

Transcript:

Alejandra: Table talk is not your typical DND TTRPG podcast. We are not here to run you through our whole campaign.

Mariah: We're here to talk about everything else in the space of Tabletop Roleplay.

Alejandra: I'm your host, Alejandra Wilhelm.

Mariah: And I'm also your host, Mariah Gresham.

Alejandra: And we're your Tabletop Roleplay girllies.

Alejandra: And we're rolling. Awesome. So, it's the first episode of Table Talk. We've been talking about doing this for I don't even know how long. A hot minute.

Mariah: Couple months.

Alejandra: Couple months, as any respectable person does.

Mariah: I saw a literal TikTok audio the other day, I can't remember what it was, but it was like, are you the best friends that have a podcast? And they were like, no — as they were recording a podcast. Don't call me out that way TikTok.

Alejandra: Yeah, TikTok is disrespectful in so many flavors, but yeah. So, this is table talk. It's a little podcast that we've kind of come up with in the sense of there are plenty of podcasts out there that are going to run you through all the wonderful mystical adventures of other people's campaigns, which is incredible. There're so many notable ones out there. We watch an abhorrent number of hours, too many of them, of Dimension 20, Critical Role, Dungeon Daddies, just start listing names and hope that one of them takes notice of us.

Mariah: There's also my long con campaign of trying to get all of you to watch Critical Role because I've watched all of Vox Machia and I'm like, bitch, I'm invested now. Because I had a friend drag me into it — they were like just put on your cleaning.

Alejandra: And you're like, well, this is going to be my personality for the next ten years.

Mariah: Yeah, 100%.

Alejandra: Meanwhile, me, on the other hand, I'm like, I am trying so hard. It is the Naruto of the DnD space.

Mariah: It truly is.

Alejandra: I'm truly out here trying and I can't get through it.

Mariah: And I can't get through Naruto, so I get it.

Alejandra: Yeah, so it's hard as fuck. But then I did run through every single episode of Dimension 20 like it was my day job.

Mariah: Dimension 20 has more of, like, an animated series type production value.

Alejandra: It's so good. It's just so good.

Mariah: It's so good. Incredible.

Alejandra: Brennan Lee Mulligan, Aabria, just incredible people in the space of DND.

Mariah: Absolutely, Critical role is definitely very intense. Like, this is a five-hour episode.

Alejandra: Don't look at that, don't think about it too long.

Mariah: Just don't, no brain cells.

Mariah: No wrinkle, only smooth.

Alejandra: Well, perfect. So our aim for this podcast is to talk about literally everything else that has to do with TTRPG and DND outside of what happens at the table when you've started the game, and even a little bit of elements like out of character kind of check ins. So, to start, let's talk about how you and I, respectively got into this. So yes. Do you want to kick us off?

Mariah: Yeah, sure. So, I think it's one of those things where I'm that person...like, you can pretty much bet on me being aware of or at least involved in any kind of nerdy space to some degree, just because of the everything about me. So I knew about it, but I hadn't really played until honestly, right before quarantine. The same mutual friend that sort of brought you into our campaign brought me into it, and it was very much a "So you can take it slow. You don't have to buy all the things." And I'm like, cool. So I've ordered all of the cards that are available. I have cards that you don't even have. Would you like to look at them?

Alejandra: That's an entire other episode that we'll do one day, just talking about the financial debt you go into second you start playing.

Mariah: The financial burden of providing for a family that is your D&D party.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: So I was like, cool, we're in this. But bold of you to think I have any chill whatsoever. So, I kind of got into that, started playing the campaign, and it very quickly just went down the rabbit hole with it. And I think through that kind of like, I'm a huge mythology nerd. I'm a writer. I love stories and spend way too much of my time thinking about fictional people. And so, it was a perfect little conglomeration of all of my interests. It's like, cool. I live here now. This is my home.

Alejandra: I'm out here rent free.

Mariah: I'm a landowner in this space.

Alejandra: Yeah, that's beautiful. So, the way that I got into it a little bit so back in community college, I had a friend kind of similar to you in that I have always been a huge fucking nerd. And I've played lots of video games, watched tons of anime. Fantasy was everything to me. Got a Lord of the Rings tattoo like that. We out here.

Mariah: It do be the one tattoo you have.

Alejandra: It do be the one tattoo I have. And it is small, but it counts.

Mariah: It counts.

Alejandra: But I was really into it, and I had again heard of it, never understood it or how to get into it until a friend of mine was like, I really want to start D&D. I bought all the books. I just need bodies at my table.

Mariah: I need human flesh vessels to sit in my imaginary world.

Alejandra: Yeah. And so we started playing, and it was just me and, like, two other guys at this table. And I was very nervous at the concept of role playing in front of strangers. So I drank an entire bottle of wine, and then I had a separate bottle of wine just sitting on standby.

Mariah: Which, we should say that you have a high alcohol tolerance. Like, you aren't an alcoholic. It's just a full-time job for you to get a buzz.

Alejandra: I just have a furnace in me.

Mariah: We are on the opposite end of the spectrum of, like, I now no longer have any alcohol tolerance and don't even really drink that much. And you're like, there are three things on this earth that can get mildly intoxicated, and if I don't have those, I might as well be drinking water.

Alejandra: Pretty much. And that ran for a very brief stint. And then years went by until I met that mutual friend of ours, and he invited me to the table. And that was my first time really sitting at a table, I can say, with other people that were clearly very invested and were ready to jump into character at the table. Like, the other two dudes that I was playing with were just like, I cast my strongest spell, and then I'm going to be on my phone the rest of the time. So, it was not like a genuinely great example. And I definitely felt like I was the only one at the table trying to do anything.

