feel angry. Like the hair on the back of my head, or on the back of my neck stands up when they say the thing about wanting to be God, and when I'm just like: "...He pushes you." It was absolutely like embodied in that way, even though I knew for minutes beforehand that we were coming up to it, in that way it felt improvisational because Jack as an actor had earned that response from me as a collaborator and a player, because their control of their voice and their delivery and their just like, absolute perfect mocking tone 100% got under my skin as I was as embodied in Gur Sevraq as I've ever been.

And the thing that you end up having there is a complete alignment on knowing that we were both ready to, you know, end these characters, and when you have that there's a degree of "Okay, we get to both be playful here on top of that," so there's no more stress around "I don't want my character to die," or whatever, you're just like going at it. And so... the... the... I think you see a lot of these even were... triumphant, I think the closest... one of the closest scenes I can think of that sound like this is a scene in the Twilight Mirage in the pre... or in the Twilight Mirage holiday special, in which Jack's character and an NPC of mine end up kind of getting a drop on another character without getting into specifics. And there's a lot of the same cadence in our voice describing the... camera action, the, you know, what the camera sees, the brutality of what happens, stuff like that. We're in that same... that same like brainstormy mode, and that's not put on in any way, because all we have is a not that says: "Uhh, I think they stab each other and then they fall." And that's like good enough... that's like enough to make us... prompt a scene, it's more like a prompt than a script. And then we get to be able to be like: "Oof! From that prompt together let's sketch this out."

So that's what that looked like, and in terms of... so, in terms of outcomes, like a 100% had to be on the same page. And part of that is, we weren't playing Beam Saber. In retrospect, I felt like: "Ooh, maybe it would've been fun to play Beam Saber there, to like shift back to Beam Saber rules." But it wouldn't have been in the sense that... Clem would have come into that... There wouldn't have been a 100% shared authorship in that way... Not that there's such a thing as a 100% shared authorship, because there's of course power dynamics and duh-duh-duh, like, I'm not under false pretenses about the relationship between people, like of course there's always some element of... of inequality in any relationship and blah-blah-blah. But comparatively, in a world where I am now in an oppositional role or in a role where I'm setting consequences that Jack has to roll to resist... that's just not how we wanted to do that, we wanted to do it inside of the idea of... these two characters are willing to die in this moment, and

are the two characters who can most make each other get there. And that was fantastic and I was really happy with that.

Um, uh. Jack says: “You can tell that moment was pretty real because you immediately walked it back as too aggressive.” I mean here’s the double bind is: I knew I was going to walk it back! The prep was: Gur Sevraq will push you off and will feel bad and walk it back. So, it’s this very interesting weird thing where like... we knew that exact arc would happen, and we still had that... that feeling, we were still able to have that feeling, and I think project the feeling of improvisation, of not knowing what was going to happen next. There is a degree of just giving yourself over to some degree that was just really really fun, I think. Um.

“2. Did you have the idea from the beginning”—this is also from Morgan—“of the season that the holiday special would be a GMless game about a revolution? Or was this arrived at later in the season? Or was starting a revolutionary movement integral to the conception of the season from the beginning?”

I think the last thing is probably true? That... I always... I mean it was true in the sense that it was always on the table, right? Like. one of the things from the jump, if you go back and listen to Drawing Maps, or the intro to the first... to the season, or even look at some Discord messages, it was: here are characters who cannot yet conceive of revolution. They’re all on the edge of it, they’re all right on the edge of ideology, right? They are so subsumed in the Principality that imagining something beyond it is hard, and... and it feels silly or goofy.

The outcome was never... was never scripted though, in that way. I never thought for su... In fact what I thought would happen—and for the first half of the season, honestly, coming into Millenium Break, coming into *Kingdom*,—I didn’t think Millenium Break would... I thought the Kingdom would fall into crisis and fail, right? So, what I imagined, what I knew would happen was at some point in the series someone would try to start a revolution. I did not know if it would work, I did not know if it would stabilize, and I did not plan on *Kingdom* or any other game being at the centerpiece of it, right? It’s not a holiday, it’s a midseason break, I had no...

We could’ve gotten through this whole season without one of those at all very easily. You know, I like doing those game breaks, but there’s nothing... there’s nothing in me that’s like if we don’t do it then it’s not a real season or something like that. You know, Marielda didn’t have one of those, I think that’s a real season. The... Winter and Autumn in Hieron have their, like, Detective games, but they’re not... they’re not... they don’t have that style of game... Winter obviously has the flashback thing, that’s literally just there ‘cause it was a holiday and it felt like we should have a holiday special, but not... but it has nothing to do really... I mean, thematically there’s some overlap with Winter, but it’s not key to understanding Winter in Hieron, or something. And so... and so yeah, that part of it was not at all inten... not at all necessary. Now, I should say, there are rules for founding a faction in Beam Saber by way of the new expansion Austin Ramsay just put out. I think it’s called The Continuing War? Is it The Continuing War?

