

Fiat Lingua

Title: Remembering *Defiance*

Author: David J. Peterson

MS Date: 11-30-2015

FL Date: 12-01-2015

FL Number: FL-000033-00

Citation: Peterson, David J. 2015. "Remembering
Defiance." FL-000033-00, *Fiat Lingua*,
<<http://fiatlingua.org>>. Web. 01 Dec. 2015.

Copyright: © 2015 David J. Peterson. This work is
licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Remembering *Defiance*

Defiance was an American television show filmed in Toronto, Canada that ran for three seasons on the Syfy network from 2013 to 2015. I worked on the show as its alien language and culture consultant starting in the fall of 2011 up until its cancellation in the fall of 2015. Though hard to precisely quantify, I'm confident that *Defiance* has featured the largest volume of conlang material of any television show or film to date. This essay is a catalogue of some of that work.

BACKGROUND

Defiance began its existence as a computer game created by Trion Worlds. Its initial development started in 2008. Trion's idea the entire time was to create a game that would have a television show associated with it, the idea being to have the world of the show and the game feed off of and into one another. After coming up with some initial ideas for the world of *Defiance*, they struck a deal with Syfy to produce the show.

Syfy turned to Rockne O'Bannon, creator of *Alien Nation* and *Farscape*, to write the pilot and serve as the show's show runner. It was at this point that I joined the show. In the spring of 2011, the first season of *Game of Thrones* aired on HBO, and one of the executive producers of *Defiance*, Tom Lieber, thought after seeing *Game of Thrones* that it would be a good idea to have some alien languages in *Defiance*. Tom, a former NBC page, had a friend who was also a former NBC page who was friends with Bryan Cogman, originally the assistant to *Game of Thrones* show runners and creators David Benioff and Dan Weiss (he's now a writer and producer on the show). Through that connection, Tom got my contact information and, in the fall of 2011, invited me to work on *Defiance*.

For conlangers, it's worth noting that this is how Hollywood prefers to work. The competition that was held for *Game of Thrones* (and later for *Noah*) were great exceptions, and likely never to be the norm. Casting calls for actors continue to work for two reasons: (1) even if they're not actors themselves, producers/directors can decide which actor better fits what they have in mind fairly easily; and (2) there are *legions* of both established (and highly paid) actors and new actors trying to break in who won't command as high a salary. The fact that well-known actors are a draw means well-known actors will always continue to get cast, but the fact that all productions have budgets means there will always be casting calls and opportunities for new actors. Plus, all shows and movies need actors. Since there isn't enough demand for conlangs in television or film—and since producers/directors know neither what they're looking for nor where to look, let alone how to evaluate what they find when they find it—there aren't any calls initiated by production companies for conlangers. If we want for there to

be an industry, we need a different model. We need to find a way to work within Hollywood that gets more conlangers a shot. Plus, as *Game of Thrones* is closer to the end of its run than the beginning, our window may be closing. Clock's ticking.

INCEPTION

To get things moving, Tom sent me a draft of the pilot written by Rockne O'Bannon, which I read. That version was very different from the version that ended up getting filmed, for reasons which will become obvious in a bit, but it was interesting. Set on Earth, *Defiance* is a show that takes place 30 odd years after aliens came to Earth seeking refuge. The action takes place in St. Louis, now called Defiance, where aliens (called Votans) and humans have learned to coexist. There was potential in the script for a number of conlangs, and since it was set on Earth, there could actually be borrowings from Earth languages into the various alien languages, and vice-versa. That was enough to intrigue me.

After reading the pilot and looking over some materials on the aliens and world that had come from Trion, I met with Tom and Rockne for lunch to discuss the show. They wanted me to do two languages, one each for the alien races whose characters were going to have the most dialogue: the Irathients and the Castithans. Rockne's main concern was that the languages sound maximally different onscreen. My idea for this was to make the languages polar opposites:

IRATHIENT	CASTITHAN
VOS	SOV
NA	AN
NG	GN
NR	RN
PN	NP
head-marking	dependent-marking

That was simple enough. To get them to sound different, though, was a bit of a trick, since the one rule for all languages created for television or film (well, aside from the fact that they all have to have [θ], for some reason) is that they sound as exotic as possible but be easy to pronounce for the monolingual English-speaking actors. These two things are, of course, at odds—especially if one is trying to create a more or less naturalistic language. My idea, then, was to target the rate of speech and intonation, with Castithan being spoken as quickly as possible, and Irathient as slow as I could get it. I was moderately successful. For example, while Castithan is spoken rather quickly, the breaks between phrases are quite jarring. The result is a series of quickly spoken

phrases with noticeable gaps in between. Irathient, on the other hand, is so fluid and so pronounceable, that despite my intention, you actually can speak it fairly quickly. The consonant clusters slow things down (and that was intentional), but it flows so well I barely notice them. The head-marking and more or less strict word order, though, makes it easy to drop words, so most lines that were translated into Irathient had fewer words than they could have (maximally), so that helped to allow me to slow things down.