Mariah: When you joined that game, I was the next newest person. Everybody else table had played for a bit, and I played together for a bit, and so they had a good little cadence going.

Alejandra: So I had really just a genuine moment of sitting there in awe because, one, you all had such a great dynamic together, and then there was people doing character voices and just, like, very in it. And I was like, oh, I'm invested. I'm super, super invested. On top of that friend being, like, an incredible DM.

Mariah: There's a big titty kalashtar ranger, I'm here for it.

Alejandra: And so that was my first experience at a table. And then quarantine hit, and I was like, Cool. I have now developed a hyper fixation and have zero outlet.

Mariah: And you had to move back to Houston.

Speaker C: Yeah.

Alejandra: One, I had to move back to Houston, but at the time, I was still driving up, but then quarantine hit and RGM got into an accident that kind of put them out of commission for a while. So, I was like, okay, I now have this hyper fixation hobby. And DND, unfortunately, is one of those things that you cannot play unless you have other people or at the bare minimum, a DM.

Mariah: You can do it, I feel like with a DM, and you and I have conversations where I've held you at gunpoint and be like, hey, in our current campaign that you're running, if you and I remain alive, I must see the end of this character's arc. And if one of us dies, we will host a seance, because I cannot have mental peace unless I know.

Alejandra: Yeah. And of course, quarantine is like, okay, well, I have infinite amounts of time, no responsibilities.

Mariah: What a weird time.

Alejandra: It was such a fucking fever dream. But I was like, any good person was throwing myself into TikTok and just trying to use that as escapism. And I was living rent free on DND TikTok kind of thing. And eventually, the way that you do, where you go and you find those people that are running like, little taverns as their TikTok page or whatever, I was like, this is cute. And I found a guy who was doing he's like, hey. I remember seeing the first video, and he was like, we've seen plenty of taverns

and magic shops or whatever, but we haven't seen a Thieves Guild. And I saw that. I was like, that's an interesting concept. And then I saw the video where he posted basically, like, role playing the interview process to get into this thieves guild. And I don't know what fucking demon possessed me, but I was like, you.

Mariah: Do know demon possessed you. And on the first episode, we won't go into it.

Alejandra: Yeah, this is true. But Redacted, I do know what possessed me. Maybe my need for attention, maybe the fact that he's kind of attractive. Who's to say? But I was like, Well, I do have a barbarian costume from, like, Renaissance Festival just sitting in my closet, and I was like, what the fuck is a barbarian doing with these guilds? God knows.

Mariah: Just bonkin

Alejandra: Bonkin, whackin and bonkin. So I made my little intro, and then I had no videos on my thing, no followers. I was one of those creeper accounts. And then, as TikTok does, it blew up more than I expected. And then also the tag for his Thieves Guild blew up subsequently. And so, there I was like, well, I have nothing to do with my time but this. And now I feel like there are many eyes on me.

Mariah: I've now become a founding member of this guild.

Alejandra: Yeah, it grew into its own fucking beast, and we could probably get into all of that later.

Mariah: That would actually be a really interesting thing.

Alejandra: But I did that for a long time, and it was really cool. I met a lot of cool people, like, in that DND TikTok space. I have friends to this day that I still talk to that live all over the place. And then eventually we got back into another campaign and ran that for?

Mariah: A year.

Alejandra: I think.

Mariah: I had a horrible sense of time before covid-19, so now it's just nonexistent.

Alejandra: Yeah, it was a while, though, it was a while we ran it.

Mariah: For sure, we played a good like almost 40 sessions. And we played twice a month.

Alejandra: We played like twice a month, if not more. And we would play sometimes we play Saturday and Sunday for like eight to twelve hour sessions, which is fucking ridiculous.

Mariah: We're like, cool, we didn't do this, but it was the energy of like, shotgun this Red Bull and sit back down. We're not done.

Alejandra: We're not leaving this table until it's fucking 03:00 in the morning.

Alejandra: But yeah. And so that was like the first time that I really, really sat long term at a table playing the same character and having our characters develop. And it was amazing. And eventually, as sometimes happens, that kind of situation broke up. But you, me and two other players that were at that table were kind of left DM-less. And many of us are people that much more prefer to play at a table.

Mariah: Yes, definitely. I can play online, and I do and I like it. But whether it's just neuro-spicy thing or whatever, online you have about 2 hours with me and then my brain just switches off.

Alejandra: I can definitely play online campaigns. I have a couple of online campaigns that have been running for over a year now. Not me running, but I am in them and I love them. They're fun, but it definitely does not hit the same.

Mariah: No, like in person. It's like, cool, I'll be here for 10 hours. Yeah, for sure, that's fine.

Alejandra: Online, I'm like as soon as it starts getting to like 10:00 at night, I'm like, we better wrap this shit up because I'm going to bed.

Mariah: Like I've worked tomorrow.

Alejandra: Yeah, I got to work tomorrow. But yeah, at the table, when you have somebody sitting across from you and you're seeing the emotions run through them in the scene and whatever, it's addicting for me. And I love it. And I like getting into those characters and really feeling that click of like.

Mariah: Of feeling like they become real.

Alejandra: Yeah, they become real. And the emotions are real and the things that you experience together are very much real. And we were all kind of left aimless in the ether without a DM because again, you can't do shit without the human computer that is running the world for you. And so we were kind of stuck there and two of the players were relatively new.