[01:15:00]

]What's it..? Someone remind me, I'm checking... The Growing Conflict! The Continuing War, Jesus... *The Growing Conflict* which is up at austin-ramsay.itch.io. And that has a bunch of new playbooks: Artificial, Captain, Hero, Proxy, Rookie, Transformed... and Artificial is Thisbe, Hero is Sovereign Immunity. It has two new crews... two new squads: The Crew which is like... they have a Cause and they have a spaceship, they're kind of like Star Trek-y, and then Double Agents who are double agents, and then there's faction management rules and faction creation rules. If those were out when I first started, maybe that is that way we would've gone about this, and it's a much different thing, it's actually very costly, you really need a party who is like willing to do it. So yeah, so maybe that's the way we would've done it if that had been available. A note here: I don't think we're gonna much... we're probably not going to use many of the faction rules, mostly because, again, the players just aren't keyed into that part of the gameplay in the same way. It's not as interesting for them or their characters. I think maybe Valence would be interested, but even Sovereign Immunity doesn't... You have to... You can go read the book and see what I mean, but there's like kind of a lot of... There's a lot going on, and also, SBBR isn't in command of Millenium Break, which is an interesting and important thing as we go into the second half of this season. Millenium Break is now run by a council of people, and is run democratically, and that means it's mostly run by the high tier factions... or the high tier squads in it, which are the less revolutionary ones by and large, with the exception of the Oxblood Clan, but even that... but even the Oxbloods aren't like... they're not as numerous as the Company of the Spade, right? So yeah, you know. Just things to think about as we go forward, for sure.

So yeah, I didn't have anything planned necessarily... I had a feeling in my gut that we would get there. There are other things that like... like the Courage reveal, that I always knew would be coming, and there's other big plot stuff coming up that I haven't talked about at all, in terms of season structure and stuff like that, that I'm holding close to the chest even from other players in some cases. But that's... So it's not a bad question is what I would say. There have been seasons where I have had that style of... Like, the Rosemarrow Detective story I always knew would be there in the middle. But I didn't know the content of that for instance at the start of Winter. Um...

Next question... is very similar, and I'm just gonna note one thing here... **Jordyn** writes in to say:

"The Gur-Clem scene at the end of the Kingdom game, broadening to the state of the Divine Universe was absolutely incredible radio. How much of that Gur-Clem scene comes from play at the table (if any) versus how much comes from a pick-up/post-Kingdom discussion?"

I've already answered the former part, but I do wanna note: even... When we talk about like... when I talk about trying to get it right, the thing that you note here, "broadening to the state of the Divine Universe", that was like... such a struggle to figure out. It's one thing to sit down and

knock out a really good scene with Jack, because Jack is such a good player that I love to play with them. I love to just like to imagine, and embody, and all of that, all of the verbs we use with Jack. But there's a difference between just that and... um... like, ending an episode. And so at first the episode ended on: "All personnel return below deck... All personnel return below deck..." And then it ended. And Jack and I went back and forth, and Ali was in this conversation too, as like the production team, like: "Is that the end? What do we do here? How do we..? Do we paint the picture of people on board? I don't wanna act for other people's characters right now... It feels kinda silly to pull the attention away from Gur and Clem, this is such a big deal... Like, uh, what do we do?" And I realized that like the horror, the best horrible thing I could do was to zoom out as far as I could, was to be like: "And this is a tiny nothing thing that's happened in the face of the Divine Principality which is this massive machine." And it also felt like it was... it was the moment in the show's arc to foreground the rest of how big the Principality is, and like that other things are happening at this moment. Because in some ways it lifts Millenium Break, because now Millenium Break is... is... has become a faction, and that means they get to stand shoulder to shoulder, at least on Partizan, with these groups that exist across the stars. And that... and that is, like, both, again, very scary and also it should feel kind of overwhelming. And so working through that... I might have the like, the literal... um... where is it? Um... production... Type out "zoom out" and see how often I say "zoom out"... Yeah, here it is. Um... This is me... a bunch of pickup files I linked to Ali, and then: "Also as it stands we just end on Jack and I talking." There was a conversation, that's what there was, there was a conversation after the zoom out, in fact there's... including a moment that I wish had made it, but we just couldn't figure out how to fit it in, where we talk about...