Anyway, at this point, two things happened that shook things up. First, Rockne O'Bannon called to tell me that the languages were too "subtle". I think he was looking for languages that were cartoonishly exaggerated à la *Star Wars*, as opposed to the naturalistic route I was going. In order to take it there, though, I said I'd need to work with more of the IPA than I had been (after all, there's only so much one can do with a language that needs to be "easy" for an English speaker to pronounce). Consequently, I began working on phonological overlays for Castithan and Irathient to make them pop a bit more. Specifically, I was going to introduce a series of clicks to Irathient (one series, not several), and make Castithan fully tonal. I didn't hold out hope that the actors would be able to successfully produce either (one of the reasons I didn't do multiple series of clicks, e.g. non-nasal vs. nasal), but theoretically they would sound pretty cool—or could, if given to the right performers.

As I was preparing these, though, I got a second call from Rockne. This one was quite different. Apparently many years prior, Rockne had written a pilot for a show called *Cult* and had pitched it to the WB way back in 2004. When the WB changed hands and became the CW, though, the new executives dropped *Cult*, and so Rockne went on to pursue other projects. Seven years later, the CW went back to look at that pilot script and decided to bring it back, and they contacted Rockne to see if he was interested. *Cult* was a passion project of his, and so even though he was the show runner on *Defiance*, he decided to leave the project to see his pilot get off the ground. So right in the midst of this great upheaval for the languages, the one who called for the changes left, and a new show runner came in to replace him: Kevin Murphy, former show runner of *Battlestar Galactica* prequel *Caprica*. With the exit of Rockne O'Bannon and the other writers working with him, I became the most senior member of the *Defiance* crew outside of the network executives, which was weird.

Some time in February, I met in person with Kevin Murphy and the director of the pilot, Scott Stewart. This was kind of an odd meeting, since I was, essentially, inherited by Kevin from the previous iteration of *Defiance*, so it was both an introduction and a pitch to do what I'd already been hired to do. Key to this meeting was the issue regarding the character of the languages. Basically I presented the original versions of Castithan and Irathient to Kevin and Scott and asked if they were okay, or if I needed to retool them along the lines of what I'd been preparing. They both agreed the

languages were fine as they were, so I didn't end up having to introduce tones and clicks. That was a big weight off my shoulders.

To be sure, it would have been neat to have a tonal language and a language with clicks in a television show, but knowing what I know about the level of involvement a language creator has on set (i.e. none), I'm not only not confident that such languages would be pronounced right—I'm *extremely* confident that such languages would be butchered, and would end up being a distraction rather than a cool feature of the show. If it's going to happen, it's got to happen with a language creator that can be there on set for every single take.

WORKING ON THE PILOT

By the time we had a final version of the pilot script, I had two full languages, Castithan and Irathient, and two language sketches, Indojsinen (for the Indogenes) and Yanga Kayang (for the Liberata). In addition to that, though, I had gotten the opportunity to do a lot more work on the show than originally planned and had expanded my role significantly.

Two factors led to me occupying the unique position I did. First, Kevin Murphy is a brilliant show runner. He's also a great writer (his episodes are my favorites from the series), but being a show runner is about more than how well you write. The show runner is in charge of the writers' room; is the main liaison with the network; is the one who makes casting decisions; and, in general, is the one at whom the buck stops. Every single decision, whether it comes to directing, sets, props, editing, stunts, *whatever* goes through the show runner. It's a tremendous responsibility, and not everyone is cut out for it. Kevin, though, is great at getting the most out of everyone under him and working within a budget. So that was a big part of it. Second, though, was the situation. *Defiance* didn't belong to anyone. It wasn't Kevin Murphy's idea—it didn't even belong exclusively to Syfy. As a result, Kevin sought—and received—a lot of input from everyone working on the show, including me.

The upshot of this is I was allowed to contribute meaningfully to every aspect of the show to which language or culture was relevant. Furthermore (and this is still incredible to me), I essentially pitched the concept of having writing systems for the alien languages. It happened in a weird way. Shortly after Kevin Murphy took over as show runner, I was contacted by Tracy Dorsey at CNN who wanted to do an episode of a show called *The Next List* on me. *The Next List* was a half hour show hosted by Sanjay Gupta (whom I never met) that profiled people with odd jobs. Being the language creator for *Game of Thrones*, I seemed to fit the bill. To see if her hunch was right, Tracy did a short preinterview with me to discuss how the show might work. This was fairly

embarrassing for me, because it was one of many interviews I've done that go something like this:

"So, do you work with the *Game of Thrones* actors on set to help them with pronunciation?"

"No."

"Oh, do you just work with them over the phone or on Skype?"

"No."

"Oh. How do they know how to pronounce the language?"

"I record all the lines on MP3."

"Ah... And how do they do?"

"All right most of the time, I guess..."

Of course, for this half hour episode, what Tracy was most concerned with is that there be something visual for the audience to look at, otherwise they couldn't really do an episode of the show based on me—it couldn't just be me at my computer for half an hour (despite the fact that that is *literally* all I do). To try to hype up my otherwise embarrassing circumstances, I said that I was working on a new show, and that occasionally I had meetings in LA (in this case, the "occasionally" referred to the lunch meeting with Rockne O'Bannon and Tom Lieber, and the meeting with Kevin Murphy and Scott Stewart mentioned previously). I said I might have another meeting up there that they could film, and they said that could work, so they asked if I could please get back to them on when and where it would be.

