

[ASMR] WAR [MM4A][FANTASY][STRATEGISTS]

Roy, Fulgur, you are both the listener's left and right hand respectively. The land is drowning in war and, while you are gaining the upper hand, the tides can change with the flap of a butterfly's wing. Roy, you wish to use subterfuge to ensure your foes are weakened before battle begins. Fulgur, you wish to do things honorably, offering to battle the opposing kingdom's champion to end the war quickly. Both options are optimal. Both have benefits. Who will convince the listener?

Both of you are in the midst of arguing a point, hoping the listener, your Imperial Majesty, does not catch wind before they enter the war room.

~ROY

You are much too kind-hearted to our enemies, commander. Dare I ask: are you becoming soft?

~FULGUR

What you suggest is inhumane to the foulest degree! You expect me to approve of your madness?

~ROY

Madness? It is only what our foes deserve! They came under the cover of night and burnt down acres of farmland! Ahh~ But wait. You haven't seen the damage they've caused, have you? You were too busy signing peace with the east kingdom to care for your countrymen~

~FULGUR

Hold your tongue, spymaster, or I will sever it myself and feed it to the hawks in the aviary. I serve the will of the crown and if it demands my presence in the east, that is where my attention will go. No amount of posturing from you will sway my loyalty to the word of our majesty.

~ROY

Always the dutiful right-hand. Too bad such obedience blinds you from the true pain of the people you are sworn to truly serve.

~FULGUR

Like you are one to speak of pain. Your proposals of war only make it too clear how much you wish to see people bleed.

~ROY

And we circle back to our enemies deserving such savagery! They will never listen to reason nor extend a hand of peace, so they must be forced to kneel by any means necessary.

~FULGUR

You would make them bend the knee with them screaming for mercy.

~ROY

And is that a problem? They'll still be on their knee~

~FULGUR

You vile--!!

The listener opens and enters through the double-weighted doors, tired but stern-faced. They appear unfazed, so they must not have heard the argument.

~ROY

Ahhh~ good day to you, my imperial majesty. I trust you'll find our commander's return from the east most reassuring, no? He just arrived this morning.

~FULGUR

(Listen: I'm grateful you are back, Fulgur.) Yes, your majesty. Thank you for your kind welcome back. The peace talks went smoothly and we are now in alliance with Queen Jasmina and her people. (Listen: You had no trouble returning, I hope?) There was no interference during my return here. It was an uneventful journey.

~ROY

Yes, yes, he even brought gifts! They have already been inspected and await you in the audience chambers~ BUT, I do believe we must let this meeting take precedence over trinkets from previously hostile lands, yes?

~FULGUR

...yes. We must discuss how we are to handle our foes to the south. Lord Mideon will not be silent for long and his forces grow with each day that passes. We cannot risk it growing to a size we cannot handle. If we are able to somehow force him to yield, then we may yet win this war before more blood can be spilled.

~ROY

(Listen: Do you agree, Roy?) I do agree with the commander... to *some* extent, anyway. My scouts have already assessed our southern foes and have returned quite a lot of valuable information~ (Listen: What information did you find?) Oh they found quite a bit, including the true size of their forces.

~FULGUR

It can't be more than what has been rumored, correct? That would be impossible.

~ROY

Oh quite the opposite. You see, Lord Mideon likes to flaunt what he doesn't actually have. What we expect to be a full army of trained soldiers and warriors is actually just a flock of unintelligent drafted citizens and witless mercenaries, all hoping to get some glory in the field after the war ends.

~FULGUR

You're telling me that Lord Mideon drove back the western kingdom-- one of the biggest threats in this war-- with an army of knaves and civilians?

~ROY

Give people enough motivation and you could make the farmer's skill for butchery a perfect tool for battle~ A warrior's skill is no doubt the best investment in the protection of land, but anger resides in every soul, commander.

The listener walks up to the war table and observes it. The west is a threat. The north has been on full defense. The south is silent.

~FULGUR

If this information is indeed true, then this now puts us in a very precarious position.

~ROY

What do you mean? We can overpower them very easily now that we know who we are dealing with on the field.

~FULGUR

No. It is not that simple. (Listen: Do you have concerns?) Yes, your majesty. I have one major concern. If we go to battle against this makeshift army, what will that make us?

~ROY

Defenders against chaotic invaders who have nothing left to lose?

~FULGUR

Or slaughterers of innocent folk who were forced to fight in the name of their lord.

~ROY

They can very easily lower their weapons and surrender.