I say: "Does anyone see us fall?" And Jack notes like: "Oh, I think maybe we hit a de... we hit like an extension, a scaffolding or something on the way down, and someone from the Commissary is like looking out the window, or maybe it's like on a video tape... Yeah, that's what it is, it's a video tape we have to go through, you know, a week later people scrub through, and for just a few frames you see them clanking against a metal awning or something, and then landing and stabbing each other again and falling further, right?"

And maybe some of that, like some element of that made it in, but there was another follow up bit that definitely got cut. And so it ended on us like laughing and talking about the dark end of these characters, and I say: "Also as it stands we just end on Jack and I talking. I'm gonna crash soon but tomorrow I may decide I want a bolder zoom out, but I'm not sure. Part of me wants to linger on the loss of these characters. There specifically is this moment at the end of the fight where there's just this automated "All personnel please return below deck..." message that repeats. That might be a harsh but a good end, but maybe it's not hard or clear enough, I'll sleep on it."

And... uh, where we end up getting eventually.... Oh, the other thing that I... that gets cut here is that I ended up saying in the original recording, like: "I guess we're gonna have two new characters when we're back from break." But then I brushed my teeth, apparently, and I said: "I think I'll do a brief outro tomorrow." And the outro that I ended up coming up with is... Jack

suggested... Jack then suggested cutting it right after the “All personnel...” thing, because there’s a degree to which it’s sharper, and then I say: “The two things that I really want to emphasize were that it was a serious thing in the scope of Partizan, but also that Jack and I were on good terms, that it wasn’t like they and I were like, you know, in a fight over this, or something.” And like, the stuff that we ended up cutting was us laughing and joking. And so, that did get cut, but I think I did at least... I do think that, going back and listening to it, and this is what I did, that by listening to it I realized: “Oh, I think you can kind of tell that just by the way we’re handling it. We both think it’s so good that we’re on good terms as terrible things are happening even.”

And then we go back and forth on this for a while. There are other versions of the end of this thing with music, and the thing that ended up working for me was... you know how it beeps and it does kind of like... the klaxon sound is playing? I ended up... Jack couldn’t... There’s a, there’s a... not a pitch shift, there’s a key change, or something, in there, I don’t know about music. But in sending me one of those things I realize: “Oh, I can do a sort of... a sort of key change in the outro as to what is happening here.” And what I ended up figuring out was... Let me see here, where is it? Uh... I say: “Ali, can I have permission to be big brained?” and Ali said: “How big is your brain?” And I said: “There are a bunch of like views from across the Galaxy, you know, From deep beyond the Partizan portcullis, those on the Nobel homeworld wonder what has become their wolf, Valence, and worry whether their emissary has secured safety for them, stuff like that.” And then that’s when I realized as I said:

“I wanna sneak this in: “Under sunset-hued skies and in the safety of roaming fleets, the attentive scions of long dead Profits and Excerpts, Satellites and Cadents, see the future first,”—which is a Frank Ocean quote,—“see the future first, and prepare for what’s to come.” And at that point I was like: “Oh, this whole thing should be that zoom out. This whole thing should be: who else around the world is... is looking in?”

And so even something as small as that ends up having days of conversation, recording, test recording, writing, rewriting, to get, you know, the tone on something like that right, that then sells the entire, like, importance of a sequence like that, which is fascinating.

Um, so, thank you to anyone who's done that. Um... I think we'll be back this... this Thursday. There's still a... there's still a question because of some non-show related scheduling problems, but I think... I think what we're gonna do is get an Austin to edit an episode or partially Austin-edit an episode this week, we'll see.

Dakota writes in and says: **“What happens to the squad moves and facilities in this big switch around, are they all held in common?”**

That is a great question! Let me take a quick look... Because what I think I ended up doing is some of them came through and some of them didn't. This is Drawing Maps so I'll say this here, but remember, please don't like go broadcast this because there are people who... If someone

in the Discord says: “Hey, do we know what their squad is going to be yet?” or something, say: “You can go listen to the latest Drawing Maps.” Don’t give the answer there, because other people might click on that spoiler and they might not want to know that yet. So be very careful with these spoilers.