Naturally, there *was* no such meeting planned—and none would ever come up organically. There was no reason for one to exist at that point. So then I basically had to *pitch* a meeting to Kevin—but not just any meeting. A meeting that would be filmed for this random news show—a meeting that would make it look like I did more than sat at my computer all day. So not only was it a meeting I was trying to conjure up, it was a meeting that everyone would need to get approval for, as it would be filming in an office with potentially sensitive material (i.e. scripts, notes, and artwork for a show that hadn't aired yet).

The purpose of the meeting, then, was going to be me pitching writing systems, plus some other miscellaneous material I had been working on. All of this could be done over e-mail, but since I needed a meeting to film, Kevin agreed to hold a meeting. There wasn't much time between the filming and the meeting, though, so in a short amount of time, I had to create three writing systems with at least mock-up fonts to pitch. I ended up working on these all the way up to the night before the meeting—the same day filming started. This was also the day John Quijada came down from Sacramento for a visit. When we thought there wasn't going to be enough material on just me, I came up with the idea of interviewing John Quijada, who could talk about conlanging generally as an expert. I also invited some friends over to play video games so that we could film that, for variety. Turns out they ended up with enough material, so

they cut all of that (which was a bummer to all concerned), but this is what that experience was like. My wife Erin and I even moved my desk downstairs so we could make a corner of our living room look something like an office, despite the fact that we lived in a one room loft...

Anyway, the day of the meeting, Kevin was sick—so sick, in fact, that he said he probably wouldn't have come in to work had the camera crew not been coming. I was already pretty nervous about everything, but this just upped the ante. I said that I hoped the meeting was worth his while, and his flatly honest response was, "I hope so too."

Despite that build up, the meeting actually went very well, and you can see it on that episode of *The Next List*. It was me, Kevin, script coordinator Brian Alexander (on whom, more later), and Scott Stewart, who was on the phone. Kevin loved the writing systems I created, and so they became a part of the canon of the show.

That decision, though, was enormous. Consider that essentially I was asking them to let me do something that is usually reserved for the art department without any evidence of prior ability—and to pay me extra for the privilege. Sure, they saw what I had produced (a couple lines of glyphs on paper), and I talked it up, but they had no evidence that I could make fonts or writing systems that would look good. And, in fact, the head of the art department, Stephen Geaghan, had actually created writing systems before as set dressing for other projects he'd worked on, including *Babylon-5*. It was essentially a visual element that was taken out of the art department's hands and given to me—something I didn't fully appreciate until I worked on the CW's *Star-Crossed*, and got to create a writing system again (thanks go to Joseph Zolfo for that one—and to production designer Jaymes Hinkle for letting me do it!).

Once this was set, though, I started contributing all over the place. On the writing end, I ended up creating backstories and histories for the various alien races, including creating the Irathient and Castithan religions, the Castithan caste system, naming strategies for all the Votans, and an alien-human hybrid card game, the rules of which Erin and I worked out.

From an artistic standpoint, the impact was even greater, though I wouldn't realize it until I visited the set. Incidentally, I didn't visit the set because the network felt it was appropriate for me to be there to coach the actors: My set visit was a thank you from Kevin Murphy. Apparently not even the show runner could convince the network (which, on the whole, has always been *incredibly* supportive of me) that I needed to be on set, which should be a good indicator of how things usually go for a language creator in Hollywood.

Anyway, to give everyone some background, the three scripts I created before the pilot were the Irathient (a VC abugida), Castithan (a CV abugida), and Indojisnen scripts (a CV syllabary). They're shown below:

