

Episode 25:
“Rebel Scum and the Evil Empire”
Featuring Andrea Stewart

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M: You're listening to Worldbuilding for Masochists.

R: And we're wondering why we do this to ourselves.

AS: Because don't you want to have an excuse to make your own wiki? I'm Andrea Stewart.

M: I'm Marshall Ryan Maresca.

R: I'm Rowenna Miller, and this is Episode 25: Rebel Scum and the Evil Empire.

[intro music plays]

R: Welcome, listeners, welcome back! We are so excited this week to be presenting a fantastic guest author for you: Andrea Stewart is with us to talk about rebellions, and empires, and all kinds of big, awesome worldbuilding stuff. Andrea, can you introduce yourself?

AS: Sure, so I'm a science fiction and fantasy author, I write a lot of short stories, but most recently I have my debut epic fantasy novel coming out in September, and it's the first in the *Drowning Empire* trilogy, it's called *The Bone Shard Daughter*, it's set in an archipelago of many islands where every citizen has to donate a shard of their skull to the empire, and these shards power monstrous constructs that enforce law and order, *but* the emperor's rule is failing. So it's actually in an Asian-inspired setting, and I've been telling people it's kind of where these characters are just trying their very best in a broken world.

M: It's really cool. It's really fun. I really like it.

R: That sounds amazing! That sounds amazing, and as we say in this podcast, we love an archipelago, so...

M: We love an archipelago!

R: We love an archipelago, so I cannot wait to read it, I'm jealous that Marshall apparently already has.

M: Ha ha!

R: [laughs]

M: That's such a rare thing, actually, that I get somebody's book ahead of time to read. A) that I actually managed to read it when I do, because I'm so bad at that sort of thing, but that I actually get one ahead of time. It's rare, and I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it a lot.

AS: Well, thank you.

M: And you will too, listeners. I have declared it.

R: Yes, and remind us when that is coming out, Andrea.

AS: September 8th.

R: OK, so you have time to build up to it, listeners. Anticipate. Preorder. Salivate.

M: Get your preorder on. Because, you know, we need that, we all love it. You've got a book coming soon, don't you, Rowenna?

R: Yes, I think by the time this airs it will have just come out, because it's out May 19th, so...

M: Woo!

R: That's in the past now I assume, listeners, but yeah. So that's an exciting, weird time for all of us, having books coming out in the hellscape that is 2020, but you know, I'm just glad that we're providing some reading material to help get you through this. We hope.

M: So both of your books are kind of about empires that get rebelled against, and...

R: It's true.

M: And that's what we're here to talk about today.

R: I know, it's kind of fun because we have Andrea's *Drowned Empire* and I have an *Unraveled Kingdom* and it's just... it sounds like a mess, is what it sounds like, but often messes make fantastic stories, so... [laughs]

AS: And all empires do seem to fail after a while, so...

R: They do.

M: It's kind of the nature of the empire to build up and then fall down because there's something untenable trying to control too much at once.

R: Yes. I think my favorite is the Roman Empire, and they actually tried splitting, like, "Well, we're too big, so we'll just go East and West" and at least for the west, it didn't really work out well, and then eventually it didn't work out for the east either, so, you know, their strategy failed, but... It does seem like fantasy really does love and empire though, and is it because it provides that catalyst for a big story, is that why fantasy loves an empire?

AS: Well, I think that as soon as you have something like that that's so large it can be oppressive, then you have a good story where you can have kind of the underdogs coming in and saying, "How do we dismantle this, how do we take this apart, or make it fall apart faster?" And I think that is a really good way to start a story, and really kind of interesting from the perspective of the structure of the empire, it's a really interesting place to start a story, especially because I think people do like to follow the underdog, and they do like to see how they can go up against something that is so powerful.

R: Well, I think that speaks to us in our personal lives often, doesn't it?

AS: Oh yes.

R: Like, I don't care where you are here in the year of our Lord 2020, but it can often feel that the odds are against you, that the systems that we live with, whether those are comfortable or oppressive systems, are still a lot bigger than us, so I think that there's something about that empire versus the underdog that speaks to something that we want to see fulfilled.

