

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 girlies.

Mariah: Quick PSA from post-production Mariah. This episode will center on our experience with lines and veils, and how we maintain emotional safety while telling great stories. Content warning for brief, topical mentions of suicide and self-harm from 1:55 – 2:50. Please feel free to skip this section if it might be triggering for you. Enjoy the show!

Alejandra: And we're rolling.

Mariah: Ready Freddy?

Alejandra: Ready Freddy. Perfect. Well, welcome back to table talk. Thank you so much for for enjoying our shenanigans enough to listen to us ramble some more of our nonsense.

Mariah: Your regularly scheduled nonsense.

Alejandra: You're regularly scheduled nonsense with your favorite tabletop roleplay girlies.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: So actually, I think this episode we kind of discuss. We wanted to talk a little bit about lines and veils as something that you encounter at the table, which is something that I got introduced to by that mutual friend that we both shared because I don't think I had that happen in my first game that I ever played. But we've definitely had varying degrees of encounters of DMs that have never heard of lines and veils DMs that highly encourage. It what happens when they are in use. When they're not in use.

Mariah: And I think we've had different levels and we both now have policies about that being an explicit discussion that we take in our own games and games we play in and all of that for sure.

Alejandra: And just in case there's anybody listening, also, like many DMs I've encountered that haven't heard about it before yes, lines and veils in the TTRPG space are like a discussion you have with your players prior to starting the game where you discuss things that they may not want to encounter in a roleplay scenario. Things that might be triggering, things that could be addressed, but maybe don't go into detail. So that's where lines are. Lines are hard lines in the sand.

Mariah: Lines we aren't crossing, we're not going to touch it.

Alejandra: Veils are things that I can see, but do not want to interact with it too much.

Mariah: Or like, it can be a topic, it can exist world, it can be a thing that happens "off screen", but I don't want to role play it. I'll out myself and use my example. One of mine is graphic depictions of suicide.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And where it's like, is that a part of life? Is it something that happens to real people? Absolutely. And I don't need that erased necessarily, but I also don't need it to be like a central thing. I am not going to role-play a suicide scene or sit through the roleplay of a suicide scene if it happens off camera again or it's like.

Alejandra: Alluded to or something like that.

Mariah: Yeah, it's just like we're not going to sit here and have like a 13 Reasons Why moment where we go step by step detailed through it and I won't even get on that soapbox because I'm a psych major with depression and I'm not going to go there and why that's problematic.

Alejandra: For sure, it's something that's, in my opinion, deeply, deeply important and fundamental. When you start playing in these spaces and when you maybe have never played before, it's hard to imagine why that might be necessary.

Mariah: So it's a whole weird thing. I feel like I've thought about it as we've entered the new campaign with the newer DM and player who hadn't really had that conversation before. And, in general, is a bit of an odd thing to be like, hey, so we just met. We're going to play a fun little storytelling game, tell we're going to roll some dice. But before we do, what I need us all to do — what I need you to be cool with and responsive to is we're going to go through a list of things and if it bugs you, can you raise your hand?

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: That's just as a concept is odd. And the way I like to do it, and I think you're the same is we.

Alejandra: Actually have a list, we have a physical list.

Mariah: And I think for Vampire the Masquerade, which I will start running soon, I'm going to have a more expansive list than we even have run before, and probably a bit more detailed, just because

even though we know each other quite well of them, when you get to the nitty gritty of where are the lines on what we're cool?

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: And because the new campaign we just joined is like an eldritch horror campaign. Your campaign is not a horror campaign, but it's always good to know.

Alejandra: It's good to know. That doesn't mean that there won't be dangerous situations that you'll be put in that could broach those subjects.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: And it's always good to have on hand to know your limitations because as a DM, your priority is to make sure that everybody's having fun and everybody's comfortable.

Mariah: And that you as the DM are also comfortable. And that you're not having to narrate anything that is triggering for you, or that's bad for your brain, or just not good. And there's a line between a traumatic thing happening to my character and just being a bit of a masochist when it comes to that, just living for the trauma. And then also something that actually touches on things that you, as a person, have experienced that we're not trying to bring up.

Alejandra: Sure, as much as DND is also an outlet for trauma.

Mariah: We're not doing like your big T trauma. And I think it's a thing where we go through and if it's a group of friends and you're fairly comfortable, it is pretty easy to just go through the list and someone will raise their hand when needed. It's thing of like, you don't have to tell us why, just be like, I'd rather not. Or we'll kind of like, stop light it, and it's like red light, yellow light.

Alejandra: Yeah. The traffic light systems. I think Alyssa has soccer cards.

Mariah: She does. She has, like, a red card and a yellow card.

Alejandra: A red card and a yellow card that she will use sparingly. Whatever. Anyway, it's being dumb.

Mariah: Yes. Sometimes it's a joke, and sometimes for serious reasons

Alejandra: Then there's serious moments for it. But yeah, it's a super important thing to do and kind of in line with how we're starting this. It should be one of the first things that you encounter when you're entering that space.