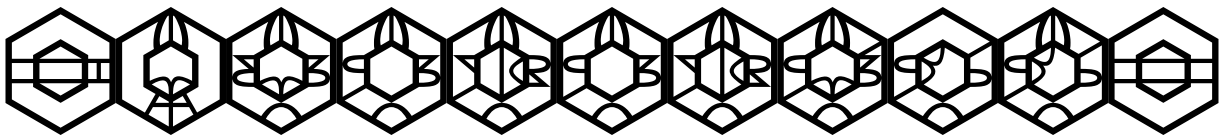
IRATHIENT

ပင်လယ်ကမ်းခြေ

CASTITHAN

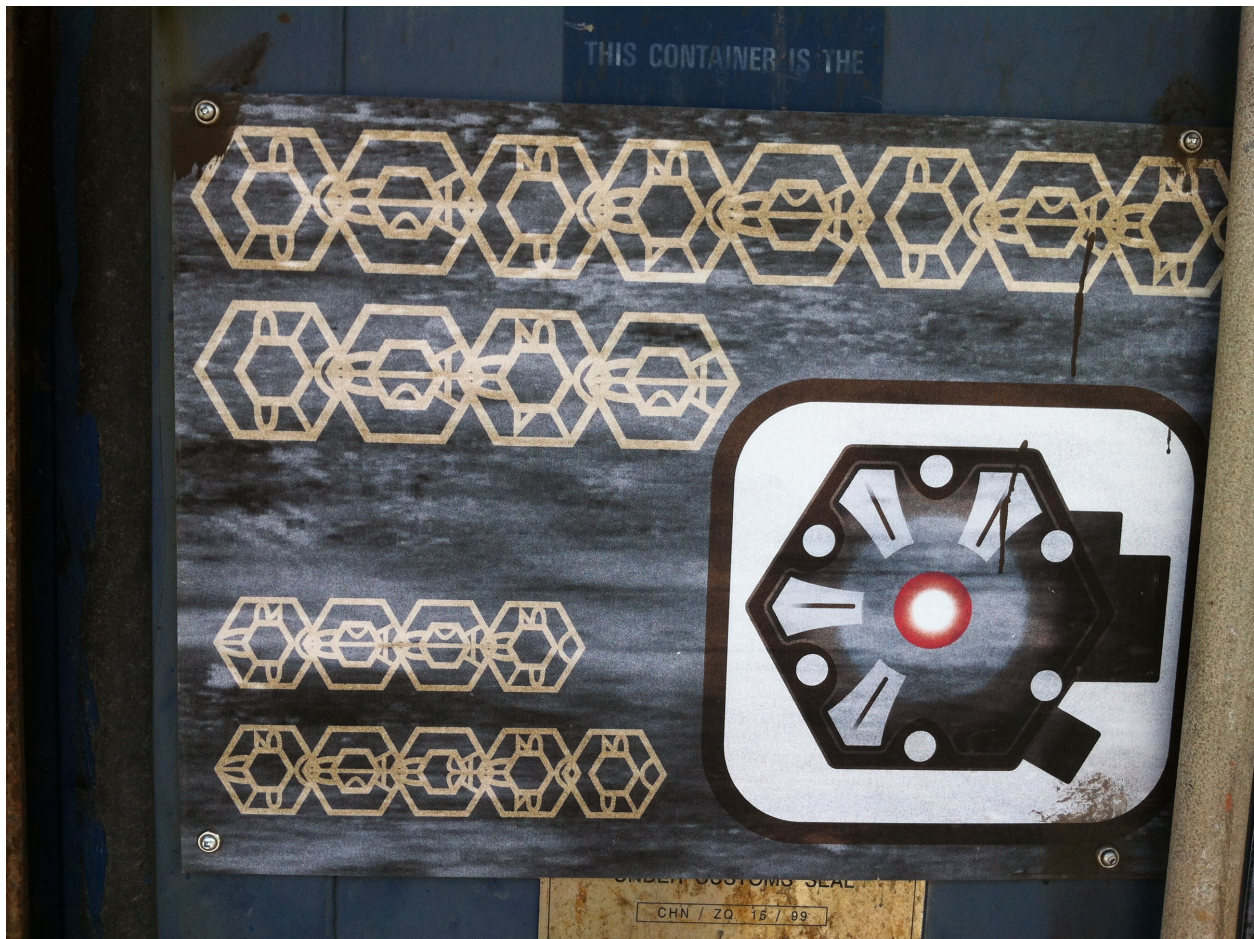
လေ့ကျင့်ခန်းများကို လေ့ကျင့်ရန်

INDOJISNEN



Now here are some pictures from the set.







Now, is everything used correctly? Hardly. There are spaces between words in Irathient when there shouldn't ever be (a raised dot is used to separate words); the Indojsnen is oriented incorrectly, though cleverly, and the hexes aren't interlocking; the Castithan is used in a bizarre way that's clearly an artifact of how the font works, but, nevertheless, what an unimaginable thrill! Visiting the set of *Defiance* for the first time was undoubtedly one of the greatest moments of my life—and it was all because of the writing systems. Hearing the languages spoken is great, of course, but there's something more permanent and real about physical artifacts and print material.

It was also informative, as I knew what I had to do in the future with material that was going to be seen onscreen. Naturally, background decoration like the liquor bottle above, or these tiny pill bottles in Doc Yewll's office don't really matter.



But sometimes it does matter, and I could see exactly what they were doing with the font. Here, for example, is one of the many director's chairs that had custom name plates for the actors:



Above is the chair for Tony Curran, who played Datak, and below the English name it says the rough equivalent of tonaYa 'worran. This is how that happened.

What the art department did was they typed <tony curraan> using the Castithan font. This is what it returned, in order:

1. t = ṯ /t/
2. to = ṯṯ /to/
3. ton = ṯṯṯ /tona/
4. tony = ṯṯṯṯ /tonaja/, but that's only word-initial /ja/; should be ṯṯ
5. tony c = ṯṯṯṯ ṯ /tonaja/, where ṯ is the marker of a following geminate consonant
6. tony cu = ṯṯṯṯ ṯṯ /tonaja wo/
7. tony cur = ṯṯṯṯ ṯṯṯ /tonaja wora/
8. tony curr = ṯṯṯṯ ṯṯṯṯ /tonaja worra/, though geminates are no longer pronounced
9. tony curra = ṯṯṯṯ ṯṯṯṯṯ /tonaja worra/
10. tony curraa = ṯṯṯṯ ṯṯṯṯṯṯ /tonaja worra/
11. tony curraan = ṯṯṯṯ ṯṯṯṯṯṯṯ /tonaja worrana/

Looking at it now, I actually have no idea how they managed to get that long /a/ glyph in there... They must have thought that there was no /a/ there, so they just typed another one. Anyway, what happened was there are certain glyphs that just needed to be stuffed somewhere, so I stuck the geminate symbol on <c>, knowing that I would never use it. Of course, that doesn't prevent someone who doesn't know the system from using it. Similarly, the glyph for /ja/ I stuck on <y>. In typing the romanization, I would naturally type <a> after <y> if I wanted /ja/, so I didn't bother with having the ligatures apply to <y> by itself: It would apply only to the result of <ya>. This is why the incorrect version of /ja/ appeared (i.e. incorrect ṯ vs. correct ṯṯ). And, of course, it goes without saying that that glyph wasn't even appropriate in the first place, and they should've been looking for the /i/ glyph, but that's a bit much to expect of those with no conlanging/linguistic knowledge.