M: Yes, but also since so much of what fantasy is is - I mean, the traditional term is 'epic fantasy' - and to some degree there is nothing more epic than the big sprawling empire, be them malevolent or benevolent, the idea that there is something of such grand scope and scale going on in the world helps pull everything together in an interesting way, I think. Then trying to destroy it is also fun in an interesting way, which is a great worldbuilding challenge to do, because it's basically, you're setting up all your dominoes with the express purpose of knocking them down, and that's half the fun.

AS: It's definitely fun. It can get very complicated.

R: Well, it can, you know, because I feel like you end up with that question of, you know, if you're doing consistent internal worldbuilding, you have to make your empire strong enough and big enough that it is a legitimate force and a legitimate power, but also has cracks that can be exploited by your underdog protagonists, and there's a weird balancing act there of not making it too, you know, deus ex machina, that the author just came in and set up a house of cards. It

can't feel like a house of cards, it has to feel like a real, strong empire that we can believe is controlling, you know, X percent of the world or whatever.

AS: And I think if you look at history, the dissolution of empires is never really a very neat thing, it seems to take some time and it gets very, very messy and very complicated.

M: Rebellions and revolutions rarely are about bringing peace and order to the world, and more often are about creating a new empire with different people in charge.

R: So when we talk about empire, what kinds of empire do we mean, like what kinds of empire can show up in a second world fantasy?

AS: I think most of the time you see the kind of empire where there's an emperor who is basically the all-powerful person, and they've kind of been taking over other peoples and other lands, I think that's what I would see the most often in fantasy.

R: Yeah, that land-grab expansion thing often feels like a hallmark of empire, that it's about the constant growing, like this big amorphous amoeba taking on more and more territory, that often feels like a trademark.

M: Well, that's what separates an empire from, you know, a kingdom or a country - that they have the central area that is the, you know, heart of whatever the empire is, and then all these other areas that are technically other nations that they have control over one way or another, and it's about that maintaining control over other people is what makes them an empire.

R: And I think it's interesting because you can get into the question of how are they exacting control, are there people in residence enforcing the laws of your homeland, heartland, kind of whatever into place? Is it a tribute situation where people have to send in tribute? Is it mostly just a 'extracting your resources' kind of situation? I think that there's some different flavors of empire that you can get into, depending on how much of it is about just exacting more resources and money from space, and how much of it is about spreading culture, and how much of it is about- you know, you can have a lot of variation in terms of what the driving goal behind spread is.

AS: What created the empire in the first place, was it because the heart of the empire decided that they needed to get more resources, or was it because they decided that they needed to colonize other lands and they needed to spread their culture, what are the reasons behind it? I think it's really important for determining what kind of empire you have.

M: Yeah. Like in *The Traitor Baru Cormorant* by Seth Dickinson, he's got this empire that goes over- their main goal is, "We're going to take you over because all y'all are just not living right, and we're gonna set you straight," and I mean, it is this horrific oppressive empire - the main character comes from an island where the empire shows up, and the emperor is like, "Oh yeah,

we're just here to help you out, we're gonna make schools, we're gonna improve your infrastructure and all that, oh, and your polyamorous marriage? That's bad, and we're gonna break that up and send you to reeducation camp." And, I mean, it's a horrific empire, but it's really well done, and it's a book I highly recommend. I have not yet read the second book of that series yet, I need to get to that, but it's- I was about to say it's a fun one, but it's kind of not fun, it's kind of harrowing and soul-scraping, but, like, in a fun way. It's a really good book. I highly recommend.

AS: I think that's an interesting thing that you pointed out too, is that sometimes the empire can say they have altruistic motives, so they may say that they're doing this for the good of the people that they're actually oppressing. Sometimes I think that it's a little bit more overtly selfish, but I do think that most people like to think that they are the heroes of the story in some way, so they wanna put a good sheen on it and say, "You know what, we're doing a good thing here, this is why we're doing it, and it's really gonna benefit these people."

R: Yeah. Like, you read Kipling's *White Man's Burden* now and it's horrifying, it's exactly what we would say is everything wrong with colonialism and empire, but you can tell a lot of people really believed in it at the time, like, "Yes, because we have this elevated position" - in air quotes - "elevated position over these *poor people* that we want to *help* we *have to* do it," and I think that, I mean, when you're writing fantasy, you can kind of play with a lot of that stuff in terms of what do people believe and what is their motivation, and people can earnestly believe stuff that is just... bonkers wrong, but they act on it because they really believe in it.

AS: Yeah, I think that there is definitely a role for propaganda in controlling people and making them believe that what they are doing is right and we are the heroes in this situation.