Mariah: And I think with our experiences with the past campaign that you, me, Alyssa, and Bex played in with that past DM and a few other players, it was a Ravenloft campaign.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And so it was implicitly horror and also kink. Because why not, right?

Alejandra: Because we're fucked up hoes, and we're not going to dig into why. We were like, oh, is this a scary campaign with horror elements?

Mariah: Yes.

Alejandra: What if it was also horny?

Mariah: This is for me.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: This is because the kink community and the DND community... that vendiagram is a circle.

Alejandra: It's a goddamn circle.

Mariah: It's the thing where our DM knew everybody at the table really well.

Alejandra: Yes.

Mariah: And so he implicitly knew what our triggers were, I think, at a general level. Just because he knew us.

Alejandra: Because of the discussions we just had in general.

Mariah: And just like the friendship that we had had individually with him, but we did not know each other's triggers or things that could set each other off. And also, to be fair, there are sometimes niche things that come up that may have never come up, or you didn't even think about until you were in the moment. Or there's something that happened to you in the past that you just don't really talk about. So, that campaign didn't go poorly, we managed it fine. But looking back toward the end of campaign and after we left and when I was thinking about how I would want to run my own table that was not super responsible of any of us to do.

Alejandra: I think especially given the context of like I think lines and veils are more important in games where you are exploring those horror settings. And then even triple so because we were also adding an element of kink to ours. Although, yeah, like you said, some of us were brand new. Like, we had just met, started that campaign. You and I were friends for a while, but I don't think we had really gotten into crazy conversations about triggers or anything like that.

Mariah: Not really. I mean, we knew the big ones, but it's like yeah, it's not really a conversation we're like, hey, so what's your list of traumatic things that have happened? That's not really something that most people do..

Alejandra: You just talk about overcomplicate.

Mariah: And maybe some people do it, but you and I are also too bad at being vulnerable with people and relying on people to have that conversation.

Alejandra: You can use our inside voice. Don't need to come for me like that...in your home.

Mariah: We're the same bitch in different fonts. So, yeah, we knew some things, but it's just not a really thing where it's like, all right, prior to having this human interaction, let's hash everything out.

Alejandra: So yeah, I agree in the sense that on everybody involved in that scenario, we could have had a formal conversation. Although, albeit it never got to a point of extreme discomfort, we managed.

Mariah: And the DM was good at catching things and stopping when we needed to. And people are also good at removing themselves if that scene was not for them. We still handled it well and handled it safely, but it's just like it's a thing of the principle of it looking back and just as a best practice, that was sort of an edge case campaign where it's like we were playing with some dark stuff, which I love. I've never made an emotionally stable character in my life.

Alejandra: We live for it in this house.

Mariah: But going along with that, there's a level of care I think, that should be taken. And it's not like, again, psychology major, like this my bread and butter. It's a responsibility thing.

Alejandra: Yeah, absolutely. And I also think even beyond just the element of discussing triggers or what have you at the table, it also kind of sets a tone for open communication with you and your players, especially in cases where you're like, some of us don't know each other this well. And like you said, some of us. I'm not going to look at any reflective surfaces in this moment. Don't like being vulnerable with people.

Mariah: No, it's also me. I've been in therapy for years. I'll say that with my whole chest.

Alejandra: That they don't know or they're not super familiar with, but it does help kind of open up that channel, I think.

Mariah: And that sort of sets that precedent of what communicating looks like. I've had awkward moments, or times where I've uncomfortable with something. Do I say it at the table? Of course not, because I am anxious and have historically a fawn response. But you have that precedent of, like, okay, even if you don't say it in the moment, you feel safe to talk about it later..

Alejandra: And just address it at some point with the other players in the DM at your own comfort level.

Mariah: And I think the fact that if you can address it casually and be like, hey, this is, like, a thing we're going to do, it's not a big deal.

Alejandra: It's not a big deal.

Mariah: I'm not trying to get everybody's life story.

Alejandra: We can pivot once accordingly.

Mariah: But yeah, I want to know what we're comfortable with and what we're not.

Alejandra: Yeah. It's something definitely like and sometimes I think, like you mentioned where sometimes you don't realize that there are things that are going to bother you until they come up. Sometimes it's not even just about triggers. Sometimes you're like, I need a reality check on this particular scene because it's a little intense.

Mariah: That's also an interesting thing. Bleed over, which is definitely a thing of, like, DND is effectively improv. And so, in theater communities and improv communities, bleed over is talked about and addressed really proactively, but it's talked about less openly in DND, I think, just because we're not quite there yet. Like yeah, it's improv, but it's not, like, thrown under necessarily that same umbrella.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: When people don't think of tabletop roleplay games in the same as, like, going to an improv class, and we're going to yell at each other over our fictional mother's trauma. I don't know...I've never taken an improv class.

Alejandra: Although it probably would be super great.

Mariah: It would probably be so much fun.

Mariah: But having that way of being able to check yourself, and as the DM check in with the players, the players, the players checking in with each other or whatever, being like, okay, we just role played something pretty intense, an intense argument or whatever. And it's like, all right, something didn't go the way we want it to. And the characters are frustrated, and maybe the people are also frustrated.