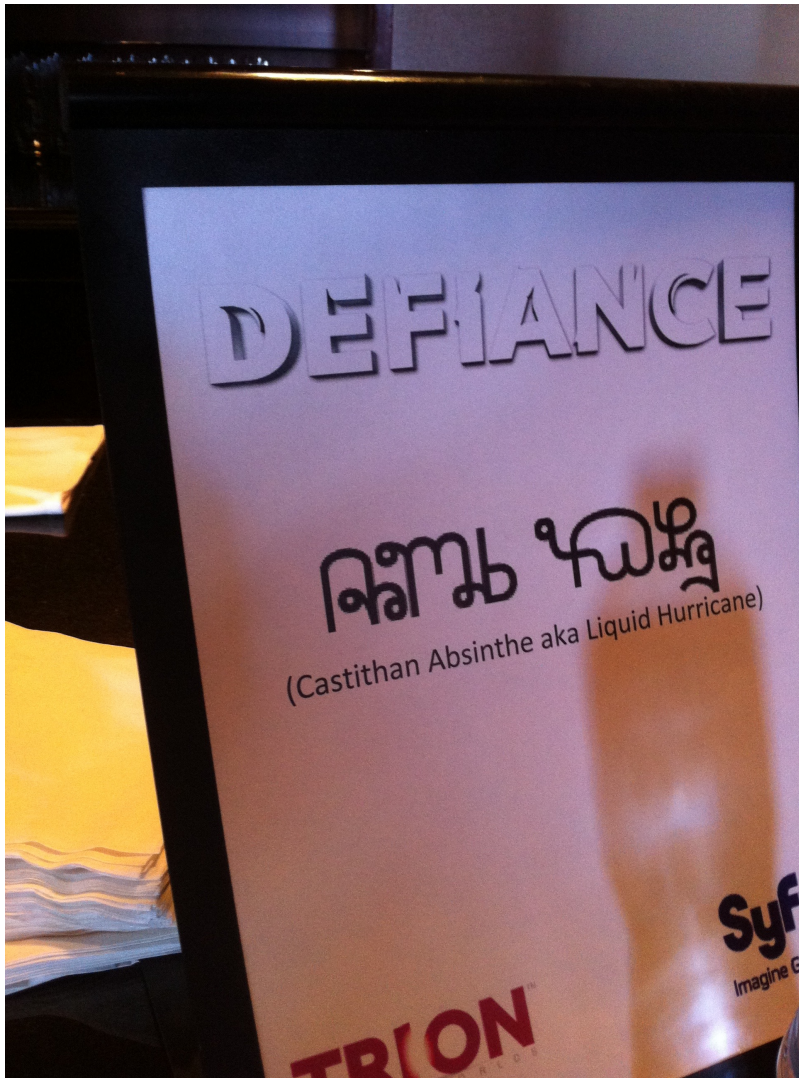
In future, then, I translated all the signage that would appear in focus, and the results were always delightful, as with this mayoral campaign poster:



In addition, though, I got to see the card game I created used on set, with the actual cards designed by the art department:



Syfy even had me name a drink at a party off set later that year:



But the wildest thing to me was that the hexagonal script I designed for the Indogenes actually influenced the look of the Indogenes themselves. The hexagonal patterns were used on Indogene buildings, and they actually made Indogene skin out of mini-interlocking hexes—going so far as to make the *contact lenses* Indogenes wore hexagonal!





The conlang work's impact could be felt everywhere on the show. On most shows I work on, I'm basically a translator, with the added work of having to create the language(s) that I need to translate into. On *Defiance*, I had a seat at the table. My creative input was sought out and more often than not made its way into the show. It was an incredibly rewarding and unique experience.

AFTER THE PILOT

Coming from *Game of Thrones*, I was surprisingly unprepared for working on a television show. During the first two seasons of *Game of Thrones*, I'd get pieces of scripts and translate the material given, but also prepared other miscellaneous translations just because, thinking they would be used. They would not be—or at least not during principal photography. This isn't me saying, "Oh, they'd never use dialogue written by the language creator": I was writing dialogue bits for background extras and other miscellaneous characters in the scene to fill it out, and this is *precisely* the type of dialogue that's done in postproduction—*not* during principal photography. Furthermore, it would *never* be done during principal photography, because if it were, the extra that got that line or set of lines would no longer be an extra: they'd be a featured extra. Which means more money (plus an agent, an end credit, union fees, etc.).

Much cheaper and easier to give that dialogue to a small set of voice artists that add it for every scene in postproduction.

This is something I know now because I've worked in television a while (and also because I evidently never paid much attention to how shows were made before I started working on one). During the first couple seasons of *Game of Thrones*, though, I was giving myself a bunch of extra work that never saw the light of day—especially because by the time postproduction rolled around, those involved started generating dialogue for me to translate because they never saw the stuff I sent off earlier (they weren't involved in that process, and weren't even in the same physical location—and it was months after the fact).