R: Yeah, I mean, even a lot of the language that- you look back at the British Empire in the 19th century, and just the language surrounding how we talk about the empire and how we talk about Queen Victoria, I mean, it's very propaganda-ish, because you just associate all sorts of glorious, beautiful, wonderful words with this that gloss over reality, what was really happening in these places that were being colonized.

M: I was just thinking, there's been that meme that's been going around recently of, "The British in their own history books: / The British in everybody else's history books:"

AS, R: [laugh]

M: But yeah, a lot of what you have to decide in terms of what you're building with the empire is what they believe and why they believe they're doing what they're doing. And how they then maintain their control. Like, is it a thing where they have soldiers and colonizers, or is it more a situation of trade where they're, you know- I mean, the Aztec Empire was mostly them going from village to village and being like, "It's a real nice village you got here, it'd be a real *shame* if something happened to it. Instead, if you wanted to trade with us, that would be much cooler."

R: [laughs]

AS: I do think that between real-world empire and fantasy empire, it's oftentimes the fantasy empire control is maintained through magical means, so, I mean, obviously I've done that in my book, which is fun, it makes it even more difficult, like why just have armies when you can have magical armies, right?

R: I mean, why would you, really?

M: And in fantasy worldbuilding, that's a whole new avenue that you get to open up in terms of how the empire works, and how the nitty-gritty of the infrastructure works, and if magic is a tool that they can use... I mean, one of the things that I found really neat in your book, Andrea, is the idea that the administrative aspect of it- I mean, there was the emperor and then there was all of his magical constructs, magical army, and it was like, he didn't actually have any other people around him, it was just the magical stuff he controlled, and I thought that was really neat. It was like, "I don't need more infrastructure! I've got magic! That's all I need."

AS: And then he could justify it by saying, "Oh, well, you don't actually have to be in this army over here, you can just donate a shard of your skull! It's fine! Might cost you some of your life force but, eh. Isn't that better?"

M: "Isn't that better than actually having to go and fight the war yourself? Don't you think? Don't you think?"

R: Well, and I think it does bring up really good questions about how does magic fit into your world, you know, if you have an empire, I think it's hard to have a situation in which an empire is *not* trying to control as large a share of the magic as possible, right? So it kind of makes things even more of an uphill battle for an underdog protagonist if you have an empire that's also controlling whatever magical capabilities there are available to people. I think that Melissa Caruso's books do this really well with, she has people with magical ability are basically drafted into service for the empire, you don't really have a choice, and I think that there's a lot of room to play with that kind of thing.

M: So then, I think the key thing is once you've created your empire, you're going to want to destroy it over the course of your story, because why else make an empire unless you're going to have a plucky band of rebels come and tear it down? How does the rebellion work, why do we take for granted that that's the common narrative, that the empire gets torn down by rebellion as opposed to just imploding on itself out of corruption like usually happens in the case of any empire? Besides the fact that that's less of an interesting narrative story.

AS: Well, I think as soon as you have this big powerful entity, people are gonna get dissatisfied, even if they have a narrative of saying, "Oh, we're actually helping," or "Oh, isn't this better,"

when people don't have a choice in that matter, I think that it's definitely fertile grounds for some sort of rebellion to form.

R: And I think that the question, too, of what factors are leading people to decide now, now is the time that we're going to do it, you know, was it greater injustice coming out of the top, is that what's kind of cracking people and pushing them over the edge, or can you have elements of that outside pressure, either the corruption of the empire itself or just the overextension of the empire itself showing its cracks, and people saying, "OK, now we can take advantage of this," or even external pressures, that people can kind of look and say, "OK, well, this war that we've been having with our neighbors has taken a whole lot out of the evil empire, now's our time that we can probably make something, or we can pressure for something."

M: Yeah. In the case of, say, Traitor Baru, she's a character who grows up from one of these islands that has been taken over and she's been raised in their education system, but because she saw the horrors and saw the direct effect it had on her family, early on makes this decision of, like, "OK, I am going to infiltrate all this, I'm going to be the best I can be within the system of the empire so I can raise up in the ranks and destroy it from the inside," that's her entire goal over the course of the first book, and it becomes this very personal journey for her, so while she does gain allies over the course of the book, it's less about forming a rebellion and more about just being the rebellion personally, and I think that's at least part of it, is how do your rebels find each other? What's that impetus that helps them come together one way or another? Like, do you have a charismatic rebellious leader, or is it just a matter of people congregating together and being like, "[whispers] This sucks! Doesn't this suck? I think this sucks. Let's make this not suck!"

