

It's now a little over a year from the day when Tracy Dorsey brought her *Next List* crew to Orange County to do an episode on my language creation work. At the time, I really had no idea what the coming year held in store for me, so I did my best to look busy. I had recently joined Syfy's *Defiance* as a language creator, but hadn't yet done any serious translation work, and while I'd finished my work on season two of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, there'd been no discussions about season three up to that point. I remained hopeful, but that March I didn't really have much going on.

During my first interview on the morning of twelfth, Tracy asked me if I'd be working on the Valyrian language for the upcoming season of *Game of Thrones*. Immediately alarm bells went off, as I started to think back and wonder, "Did I accidentally say anything?!" Though there had been no discussions, I and many assumed that some form of the Valyrian language would make an appearance in season three, but at that stage, any such discussion would have been premature, and certainly would have been covered by a non-disclosure agreement. Trying not to look too perturbed, I asked Tracy why she would ask that, and Tracy told me that when she'd interviewed executive producers Dan Weiss and David Benioff earlier, they'd said I'd be working on Valyrian this season.

And that's how I learned I'd be creating a new language for season three of *Game of Thrones*.

For those tuning in to the *Game of Thrones* premiere tonight, you'll still have to suffer through a few subtitles, but the audio will sound a bit different from seasons past. Though there are a number of Dothraki speakers yet alive on the show, there's surprisingly little Dothraki this season. In its place is quite a bit of dialogue in two related languages: High and Low Valyrian.

In George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, High Valyrian was meant to occupy the place Latin occupies in the Western world. Latin was the language of the Roman Empire, spoken commonly for several centuries in and around the Italian peninsula and beyond. It would eventually serve as the mother language for all the Romance languages spoken today (Italian, Spanish, French, Catalan, Romanian, etc.).

High Valyrian, in turn, was the language of the Valyrian Empire: an expansive domain that existed for several millennia before it was destroyed by a mysterious event cryptically referred to as the Doom. In its purest form, High Valyrian still exists as a language of scholarship and refinement, though its impact on the region was far greater. High Valyrian was taken up and creolized by the old Ghiscari Empire, where it's still spoken at the time of action in the books and the show, and it served as the mother

language for the various Low Valyrian languages spoke in the Free Cities of Volantis, Braavos, Myr, Pentos, Lys, etc.

This season, I worked on two of the Valyrian languages: High Valyrian (the oldest form of the language) and the Low Valyrian spoken in and around Slaver's Bay. To translate sentences into the latter variety of Valyrian, I would first translate them into High Valyrian, and then apply a series of phonological, semantic and grammatical changes to the text. The resulting language is approximately as different from High Valyrian as Old Spanish is from Classical Latin.

If you watch the premiere tonight, you'll hear some of the Slaver's Bay variety of Valyrian. Both Nathalie Emmanuel and Dan Hildebrand do an outstanding job with their lines. I was extraordinarily pleased with their performances, and I hope you enjoy them as much as I did. And even if languages aren't your thing, I hope the Valyrian won't distract you too much from what I think is a truly superlative premiere for season three.