In addition, when I would translate something for *Game of Thrones*, I would send something like this along for every single line:

Episode 7, Scene 6

Drogo's last line is "The land ends at the Black Salt Sea. No horse can cross the poison water." The next line is Dany's.

Sorfosór nákho vosécchi she havázh. Sáni sórfi vékha yómme havázh. Sórfó áthyolari ánni. ([n76_1.mp3](#))

[sor.fo.'sor 'na.xo vo.'set.tʃi ʃe ha.'vaʒ 'sa.ni 'sor.fi 've.xa 'jom.me ha.'vaʒ 'sor.fo 'aθ.jo.la.ri]

/earth-NOM end-3SG.PRES.NEG NEG.EMPH on sea-NOM lot-GEN dirt-GEN exist-3SG.PRES across sea-NOM dirt-NOM birth-GEN 1SG.GEN/

"The earth does not end at the sea. There are many dirt beyond the sea. The dirt of my birth."

That's the scene number, a little introduction to the scene, the translated line in the romanization I devised, the title of the .mp3 file, a broad IPA transcription, a full interlinear gloss, and the translation. Plus sometimes I'd provide notes on the translation as well, explaining etymologies, usage information, cultural tidbits, etc.

After I'd send this off, it was likely the job of the script coordinator to go through these pages-long documents they got from me, find the romanized line, and paste it into the script. The rest was either useless or redundant.

When I started working in earnest on the regular episodes of *Defiance* once the pilot was done, I got a crash course in what is actually useful during the writing/filming process from script coordinator (later writer and producer) Brian Alexander. Brian invented the format later refined by Dan Hindmarch and myself that I now use for *all* shows, including *Game of Thrones*.

The first step was switching to Final Draft, which is the program that script writers use to write scripts (a similar online program that's free to use is Writer Duet). This produces a file format (.fdx) a script coordinator can work with, and a format actors are used to dealing with.

The next step was changing the information I provided. Each line I translate now looks like this:

(6) - (Ep307_SC34_6_ALAK.mp3)

ALAK

<... but not without honor.>

TRANSLATION

...kworo hivizhiwa kano kanwa.

PHONETIC

...KWO-ro HI-vi-zhi-wa-ka-no KAN-wa.

...but honor-without never.

Actually, the *Defiance* lines always had a few extra bells and whistles. A usual line for another show looks like this one from season 5 of *Game of Thrones*:

(MASTER_505_5.mp3)

MASTER

You don't actually mean to do this.

TRANSLATION

Kesir gaomagon drivose aole indio daor.

PHONETIC

KE-sir GAO-ma-gon DRI-vo-se a-O-le IN-di-o DAOR.

This to-do actually yourself intend don't.

(Incidentally, if you want to talk about romanization systems, be prepared if you hope to work on a show one day for using Final Draft. It basically accepts ASCII. It'll tolerate *some* of the accented characters used in Western European languages—i.e. Spanish, French, Portuguese, and German—but nothing else—not even the special characters found in Dutch. And forget about using counterintuitive transcriptions. Best of luck if you think you can get away with spelling [ŋ] <q>!)

Essentially, the .mp3 has the name of the character first, so the script coordinator can easily separate out which .mp3's go to which actor, followed by the episode number and a chronological number to distinguish it. The actors, then, get the .fdx file (or a .pdf)

which has the lines divided by scene. Then the dialogue is written just as it is in the script, with the character name followed by the English line, and then the translation. After that is what I've called a "phonetic" line, which is really just the romanized version separated out into syllables. Main stress or high intonation is rendered in all caps; everything else in lower case. After that is a kind of literal word-for-word gloss so actors know approximately which word means what. Some actors find this useful; some don't. Similarly, some absolutely rely on the phonetic version; some just use the romanized version; some just use the .mp3's. Preparing material in this fashion, though, greatly improved my workflow and eliminated a lot of the confusion that cropped up in the early days. Really, though, the reason I was able to do this is because Brian Alexander took it upon himself to figure out a good way to do things. Together we were able to come up with a solution because he actually gave me feedback, which is something I never got on *Game of Thrones*. I had no idea if anything that I was doing was useful; I'd just notice that sometimes things would come out well on screen and sometimes they wouldn't.

Anyway, in addition to translation, I'd also get each version of every script and get the opportunity to provide feedback both at the network stage and the production draft stage. On *Defiance*, I'd often request more lines to translate, and more often than not I'd get them, even if they ultimately got cut. My greatest triumph came in the eighth episode of the third season. The episode was written by Kevin Murphy, and it featured, for the first time, a number of scenes on one of the Votan planets (the Castithan home world). They were scenes showing one of the main characters, Datak Tarr, as a young child with his father (with Tony Curran, the actor who plays Datak, playing his father, and a child and teen actor playing the younger versions of Datak). There was a *lot* of dialogue and it was *all* going to be in Castithan, which was appropriate, as at this point in time in the story, no one had ever even heard of Earth, let alone supposed there were people on it and that they had a language called English, among many others. Frankly, I didn't think it was going to make it past the network cut, but the network was on board with it, so I set about translating all the dialogue. Apparently during the table read, the other writers thought the scenes were moving too slow, though, and they wanted to do it all in English. Tony Curran, who was going to be the main actor in all these scenes, called me up incensed. He let me know what was going on, and that it made no sense to him—that the scenes *had* to be in Castithan. And, of course, I was all in agreement. It's *really* exciting when the actors get involved, because they win more arguments than they lose when it's their dialogue. I worked with Kevin to shorten up the lines as much as I could (in some instances cutting just a single syllable), and we eventually got them short enough that everyone was happy with them. And then it was filmed—and aired. An entire subplot with not a word of English. That episode remains one of my all time favorites from everything I've worked on.