What’s come together, what’s come forward on this is a mix... it’s a mix of things, but it’s not everything. So, for one thing, Future was with Gur Sevraq and fell into the ocean, has not been recovered, and so, the Rapid Evening had that Beginner’s Luck like, move, Future’s Hallowed, that’s gone. So, the thing where they were able to spend their Spark to turn a failure into a partial success—that’s gone. Also gone from the Rapid Evening: Secret Routes. Those were the Rapid Evening’s secret routes, which is to say, those were Kesh’s secret routes, I don’t think those count as secret when you try to use them against the Principality in this way. Crysanth Kesh knows where those are.

We’ve kept Airfield and Infirmary as a sort of reference just to... so for instance the Winter Doctor has come along with Millenium Break and with this new squad that’s... I mean, it’s just SBBR, it’s just... Big SBBR is what we’ve been calling it. And so they get Infirmary and they get Airfield, and that’s not like... It’s almost just like they were able to grab enough stuff from Icebreaker Prime to replicate those things, right? In some ways I’m thinking about the Airfield less as a literal airfield and more like the gear necessary to maintain and operate, you know, large transport vehicles. And then likewise, the Infirmary, partially was about getting Schuyler Stevens as like a full-time infirmary doctor. So, those came over. And then Forged in a Fire came over, um, and then there’s a new move that they took, and I think that that’s it. I don’t think that there’s any other... Let me double check, let me look back at the Rapid Evening... Um... Sponsor is also gone. They also don’t keep Sponsor, because Sponsor was tied to Gur Sevraq and that’s gone now. The Church of the Resin Heart is not sponsoring SBBR. So. So, yeah. I think those were the big things... And then they both had Prowess, Insight, that doesn’t come over, obviously. And they both had workshops, so that doesn’t come over. So yeah. That’s about what it is.

Um... I don’t think... Oh, and then A.O. Rooke and... A.O. Rooke comes over, the Runt comes over which is... which was Millie’s robot bud, both of those, both of those exist here. Though actually I’m looking at it, and I don’t see the Runt listed, so I should copy that over. I can do that when I’m done with these. So yeah, that’s the gist of how that stuff’s coming over.

Um... Pa-pa-pah...

Thomas writes in and says: **“You’ve talked before about keeping PARTIZAN’s arcs tight and focused, which has been really effective for establishing the game, getting to know the players, and progressing the plot. However, how did you anticipate this pacing changing as you move into the late game when the A-plot becomes the main focus?”**

Um, I think it's gonna stay the same. We've recorded a bunch already, I think one of these upcoming arcs will probably be three episodes, but the other one's two, like the previous ones. And I think we already had a three-arc episode, and, unsurprisingly, the four-player party is the one that goes three episodes. ...Sorry, I said "three-arc episode", I meant a three-episode arc. So it's like very, very similar, I love the tight focus of this season, and that's not a promise to do that forever, but on this season I think it's been working really well. And it kind of justifies the long downtimes in a weird way. I don't really want to talk about downtime, we haven't done a downtime yet, or not a full one, I guess. But there is like... There's enough... It's just a lot, it's just a lot, you know, now that it's one big group. And so we'll see how that goes.

But yeah, I think we're gonna keep... try to keep things the same. Part of that is *Beam Saber*. Like, *Beam Saber*'s mission report system is so good at getting you to prep a mission that's focused, that has a certain number of challenges...

[01:30:00]

...that has... Like, everything is very clean. I don't have the sprawling sense that I did when we were running *Blades in the Dark* in Marielda where I would just... badly overprep huge spaces, and it was just a nightmare. This is, this is... everything has been focused. And it doesn't mean that it's like small, necessarily, um, I shared a clip on Twitter of Keith, Jack and I talking about... I mean it was Keith, Jack, Ali, Sylvie and I, but mostly Keith, Jack and I talking about a combat encounter in an upcoming episode, and just how good it is and how chess-like it is. Like, there's some stuff coming up that I think is *Beam Saber* at its, at its best in terms of fight stuff. It's like really, really like interesting cooperative maneuvers, interesting dilemmas and prioritization questions, really cool fight stuff that's very characterful. I just really liked it, so... look forward to all of that.

Um... Alright. Oh wait. Did I go too far? I did... Uh... No. Here we go.

Juliet says—and some of this stuff, some of these following questions come from past Drawing Maps... things that were asked forever ago, but I'm just putting them in here so that we can get them answered

"Given the morally grey..."—it's **Juliet** who says: **"Given the morally grey nature of both squads in this season, and this setting of an interminable, inescapable war, how do you draw the line on where a squad's actions and consequences draw into "war crime" territory?"**

Did I already answer this one? Maybe I already answered this one. I don't remember if I already answered this one.