Mariah: You and I, when we started that campaign, were definitely the most experienced and the most comfortable with where we were at. And at that point, I was like, I would love to DM — and I am about to start damming a different system. But I was like, I do not have brain space to do like this. Would love to do it, but it's not a thing I can contemplate right now. And so you were kind of left at the altar a bit.

Alejandra: I was like ok, if its going to be anyone, I guess it's got to be me.

Alejandra: And I think also I used to have such insecurities about doing it for a long time, especially because, again, that DM we had was pretty incredible at running games. And so the idea of me not being good enough was really problem.

Mariah: Absolutely. I love that DM dearly, but it's like I told him on more than one occasion, I'm like the first time I DM, you can't be present.

Alejandra: Same here.

Mariah: And I'm so sorry. Same here. I am clinically anxious and I can't deal with that.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: When you're finally released from the chair and you're like, I'm going to cause havoc, I'm like, please not. Please not in my freshly planned house of cards held together by toothpicks and glue.

Alejandra: You know too much about the mechanic. You can make sure broken ass characters and I'm barely getting my head above water.

Mariah: Yes. If I think of the four of us, we know each other so well and we are so comfortable with each other and feel so safe with each other that it felt like a very forgiving soft space to step into and kind of try something.

Alejandra: Yeah, exactly. And I felt very confident in that. The other two players were very relatively new. Even though they'd been playing for like a year and a half with us.

Mariah: They hadn't had a breadth of experience with a bunch of different DMs.

Alejandra: And as for you, I've known you for so long, I feel super comfortable with you.

Mariah: And we have very similar styles and the characters we like to play and the stories we like to write.

Alejandra: Exactly. So I was like, again, I was on my fucking Dimension 20 kick and I finally watched Aabria Iyengar's campaigns like the Court of Fey and Flowers stuff and all of that. And that truly was the time that I watched her DMing style, because again.

Mariah: Brennan is that level of God Tear. Yeah, he's out here just doing voices for the monsters and sound effects. He's a human sound machine.

Alejandra: My guy. Zero chill, it's a gift. And Abrea is also God tear in her own right. Her particular style lined up with me, it's more approachable.

Mariah: The same way that I think for me when I started watching Vampire the Masquerade LA By Night and a bit of New York by Night. Jason Carl, the guy who GMs for that of like, he is a lot more stoic and reserved, but it fucking works. And it's like he doesn't try to pressure himself to do a bunch of crazy voices and he'll change his posture or he'll change little things like his expression, and that's how he predominantly expresses what's going on. I'm like, that seems like something I could do because I am not a voice actor. I can't do it.

Alejandra: I can't either.

Mariah: If I try to do an accent, it's insulting.

Alejandra: Like, I fear that I'm doing a hate crime.

Mariah: It's like there's a non-zero chance someone's going to backhand because it's going to be very bad. I can do voices, but that's very much like a character, right? And I feel like I always default into the voice I use for Anya, my character in your campaign of just like, slightly British

Alejandra: A little bit British, you always got to throw the dash of Brit in there.

Mariah: Especially if it's a rich character. And then if it's not, I'm like, I don't know what to do with this bitch. Yeah. It was like finding those DMs that are very public. And also, I think, players too, that just have different styles. And it's like, okay, you can do this in different ways and there's not one correct path. You don't have to be a voice actor. Yeah, I don't have to be able to live on National Geographic practicing lion roars and audio effects. It'll be fine.

Alejandra: I loved Aabria's style of narration and I was like, this clicks for me 100%. And so she was really the reason why I was like after watching her do it, I was like, okay, I feel like if I can do it like this, then I am capable. And I also was just like, well, we have no DM. And then I look at the shrine of DND shit accumulated.

Mariah: I do have all the monster manuals.

Alejandra: I do have every monster manual for no reason.

Mariah: I have them. I've looked at them once fully as a player.

Alejandra: There's books I had not even opened. I just liked looking at them, collecting stuff.

Mariah: Wanted to have them.

Alejandra: I just wanted to look at them, know that they were mine.

Mariah: So you were like I guess it is going to be me because I have to buy almost nothing.

Alejandra: I'm like the barrier to entry right now is nothing because I've already invested.

Mariah: It's just how can I minimize the math?

Alejandra: Yeah. Because there is a lot of math in tabletop. Much simple math, be it. But however, I am bisexual and very pretty.

Mariah: And math is... we're definitely more of like the fun marketing girlies. Just like, should not touch the numbers.

Alejandra: Like, if you throw numbers my way, I am going to scoff at you.

Mariah: I can do, like, psychology field stats. That's about as deep as it gets. I took formal logic in college with other law students to get out of taking a math credit because I went to an engineering school.

Alejandra: Oh, yeah. I structured my entire high school and early college career to avoid calculus.

Mariah: I did have to take calculus and it was rough.

Alejandra: They forced me to eventually.

Alejandra: I really had worked so hard to not do this. And then I ended up doing it anyway. And I hated it. I hated every second of it. But no, yeah, I truly was the kind of player that I was like, cool, I'm going to roll my damage and then angle my dice trade towards the DM and look cute enough for him to do the math for me.

Mariah: Right?

Alejandra: And he's like, man, that is just in fact, three d6s. And I'm like, it doesn't matter. It does not matter.

Mariah: Like three plus four is twelve. No, three plus four is seven.

Alejandra: And our point is thus proven. But yeah, so the the most...

Mariah: There's no way to save that. I was like, maybe my brain was going like, seven.

