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PERSON: Welcome to the "Talks at Google" podcast where great minds meet. I'm Matthew, bringing you this week's episode. Talks at Google brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at [YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle](https://www.youtube.com/TalksatGoogle). Travis Willingham, Marisha Ray, and Mathew Mercer discuss the origins of Critical Role, the podcast and company at the forefront of Dungeons & Dragons' modern resurgence. They discuss their approach to creating characters, the benefits of playing D&D with the people you work with, and why they're so damn charitable. You can find more details about Critical Role at www.critrole.com. In conversation with Googler Matthew Prince, here is Travis William, Marisha Ray, and Mathew Mercer, "Critical Role."

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MATTHEW PRINCE: So I kind of want to jump in at just the very start. So how did Critical Role really begin? It grew out of a house game, but how did you take it from that to this massive digital entertainment conglomerate that you are now?

MARISHA RAY: Oh, man. That's a big question.

MATTHEW MERCER: I think we're still figuring that out.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Five words or less.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, God.

MATTHEW MERCER: Felicia Day asked us to. That's how it started. Yeah. We were just playing at home. I've been playing since high school, and I dragged this guy and a few other people who had never played before in for one-shot that turned into a home campaign for a couple years. And then--so a conversation between Ashley Johnson and Felicia at a party, she mentioned this D&D game of voice actors, and they were just ramping up their content on Geek & Sundry. And she went, "Why don't you guys do that on the network?" And we went, "What?"

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: People will watch us play D&D?

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TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, we were more skeptics than anything. We were like, "Nobody's gonna to watch this." We'll do it one time. Like 15 people will watch.

BOTH: Yeah.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: And we'll be like, "Okay, that was fun."

MATTHEW MERCER: And even then, there was, like, some work-shopping, 'cause the initial idea was pre-Twitch. It was like, you know, you guys'll play the game for a bit, and then, for the boss fight, you jump into, like, the D&D video game. And I'm like no.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: No.

MATTHEW MERCER: We just want to play our game. This is still our game.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah, it was very hard describing to people who didn't really play Dungeons & Dragons how that completely broke Dungeons & Dragons. But yeah, and then eventually, when Twitch came around, it was just full live format. We're not changing anything about our game. And we were like okay. That's pretty much the only way you could do this, but no one's gonna watch four hours a week of D&D.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Little did they know.

MATTHEW MERCER: Now we're here, so I don't know. Life is a strange scenario.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: For us as a company, too, it's been sort of perpetual catch-up, we always call it. We've always been taken by surprise at sort of the fan reaction,

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the numbers, how it keeps growing, and how it expands into new things, so we've just tried to play catch-up as it grows. Yeah, I got it. You got that?

MATTHEW MERCER: I got it. I got it.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Okay. Over here! Oh, you guys. Throw it over here! We gotta bring people in for this.

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: Well, and the Twitch algorithm is weird, not to out any of our friends at Twitch or anything, but when you only see the concurrent number of viewers watching at a time, that's a little hard to gauge how many people, in total, are actually aware and watching your show. So I think it wasn't until the first New York Comic-Con that we went to, and we ended up having a line around the block, and we were like...

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, no.

MARISHA RAY: "Oh, I think more than 10,000 people watch our show." I don't think that's accurate, unless all 10,000 are here in New York City. So yeah, that took some time to get used to.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, what was it? It was like a comic book store, and we were like, "Oh, we'll just take the quarter front part of your store, and we'll sign some autographs for anybody that happens to come in."

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And it was, like, out and around the corner, and that cop came in, and he's like, "Who is this for? What is this line for? Who is this?" And we're like, "It's for us. We're Critical Role."

MARISHA RAY: We play...

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: "What are you?" [laughter]

MARISHA RAY: Dungeons & Dragons. Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: It's weird.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Speaking of playing catch up, as an L.A. commuter, the podcasts have been a lifesaver.

MATTHEW MERCER: Good. So happy to hear that.

MATTHEW PRINCE: So what's kind of been the inspiration behind some of your newer offerings? You know, "Handbooker Helper", "Between the Sheets," you know, "All Work, No Play." What's kind of been the driving force behind that?