~FULGUR

I cannot speak for the mercenaries, but if the people who were drafted to fight are doing so under duress, it may not be that simple. (Listen: You have a good heart, Fulgur. I understand what you mean.)

~ROY

Your majesty, he may speak in some form of truth, but showing weakness will only open the door for them to strike us when we least expect it. May I remind you that Lord Mideon is a manipulative snake who seized his throne through underhanded means?

~FULGUR

And you believe his people are the same?

~ROY

They allow him to rule, so they must be. (Listen: That's quite a position to have, Roy.) Am I not wrong, your majesty? After all, while the crown will always carry respect, the people will always hold the gavel over those they allow to rule over them. Forgive me for being blunt, your majesty.

~FULGUR

The way you worded that is borderline treasonous, but it is rooted in fact. We would be foolish to ignore that. Despite this, can we truly be content with the murder of innocent people? As they are drafted, it is not a willing enrollment to war.

~ROY

They lose their innocence when they step on the field instead of running for the hills. They know they may die, so there are no qualms in fighting against them.

~FULGUR

Your majesty! Do you understand the issue now? There may be those who appeal to the left-hand's words, but we cannot simply think in black-and-white and assume all will agree.

"Enough!" The listener takes a moment and raises their hand, giving an official perspective on the matter. "If we decide not to harm the innocent, how are we to proceed?"

~ROY

How are we to proceed if we wish to not harm the innocent? Your majesty, surely you jest--

~FULGUR

You heard them quite clearly, spymaster. They proclaimed if, not that we are to deem the drafted to be innocent. We cannot sit here squabbling over the semantics, so we must find a way to end this conflict as if the army is half-forced.

~ROY

Hmph... well, when you put it that way, it's quite simple: We weaken them enough to force their surrender. (Listen: Explain yourself, Roy.) I will happily explain myself, your majesty. (Approach the war table and tap the southern kingdom marker) As we know, the southern kingdom rests along the Salt Coast.

~FULGUR

Correct. Nothing lives within those waters, so their people rely on farming and trade to maintain their economy.

~ROY

Precisely~ TRADE is the key here. (Listen: What do you mean?) What do I mean, your majesty? Well, as the south relies on the good nature of their allies to ensure enough commerce comes in, what if we were to halt their supply?

~FULGUR

And render their entire kingdom to desperation?

~ROY

Trade is one of two options their kingdom has to keep themselves from being seen as vulnerable, commander. Let's not make me the devil just yet.

~FULGUR

How would we even accomplish this?

~ROY

We simply station small factions on the roads leading to the south. No trade can avoid our borders, so it would be an easy enough task.

~FULGUR

So they do what? Destroy or steal exports being delivered? By destroying them, we waste resources, but by stealing them we show ourselves no better than thieves when this war ends.

~ROY

There is a third option, but if you are already hesitant to see my point of view on this idea, then there is little need to bring it up. (Listen: What is this third option?) Well, your majesty, this third option will allow exports to enter the south... with a few changes on their manifests~

~FULGUR

...do not tell me you mean to poison their food deliveries?

~ROY

Then I shall not, but I will not deny it nonetheless~

~FULGUR

You are beyond demonic! (To listener) Your majesty, this strategy is madness and I'm sure you know this well.

~ROY

We're in WAR, commander. We're not here to play nice with those who threaten our lives.

~FULGUR

But we also must bear the consequence of what happens during this war after it ends. Do you not think of what will occur if we do this and word gets out? No kingdom will trust what we trade with them and we will be hard pressed to recover being a trustworthy ally.

~ROY

I'm certain the other kingdoms will understand such actions during a time of duress.

~FULGUR

You underestimate common sense. (To listener) Your majesty, allow me to make this issue one we can solve swiftly and without much bloodshed.

~ROY

Commander, what could you possibly do to promise such light results? There is no peace to be made with Lord Mideon.

~FULGUR

I do not plan to offer peace to a man who won't consider it. I plan to make them obey the Law of Surrender.

~ROY

Hah! That old code of war? Do you seriously believe that Lord Mideon-- a usurper, mind you-- will actually care to honor such an outdated practice?

~FULGUR

(Listen: Explain this to me, Fulgur.) I will explain, your majesty. The Law of Surrender was agreed to decades ago by all five kingdoms on this land. It was made to keep the damage and bloodshed to a minimum should war come to pass.

~ROY

It's been SO helpful thus far in mitigating the lives lost in this war~

~FULGUR

Regardless. The agreement states that a champion from two opposing kingdoms may represent their states and fight to resolve their conflicts one on one instead of allowing more people to be killed in battle. It was made with the people in mind.