R: Well, I think that's a good question, because communication has to be some element of a rebellion, right, whether you've got some sort of whisper network word of mouth thing going, but what I think is really interesting is once you get into kind of the 18th century age of rebellion, publication is a huge part of fueling revolutionary rhetoric and uniting people behind some common ideas, like you have both the American Revolution and French Revolution, people are putting out treatises and pamphlets, and these are widely circulated, and it's kind of creating a rhetoric of revolution to kind of get people to all get on board with the same ideas. Whereas you might have had more disparate concepts of "What do we want? When do we want it?", it would kind of be like, "Uhh, we all want different stuff. Oh, but we all read the same book! We can say what do we want!" you know?

[19:53]

AS: Right, and I think especially if you have an empire that is spying on its own people, you have to have some kind of form of communication between the rebels that's gonna allow them to not get caught.

R: Yes. And probably also there another opportunity for interesting magical systems in your world, if that is something you are interested in pursuing, how do people communicate and unite and get together if they're trying not to get caught, if they're trying to keep this underground.

AS: Well, I know in some cases, you know, I'm thinking *Star Wars*, right, where they have their hidden rebel base that they can go to, and the empire's always trying to figure out where it is, but it's kind of like their home base where they can plan and figure things out without worrying about being overheard.

R: Right, and I think that you can have fun with those kinds of settings, I think, in fantasy, and you can also have fun with the- *in my book* I had kind of an urban setting, so you don't know necessarily who all the people are who are invested in this rebellion, and I have, it's a throwaway line, but at one point they say, like, "Oh yeah, the guy who prints our pamphlets, he's an anarchist and he's got a printing press in his shed" so you can have these little pockets of discontent just existing in the setting that all of your ordinary people are kind of going about their day, but they don't know necessarily who's hiding a stash of weapons under their floorboard, or a printing press in their shed, or illegal magical implements in their attic, or whatever.

M: Right.

R: So who is in your plucky rebel band? Who do you need in a plucky rebel band? What's the cast of characters necessary to foment fantasy revolution?

AS: Well, I think usually you want to have somebody who is charismatic and can kind of delineate those ideals in an articulate way so that people really can understand it and kind of glom onto it, I think that's definitely one of the necessary characters. You need somebody that can do some of the logistical planning for that rebellion.

M: I was gonna say, writing a rebellion is not unlike writing a heist-

R, AS: [laugh]

M: Except what they're heisting... is the empire.

R: [laughing] Right!

M: Because you need your crew, it might be a big crew but it's a whole crew to be sneaky and do the things that need to be done to achieve the goals, regardless of if the goals are, you know, steal a necklace, or if it's topple the empire. It's still essentially the same process, especially in terms of how you're casting your characters when you're writing it.

AS: That reminds me of *Mistborn*, I don't know if you have read that. Basically the first novel is kind of like a heist novel, taking the empire's treasury and collapsing the economy? So it's kind of, I mean, it *is* a rebellion and a heist at the same time.

R: [laughs] Well, you know, Andrea, you mentioned logistics, and I feel like one person or a group of people or a network of people that you might need is the purse. Where is the money coming from? How are you funding this? I kind of feel like that's the spot that I could probably light a giant pyre of word count of writing all kinds of stuff that- like, no one wants to read this, Rowenna, they want to get to the big battle scene, and I'm like, yes, but how many pounds of gunpowder are we getting from which factories in which foreign countries that have illicitly agreed to support us?

AS: How are the supply lines working?

R: Right! And if you have supply lines, the evil empire is going to want to interrupt them and they have the capability to do so, so how do you prevent that from happening? So, you know, it's-

M: You say no one wants to read that, Rowenna, but that's 100% my jam.

R: Well, then you will enjoy book three of *The Unraveled Kingdom*, because we spend quite a bit of time on securing supply lines!

M: Woo!

R: And suppliers for a rebellion. But yeah, those people have to be potentially skilled negotiators, potentially smugglers, potentially international diplomats, because when you start talking rebellion, you know, who else is looking at this empire thinking, "Yes, I would like them to topple too," your neighbors maybe? Might be interested in what's happening politically with someone who's been either belligerent with them or an ally to them, so I think you can also have room in your crew for the international diplomat who's turning larger cogs and wheels at a world-level viewpoint.