Alejandra: Sometimes you are frustrated as a player about the in-character decisions being made at the table.

Mariah: And so there's that moment to be like, okay, was that fight a fight in character, or was it also kind of a fight in person? And if it was like, we're human, emotions bleed over, that's okay. But, are we good? Or do we need to take a few minutes and reality check a little bit, parse back out and be like,

okay, this is me, Mariah, the person that is controlling this character, and this is the character and what their motivations are and their feelings and their reactions, which are not mine.

Alejandra: And the lines and veil discussion, I think sets that tone really early to have those conversations be capable of being had in game, out of game, pre, post, whatever.

Mariah: It makes check ins really normal.

Alejandra: And as you start getting into that space, like, I don't give a fuck who you think you are. I don't give a fuck if you made this character five minutes ago and you named them Boblin the Goblin. You will find that at some level, you've inserted yourself into that character. It might not be all of you. It might be a little portion of you.

Mariah: Whether you do it consciously or unconsciously.

Alejandra: Whether you do it consciously or unconsciously, I don't care if you didn't have a backstory for this character before you even started rolling some dice. As the story progresses, at some point, you're inserting a part of yourself in here.

Mariah: Something is subconsciously driving it.

Alejandra: And then it can happen so quickly where somebody makes a statement about your character. You're like, that's a statement about me. And someone just opened the door in the house right. And whacked me with a baseball match over my head.

Mariah: Yeah. It's very interesting. And I am somebody where I like to play dark characters, and I like to play with the darker elements of humanity through tabletop role playing. Hence why I'm running vampire the masquerade. We are a consistent brand, but in that I have to also be very responsible and accountable to myself and communicative with people I'm playing with. I'm good stepping into this, but I'm also aware that I might be opening myself up to feeling some not great feelings. And that's okay, but I have to prepare for that, and I am very big on being accountable.

Alejandra: I think there's accountability for both the players and the DM, respectively, because you have to look out for your own interests as well.

Mariah: Absolutely. And it's hard, like, or it seems to be hard as a DM. I've seen DMs take a moment pause and be like, is everything okay? Or whatever. And just the feeling in the air is that everything is definitely not okay. And then someone's like, no, yeah, I'm fine. It's like, I understand that impulse also to be like, I just had a moment where it's like, if someone had asked me, I would have wanted to disappear into thin air because it's like, I'm not okay, but I'm also not going to talk about it right now.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And so it's like, that's a hard push and pull, and both sides are understandable. If you can create that culture where it's very easy and nonchalant, almost talk about, like, this is what might come up for me, then in those moments where it is charged for you emotionally, you can still, like, you're not nonchalant about it, but you can still communicate the things that you need to communicate to keep yourself safe emotionally, to keep other people emotionally safe, to continue having fun.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: I mean, at the end of the day, it is a game. It is a hobby.

Alejandra: It is a game, and it is a hobby, and it shouldn't have to be that serious.

Mariah: Yeah, it's not that deep.

Alejandra: It's not that deep. And no, I remember, for example, we go back to the kink campaign because it's a really good example of this. And also, I think, on the note of the self-insert and people opening doors and me looking at myself in ways that I didn't think about before. It was a kink campaign, but before we had decided there would be kink elements, I had already made my character, and I was already too invested in the story behind this character that I was like, I'm not going to switch it up now because I really like this and she was already integrated with a big NPC in the campaign.

Mariah: You already invested in her.

Alejandra: I was already invested.

Mariah: You had the pinterest board.

Alejandra: I had the pinterest boards, the Playlists, the maladaptive daydreaming long drives.

Mariah: We can't yeah.

Alejandra: Can't go back. It's locked now. And just entering that campaign and then we ran into a little bit of an issue in that the DM was having a hard time conceptualizing intimacy with a robot because my character was a little war forge.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: And I was like, Homie, if you need me to send you source material, I'd have it plenty.

Mariah: I can give you what you need.

Alejandra: I can give everything you need. And we can finesse whatever you need me to finesse. Does she need to have attachments?

Mariah: We need to have a very specific shop that she visits, a very specific vendor? What do you need from me to get this going?

Alejandra: But unfortunately, it was just something we could not find common ground on. And as I started playing her, I would say she was the first time I played a character outside of my comfort zone. Like, truly a character that I was not, at the time I thought, not self-inserted, because normally I play pretty promiscuous and sexually forward, confident characters because that is just the kind of person I am in real life, and it's very easy for me to tap into, and it's fun. Who doesn't love a horny Bard? But ironically enough, made, like, an asexual bard robot. And so I was like, okay, one, I'm having to play someone that doesn't express or emote a lot. And then two, me and my DM are not finding ways for her to be intimate. So I can't build anything, and I also cannot find it in myself. As I started playing the character to find ways to justify her being sexual.

Mariah: Because there are a ton of different ways to play a war forge.

Speaker C: Yeah.

Mariah: But with Cadence, your character in that campaign, you did kind of get pigeonholed into a very specific thing —through no fault of, like, yours or the DMs or anything.

Alejandra: I got kind of locked.

Mariah: And if there's anything wrong with playing a pretty celibate ace character.