Alejandra: I fully thought you were doing a bit

Mariah: Yeah, hate that for me.

Alejandra: I love that. You're so pretty.

Mariah: That's so loud. The first episode.

Alejandra: It's the first episode.

Mariah: Well, I have a lot of skills. I'm very smart.

Alejandra: You are. You are. 100%.

Mariah: You can't be good at everything. You cannot that's unfair to the world.

Alejandra: Yeah. Much like in character creation, there are other things we invested our points in. And math was not it. Math was not on the thing on the roster prioritized.

Mariah: No. Cool cool cool cool cool cool cool

Alejandra: But yeah, like we were saying, math was the most intimidating part of it for me. So I was like, I'm going to start this. However, I know us as human beings, and I know that we are perfectly capable of sitting at a table for eight fucking hours to avoid a combat situation via roleplay.

Mariah: Because that definitely happened in that previous campaign where we met.

Alejandra: Oh, yeah, it was fucking hilarious. Because he's like, we're at the cusp of this big combat and it's like.

Mariah: What if 4 hours of chisme, and what if we started gossip girl style rumor mill and just sow dissent in this city where we landed. Yeah, no combat.

Alejandra: No combat. We were like, well, but there was this one thing I wanted to do right before. Can we just do that real quick? And that turns into like 2 hours of intense emotional character development.

Mariah: It was never a chill thing.

Alejandra: It was never going to be no. By any stretch. And I knew that we were roleplay hoes through and through. So I was like, okay, I'm banking on the fact that you guys are going to love the roleplay more than getting into combat scenarios. I have combat scenarios still planned.

Mariah: Absolutely. Combat is still dope. I am a min-maxer through and through. Now that I've started doing it, I can't make a character and not optimize them at least a little bit. And I like doing hella damage. It's fun. I like using the spells and your weapons and all that. Yeah, but it's not why I'm there.

Alejandra: It's not why you sit down at that table.

Mariah: Especially for sessions where we're going to play for hours on hours on hours because I will zone out after a certain amount of combat.

Alejandra: And I know that we're all like that, so I definitely, I think, now try to structure the combats to be short, but give you enough room to do the things that you need to do as a character and build your confidence as players.

Mariah: Like, the combats will be narratively tense enough, and we'll weave in little moments of characterization and roleplay within the combat, where it keeps it moving, where it's not just like — what do you do? What do you do? What do you do?

Alejandra: Yeah, but I am not here to sit down for like 3 hours just going through turns and turns of combat. No, but yeah, the math was the thing that was the most intimidating thing to me. And then when I started planning for our campaign, I was like, I'm going to have just a treasure trove of spreadsheets and calculators and generators at my disposal.

Mariah: Yes.

Alejandra: To minimize as much math as possible. The most I want to do is my damage rolls and then just plug them into my calculator and live bliss free.

Mariah: It's nobody's business what happens behind that screen. That's between you and God.

Alejandra: You don't need to know that. I'm miscounting half of the shit, probably.

Alejandra: No matter. Doesn't matter.

Mariah: Doesn't matter.

Alejandra: But yeah, then I started the process of DMing for you all. And that's where I'm at now. And I've been loving it so much.

Mariah: I'm more invested in your campaign, in my character and our two other players characters than I ever have been in anything. In the sense of, like, anything in roleplay and D&D. We have such a good cadence and a good chemistry between us. And our stories are so interwoven that it's just like we sit down, it's like, okay, we know we're going to move in lockstep and we know we're going to play off each other and that it's just going to fall like domino's and it's so fucking good.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And I think it's what I think we've all wanted our TTRPG experiences to be. And it's so hard to find that core group. Where it's like, okay, we're friends. We like each other's people. We have compatible roleplay styles. We're compatible in what we want out of game. We know how to build characters. We know how to adapt and play off each other when we're playing different things. And it's so interesting. [coughing] Okay. Hi allergies in Texas, just ending my life.

Alejandra: Pollen in Texas. Man It's a killer.

Mariah: We still play at other tables with other DMs and it's still fun, but it's different. And it's just like, that chemistry is so good and so precious and it's like I think we're all very protective of that, which is cool.

Alejandra: That table is fucking hollowed ground.

Mariah: Literally. You have to get like, a government clearance.

Alejandra: You really fucking do. We do not just let any bitch walk up into the table because it's so important.

Mariah: So, like, we were just talking about this, but the same way you can have good friends that are really bad to travel with, it's the same with D&D.

Alejandra: Like, I cannot engage in a near lifelong adventure with you and your stupid character.

Mariah: Yeah. Or it's even just like, even if the character is good, and even if they can objectively role play or whatever.

Alejandra: It's just like... it's that chemistry.

Mariah: Yes, and there's this unspoken feeling, like it drags now. Once you hit that, then it's like, oh, okay, now I know what it should be. I've felt Nirvana.

Alejandra: I've gotten a taste of the good good, and, like, I cannot go back yeah. At all. Yeah. And I agree in the sense of, like, you, me, and our other two players, Alyssa and Bex, have been playing so long with each other, mesh so well together, and we truly can step into any table together. And it's so amazing to me how we work together. I think this last time that we just started a new campaign where I matched with a guy — hi, Teddy — who graciously told me about a concept for a campaign, and I

was like, I love this. Do you need players? Because I wanted to volunteer myself. Half of our players live in Austin and the other half live in Houston. So it's hard to get us together. But when we do, we do play.

Mariah: Yeah, we play once a month.

Alejandra: We play once a month.

Mariah: Like the Austin peep drive down.