MARISHA RAY: When we first branched off and decided to do our own content, I broke down into a Venn diagram what made Critical Role intriguing and successful. And it's clearly not just because we're people playing Dungeons & Dragons. There's a lot

of D&D shows, and none of them have exploded in the way that Critical Role has.

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And so, if one half is the fascinating piece of Dungeons & Dragons, I think the other half is our relationships as friends. And we've known each other for so long, and being voice actors, we've gotten really good at the give-and-take of interpersonal relationships, both on stream and off stream, so I wanted to experiment with what people were engaged in. So we kind of broke down the content into three categories, which was personality-based, which is--like, "All Work, No Play" was pretty much straight personality-based. Gaming-based, which is what "Handbooker Helper" is, and then kind of right down the middle with "Between the Sheets," where we're talking a little bit about how we came into becoming storytellers as professionals, so it worked pretty well. We found that people are engaged in us as personalities--

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MATTHEW MERCER: Which is still weird.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: I say this only because I--

MARISHA RAY: It's interesting.

MATTHEW MERCER: I have my own insecurities, but like--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: I heart you, Matt.

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, you're sweet.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: I heart you.

MATTHEW MERCER: But just yes. It's been a fascinating catch-up, to try and figure out why things have gone the way they have, and breaking them down, and then going, "Really? Okay, cool."

MARISHA RAY: So it was kind of that, so it was why does our content work? And then the other, later half of the goal, which is what do we want to do with our content? What is the goal of our content? And we've discussed a lot, as a company, that our mission with Critical Role, in general, is to tear down the barriers into storytelling and to let everybody know that it's--everyone can be a storyteller. There's a story behind all of us,

and don't be afraid to get out there and tell these things, whether it's in your own personal Dungeons & Dragons group, whether it's fan fiction, whether you're trying to start a vlog yourself.

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Try to lower the barriers to entry. So that's where "Handbooker Helper" came from was trying to not have people be so intimidated by the player's handbook and to just...

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: Get people playing.

MATTHEW MERCER: There's nothing harder than going to a bunch of people who never played a role-playing game like, "I want to try out some D&D." "Cool. Read this."

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, I was out. I was out.

MATTHEW MERCER: Uh-uh.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: I opened up, like, wizard, and I was like "Nope. Calculus? Nope. No thanks. I want an ax. Can I hit things? Cool. Just tell me as we go along. That's all I need to know." I watched the "Handbooker Helper" videos, and I'm like, "Oh," but three years--

MARISHA RAY: Six years later? Yeah. [laughter]

MATTHEW PRINCE: But, I mean, there are so many pictures. It's practically a picture book, really. Like all of those player handbooks...

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW PRINCE: You know?

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, straight up. Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: A table is technically a picture, right? Technically.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: It's a very square, repeated picture with numbers. Travis?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yep.

MATTHEW PRINCE: And Marisha, you were mentioning that, like, all of this was about, you know, letting people tell their own stories, but--and that's all nice, but was it really

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just a matter of getting Sam and Liam into a hot tub and recording that? Is that the main goal?

MATTHEW MERCER: I mean, if we're being honest.

MARISHA RAY: Yes.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, you cut to the core of us.

MARISHA RAY: What can I subject my friends to? And say, "Oh, it's for production. People love it. It's great."

MATTHEW PRINCE: Oh, cool. So I want to touch on a little bit more of, like, you know, turning this home game into kind of this Internet phenomenon and kind of, like, your own relationships with D&D as, like, a game and just kind of as a system almost. So how did each of you kind of start playing D&D? What was your first introduction?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Well, I can say the first time I ever played was at Matt and Marisha's apartment, for the very first game that we ever had. I had remembered hearing about D&D from people, other voice actors like Gary Lowenthal and Crispin Freeman, and when they talked about it, I was always really intrigued. And from a video game perspective, you know, there are open sandbox-type games where you can go wherever you want to and engage in certain missions as you want,

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but you're still limited by whatever is programmed. And the first time that we played, I was very meek and timid, and Matt was asking me things like, you know, "What's your character's name?" And I was like, "Oh, shit, um, Grog." And he was like "Okay, Grog, what does your barbarian goliath do?" And I was like, "What do you mean?" And he was like, "What's his back story?" I was like, "He makes fine leather boots." And he was like, "Okay, we'll get there." And, later on in the game, when

there was this intimidation moment with, like, a tavern keep, he was like, "What do you do?" And I was like, "I mean, can I do whatever I want?" And he goes, "You can certainly try." And I just--the first thing that, like, came off my head, and he just went with it, and rolled with it, and I was like, "Oh, my. Oh, my god. Literally anything that pops into my head, you will try and roll with." And so the limits off of, like, what you can try were just taken off, and that, to me, was the real hook, right? Like, the real drug, because it was like, "Oh, jeez."