Alejandra: It's just something I would never I had never done before. And I was having a hard time kind of you didn't really plan for. And I was having a hard time kind of stepping into the suit of my character and realizing how to play her.

Mariah: And because of that miscommunication, you couldn't make the bigger shifts you maybe would have needed to make with Cadence. Like, ok she got a software update, and she can literally something I find something that.

Alejandra: Could help me justify it to get her in there.

Mariah: And so that sort of you felt more locked in.

Alejandra: I felt pretty trapped and locked in. And then I also had just a moment of realization that I was going through this whole as much of a sexual being that I am that also, in turn, causes people to sexualize you often. And then I was having these realizations about all these characters that I've played so far, and I was like, oh, I self inserted in a way that I wasn't prepared for. And I was like, I'm more aware and realizing that I'm having a hard time playing Cadence because I don't know how to work in an environment where I'm not using sex as a power or being sexualized. And I was like, oh, no, I.

Mariah: Need to take a lap.

Alejandra: Listen, that's a hardcore realization for me. And I was like, I need to step away. I remember having the conversation with that DM about that realization, and he was like, that sounds like something you need to work through, Chief.

Mariah: That seems like something for a mental health professional.

Alejandra: You are correct.

Mariah: And that's an interesting thing where sometimes you can have those realizations and then still be cool to play that character, and sometimes you can have those things and be like, all right, I love things about this character. Once you had a different plan, you were able to kind of drop what you felt was shackling you a bit and just have fun with Cadence and final days. But it is that thing of like, all right, it would be better and healthier and lighter for me to step back from this. And now I have this information that I wasn't prepared to glean, and I'll.

Alejandra: Deal with that in my own outside time.

Mariah: That is not at a table with six other human souls.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: In a fantasy world.

Alejandra: That's something I need to take responsibility for outside of here.

Mariah: We'll do some journaling. We'll fucking find a prompt for it. I don't know, but we're not going.

Alejandra: To do goes and pays for a whole therapist. And I'm like, I am going to sit here and tell you about every DND character I've made up until this point, and we're going to talk about it because yeah, one of our players, Alyssa, genuinely does that.

Mariah: And I had to do it in my last therapy session. I had to go in. I'm like, I told you I played DND, right? Yeah, and she does not. So I was like, cool. I'm going to have to explain this in a way where I give you the information that you need clinically to make a conclusion, but I don't just go off in the weeds of explaining how spell casting works because that's not relevant.

Alejandra: That's not what we're talking about here.

Mariah: So it's always interesting.

Alejandra: But it is something that it made me have a realization about all the feature characters that I was making, but also in turn, I started exploring that self-insert in different ways. Now I kind of parse out a little bit of, like, what part of me am I going to throw in here?

Mariah: I like to do that too.

Alejandra: And it's really helped me explore, like, different parts of my personality that don't rely on just solely that one part.

Mariah: That's why I like to play with the darker stuff, because it's things where, like, the person I am and the values that I have, there's a ton of things I would never have any desire to do. But you have those little intrusive thoughts, and so it's like, well, what if I took this intrusive thought and I made a person around that and they gave themselves permission to be a monster? What then? And that's interesting to play with. And it's interesting as someone like, I think I have a weird ability to psychoanalyze myself and be abstract about it.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And mine is definitely from this psych background, too, which is probably of arguably not healthy, according to therapist. Stop doing that. But yeah, it's an interesting, fun little thing of like, you can look at yourself in abstract almost in a way that's kind of cool.

Alejandra: Yeah, it is super cool and introspective and something that you don't really realize when you're like, I just signed up to play fan, like make believe with a bunch of adults when our schedule is lined up and the Google Calendar invite was accepted.

Mariah: We both, I think, have characters where we just show up. We sign on to discord, we show up at the table, and we roll dice. And I have my rogue character. I'm like, she stabs a lot. I like rolling that sneak attack.

Alejandra: I love the good good damage.

Mariah: Good maraca shake of all those damage dice. It's good for my brain. And yeah, I have ideas. I've talked to that DM, and there's other things I could do with her character, but I like that that campaign is more light and that it's more just about be bebopping around a fantasy world and it isn't super plot heavy and emotional and it's not like a hyper fixation. As opposed to the Strixhaven campaign, we leave the table and for the next month or until we play again.

Alejandra: Your mind is reeling about the possibility.

Mariah: I'm like action characters. ABCDEF and G are involved in this and what's their perspective? How are they going to react? How is this going to set off a chain of reactions? And I'm texting you about NPCs. And we're, not in a meta gamey way, but just in a like we both need the stimulus.

Alejandra: I need something to carry me through until a month later.

Mariah: Sit down. I need to get like a lay of the land as the player so I can know what my character is sitting in and I can orient appropriately.

Alejandra: 100%. Yeah, it's always that good gets to me. And then I think taking it back, I know we fucking rambled, but we fully did.

Mariah: I definitely had a moment where I was like, fuck, this episode supposed to be a lines and veils and we're gone. We're out in the fields and the veils did veil and we're in the back 40.