Alejandra: So in my mind, initially, it was just going to be me joining this campaign if he had other players, because I miss playing at a physical table, and he really wanted to run it at a table. And I was only playing online campaigns and then DMing at the table. And when he told me the concept, I think we went to Sherwood.

Mariah: Yes.

Alejandra: Me and Alyssa drove up to Sherwood to visit you and Bex. And I mentioned it to you. I showed you, like, the audio recording he did of the intro. And all of us sat there and.

Mariah: We were like, so give it to me now.

Alejandra: So are we playing this or not? And I told Teddy and I was like, I know you've been trying to get players for five months. I've gotten you players in a matter of days.

Mariah: It's like 5 hours later. Here's your party.

Alejandra: Here's your party. Please do the prep necessary. We are coming down next weekend, so whatever you need to do to finalize.

Mariah: You're right, that's right. Y'all came up for Sherwood, and then we had scheduled to play Strixhaven, which is the campaign you run, the next weekend. And when we were still playing our previous campaign, I was the only player that everyone else. Is in Houston and I was driving down every other weekend because that DM was so good that I was like, I will drive for this. But also don't do that. Don't make yourself drive 6 hours round trip every two weekends out of the four. That just isn't sustainable. So when we left that campaign and I'm like, okay, going down once a month is the right cadence, right? Because then I can still have a life outside of it and do things and have time to recover.

Alejandra: And same here. It works for my work schedule and I have time to do other things. And I'm not constantly on having your session prep. So I can leave it to the week before the weekend that we're going to do it.

Mariah: And you have space to appreciate the session we just played and think about what you want to do. and especially our situation where we quickly brought in this barrage of NPCs.

Alejandra: Man, listen, I did this to myself.

Mariah: You did.

Alejandra: But I also did it for my children. And let that be on the record.

Mariah: We did build the world collaboratively, which I love. But we very much like have all their families built out and they're all connected to each other. And you had homebrewed the world with some of your friends from the server you were in.

Alejandra: That was a whole thing of like I really took the first time DMing and I said, I'm going to take Strixhaven because it seems pretty simple and that's what we all agreed. We had a lot of interest in doing fantasy college. And I was like, I'm going to stick straight to the book. I'm not going to homebrew anything. I'm going to keep it simple for myself. I said this out loud with my whole chest.

Mariah: Your whole chest. And we were like, great, fantastic.

Alejandra: Yeah, we love this. And then within before we even started our first session, I think I was like, hi, everything has changed. It is in an entirely homebrew world. I have a fucking Titanic iceberg effect of a discord where I truly do, where you have channels that the players can see for keeping everything organized and then everything that I can see is a behemoth of an organizational system.

Mariah: And you're like, no, I showed you that it's in channel. And I'm like, you have not put it into one of our channels.

Alejandra: No, it's somewhere deep in the research of my mind palace.

Mariah: You may have shown it to me, but I do not have access to that content. It is locked away somewhere.

Alejandra: Yeah, and deep in that mind palace, I also have like a high council of DM friends who I go to when I need to plan and have my machinations about players.

Mariah: Which one of them, Oak, who was I was also in that server.

Alejandra: Shout out to Oak.

Mariah: I love him.

Alejandra: He's my RP husband.

Mariah: He's fantastic. Incredible. And just a great bean.

Alejandra: And just a good incredible human.

Mariah: Great, great human. But for my character, because I gave you a very traumatic backstory.

Alejandra: You really did.

Mariah: Which is so funny that I didn't know what I wanted to play for Strixhaven for so long because it was hard to kind of figure out what I wanted to do coming out of that other campaign. And then I had that idea and I was like, okay, this is something. And then we talked about it, and then it very quickly escalated. And then you were like, how traumatic? How much trauma would you consent to?

Alejandra: Where am I allowed to go?

Mariah: How traumatic can I get? And I was like, yes. We have clarified a few things. I'm like, listen, the family pet must survive.

Alejandra: No pets will be harmed at my table.

Mariah: No pets will be harmed. And then I need her like Godparents to not have be part of anything fucked up that's ruined her life. And other than that, have a field day. And apparently you did, because you shared with me, for lovely reasons, that whatever you came up with and you pitched to Oak, he said something and then.

Alejandra: He gave me something because I was like, hey, here's this character. Here's the low down. I'm trying to obviously instill a lot of trauma. There's a lot we can work with given blanket consent.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: Where can we go with this?

Mariah: And Oak is an intense DM. He is known for some crazy fuck shit.

Alejandra: And so he gave me something and I was like, this is interesting.

Mariah: However, what if?

Alejandra: Like, what if I crank that shit to ten? And then I said it and I was like, ok it's maybe a little psychotic. And he was like, Honestly, that's very fucked up, but I love it. And so then that's when I messaged you. And I was like, how fucked up can I go? Because I do need to clarify.

Mariah: And I said, go for it.

Alejandra: Yeah. Full set.

Mariah: And then you texted me and was like, So I know what it is. But Oak called me a psychopath for it. And I'm like, cool. Because that's saying something, he has a high tolerance for shenanigans, so I'm like for him to say that — that's wild. There was a bit where, because you can't lie to me in person, so I would guess a few times over text. And now I've stopped guessing because I feel like, one, I don't want to know, and two, I don't want to give you any more ideas.

Alejandra: Which I don't know how well I've been doing, but I think I've been doing pretty well at just like even normal.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: I'm truly fighting for my life because I am a terrible liar and my face shows fucking everything. So you all will start talking about your hypotheses of things that are going on.