AS: I do think that's where the fall of an empire can get really complicated, because if you have all these disparate interests that want the empire to fall for different reasons, then what happens when they've actually succeeded, who's getting what out of this, basically who's going to be creating the new government? I mean, as soon as you get foreign interests involved, I think that that's going to make things more complicated.

R: Absolutely, and I think that it can also- where *are* you going to go after the rebellion succeeds? And I think that that lays the groundwork for what does afterward look like? To what degree is this still this kind of internal ideal of "we want a country that looks like this" and to what degree is it "we're beholden to other people, other people are very capable of just swooping in and mopping up and taking over"?

M: I was going to say, or are we just going to make a thing that's exactly like the thing that we just overthrew, except now *we're* in charge!

AS: A different leader! Everything's finished now!

M: That's all we really wanted. We weren't so much about the injustice, just so much as the injustice to *me*.

All: [laugh]

M: But I wanna see more of stories that are like, "OK, now that we've won, now what?" Because I think that's a lot of times the more interesting story, of when you rebuild, what do you rebuild, and who decides how you rebuild what you rebuild. That's a lot of the fun nitty-gritty as well, though.

AS: Right, because you've taken everything apart, you've defeated this empire, you're basically leaving this whole structure in shambles, so what do you do after that? I mean, that, I think, is a really interesting question.

R: Yeah. I mean, I think that we often want the story of the big revolution, but then we skip over the part where everyone's sweating and 90 degrees in Constitution Hall trying to hammer out a government.

All: [laugh]

R: That was important to me to include, so that's something that I considered when I was writing my third book, and I didn't want to drag my reader through a painful process of sweating and 90 degrees in Constitution Hall, *but* you have to recognize that it's there, and that's something that if you don't have that, you don't really have an ending, you just kind of have a vacuum.

M: It's one thing to be like, "Yay! We won!" and have the party with the Ewoks, but what does "we won" look like? It's easy to end on that upbeat moment, but there is always gonna be the messy stuff afterwards, and I think the messy stuff can be the more interesting stuff, like you're gonna have that sweating out a constitution scene, and who gets to be in the sweaty room is a huge question, and...

AS: The sweaty room where it happens?

R: The sweaty room! [laughs]

M: The sweaty room where it happens. Who gets to be in that room to make those choices? And I think that that can be as dramatic and engaging of a story as anything, and I think we need to see more of that story sometimes.

R: I agree, and especially because if you have a rebellion and, in order to get enough people together to stand up against a very large entity, you've probably brought together people with disparate viewpoints, you probably have people who are, you know, we all are united in a common enemy, but our individual viewpoints and what we really want to see come out of this, there's some variance there. And I think that that is gonna get messy afterward, because you're gonna have to sort out, well, OK, we accomplished our goal, now we're not actually all in agreement about everything anymore, we're gonna have to hash this out.

M: On top of that, you can play with the idea that there was a reason that the empire existed in the first place, and by tearing it down, you've now opened the door for whatever reason that was to come swarming back in. I'm thinking specifically of Brian McClelland's, the first book is *Promise of Blood*. It literally starts with the rebellion having won, and they've killed off all the kings and everything, and they're like, "OK, now we're going to start to rebuild the government," but it's called *Promise of Blood* because there actually was a divine right of kings, the gods were like, "Oh, no, there has to be somebody of this bloodline on the throne. Oh, there's nobody of the bloodline left alive? Then the evil gods are coming back."

M, R: [laugh]

AS: So in this case, the propaganda was true.

R: [laughs]

M: The propaganda was true! That's a fun thing you can play with, you can play with the idea of propaganda existing within the empire, and what are they telling the people who aren't rebelling, and what's the story? What's the point of view that you're getting? Because the difference between a plucky rebellion and evil terrorists is just whose point of view you're writing from.

AS: Right, there's a whole subreddit, I don't know if you've seen it, called The Empire Did Nothing Wrong for *Star Wars*, where it basically talks about how they *are* terrorists, and how they killed a lot of good people on the Death Star, and stuff like that.

M, R: [laugh]

M: "There were perfectly innocent contractors working on rebuilding the second Death Star!"

R: "My dad was a janitor on the Death Star!"