Alejandra: But I can't see the road. I think, thinking it back to that. Lines and veils and then also opening lines of communication. I had an experience with a DM for an online campaign where when we first started, he was a new DM. That was his first campaign he was starting with. And I remember these are also people that I've never met only playing online. I've got names and that's it. And I think we were in a dungeon or something and there just kept being situations where I was like, maybe.

Mariah: I didn't agree with this ruling, but.

Alejandra: He's a first time DM and I'm going to let it ride. But then there was a point where I think I was also still what I would consider relatively new to DND. And so, I would say where I'm good with role play. At the time, I was not very good at combat or like strategizing my turn.

Mariah: And I will say, like, our mutual friend DM almost acted kind of like a director.

Alejandra: A director.

Mariah: Yeah, that DM for the Ravenloft campaign and then the campaign before that where you and I met, was very forgiving about mechanical stuff. He adhered to rules, in a way, but he had certain things that he just didn't like. He didn't like touch healing. So it's like all healing was AOE healing.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: And then so you go to other DMs and, who are like that OP as fuck, and you're like, I....

Alejandra: Got spoiled a little.

Mariah: And it's like, well, because our DM was annoyed by the concept of touch healing. So he's like, fuck it. I do what I. Want, but other DMs don't do that. So, you have to treat each game as it's own thing.

Alejandra: DM, individually because yeah, sometimes you get a little bit spoiled with the home rules in your game. So I was, like, trying to take a step back and be like, this is a different DM. These are different rules.

Mariah: And I was like, you don't know these people.

Alejandra: I don't know these people. And he is just starting to DM, so I don't want to we're online.

Mariah: So you can't see tone, you can't see facial express.

Alejandra: So there's lots of factors going into it. But I remember there was a point where, like I said, I was not super great at strategizing my turn or understanding the action economy kind of thing or all of my own abilities. Yet this is a class I haven't played before, and I made some decisions that, in retrospect, are pretty stupid. Like, now, knowing what I know, but I was taking the perspective of me playing a video game versus me playing D and D. And I think I was trying to do something to the element of kiting the enemies through a hallway and creating, like, a bottleneck situation. And I was the first one to go, and so I did that. And so he made kind of a comment about, like, okay, well, Valendra has opted to just be in this corner and hide and not do anything with her turn. Pretty much, yeah. It was, like, a little underhanded comment.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: It hit me weird. And in retrospect, now knowing what I know, what I didn't know then is, like, I was a real good assassin. Knowing I was first in initiative, order.

Mariah: And knowing that DM is now as a person, you can sort of interpret it better with his tone and his humor style.

Alejandra: But in the moment, it hit me wrong. And our old DM was also a player in that campaign. So I remember DMing him in the moment and being like, am I crazy or did that kind of suck?

Mariah: Is it fair that that irked me?

Alejandra: And he was like, I can see why that would irritate you or the tone of it. He's like, just talk to him about it. But I had the nerves of and you know me.

Mariah: You're one of the more outspoken women that I know. And I mean that genuinely. Through my friendship with you, I've done so much good shit for my confidence and just my ability to be less hard on myself and love myself more and all that. You are not generally a person that.

Alejandra: Is afraid of conflict.

Mariah: Right, exactly.

Alejandra: Is a nice way to say it.

Mariah: You're not confrontational. But it's just like you aren't averse to conflict if it's necessary.

Alejandra: But I do have a moment of one. It was, like, insecurity in my own ability and knowledge in the game and then being called out on it and being called out on it and by a person that I don't know felt shitty. And also now I'm having to confront this person about it in a way that I don't know this man. And also, I'm, like, the only woman in the party.

Mariah: I was about to say, I thought you were the only woman at the time.

Alejandra: At the time.

Mariah: And you were the newest party member.

Alejandra: The newest party member by a lot. Like, all these guys have played with each other for a while. And I was just like, this new girl coming in. And there is a level of that kind of carried over insecurity from my gaming days of the reason I don't play online.

Mariah: Like, being in the servers.

Alejandra: Yeah, and men talking shit about my ability because I suck. And I'm like, well, I don't get the opportunity to learn because you're yelling. I'm getting yelled at by twelve year olds about how I'm 300 pounds and ugly and, like, random shit like that.

Mariah: I know I'm bad. I accept that. I'm bad at videos.

Alejandra: And so it was an element of, like, I think a lot of that was getting brought back up for me. And I think that falls in that, like, things you didn't expect would bother you, and then they come up in the moment. And I eventually did, I think, after the game was done, because it kind of set a sour tone for me for the rest of the game.

Mariah: I remember you messaging me. You texted me after you all finish playing that session. And you're like, this happened. And I was like, no, that's valid. Because I also didn't know much about them. I met, like, one of the guys very briefly, but I feel like I know these people. I'm like, yeah, just objectively that would have also bugged me.

Alejandra: But I approached him. I let him know, and we had a good conversation about it, and I didn't even think about it that way. And he's like, I can definitely see why my tone and the comment in the moment, it's not great. And we talked about how also, respectively, he comes from an environment where he only plays with men and the riffing and the roasting is often and frequent.

Mariah: And it's not that you can't hang.