Mariah: When Becks and I were having a conversation about it and you were on the couch.

Alejandra: I was like, my face is stone. I will not emote. I will not look at any of you.

Mariah: There's a couple little things that I've gleaned, but nothing big.

Alejandra: Also, can you tell the difference between me being like, okay, you guessed it, and then me being like, that's kind of a good idea.

Mariah: There are slight differences, but a lot of my outright guessing was done over text because I wanted you to have deniability. And then I'm careful about what we talk about and brainstorm within the party because I don't want it spoiled for myself. But also it's like, it's going to be bad. I know it's going to be bad.

Alejandra: It's going to be real bad, chief. And then you are also about to start DMing. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Mariah: So I love all the world of darkness, white wolf lore. Like I said earlier I've watched most of LA By Night and a little bit of New York by Night and is just it's dope as hell.

Alejandra: I love it.

Mariah: It's modern day setting and it's horror and it's like vampire society and all that. And it's just very cool. And we talked a lot about wanting to do like you're a big Dragon Age fan.

Alejandra: That would be an entire episode where we're like, I'm not even going to talk about DND. I'm just going to sit here on my fucking soapbox.

Mariah: Oh, yeah, we can talk about that.

Alejandra: Absolutely. With the same energy of someone trying to say that a certain dinner was like a business dinner, so they can classify it as a business expense. I will be doing that with Dragon Age.

Mariah: I'm ready for you to hold us at gunpoint at any point.

Alejandra: Sit down. We're doing this.

Mariah: Yeah, but so we talked about in that kind of like inquisition quest where you go to the ball and you're like dealing with the court politics intrigue and all of that. We'd all talked about that being really cool and wanting to do something like that. And I'm like, well, I can do that. But with horror and vampires.

Alejandra: And we were over here, like slamming our credit cards on the table.

Mariah: Yeah. Every time I would come to Houston and we would go to that DND shop by your house, someone would find another Vampire the Masquerade source book and hand it to me. And then I would be like, well, I guess I'm buying this now because I have very little impulse control where this is concerned. It's all going to other things. So I have been wanting to do it for a while, and we've never played it. I definitely know the most about the lore. You guys are super new to it, and the mechanics are different than D&D. It's an entirely different system and all of that. So I knew I needed to have a decent understanding of this so I can explain it and all that. So I needed time for my life to not be a mess, so I could then research it and read through the book, which I did. And then so it's like once I kind of started doing that, we're like, okay, we now need to make characters. Like, a few months ago, like, you and Becks kind of started brainstorming what you guys might want to play.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: I was like, okay, this sounds dope as fuck. And then the Fall of London book just came out.

Alejandra: And we just got that. I think the last time that you came down.

Mariah: We were there a couple of weeks ago, last time I was in Houston. Because I was going to just homebrew a Camarilla court in Austin, basically. And I was like, that would have been cool and that would have been fun and great. But similar to how you said having that Strixhaven book to go off of, I'm like, it would be nice to have something structured around and to kind.

Alejandra: Of have I want the bones.

Mariah: Something to go off of. So you're not going to do everything yourself. And in VTM, there is combat, but it is almost all narrative focused and it's very character driven and plot driven, and it's all RP all the time. And that is all of our bread and butter. And it's what I go to it for. And so if I'm going to sink time into creating and running something, I want it to be character centric. Because writer, that's my whole thing. So, yeah, we took the Fall of London, and are sort of tossing everybody in. And your character is made, Becks's character is made, Alyssa still needs to make hers. And it's really fun because I'm surprised about how chill I am about not knowing anything about the plot, because I'm very much waiting to see after we have all three characters and after we make the coterie and then kind of seeing where we're at because there's a lot of interesting little hooks and things. Strings I can

grab. And at the end of the day, we know London will fall, right? So we know the end result, but it's what happens in the in the intermediary time that is of interest to me.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And that story will be very fun to play with. And so, I think similar of like, I'm going to use a lot of the structure of the Fall of London book and keep that in what we're trying to do. But I'm definitely going to branch it off and dive into more personal things for each character build that world. And also take some of those NPCs that are there and tweak them a little bit and make them fit — it's like a joke of like, will it be a girly pop dating SIM? Maybe.

Alejandra: It's got to be. It's got to be 100%. Take it from someone that is sitting at the table with all of you horny hoes. Granted, I am also a horny ho. I am on this doc.

Mariah: You can't say it like you're not the mother.

Alejandra: And I'm not out here actively feeding you all every single day.

Mariah: And like you don't pick disrespectful character art. You will scour the internet for the greatest NPC art, which is why my Strathaven character has like four potential love interests.

Alejandra: Four potential love interest. Love interest of varying degrees of classic book-tok tropes.

Mariah: Toxicity for spice. And then just like, why have you done this?

Alejandra: Bex's character is also in a bit of a love triangle.

Mariah: Her character has like three, I think, at least.

Alejandra: Yeah, she's got two and she's got like a side boy two and a toxic ex out in the world somewhere.

Mariah: Yeah, we don't count him.

Alejandra: And then fucking Alyssa is out here starting a full host club of just.

Mariah: The we really did watch that anime. And Alyssa's like, you know what? If you can dream it, you can do it. I'm going to bring this in.

Alejandra: Yeah, we watched fucking Ouran High School Host Club, which is a classic and staple piece of media. And she was like, can I start a host club in Strixhaven? I was like, if you can role play it and you can recruit some people, absolutely.

Mariah: Who am I to crush your dreams?