AS: I do think a lot about that kind of stuff too, actually, and that's something that I address in my books, is, you know, what does the rebellion have to do to actually overthrow the empire, and what kind of scars does that leave behind? Who's damaged by that? Because when you have these two forces going up against each other, there's always going to be collateral damage.

R: No, exactly, and I think that often you can really strongly pit "these are the ideals that we are fighting for" versus "this is the pragmatism of what this looks like in action." And I feel like reform is not played with enough in fantasy? Probably because, again, it's the boring stuff that no one really wants to read, but I attempted in book two to play a little bit with the idea of, what if there were people who really just want reform? Like, "We don't want to go down the revolution road, because that's a lot of dead people, so what if we go legislative reform?" And it's interesting because we don't talk about it much, but major changes happen in government through just legislative reform too, so...

Like, you look at Britain over the course of the 19th century, and it's almost as though they were very carefully avoiding riot and rebellion by constantly passing ever-increasing - and really only pertaining to Great Britain's mainland island, not to the colonies, but - continually addressing these grievances that, if left unaddressed, could have led to much more violent action. But instead, in piecemeal, slow, over the course of a century format, you see major changes occurring. I don't know if anyone wants to write a book about that, but... sometimes just awareness that it happens.

[32:14]

AS: It doesn't happen fast enough for some people.

R: Right.

M: There is that.

R: I think that acknowledgment that it's there, you know.

M: Well, and there's the people who want the rebellion because they think that they're not the ones who are gonna pay the cost. Like, it's easy to foment rebellion and be the one just printing pamphlets and making speeches, and now you go fight, and you go take down the empire, and it's like, "Ohhh, they got killed. But they were the sacrifice we needed to..."

R: Isn't the famous Thomas Jefferson [quote](#) that the tree of liberty must be watered with the blood of rebellion, he said this right after the Whiskey Rebellion, and he was in France at the time. Like, it wasn't your blood, dude, so...

M: "It's very important that other people bleed for this cause!"

R: [laughs]

M: [hesitantly] And, you know, we're seeing that now with, like, "Oh, we need to save the economy, and so some will die..."

AS: "But that's a sacrifice we're willing to make."

R: "Some of you may die, but that's a sacrifice I am willing to make."

All: [laugh]

R: Yes, *Shrek*, the great bastion of Western culture.

AS: It was very prescient, you know.

R: [laughing] Yes. You know, now that I think about it, I think that those elements of *Shrek* kind of do have a good tie-in to fantasy empire and creating an image of empire, that there's so much of the beginning of the first movie that's about creating an image, and about having a leader who projects a certain image, and eliminating anything from an empire that does not feed into that image that you want to create, and I think that especially when you talk about colonialism and settler colonialism, that plays out historically, that the idea of creating a particular brand for your empire and enforcing it is something that, you know, *Shrek* got deep there.

[long pause]

M: ...well, yeah.

AS: It was a lot deeper than I expected, actually.

R: Yeah.

All: [laugh]

AS: When you put it that way...

M: But I mean, certainly, how much of what colonialism is is, "Look at this wonderful land that we now take, and the fact that there's already people there is just a minor inconvenience that will be settled with sooner or later, but you know, what's important is that we, the empire, now have this wonderful new land we can take and utilize its resources however we see fit, because we know best."

R: Yes.

M: I'm playing a lot with those tropes in- *in my book*, being the one that I'm currently writing, because it is about a country that's not only been colonized, but been multiply colonized, like one nation comes and colonizes it, and pulls away, and then other people are like, "Oh! So we can colonize it now!" and the people who are indigenously from there are like, "Aww, we kind of live here, can you not? Can we stop being the battleground of *your* wars, please?" and then they're like, "Oh, this war-torn country that's been so destroyed, now that the wars are over, we need to rebuild it so that they can be the country that they deserve to be," and they're like, "Wait, no, that's not right either." So I've been having a lot of fun with that with that book, and playing with the idea of what the rebellion or the revolution *is* and what that looks like.

R: I think that's a really astute point though, Marshall, because when we talk about sort of the maneuverings of empire, often we are talking about empires battling each other, but then what are they fighting over? It's often, you know, someone's backyard. And I think it's kind of funny how we, for example, in the US we call the Seven Years War, our little corner of it is the French and Indian War. That was part of a much larger, "let's have a giant worldwide fight about what land we, England, and we, France, get to claim," and it's kind of swept under the rug, but it's like, "Well, but- that- I'm here. What?" you know, a lot of indigenous people kind of get erased from that story, except to get kind of tagged onto the name French and Indian War.