Separate from all of this is my work with the art department. Periodically I'd get requests in bunches from them for translations that were going to be appear somewhere in the show. So, for example, at the end of the first season when there was going to be a mayoral election, I was asked to translate a bunch of campaign slogans, such as the following:

Datak Tarr: For a Strong Defiance
Rosewater: Independence = Freedom
Tarr: A Tough Man for a Tough Job
Tarr: The Strength for Change
Amanda Rosewater: For a Free Defiance

For one of these, then, I'd translate them into as many languages as requested. For the last one, for example, I did a translation into Castithan, Irathient, and Indojisnen (for the latter, it was pretty simple, as I had a basic idea of the case system and how modifiers would work; the rest were proper nouns). In Irathient, the translation was:

Amanda Rosewater: *Gyi Difaiyants Nudevugba*

That was pretty easy; just an adpositional phrase with a modifier modifying a proper noun. Next I had to render that in the native script, which means adhering to the spelling conventions of that script. This is how it looks:

• လှာလှာလှာ ဘေးထွေးစွာ ဖြစ်ပေါ်နေသော သို့မဟုတ် ဖြစ်ပေါ်နေပါက

[illegible]

After I'd finish all the translations, I'd usually put together a .pdf, so I could be sure the art department had a model of what the translation was *supposed* to look like. Then I'd paste all the orthographic versions into a Photoshop document (.psd) and e-

mail that off. Most of the time that was fine. Sometimes, depending on the program, the fonts wouldn't work—hence the .pdf. I'm still baffled by the fact that certain programs render the fonts perfectly, and others don't. Photoshop is great, but apparently they don't work in After Effects and Lightroom—all of which are Adobe products. Why the heck?!

After I've sent all that off, it's up to the art department to take it and do the rest. Here's the result of this particular translation:



The results now are perfect (i.e. no errors in the orthographic text), and you can see that they also added Amanda Rosewater's name to the bottom in a larger font size. Overall, pretty cool little poster—one of about a dozen different styles. Seeing this stuff up all around town on the show was always my favorite part of watching *Defiance*.

Another aspect of working on the show that I spent a lot of time on was translating song lyrics. Starting with the pilot, where I wrote lyrics for one of the songs,

I translated, now that I'm looking back on it, probably over twenty songs for *Defiance*. And it was a nightmare. Ignoring the content, look at just a small sample of some lyrics I had to translate (these are from "Advice From a Casti Dowager"):

*Surrender your arms, for he is your blade
He's your warm and your cold, he's your light and your shade
He's endowed and he's proud and allowed to get laid
Why not keep your head bowed, girl?
You're about to get plowed, girl.*

I mean, are you *kidding* me?! End rhymes, internal rhymes, feminine rhymes (in the sense of Pushkin), all of it scanning just so in English—to say nothing of the fact that this is supposed to be a native Castithan song that's getting translated into this perfect, pristine, clever English. And that's just five lines of eighteen from one song—and I'd get less time to translate a song than I would a script. In fact, I'd usually get a single day. And the *worst* part is for a number of songs, I'd often translate the whole thing, and then have everything but two lines done in English. I'd ask afterwards, of course, "Why didn't you have me just translate those two lines!", and the response was, "I had to hear the whole thing to know what would sound best." Yeah, no. This is why (more advice to future professional conlangers) I asked for extra money for song translation in season 3. The result? *Far* fewer songs translated (I think it was two for season 3 and that's it). It's a tradeoff, but it was worth it just to preserve my sanity.

Despite the fact that I still have nightmares about getting an e-mail asking me to translate a song, the songs ended up being some of the coolest things I did on the show. I got the opportunity to write original lyrics to a few songs in the first and third season, and the songs eventually came out on CD. Brendan McCreary, brother of Bear McCreary, wrote most of them, and they range from pretty cool sounding to utterly beautiful. "Lonely Light" is my favorite of the bunch, and I've gotten to hear it performed live, sung by Olivia Pucci, on two separate occasions. Just gorgeous. The first time I heard it is an experience I'll never forget.

Oh, before leaving music, I also got the opportunity to sit in on two recording sessions, one in season 2, and another in season 3. Truly fascinating experience to see actors record songs their characters would be singing on the show in the languages I'd created. Having recorded songs in Ithkuil, I know what they were going through (though nothing I created was ever *half* as difficult to pronounce as Ithkuil). When you're singing in your native language, all you have to worry about is pitch. Singing in a language that isn't your own, you have to worry about pronouncing each and every syllable correctly. I was especially impressed by William Atherton, who was quite patient taking notes both from me and Kevin Murphy about different things at the same time.

Altogether, though, *Defiance* kept me busy. The amount of work I put into *Defiance* is equal to the amount of work I put into all the other shows I've worked on combined. Easily.