Alejandra: No listen. I am a very rule of cool DM, I use the rules and the mechanics as a structure. However, I can be bribed with good storytelling. So if you can dream it, I'll make it happen.

Mariah: Especially, I think, when it's role play centric things, I like just letting the wheels come off. Yeah. Combat, especially in DND, of their rules for combat for a reason. And yeah, there are certain things of, like, we do non-damage cantrips you can do as a bonus action, or like, you can take health potions as a bonus action because why would that take an action?

Alejandra: Which there was a recent video on TikTok of a dude just like fucking going nuts about how you can't do that because you can't physically drink a potion in 6 seconds. Which is what, like a bonus action is or something.

Mariah: Have you ever taken a shot?.

Alejandra: Then everybody else was like, what if since it's DND and it's fucking a world of magic, you just made, like.

Mariah: Tell me you've never been to a party without telling me you've never been to a party.

Alejandra: Tell me you're a bad time. Without tell me you're a bad time. Just make little concentrated shot potions my guy, and then call it a fucking day.

Mariah: Like, you're saying if I have a corked bottle, a corked glass bottle, that my fucking dragonborn character can't rip that cork out with their teeth.

Alejandra: Like a human sized potion for a giant dragonborn is a shot.

Mariah: Yeah. And I mean, if your character is chaotic enough, I feel like anything can be a shot if you believe in yourself.

Alejandra: And if you've ever been a college girl, you know damn well 6 seconds is nothing.

Mariah: True.

Alejandra: Nothing and nothing.

Mariah: I don't want to talk about the different directions my brain went in.

Alejandra: You'll drink a variety of things in 6 seconds. I'll tell you what.

Mariah: There are moments where I'm glad this is an auditory medium and they can't see our faces because if we ever film this, I'm going to have to get something to hide my face behind.

Alejandra: We'll just be out here like dead mouth. It's so loud.

Mariah: Lord have mercy.

Alejandra: Oh, man. No.

Mariah: Yeah. I have a healthy amount of that as well, of like, it's my game, I'll do what I want. And like, listen. I've also had experiences where people don't understand the rules and so they try to sort of Napoleon complex their way through and pull in nonsense that makes no sense.

Alejandra: You still need the rules and mechanics because you do need the structure.

Mariah: But I think there's a good balance between letting it be fun and fantastical and all of that without just having no structure at all. And I think that's where for role play things yeah. Let people, if they can if you can role play it, go for it.

Alejandra: If you can sit here and phoenix write your way to a conclusion.

Mariah: You can't just dictate it to me, like not writing a novel.

Alejandra: You can tell me what you want to do and I'll agree to give you a chance to do it.

Mariah: And I think that encourages better roleplay, too.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: Because it incentivizes it for them. With combat stuff, I'm like, all right, your weapons do what they do. Your spells do what they do.

Alejandra: Yes.

Mariah: There are casting restrictions for a reason. Like all of that jazz.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: But outside of that, go for it. Also, like flavoring the spells and how it looks or manifest is so fun. We started doing that in our previous campaign, and we've really gone off the deep end with it now. And it's very, very cool.

Alejandra: I mean, especially in in a setting where you are at a magical university and all the different colleges. And this is what I love about Strixhaven, is that when I first picked it, or we picked it as a thing that we were going to do, I did some research and there's a lot of people that have certain emotions about Strixhaven and the story and its lack of luster and things like that. But I looked into it, and I'll agree in the sense that I've read through a lot of the story that is in it already. And I feel like, yeah, there's missed opportunities with certain things that they introduce that they never really do much with. And the main plot is a little lackluster for me.

Alejandra: And in the initial part of us starting to play and I was very much like, going according to the book, I still use it as a structure for how our school year is going, the classes taking example to that, it's great for all of the mechanics of school in it. I like and I've added to them in how to structure our days. Because also one thing it lacks is giving you a way to sort through time spent between those main points in the story. It'll just go like, here's the written part of the event that happened. And then it goes like, I don't know, anywhere from like two to four weeks happens in between. And then this thing happens that's actually.

Mariah: Really similar with the Fall of London of it's like, you're given events that can go in any order. Like, they give an order, they're like, you don't have to do it in this if you don't want to. There's a kickoff thing that you do because you need to meet certain people for everything to make sense. But then it's like, okay, you can run this in any order. And it'll have different effects. Like, if you get in combat early versus if you get in combat later. If you meet these people at the beginning, you hear their side versus if you hear it later. But yeah, you can build around that.

Alejandra: That, yeah, is interesting. And I think I've gotten to a point where I like our structure. I like how we do we have ample moments of like, these are the activities you can select during your classroom hours. Then there is downtime activities and then we'll go into plot stuff.

Mariah: It's also think of because we have a smaller party. Yeah, you have a lot of time for our characters to interact. And for us each to do our own plot stuff and it not feel like it's dragging.

Alejandra: And it gives a lot of time for that. Like you were saying, describing your style of magic and how it manifests and what it looks like. And it really helps you connect with that character and really think through why does their magic look this way?

Mariah: And you can drop little hints and things about secrets or characters.

Alejandra: I love those little kernels of good storytelling.

Mariah: I love what we were able to do. Last session with my baby and her trauma.

Alejandra: We've started on the trauma and yeah, I think, like you were saying in that how you said, you're not as worried about not knowing enough about the plot of the game itself yet for Vampire the

Masquerade, I learned pretty quickly that I can plan as much as I till the cows come home. But ultimately, at the end of the day, and I think this is a commonality with any DM that the players dictate the story.