"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 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 think that this is a great question. And I think that it's like... this is the difficulty of any depiction of war. Uh... I need to find this quote really quick, just to confirm that it's who I thought it was... Yeah, this is... Truffaut, of course, says... Um, there's a question for the filmmaker Truffaut who says: "There's very little killing in your films. How come?"

"I find that violence is very ambiguous in movies. For example, some films claim to be antiwar, but I don't think I've really seen an antiwar film. Every film about war ends up being pro-war." And the response from the interviewer is: "Even a film like Kubrick's "Paths of Glory" or his "Dr. Strangelove"?"

"Yes, I think Kubrick likes violence very much."

"I've thought about..." uh, this is now back to the writer: "I have thought about Truffaut's point for the last two weeks, and only now am I beginning to understand and agree with him. In "Paths of Glory", which so many people consider the strongest antiwar film ever made, the film doesn't so much condemn war as the French government that thought it necessary to sacrifice its soldiers. War isn't hell; it's just the men who run them are frequently hellish. And every war film, just like every war, has its heroes, and that, too, seems to cut across any antiwar sentiment. As Truffaut said, it makes violence ambiguous."

And I think my response to this is that violence is ambiguous. Um, it's not an antiwar show, Friends at the Table. We are not a pacifistic show. I've flirted with pacifism before as like a moral system, and have come out on the other side feeling like... looking at the world and thinking: "I don't have the luxury of pacifism." Twilight Mirage is about this in a real way, right? In some ways, I think, the little tiny drop we've got in the Twilight Mirage was still that, is still that question of... what is pacifism in the face of tyranny. And when we look in the streets right now in the United States, when we look at, you know, oppression globally, I think that there are points in which physical violence is on the side of justice. I don't condemn it widely, or, you know, totally, rather. I can condemn very specific actions, I can condemn war done by imperial states, and the show definitely does that. But conflict and violence are not fundamentally negative things.

And I think that the show in this season is much more interested in how do we get to a point at which... when you're inside of empire and empire subsumes everything including your own revolution, potentially, how do you know when you're doing the violence that is necessary versus the violence that is... that is in its own way, um, only working towards the ends of the thing that you're trying to fight against. In that way I don't have a lot of problem... I don't have a lot of problem with the idea that we might stumble into glorifying certain types of violence. What I think is difficult is: are we also glorifying the types that we... that we don't want... that we think are bad? And to some degree I think we are, in the way in which any type of aestheticization grants something power.

I'm thinking a lot about the moment in the Orzen fight, where the... the Hallows of Imperium show up, and I do my best to describe the Cadenza as arriving in a kind of victorious and powerful and moving way to the people of Orzen, and that's... I think that that's important characterization because it's honest about the world and the beliefs and the characters in that world. And I want to, for a moment, trick you into... There's like two things happening. One, I wanna trick you into being: "Whoa, cool robot!" But two, I want you to understand that like, that is the mechanism by which... that is one of the fronts on which the fight against imperialism is happening. And being... going back to the Principles, to play honestly is to represent that weapon of imperialism. And I could do it in a more abstract way, I could say: "And this thing shows up and one of its traits is that it's inspiring to look at." But I don't know that it's good radio, and I don't think that's good art.

I think that you have to... I think that there's lots of schools of thought on this, I don't think there's like a single answer to this. You know, this is not... There are ways in which we are very Brechtian in terms of our production. We... often and in a vast majority reveal the process of creation in the... in the work, right? You're hearing us debate ideas, you're hearing us talk through challenges, you're hearing us set things up, and so that to some degree has a certain sort of Brechtian politics to it. But I don't know necessarily that we're opposed to a certain sort of aesthetization in craft that uses visual or representational metafore at a high level to evoke strong emotions. And because of that I think in this season I'm willing to wade into this.

That's not true for every season. There's another question coming up in a moment that's about something similar. I don't think that that answer is true for every season, and I don't think it's true for every game. And so for me what I would say is like: I don't think you could run a game of *Beam Saber* that doesn't aestheticize violence and aestheticize warfare. Now, how it's aestheticized is... is up to you as a GM, and as you players... with your players, and whether or not that's something you're comfortable with is 100% up to y'all. But what I don't think... I don't think it's a good idea for you to step into the game and say: "What we're gonna do is do an antiwar game of *Beam Saber*." 'cause I think it would fail. I don't think that you could play this game in which the progression mechanics, the jolt of joy you get when you get to fill a clock, because missiles hit... all those other things... The game is built around a certain style of violent conflict, and the moves that you have, the abilities that you have, the actions that you have at your disposal are filled with violence. And even in the game in which you are playing a set of characters who maybe didn't invest in those and are only investing in the non-violent actions and abilities, and your vehicles haven't taken weapons, and... Even in that the game is still structured such that the places you have the most flexibility, the way... the place in which you can mechanically enunciate your will the most are violence. And so that is... There would be an absence felt, where you'd be better off playing a different game that doesn't have violence in it, or where it isn't... it doesn't have the same degree of focus on violence. There are a billion other games that you can go play that would emphasize other aspects of conflict that are not violent aspects of conflict. Maybe not as many as we would want to, but we all know that you can go to itch right now and find a bunch of really cool stuff to play.