M: I've been enjoying playing with not only the idea of who's worth rebelling against and what the means of control are, be it propaganda or... Since this one is, rather than being in a traditional fantasy world, it is more of a dieselpunk world, I've been playing with using the radio, and then the radio is also how the rebellion gets organized, there's this mysterious figure who can hack into the radio signals and be like, "OK, meet at this place and send out the messages for the rebels to congregate under," and so that gives you that charismatic leader that they'll follow, but again, there's a lot of mystery behind, like, who's actually giving these orders and what's that all about? So I've been having a lot of fun with this book. It's been a fun thing to do, I've been enjoying it.

R: Awesome.

M: That's *The Velocity of Revolution* coming out February 2021.

R: So one thing I was thinking about too, even as we are kind of probably coming to the end of the episode, that anything big enough to have a lot of control in some ways can become an empire. So kind of grappling with that within fantasy and sci fi worlds. And have you guys watched *Picard*, the-

AS: Yes.

M: Yes.

R: I think it's really interesting how that dug into the extent to which the Federation, which is always portrayed as a pretty positive and benevolent force, had a kind of misuse of power and a dark side to it, that anything that's that big, at some point is going to come up against questions that force answers that are not necessarily in keeping with whatever ethics they started with. I thought that that was a really interesting play to do, and I know that a lot of folks didn't necessarily like going down that road because it's uncomfortable, but I liked it, I enjoyed kind of digging into that question a little bit.

AS: Right, because I think yeah, as soon as you have something that big, somebody can come in and misuse it in some way.

M: But also the explicit questions there, when something is that big, what responsibilities does it have, and if it doesn't - even if it's benevolent - if it doesn't live up to those ideals, those responsibilities, then what are the consequences of doing that? Like, you don't necessarily have to have an evil empire, it can be a "good, benevolent" quote-unquote empire that simply didn't do right by one small section and that's where the source of the rebellion is, not that we're being murdered and oppressed, but, like, we're not getting everything we wanted so we might as well rebel. And again, there you get that opportunities that you have with just using point of view within your story, of what's the difference between plucky rebels and evil terrorists besides point of view?

AS: That's been something that I've been having a lot of fun playing with too, is that is it possible to make everybody happy, and it's really not possible to do that?

R: [laughs]

AS: So what's the alternative, what is the best alternative if you are somebody who is benevolent and you are trying to do your best in this empire, what can you do to make people happy, because you're not gonna be able to make everybody happy, so what can you do to kind of, I guess, just reduce suffering?

M: How can- that becomes, again, getting into the nitty-gritty of governments, and that's a thing you can play with once your rebellion wins and they have to build a new empire or whatever government they think is right, then they have to deal with the realpolitik of, "Oh, now that we're in charge it's a lot messier than we expected it to be, and how do we handle that when it turns out we're not going to be any better at it because it's a lot messier than we thought it was going to be."

R: Well, and you can play too with the idea of not wanting to outright rebel against and overturn a government but hold a government accountable, and I think that you can have some fun playing with that. I don't know how many stories there are that I can think of off the top of my head that do that, but that could be a fun thing to play with in a fantasy world, is how you hold a government that has particular ethics and has particular promises that they have either explicitly

or implicitly made to a people, how do you hold them accountable? And I think that you can play with that to some degree. So I want to put Andrea on the spot before we end the episode, and you've given us a little taste of an incredibly cool empire that you've built, would you give us just a couple of fun worldbuilding details from how you created that empire, and something about the structure or, or... anything that you want to tell us?

AS: Yeah, sure, I can give you a couple things.

R: Because we love an archipelago.

AS: Yes, yes, it is an archipelago.

M: We love an archipelago.

R: [laughs]

AS: One is that there is definitely a reason, or an alleged reason, behind the creation of the empire, and that was because there were these immensely powerful beings that were basically at war with each other, and I know that we talked about this during the episode, where when you have these powers clashing with one another, there's gonna be people caught in between. Basically, all these mere mortals were caught in between, and *somehow* they were able to overthrow all of these very powerful magical beings, and allegedly the empire right now is the only thing keeping them from coming back. So that's a little worldbuilding detail on how this empire became created.