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Yeah, I'm not limited, in any way, and I think I had never viewed Dungeons & Dragons in that way. And then came all the other things with, you know, the complex characters, and the story lines, and you know, just keeping up with what everybody was doing in the game, and how invested you become, as more clay gets slapped on the sculpture. And so that's where I fell in love with it, and I was like, "Oh, man." I had a preset idea about what this book was and maybe how it was played, you know, because of what media back in the '80s and '90s told us, and I was just wrong.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah, both Travis and I were spoiled, because Mathew Mercer was our first dungeon master, so that's--that's hard to recover from.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, for real. You're bae. Mathew Mercer is bae.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. I didn't get into Dungeons & Dragons until I moved to Los Angeles, 'cause I'm from Kentucky, and the Satanic panic is still very much kind of a thing there.

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It basically

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Whoo!

MARISHA RAY: Eradicated D&D, and now it's slowly...

MATTHEW MERCER: Don't "whoo" that.

MARISHA RAY: Coming back.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Well, Kentucky, Texas, we got a Southern thing. It's, you know--

MARISHA RAY: Whoo! Whoo.

MATTHEW PRINCE: I'm from Missouri, so I'm down.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: Double woo! Slap hands.

MARISHA RAY: But half of the country, "Whoo!" And then I was deeply interested in trying, and we met through mutual friends, and just kind of came to you one day and we're like, "Can you run a game for us?" And then, after that, I went and did a few other games, but just kept coming back to Matt Mercer.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Dang it.

MATTHEW MERCER: First one's free.

MARISHA RAY: As they say, once you get a taste--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: All part of your master plan.

MATTHEW MERCER: Exactly. I started in high school. I was a freshman and was--just joined this anime video game club called the Popular Arts Club that I eventually became president of and met Sandra here, actually. But the guys who were running it, at the time, were all these, like, track and field, like, you know, really fit, awesome kind of guys. And they were like, "Hey, Matt, want to play some D&D?"

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I'm like, "Sure, what's that? Whatever. I'll do whatever you want. You guys are cool."

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Is that homework? Am I doing it for you? What is it?

MATTHEW MERCER: And so they brought me into the game, and as soon as I started reading the books--like, I'd seen them of the art and things, but I had kind of an interest, but never actually dove into it, and it just consumed me entirely. And so I built this really elaborate character, and, like, this whole theme, and I was so excited to play. And then I started playing with them, and they're great guys. Terrible, terrible gamers. I love them to death, but it was really frustrating, 'cause I was the only one trying to push the story, and they were just like, "I want to roll high numbers and fool around. I remade Ryu as a

warrior. I shoot hadoukens. Let's go fight at an In-N-Out." I'm like I don't--what? Really?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: You played at an In-N-Out?

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah, that happened. We traveled to modern day, and went to an In-N-Out, and had a burger, and gained a level.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, no.

MATTHEW MERCER: This is legitimately one of the sessions that happened. But I got frustrated and was like, "I know this can be bigger, I know this can be better." So I left that game and started running my own. I invited two of my good friends to play, and I've just been dungeon mastering ever since. And it's through that space with my friends that I've kind of come out of my shell as a person.

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I got enough nerve to start doing theater. I learned a lot about kind of honing my ability to be social, as an awkward artist kid growing up, so yeah. So I've been D&D--while you guys were fully-formed human beings by the time I came around to you, for the most part, it was very much a proto experience for me to figure out who I wanted to be and take steps in that direction, so I'm very thankful for it.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: OG.