And so I think that if you're... if part of that struggle for you is about being afraid of triumphing in the horrors of war instead of engaging with them, then I think that there's a degree to which that's the first step in developing a mechanism by which you would make... you would keep yourself from doing that, right? Which is to say, that's the right impulse. Having the impulse of... "Oh shit, I wanna make sure that this isn't 'Wow, cool robot... Wow, cool war crime...'" is to have the attitude you already have, and then to be honest with yourself and say: "Am I capable of—and am I interested in doing the work of—keeping myself in just the realm of aestheticization and focused, practiced aestheticization versus the sort of slippage towards raw triumphant spectacle?" And if that's not something you're interested in doing, I think you're making the right call not to... not to do it, if that makes sense.

Um... Alright. **Dakota** writes in again—this is an old Dakota one, but I figured I would knock out both of them.

"Was it possible that if characters other than Millie had directly engaged with or "killed" Motion in the Pneuma,"—this is going back to the Icebreaker arc—"a similar offer would have been extended to them? Or was Millie offered the chance to be elected because she was Apotolosian? How do you design clocks like Motion/the Black Century with unique ways to fill them?"

The question of the former is yeah. It's kind of what I said before, there's a million different ways in which I could have... I could have gone one way or another on any... on any element of the... of any episode, right? I think if... Leap was probably the other one there, Motion was really really like playing at Leap also, and Sovereign Immunity. Anyone that advanced a clock on Motion I think or had this intimate moment got the sort of like... Motion looks at them and sees... tries to woo them a little bit. And there was nothing about that that was Millie-specific at that time. Now, of course, Motion is Millie's rival, and so that changes things a little bit. And that came from Sylvie really wanting to emphasize that interesting difference between... with Apotolosian culture, and also just between the ways in which what Millie wants is not just the opposite of what Motion wants in terms of war versus peace and blah-blah-blah, but like, think about what Sylvie has said Millie wants more than anything. It's like to stand still. [Austin laughs a bit.] It's to be still. It's to retire somewhere and have like a little house and a farm. And to be at that one place. There is something so perfect about that for me because... also because Millie is like one of the fastest characters in terms of like being able to get places and being that sort of scout, movement-focused character. Only Leap was faster in terms of like what could be done. And so like, everything about that is Millie, and then Millie was like: "No, I wanna stop." So I think that pairing worked out really well.

In terms of how I design clocks in unique ways... I don't know, it's tough. It's sort of like... I think it would be sort of like me asking Jack how to put together like a chord progression or something. And I think... I think that the answer is similar. Which is like, there's only a certain... there seems to be... there are infinite... There are infinite ways to do stuff, and also formulas

emerge, um, patterns emerge, preferences emerge. And so for something like that it was like... I start with a question. With that... In that case, Motion and the Icebreaker Prime arc, I knew I wanted Motion to feel... uh, feel unstoppable, like, as if she would keep coming. And so I was: "Well, how do I recognize... how do I show that that's the case here?"

There's a fight coming up that has a different clock mechanic and in that fight I wanted to emphasize a feeling of shared resources and some other stuff... uh, leadership and some other stuff. And without getting into the mechanic, that was the question that I had in mind when I emphasized... when I put that clock system out. Um... Part of it is just familiarity with clocks, and just like sitting with them and thinking about the ways they could advance or readvance or slow down or reverse. And there is sort of a limited palette that you could play with, it's just how you put all that stuff together. A clock can tick up or it can tick down. It could tick up at the same time as something or tick down at the same time, it could tick up as something else ticks down, it could have a certain reaction at a certain like level of being filled. And you just kind of sit with the theme and think: "How do I represent this mechanically?" is kind of what this really comes down to. And I think... I credit years of games, of playing games and also games criticism, and thinking about systems in that way, and also years of thinking about systems in a really different way, the sociological way, and thinking about the ways in which reward structures exist, stuff like that, right?