Another thing as to the structure, so the emperor has these constructs which he basically uses to run his government, so he has several tiers of constructs, like the first tier of constructs, these are the really complicated ones, so with these bone shards that he takes from people, he basically writes commands on them, and he inserts them into these created beings that he's put together from all these parts of animals, and that allows him to kind of program them to do what he wants? So his first tier constructs are these very complex constructs, there's a construct of trade, a construct of war, a construct of bureaucracy, and a construct of spies, and these constructs beneath them have another tier of constructs that actually answer to that top tier, so it goes down like that, I think to three tiers of constructs. That's basically how he runs his country - he does have some servants, but he also has serious trust issues, so he mostly just trusts the constructs which he's created.

R: I feel like an emperor having trust issues makes a lot of sense! That's very realistic! [laughs] And I love that it's kind of like a magical bureaucracy because... you know, I love that. There's something that makes a lot of sense to any of us who have ever been to the DMV, that that would be part of any large construct of government, would involve these tiers and layers, I love it.

AS: You start talking to the third tier, and then... [laughs]

R: [laughs] "I need to speak to your manager!"

AS: "We need to get to the next tier!"

M: Or! One of the things that I love that you play with in that is how your smuggler character, he knows when you're dealing with a simple construct, all you have to do is confuse it enough to work around its programming and then just walk past, and it's fine. He knows the hacking tricks to get around, "No, this uniform, it's not stolen, I just- it's just somebody else's- it's just another shirt that I was wearing, but I'm really an officer, it's fine, you don't have to question anything, I gotta go over there right now, thanks."

AS: Right, if you can get their commands to conflict with one another, then you basically short circuit them.

R: [laughs]

M: I love how your magic works, kind of like programming and hacking, and your other main character when she's trying to figure out how to do the program, she's like, "If I just change this one word on this one thing, then I can make everything else work the exact way I want," and I love that, that was a lot of fun the way you did that with your magic system.

AS: Well, thank you. I talked to my husband a little bit, because he's actually a programmer. Like, "Would this kind of thing- could that make sense in this context?"

R: Excellent, I love it. Well, I think that we are at the end of our time together, but we selfishly, when we have a guest, ask them to give us a gift for the world that we are building in our podcast, Andrea, so if you would like to bestow upon us any little nugget of worldbuilding, any little gem, that we have to then insert into our world in some way, we are so excited to hear it.

AS: OK, so I actually thought about this probably way too much. [laughs]

M: Excellent!

AS: So I'm actually from Canada originally, and people there are, you know, stereotypically very polite, so I was thinking about a culture with an elaborate apology ritual whereby you might be able to escape punishment by having this very intricate apology that's followed up by, like, five very flowery compliments to the aggrieved party, and that would be judged by the aggrieved party as well as some of your peers, and they would decide whether or not it was acceptable depending on, 1) the sincerity, and 2) how intricate the compliments were.

R: I absolutely love this-

M: I adore it.

R: As someone who in college was voted Most Likely to Apologize for Receiving This Award, I love it.

M: [cackles] Is it wrong that I can see that so well right now?

R: [laughing] Yes! I almost just apologized for that.

All: [laugh]

M: I love it!

R: No, that is fantastic, I love it! I love it. Well, this has been absolutely wonderful. I hope you've had fun with us, Andrea, we've had such a great time having you with us, and listeners, look out for *Bone Shard Daughter* out this Fall, I'm sure that we'll be talking about it more, and yeah. It's been great talking to you, Andrea.

AS: Thank you so much for having me, I really appreciate it.

[outro music plays]

M: Hi, you. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Worldbuilding for Masochists* and letting us help you overcomplicate your writing life. Our next episode goes up on June 10th, and we'll be talking about queer worldbuilding with K. A. Doore, the author of *The Perfect Assassin*. We're really looking forward to this discussion. We really hope you liked this episode. If you did, please take a minute to tell a friend, shout about us on the internet, or leave a review on iTunes. If you've got questions or you just want to tell us how cute we are, there's a number of ways to contact us. We're on twitter and tumblr as @worldbuildcast, and our email is worldbuildcast@gmail.com. We also have a discord chatroom linked on the About the Show page of our website if you want to come chat with us and other fans of the podcast. We'd love for you to share the worlds you're making and help us all build til it hurts.

[outro music plays]