LOOKING BACK

What I'll always remember about working on *Defiance* was how many times someone else went to bat for me. I've already mentioned a couple, but there are countless others. For example, that song "Lonely Light" was translated into Indojisnen. When Kevin originally asked for the translation, I told him that I couldn't do it, because the language was just a sketch; I'd never fully fleshed it out. Kevin went back and got the network to pay me to turn that sketch into a full language so that he could get the song translated. It was the last thing I was expecting, it being the halfway point of season 2 with opportunities to translate dialogue into Indojisnen having come and passed, but I was happy to get the extra work. And something similar happened in season 3. I'd already been asked to create a new language for the Omec (the language was called Kinuk'aaz—and yes, that's an ejective), but I was told at the beginning that there wouldn't be any need for a written language (which was a bummer, of course, but I was busy at the time, so I didn't fight for it). Later that season Suki Parker from the art department asked if I had a writing system for some signage that was going to appear on the Omec ship. I told her that I hadn't been asked to create one, but I'd love to do it, if I got the chance. Suki went back and ran the request up the ladder, and two days later I got the go ahead to create the writing system. As a thank you to the art department, I created them an alphabet, as opposed to the abugidas and syllabaries I'd created before (all of which gave them headaches):

KINUK'AAZ



A number of the actors on the show asked for extra lines to be translated (i.e. script lines originally intended to be in English), which I was always grateful for. Tony Curran, whom I've already mentioned, did so a lot; Stephanie Leonidas did; Jaime Murray did. Then in season 3 came Nichole Galicia who is the most diligent conlang performer I've ever seen. Nichole worked with me a lot on her lines, but also periodically asked me directly for translations that she would ad lib during the shoot, reasoning (correctly) that if she threw them in without asking anyone beforehand,

they'd go with it. It was *awesome*. She even got me an extra song writing credit when she asked me ahead of time to write up some lyrics for a scene where she was supposed to chant something. I did that and sent it to her, and then later on, it occurred to everyone else that we needed a song for that, and so rather than Kevin writing up some lyrics I'd need to have translated the next day, I sent along the lyrics I'd already written, and that's what we used. Working with Nichole on *Defiance* was the most positive experience I've ever had working with an actor.

Oh, and a bizarre aside. In January of 2013, Dana Ortiz from Syfy PR said she had a friend who was in charge of TED University, and asked if I'd be interested in speaking at TED. What I didn't know at the time is that Syfy was a major sponsor of TED. In effect, Syfy got me a speaking slot at TED a month before its start date—well after all the speaking slots had been filled. But not only that, Syfy turned their side of the floor outside the main auditorium into a big advertisement for *Defiance*, using my languages as the centerpiece. It was the most surreal week of my life (I was waiting in line to get lemonade behind Al Gore. I didn't realize it until he started talking to someone else and I recognized his voice). All this they did for me just to promote a show I couldn't even get my friends to watch. I still feel like I didn't do enough to repay their kindness and the faith they put in me.

Ultimately, the difference with *Defiance* is I was treated as a valued member of the crew, rather than a contractor—someone whom the cast and writers would hear about, but never see. Aside from a couple new faces from seasons 2 and 3, I met and interacted with every member of the cast of *Defiance*; I visited the set three times; I met most of the writers, most of the Toronto crew, a number of the directors... This was as integrated a conlanger has ever been with a production—and likely ever will be, until we get a conlanger who writes and directs.

MOVING FORWARD

Despite being Syfy's highest rated drama, *Defiance* was cancelled shortly after its third season ended in the fall of 2015. While all of us were hoping for a fourth season to wrap up, it wasn't entirely a surprise when it didn't come. The network had asked for a season 3 finale that felt "more final" than the previous two finales, and when it was on the bubble, no one who'd given the show the green light initially was there to defend it. It was an expensive show to produce, and I'm sure that was a major factor in Syfy's decision not to bring it back.

I'm not sure what kind of impact *Defiance* made, overall. It's certainly historic for its attempt to simultaneously produce a video game and television show, each a significant part of the overall story, but as it was not particularly successful on this front, it may serve as more of a cautionary tale than a model for emulation. It may get a

second life on streaming services, but it seems unlikely it will experience the kind of renaissance something like *Firefly* did. Coming in at 38 episodes, it didn't hit any real syndication benchmark. As a result, whatever future the languages have is really up to me. There is no publisher for something like this—possibly not even while the show was airing. I don't have the rights to any of the languages, so self-publishing is out of the question. The nice thing is that unlike other productions (e.g. *Thor: The Dark World*), it's not as if only a tiny fraction of what I created made it to the screen: a *ton* of my material is in the show, both visual and oral. I can't by any means complain that the best stuff was left out.

Still, the fanbase for *Defiance* was small, albeit fervent, and the number of those interested in the languages was even smaller. Even if I simply uploaded my entire documentation somewhere, I'm not sure there would be any interest. While it was still fresh in my mind, though, I thought I'd at least put this up to try to document what made *Defiance* so special—and even this just scratches the surface. Vis-à-vis conlanging, my hope is one day the importance of *Defiance* will be widely recognized, as there's never been another show or movie with as much conlang material in it. If that wasn't enough to pique the interest of those who were already invested in conlanging, though, I'm not sure it'll ever happen.

MISCELLANEOUS SET PHOTOS