Alejandra: Not that I can't handle it.

Mariah: It's just like if someone doesn't know you and hasn't established that friendship and that repour then they kind of haven't earned the right.

Alejandra: You have not earned the right to poke the bear.

Mariah: And I kind of have had a similar situation in the campaign with a newer campaign we're currently playing in, where I put my character in a sort of confrontational position. And I knew that going in, but then it turned to be more confrontational than I thought it was. And I'm like, this is hitting some bad things for my brain. And, one, because my expectations were misaligned with what it really is. And that's certainly not the DM's fault. It's honestly really not my fault. Because also, the nature of improv is that you "yes and" your way through it, and things polarize and characters become extreme. Sometimes you think someone's just like a normal dude and then suddenly, he's a whole himbo.

Alejandra: Now, that you've pulled him out.

Mariah: That's a very known and established thing in improv communities. So it's kind of like, okay, why am I feeling like this? And it's weird knowing that you're sitting in this situation playing a game, rolling dice playing a game, and you're like, I'm having an emotional reaction that feels incongruous with what is happening. And I know it's deeper than just this event or this exchange or the way this person is speaking to me. I know the reason that it bothers me is tied to 80 different strings that I can't pull right now, and having to sit there. And for me, I'm sort of, like I sort of just start shutting down when I feel that way because I get frustrated and upset, and then I get anxious and guilty over the fact that I'm frustrated and upset. And then I start masking more and more and more, and then I shut down. I'm like, Please, God, don't perceive me — like role play with anyone else.

Alejandra: Please divert all attention away from me. I am my house plant sitting in this chair.

Mariah: Literally, I was like, if I could become one with the stool I am sitting on, that would be ideal. I need a minute. And so I had to kind of take that and sit with it and parse and be like, okay, this is maybe a situation where, one, my communication style and that DM's communication style are just different. And we don't know each other super well yet, and I'm reactive to certain things and particularly in the way of, like, when it feels like men are being combative with me, it's very easy for that to kind of put me on the back foot and make me bristle even if it's combative in a roleplay sense. Right? Because I thought about, like, I don't have that problem with you. I haven't had that problem with the previous DM, who's a good friend of mine. But it's like well, why? I'm like, okay, well, maybe it's just because I don't know this person that well yet, and that's okay. But I had to do that work of sitting and separating it out and being like, okay, this is practically in the game, what I need. Which was to make a new character and make a weird little creepy way of the long death monk who wears a plague mask and just bops around and collects bones and just have a chiller interpretation with it. And let it ride and see where it goes. And don't feel like I need to bring in a novella of lore for every character I play, which, ironically, I.

Alejandra: Feel like that is your preferred character creation method.

Mariah: Absolutely. And there's a reason. That's why when I decided I wanted to run something, I went to Vampire the Masquerade because it's all character driven and that's why I specifically went to the Camarilla. And why we're doing Falls London is because the court politics and all of the different factions and everyone working against each other and all that jazz.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: I want to sit for hours and build characters and figure out who they are and what has happened in their life and their relationship to other NPCs and to other characters and how they're viewed by different people and how that affects the chain of events. Like, I'm a writer. That's my bread and butter. But you can still have fun just being a little kooky weirdo rolling your dice. And I feel like I should have known that because I have that in another campaign. For some reason, I think my brain was in the mode it's in with your campaign. And it copy pasted when it shouldn't have because I didn't take my own advice and be like, okay, this is a separate thing that I need to approach as its own entity and not try to use another past experience as the mantle by which I judge this.

Alejandra: Exactly. And I think it's also hard in that specific scenario because like we've mentioned before, we play Strixhaven once a month. We play that other campaign in the day after. So you are getting back to back vastly different experiences.

Mariah: Yes, and the game is fun. It's not a bad experience at all. It's just different. And that's okay. That's good, in fact. But yeah, just that thing of, like, I had to sit and identify and parse through and figure out, like, okay, all I really need from my DM is to just play a different character. I'm not in a place where I want to deal with a lot of heavy stuff in that campaign too. And some of it is definitely my own stuff and personal life and work stuff where I've had to deal with men being combative and disrespectful, and it almost became an HR issue. And so I'm also aware of, like, this is a hot button for me right now.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: Because I kind of did walk myself into a room with this character where that's, like, almost entirely all the interactions she's going to have, and I didn't think about that at all. And I'm like, that's fully on me. Yeah, that was my bad. And, okay, let's just hit reset and come at it from a different angle and relax a lot because at the..

Alejandra: End of the day, it's a game. It's a game, it's a hobby. It's not that serious. You're starting to get uncomfortable. Don't think that other people don't go through it. It's a normal experience, and especially when you're delving into parts of your personality that you didn't realize or scenario that you've never encountered before, but are encountering in kind of a fictional sense.

Mariah: Or you're getting thrown for a realization loop where you're having to realize something about yourself or having to figure out why you're feeling some kind of way, it can be very isolating. It's easy to feel like, okay, everybody's having a great time, and I'm the only one that's not. And, that's not to say the feeling isn't valid. And it does feel like that moment, but there's a simple way to fix it.