~ROY

Did he mention it was a fight to the death? One of the champions has to die at the end. A symbol of dominance or some nonsense like that.

~FULGUR

(Listen: Is this true, Fulgur?) Yes, your majesty... it is true. Should you call for it, then a fight to the death would be commanded between a champion of our kingdom and theirs. All kingdoms would witness it and acknowledge the result.

~ROY

It's a weak call.

~FULGUR

But one we should consider. (To listener) Your majesty, you have the authority to make this call and demand the Law of Surrender against Lord Mideon. He would have no choice but to answer it as his allies in the north are steadfast defenders of it.

~ROY

(Grumble) They were the ones who introduced it years ago...

~FULGUR

As such, Lord Mideon would be forced to choose a champion and bring them forth... and, if you'll allow it, your majesty, I would submit myself to being your champion for this battle.

~ROY

You're a goddamn fool, commander.

~FULGUR

Better a fool than a madman.

~ROY

Your suggestion relies on the other kingdoms actually bending to the Law of Surrender. For all you know, the other kingdoms could oppose it!

~FULGUR

The only kingdom's approval it needs is from the north, for they were the ones to establish it at all and they are the south's only allies. Do you think I am a fool for placing faith in their adherence to what they themselves put forth?

~ROY

It is a risk that is far too great to take seriously! Even if the north kingdom agrees, the others may not, rendering your effort worthless. There is zero point to bringing it forth!

~FULGUR

That is up for our majesty to decide!

The listener slams their hands on the war table, surprising both of you. "I do not know what is causing this hostility between you two but it will end. NOW."

~FULGUR

...forgive us, your majesty. We overstepped.

~ROY

Yes, please forgive us. We are both just... passionate in wanting this war to end sooner rather than prolong it further.

~FULGUR

We are your right and left hands. We will always disagree with points, but you are our imperial majesty. What either of us say will not hold any weight unless you decree it so.

~ROY

Our duties are to offer guidance and suggestions. Nothing more. (Listen: I do not care for the fighting.) If you do not wish to hear us bicker, then we will do our best to keep our squabbles private-- (Listen: NO!) Uh... no? I do not understand what you wish from us.

~FULGUR

Your majesty... I believe I understand what you desire from us. You wish for peace in this war room and beyond it.

~ROY

Peace? With you? I can tolerate you, but I do not see benefit from your friendship, commander.

~FULGUR

If we are being candid, then I hold no respect for you in return, spymaster. However... our majesty demands at least order and we cannot achieve that if we continue to aim for each other's throats.

~ROY

For once, I will agree... (sigh) I do not wish to break bread with you, but I will... hold my tongue farther into my mouth for things I don't approve about you.

~FULGUR

If you can keep your word on that, then I may happily keep my thoughts to myself regarding how I see your ethics.

~ROY

Ethics are a matter of opinion... but I can agree to that if the result is as you describe.

~FULGUR

Truly? (Hold out hand) Then we shall shake hands on it.

~ROY

Oh you are absolutely childish-- (Listen: Roy.) ... your majesty... must I?

~FULGUR

Your word, spymaster, will only be honored in an agreement of shaking hands in front of our majesty.

~ROY

Ughhh.... (shake hands) do not regret your words, commander. I do not plan to cease being the cause of your internal moral conflict.

~FULGUR

And I plan to continue being a voice of reason, but with a better vocabulary to be polite.

~ROY

Very well. (Sigh) Your hope is sound and there is a chance we can end this your way, but there is a large risk we must consider with demanding the Law of Surrender.

~FULGUR

And while I may not agree with poisoning innocent people, I can see the benefit of at least halting supplies to the south to prevent them from growing larger.

~ROY

It seems we can be cordial with one another. (Listen: Was that hard?) Was that difficult, your majesty? Heh, you have quite the sense of humor to laugh during such an important meeting.

~FULGUR

Our majesty is well loved for their personal softness. It is almost enviable.

~ROY

Yes, yes, let's not flatter our majesty any more than we already have. We've agreed to hold our teeth back, but we still must determine how to move forward. Do we starve the south or do we challenge them to single combat?

~FULGUR

Your majesty, you have heard both sides. What do you think? After this, we may head to the audience chamber and you may enjoy what Queen Jasmina bade me to bring to you.

~ROY

I am quite curious about what she gave us...

~FULGUR

We await your command, your majesty.

(END)