Experiment is really my biggest suggestion to you, is like, experiment, experiment, experiment, come up with a fun idea and see if it works, and if it doesn't work it doesn't work, and you can move on, you know?

Um... I think there's one more here, it's very long. It's from **Eli**, who writes:

"I love so much about this season. You're all tackling really big ideas with interesting and complicated characters." This is another older one. And who knows, maybe Eli would send a different message today, post-*Kingdom*, we'll see. But I do have an answer for it, so.

[01:45:00]

"There are so many amazing RP moments and Jack's music is incredible. One of the things that sticks with me though is how much Partizan often feels like a prop and not a world. The Road to Season 6 did so much to build histories and cultures, and introducing the season we learned a lot about the broad strokes of life in different regions of Partizan, but in play most of the locations have felt mostly like a background to a mech fight. Both SBBR and the RE are obviously agents of violence, and that's reflected in their jobs in each mission — bodyguards, reinforcements, capturing a base, being a diversion. These were often the actions of player groups from past seasons — that hasn't changed. Their position within empire has me wondering, though, if we'll get to see more of the world outside of the crosshair of a mech.

I believe an email from one of the last Drawing Maps touched on how in Hieron it felt like the people in the world all had names, and I understand there is a scale difference here which will always make some parts of Partizan feel nameless even as they burn. I know what Orzen looks like because SBBR was given a dossie so they knew what not to shoot. I know what Obelle looks like because we saw it's fields burning and a meeting of out-of-towner politicians in one of it's inns. I do not remember the names of any of the people who live there. I haven't seen how they live, or eat, or celebrate or, in a season that swung so hard towards religion, pray. The only glimpses of life in motion outside of immediate violence have been the brief time SBBR spent in the Sable Court and then in the Isle of Logos.

Not everyone can have the time and depth of development afforded to Marielda or Rosemarrow, particularly in a story that will span a year in real time while reaching to thousands of planets, named and otherwise. And there's a lot of great characterization that can and is happening around the sort of conflicts that treat cities as battle maps. If the PCs are positioned narratively as inescapably agents of state violence, this makes sense that their actions are a reflection of the commodification of land, lives, and culture under colonial ideologies. A lot of the characters are wonderfully terrible people to this end. Still, there is a sense of loss when the only lens to a world so richly built is one of violence.

I'm wondering if, as the stakes continue to rise, we will get more opportunities to see the small parts of the world in depth again, out of earshot of cannon fire, or if the focus is going to continue to move more to large scale conflict, and the ways those conflicts obfuscate the quiet places."

Uh, it's up to the players. I think what you're... Yes, the answer to this is yeah. That's super intentional, right?

I spent a lot of time thinking about places like Orzen and thinking about what the players will get to do there, thinking about how much fun it would be for Valence and... Broun to go see a live show at the theater there, to go see a live musical show. They don't get to do that, that's not their role in the world. To do that, to have the ability to do that would be... to... depending on how... depending on what the show is and how much it costs and everything else, might mean to be more privileged and even more... even a greater agent of the state than they are now, or than they were when you wrote this email let's say, when they were just a mercenary outfit.

I think we've seen some of it in *Kingdom*. I think we start to slow down a little bit, I think that you get to see smaller... you definitely get to see groups praying more, for instance. You definitely get to see more in the world of like: Hey, what's going on in this place. That place tends to be a hospital bed, or a place moments before it's under siege or in the time after it. That something so vibrant is being covered with smoke and riddled with gunfire is extremely intentional.

Bluff City works—and I've said it before—in such a way that the games change the laws of the world. It's why we—I've talked about this with someone who wanted to switch games in a recent Tips episode. It is the case that *Beam Saber* I am using explicitly because it couldn't... At the start of the game the one rule about *Beam Saber*'s drive clocks is you cannot end the war with them. You can change the circumstances of a person, a squad, or a faction, you cannot end the war. It's too big. That's the one rule as written about this stuff that you cannot do. It's a game that the world we've built in it was set up for constant conflict, and thinking about, again, the rules, the ways the squads are set up is: you can't build a squad that is... You can either build a squad that is an agent of the state, which is to say, tied to a major faction, or one that is incredibly vulnerable because it's not tied to a major faction. Those are the two options.