Alejandra: Absolutely. And I've had similar experiences where I also kind of got into a bad head space at one point. I think I was going through well, I mean, we're not going to get into it, but I was already going through a lot of emotional stress absolutely. Dealing with dynamics with certain people that were at that table. But we love that game so much. And I think there was some pre planned scene for like we were going into a largely roleplay based session where it was us deciding what is our character going to do in this downtime, post a big battle. And me and him, the DM had worked out a lot of details about how that was going to look and the things that were going to happen in that time of her downtime. And it was going to be pretty important, pretty significant for this character. And then we actually get into it. And it's kind of like there's an element of you create the structure of the scene and you know the main points you're going to hit. But we wanted to role play out. Let it be interactions, but we know that it's going to start and end in this trajectory.

Mariah: Yeah. Like, you know you're going to have these concrete abilities, coming out of it.

Alejandra: Exactly. And then I watched him do these scenes with other people, and they were all great scenes. And then we get to mine, and there's a point where we divert from the narrative of what we had discussed.

Mariah: Right.

Alejandra: And I'm kind of looking at him, and it's not going away, watching that.

Mariah: And not really knowing what was going on.

Alejandra: And I was like, well, again, you're trapped in the scene of yes and-ing. And I was like, I mean, you control the world, so I can't dictate outside of this. So I played along with it at first, and I think when the scene concluded, I was like, expecting there to be more, and maybe he just has a different plan for how it's going to happen. And when it didn't, I was like, Is that it? And he's like, yeah. And we moved on. And it threw me into such, like, a bad headspace that I wasn't expecting or ready for. And I think it's when a lot of emotional stresses I was dealing with other stuff, outside factors, and then this happened, and I just kind of got into this headspace of feeling disregarded, and I was like, I had an expectation going into it.

Mariah: And you thought we're like, oh, we did the work, and we communicated, and that's like, I know what's going to happen, and then that didn't happen.

Alejandra: Doing that in an effort with a character that I'm already uncomfortable playing and feeling like I'm not playing to their full potential. So I think that I just got into a little spiral.

Mariah: And it's like, I'm trying, and I feel like my effort discarded a little.

Alejandra: Bit, that feeling of sitting at that table and realizing everybody else is having so much fun. And I am spiraling at the moment very much.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: And so that I think at one point, the person next to me messaged me asking if I was okay because they could tell that something was off. And then I think I messaged him privately during the festive, being like, hey, what happened to this and this and that?

Mariah: I waited until we took a break and asked you because I could tell something was wrong, but I didn't want to ask you in the middle. And then it'd be like and you're.

Alejandra: Like, Ale's going to break down right here, right now.

Mariah: I know you well enough that I'm like, I'll grab you when we take a break and ask.

Alejandra: But then upon messaging him, yes, we had all that discussion pre planned prior to the session, but apparently, he had written a message where he was like, hey, actually, we're not going to do these parts because I want to do those later as a different element of your character development. And he just never sent that message.

Mariah: Right.

Alejandra: It was just left there in the ether. And so I had an expectation he thought he had communicated, and it was just the wires crossed in an inopportune moment.

Mariah: Right. And also thinking of like, you can communicate really well and things like that are still going to happen. We're people.

Alejandra: We are people.

Mariah: No one is infallible.

Alejandra: It is not his fault. It is not my fault. It's its own thing. And so once that happened, I was like, okay, I feel fine with it.

Mariah: It makes sense now.

Alejandra: It makes sense.

Mariah: There was an ADHD moment, and that's understandable, but yeah, this wasn't a weird moment of you giving me less than you were giving to other people or like, you pulling the rug out from under me in some way. I expected a thing, and then I got 50% of it.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: And then it's like, okay, that makes sense. But you still had the emotion and the experience of that feeling bad. And that's fair. And I think that's where it comes back to establishing that culture of open communication. So that you can deal with that and you can take a break and everybody can get snacks or whatever and you can sort out what happened and then kind of be like, okay, straighten it out in your brain and we can keep playing. And it doesn't have to turn into a thing where you spiral so far that you fully shut down.

Alejandra: Yeah. And then at that point you're not having fun. Nobody else is having fun because they realize like you're in a moment and it's having the realization that if you are going through something at that table just because everybody else is having fun does not mean that they would ever want you not have fun for their sake.

Mariah: Yes. And that is hard. It's easy to say that and it's hard to do it in the moment. We've both been there and it's very easy to say, yeah, if there's a problem, of course say something.

Alejandra: Yeah.

Mariah: But then when it's you that has the problem, you're like I am aware that that rule doesn't fully apply to me. I am the exception in all things and you're not. But it's just like I don't want to do something that seems awkward and tense and I don't want to make it weird.

Alejandra: But it's having the knowledge that, okay, perfectly fair. Maybe you're spiraling in the moment at the table and you don't want to ruin the vibe.

Mariah: But after between that session and the next, definitely address it. Don't just let it fester and torture and haunt your soul for the next however long.