Mariah: Sometimes we'll spend 2 hours making a host club.

Alejandra: Sometimes we spend 2 hours making a fucking host club and I can throw half my itinerary out the window.

Mariah: I guess we're doing this next month.

Alejandra: Yeah, but it's still so fun.

Mariah: But it's great. Yeah.

Alejandra: And now I've got it down to a point where I'm like, I know the big picture, the PowerPoint of the main things that we're going to hit, but everything in between that I am fully just handing to you as the player and just seeing what happens. I am the recipient of your narrative and telling you what comes of that.

Mariah: You are the conductor.

Alejandra: Truly.

Mariah: Do you think that the Strixhaven book, because I've obviously not read it, but that they wrote it the way they wrote it to give opportunities to embellish? Or do you think it was genuinely like they wrote it and they were like, this is the thing we want it to be, and it was lackluster.

Alejandra: I think. From my understanding, Strixhaven is made in partnership with, I believe it's Hearthstone.

Mariah: So Strixhaven is a hearthstone thing?

Alejandra: Vaguely, or no, it's a Hearthstone — It's Magic The Gathering. I played magic very briefly. Nobody read me on this. I'm sorry.

Mariah: I know nothing about Magic The Gathering It seems like you have to deal with a lot of cards.

Alejandra: Strixhaven is like, a thing in Magic the Gathering and part of that universe.

Mariah: Interesting.

Alejandra: Strixhaven is a TTRPG like partnership with Magic the Gathering to bring that kind of to life and let people play in that space.

Mariah: It's like a version of it.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: I don't know that, that's interesting.

Alejandra: Yeah. So literally, a lot of our characters and NPCs and things that we're interacting with in the places and the spells and the whatever are cards in Magic the Gathering. Like, you could go and get a fucking Valentine card. Granted, it's not my Valentine that I've now flavored differently.

Mariah: You really did.

Alejandra: But you can definitely I think the Lisette card is the card art is the art I'm using for Lisette, the Dean of Growth.

Mariah: Interesting.

Alejandra: So that is something. And so as far as how they structured it, from my opinion. I think they chose a narrative stuck with it and they just didn't flesh it out more, add more things to it.

Mariah: It's that crossover that didn't turn into as rich as it could be.

Alejandra: It's kind of just like, hey, if for funsies you wanted to take a quick little summer trip to Strixhaven and play around there, you could. But it's not super, super fleshed out, in my opinion.

Mariah: That makes more sense knowing it was abridged from yeah, because there's some crossover of gunslinger classes and stuff from Critical Role, which was originally Pathfinder and this is just like some of that. Okay, these are weird mechanics. They're not really somewhere else. Okay. This actually comes from pathfinder.

Speaker C: Yeah.

Mariah: Okay, that makes sense.

Alejandra: So they adapted a lot of things from the Magic the Gathering strip statement stuff into DND mechanic stuff.

Mariah: Okay.

Alejandra: That makes made some rules to make it happen and whatever. So I think it's just a little lackluster in that it was that partnership to make this happen as a fun thing and not like a truly dedicated DND module. But I still think DND is what you make it. And just because a module is not fun to the entirety of the DND community does not mean you cannot find your fun and take the things that resonate and leave the rest. For all the tarot readers in the audience.

Mariah: But yeah, even just having the mechanics for a magical college alone was helpful is really valuable because you can take that and reskin it a thousand different ways.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: And now you don't have to make that up because God forbid you had to be a school administrator for Fantasy College.

Alejandra: God forbid.

Mariah: No, I'm good. I'm all the way good, thank you..

Alejandra: And I think that goes to say, for example, if there are people that have been players for a long time, or even people that have never played and wish to play now, being on the other side of it, the initial barrier to entry, and then feeling like, I don't know how to run this game. I don't know how to do this. I don't know if I'm qualified to DM for people. I think now being on the other side of it and knowing how much freedom there is and also the same way there is structure offered for people. I think genuinely it's something they like to use anybody and everybody should try to pick up at some point and it's not as intimidating once you're on the other side.

Mariah: Well, it's also like I remember the title of the book now. Candle keep mysteries. I have that because I would still like to run something out of it. That book is all one shots. It goes from really early levels to when you're like big boy, like 16 level bebopping around whatever we're doing in there. But

that can be a cool little way to test the waters too. If you don't want to deep dive into like a whole campaign.

Alejandra: Yeah, and I think we've had that structure in the way of like for our previous campaign, we started with a one shot just to test the dynamics of the group. It worked. We started a campaign around it. And then I kind of did a similar thing in that I had you all do a one shot for the orientation thing where you all got to pick your clubs and explore the campus a little bit. And we had two other players previously who had never played, so it was really a moment to sit down and be like, does this work? Do these dynamics work? And then when it does, you just move into the campaign or you don't. If it didn't work, it's fine and you can try again with something else.

Mariah: Yeah, absolutely.

Alejandra: Well, yeah, we're at the end of our little episode.

Mariah: Good little chat.

Alejandra: I hope you enjoyed it. We are going to talk about several other topics and probably ramble about many a thing.

Mariah: We made a nice little schedule saying we're going to talk about this for an hour and this for an hour and this for an hour. And it's like, no we're going to ramble for four.

Alejandra: We are going to ramble for four.

Mariah: Absolutely.

Alejandra: I'm like, you get a sprinkle of structure and then the rest is what I find out. If that's not DND, I don't know what is DND and TTRPG, but thank you so much for listening. We look forward to having you on the next one and I hope you guys have a good day.

Mariah: Bye.

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