And so that whole season for me has been about emphasizing all of this stuff you're calling... calling to mind here, all these things that you're emphasizing. To me this is like: yes, this is working. The thing I think about a lot here—and I've definitely mentioned this before and this might be what you're referencing—we got an email about COUNTER/Weight and someone who specifically was upset that COUNTER/Weight didn't slow down and show every name and face the way that Hieron did, and who stopped listening to the show because of that element. And the thing that I told them and that I'll reemphasize now is that like: not every show goes by the same principles, right? Not every show is attempting, or not every season is attempting to do the same thing, and we have a wide palette that we want to play with as we tell different types of stories. As I prep for Season 7 currently, for instance, I'm like: I don't want to tell another war story, I don't want to tell another story about imperial oppression right now, we're doing that right now, I wanna do something different with this next thing. That's not to say that, you know, colonialism or imperialism might not pop up here or there, but it's not the focal point of that season.

And so in some ways the answer is: I hope so. I hope that we'll get more opportunities to see small parts of the world, but they'll have to earn their way out of *Beam Saber* to do it. We'll have to be... we will not be able to be... we have to escape the gravity of *Beam Saber* to see the world differently, and I don't know if they're gonna do that, I don't know if they want to do that. I don't know if the characters do, or if the players do, or if it's in the cards, if that victory is possible, even. But as long as we're playing *Beam Saber* the world will be reduced in the way that you're identifying. And that is very sad and very frustrating. It doesn't mean you can't run another game there, it doesn't mean that a home game or a Live game that we do, or a one shot set in this place or that place... It's why the Road to season 6 was able to do it. But that's not what PARTIZAN is about. We named the season after a weapon, you know? And I think that that is very very intentional, and that we knew coming in that we wanted to be in this space that was dire. And I think that that... we had no idea how dire the world would feel this year, and certainly I think that to some degree we have had to react to that in a certain way... And I'm curious, I'm very curious if in another year, Millenium Break stays formed or if it breaks up in *Kingdom* because we feel differently about the world, you know? Part of me wonders if... if that sense of community and coming together, building something real was there.

But I mean, I can say it outright: the reason we didn't play *Armour Astir* was because *Armour Astir*, which I love, imagined a world in which there was already a resistance, and imagined a world in which you had support characters who didn't engage with combat directly. And that game was rejected because that wasn't the state of things on Partizan, that wasn't the state of things in the Divine Principality. No one had earned it yet, right? And so... we'll see, right? I would love to see a shift there, but it has to be something that players... I wanna see Millie on the farm, right? I wanna see Thisbe on the farm. [Austin chuckles.] I wanna see the Farmer on the f... Lots of farms happening here. There's probably actually a really... There's probably actually a really good critique of the rural versus the urban or something that you can do of the show and the way that we deploy farms very uncritically to mean certain... this, this, this, or this, right? But I do think that that's a thing that's like... This is the... What you've identified, to me, is The Stakes, in the same way that the shift in, in a Bluff City game where suddenly we slip into a different ruleset is about identifying the rules of reality changing.

In fact, the thing that I've said out on the Discord about *Kingdom* is that the *Kingdom* represented a moment of opportunity in the world mechanically, right? It mechanically was saying: Hey, the formation of a faction could happen now. The formation of something that could push against the imperial power here could happen. It couldn't have happened in *Beam Saber* before that. Now, of course, it could have, because there are rules for *Beam Saber* faction organization. But let me tell you, they were not ready to do that in the *Beam Saber* rules, in the Growing Conflict rules, SBBR was not ready to form a faction, they did not have what they needed to do that according to those new rules. [Austin laughs a bit.] And so there is a degree to which *Kingdom* should feel like a moment of passing opportunity that needed to be taken advantage of, a window during which some big action could happen. And so I would love to see the party earn their way into another slow game, if that makes sense. And I don't want to make it sound like a carrot that putting in front of them when in fact the opposite is probably true, which is like: I don't know if they'd want that necessarily as players. But, but that is the way I think about these things.

It's... it's very intentional to... tease a space that would be so interesting to be in if not for, _____, right? So, that is my answer to you, Eli.

We have gone for much longer than I thought we would. [Austin laughs.] According to my OBS I've now been shooting for about two hours, so I'm not in fact going to be doing any of the laying the groundwork for Tableau stuff that I thought I was going to. I can also hear that I'm losing my voice. Instead I'm going to go eat my 10 p.m. dinner like a good adult, and I'll try to get this up in the next couple of days.

Thank you so much for everyone joining me. I think that there is a... uh, I think that we'll have an episode up this week, again, it depends on scheduling, and edit time, and stuff... But I'm... I'd say 85% sure that we'll get one up this week, so. Look forward to that, I can't wait for it to come back, the stuff that we've recorded is all really good. And I hope that you enjoy it.

I hope the rest of your Sunday goes well and that you all have a great week. Until then, until next time... Peace.