Alejandra: Play that campaign and sit your DM down. I know especially for me in my case, I would be horrified to know that any of you had some kind of poor experience, didn't communicate it. And then we're no longer having fun at the table when it could have been something that we could have easily remedied or fixed or pivoted or addressed in whatever way, shape and fashion.

Mariah: Exactly. And I think it's like we are all because the four of us are so close and it's like we're each other's best friends. It's super easy for us to one read each other and know each other and tell when it's an in-character issue versus a personal person issue. And it's a lot easier to, if there were ever any problems, which the chance of that happening is already quite low because you know us so well. It's a lot easier to address that versus where, in most cases, in the cases where if you're not that comfortable and close knit with everybody at the table, even if you're friends, even if you like them, maybe they're new or maybe you're not bonded like that. And more often than not, situations are going to come up where even like little things a disagreement over should it be an action to take a potion versus a bonus action and is that the hill to die on.

Alejandra: Are we now in a Mexican standoff across table?

Mariah: And if your DM is like, no, it really should take an action because that cork is sealed in there, then it's like, all right, if I can take some action, fine, but it's still worth talking about.

Alejandra: Yeah. And I think also in the respect of establishing that comfy communication. With Strixhaven, for example, prior to it being just three of you all, we had those two other players and they were brand baby spanking new.

Mariah: Oh, yeah, brand spanking new. The table was set up with you, then one of them was you and me,

Alejandra: Need one of you babies on either side of me.

Mariah: And then becks and yeah. So it's like we're sandwiched in with.

Alejandra: Like, experienced players and Mama DM like, you are cocooned. And I also like, you know, when we started and then we had our lines and veil discussion and we also established a lot of house rules. I implemented nonverbal ways to have timeouts.

Mariah: Which I like a lot because those.

Alejandra: Two people, respectively, I knew, have a lot of social anxiety.

Mariah: I also have a lot.

Alejandra: In a new space where you're like.

Mariah: I'm role playing for the first time. And this is nerve wracking. With new people. And I want to do well and I want to be fun and to get along.

Alejandra: I wanted to establish and let them know that if you don't want to interrupt a scene because social anxiety, but it is encroaching on things that you might be uncomfortable with, like, there is a nonverbal cue, I think, for us, we just use like a physical with your hand that you could do. And I asked other players at the table to also help hold to that in that if I'm in the scene and I don't see this person making a tee with their hands, somebody else that is comfortable voicing. It knows you a bit more like, hey, time out real quick. Or they also make a tea until everyone at the table is making a tea. And you're like, okay, this is now. Yeah, we are all tea posing at the table and levitating. And you're like, okay, maybe we pause a scene. But I wanted to implement those things because you have to take into account that some people have a harder time.

Mariah: Yeah, it's tough and it's so easy to overthink that and it's so easy to be like, well, it would be simpler and smoother and just more fun for the other people if I don't stop and have this conversation about this thing that's bugging me and whether that's in a session, whether that's between sessions, whatever. But if you don't address the thing, it doesn't just suddenly not become a problem.

Alejandra: Exactly.

Mariah: And even if you can kind of rationalize it to yourself and put it away, it's still going to affect the level of comfort and vulnerability you can reach with those other players with the DM. And not to say that you have to just gut yourself at every table. Everybody does not have to do that.

Alejandra: Do not have to bear your fucking soul.

Mariah: By no means. And arguably you shouldn't. Everyone doesn't need to know everything about you. That's one of my big soapboxes of just like, this is a fun little message from my almost 28 years of circling the Earth, you can have different levels of relationship with people, and that is healthy and good. But if you want it to ever kind of go a bit deeper, then it's even more important to be able.

Alejandra: To have that have that communication, have those lines of established communication and know where the walls are in the play pen for sure. And keep that separation in hand. Yeah. Super important. And at the end of the day, it's just a fucking game. It's just a fucking game. It's just a hobby. And it's not that serious.

Mariah: We got 53 minutes. I thought we weren't going to get a full hour out of this.

Alejandra: Here we are.

Mariah: I don't know why I doubted us, but I was like, we're going to start and then we started going on tangents. And I'm like, no, we got it.

Alejandra: I told you. I told you the tangents fill the void.

Mariah: It's locked in.

Alejandra: We got it 100%. And it's the entire reason why we started this. Because I was like, I have full confidence that you and I could sit here for twelve fucking hours.

Mariah: Yeah.

Alejandra: Just going this is just our just rolling, rolling. Well, regardless, we're at the end, and I hope you enjoyed this little safety talk.

Mariah: You love to see it, practicing what we preach and getting it out there in the second episode.

Alejandra: Yeah, getting it out there in the second episode. Establish the good rule and then get into the fucking wacky scenarios and the shennannery.

Mariah: All the fun stuff.

Alejandra: All the fun stuff. Well, thank you so much. I hope you enjoyed it and we hope to see you next time.

Mariah: Bye bye.

Alejandra: Table Talk is a podcast brought to you by Mythos Media Productions, bringing you a new episode every Wednesday. Wherever you get your podcast, find us on Instagram and TikTok at tabletalk RPG or check us out at our website, mythosmediaproductions.godaddysites.com. All business inquiries can reach out to us via email at info@mythosmediaproductions.com.