MATTHEW MERCER: Not as OG as some. I'm always like, "I played, you know, back in the mid '90s," and then I meet guys at conventions that are really awesome and they're like, "Bitch, I've been playing since '73." And I'm like, "Yeah, sir. Whatever, sir. Respect."

MATTHEW PRINCE: Do you remember what all of your first characters were? We know Grog, but--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: I do. What was her name? She was a control ranger class. It was 4E.

MATTHEW MERCER: Right, because it was fourth edition. Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: It was weird. Can't remember her name though, but I remember she was a--wasn't she a drow?

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MATTHEW MERCER: She was a drow, yeah.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. Because everyone's first D&D character is always a drow ranger.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Mine wasn't.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Chaotic good drow ranger? Yeah. Did you also...

MARISHA RAY: Probably.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Use two scimitars?

MARISHA RAY: Yeah, yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: Have a little panther with you?

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: I think my first character was a wizard, but I imagined, like, the visual of Gandalf with a sword in "Lord of the Rings," and I'm like, "I want a wizard that uses a sword," and so there was a militant wizard kit for second edition, and I was like, "Heck yeah! I mean, wizard with a sword, so when I'm out of magic, I can get to the front lines." It's a bad idea, by the way. Second edition wizards especially. You have, like, three hit points. You should not go to the front. And his name was Emeritus Trent because I was a big Piers Anthony Xanth nerd growing up, and so I used that name, but yeah. Classic story. You know, he was a young apprentice wizard, but his parents were mysteriously killed, and he had--you know, every other the every other D&D character ever made.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: So that was my first character. Not my proudest moment looking back, necessarily, but you have to start somewhere. You have to start somewhere.

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TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: It's so funny how the back stories are all kind of similar. I remember, before the second campaign, Matt was like, "When you're making up your back story, don't afraid to let your parents be alive."

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. [laughter]

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: And I was like, "Yeah, okay."

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah, like, being a hero is a pretty dangerous career in fantasy realms, but being a parent is twice as dangerous.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Insta-dead.

MATTHEW MERCER: The minute you have a kid in a fantasy realm, like, your chances of survival are cut into a quarter.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, you're having a kid? Oh, sorry. Too bad.

MATTHEW PRINCE: So what would you say is your kind of--now, with all of your, you know, experience creating characters/creating worlds, what is the process for which you could create, like, another character, if there's--when "Critical Role" Season Three happens or, God forbid, your character dies?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah. When we all TPK this week.

MATTHEW MERCER: Shh.

MATTHEW PRINCE: I'm only on episode 22.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: The fear is real.

MATTHEW MERCER: Just be smart, guys.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: We're in constant fear of TPK, so it's okay.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW PRINCE: So what's your kind of strategy to create your characters?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Mine--so Grog was just one little thing,

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and then the next, and the next, and then I think I kind of carried that over. I was one of the last people to come up with my character. I just had writer's block or whatever. And it was a flight back from Australia where I was stuck on a plane, and my wife was asleep, and I was like, "Okay. Write one sentence." And I wrote one sentence, and then I was like, "And then add to

that, and then maybe he has this." And it just kind of, like, you know, snowballed from there. So that's kind of how I did it. I don't have like a--there are some people who are like, "I know the class. I know the race. I know exactly what I want them to look like." I'm like, "How?" But maybe they're just already, you know, on that ship before it sails, so you know.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah, I think there's kind of two basic ways you can kind of go about it. You can be an inside-out person and be like, "I know I want to be a Ranger. I know I want to be a dwarf. I know I want to be these things," and then go from there. Or you can kind of go the opposite way, and be like, "I feel like I want to be a circus roadie, and I use ropes, and I'm just really into collecting knives."

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And then you can kind of go from there and then be like, "Well, what works as, like, a knife-wielding circus roadie?" And then kind of find a class and design around that way. And that's kind of become the way that I've become more interested in building characters. But it doesn't say that sometimes I'm just like, "Nah--cleric. I'll be that." But yeah. When I made Beau--because I think Keyleth was more of an inside-out person. I was like, "I'm gonna be a half-elf druid and then go from there." With Beau, I was like, okay, I know I want to be a little bit more tactical. I wanted--I basically wanted to be like a D&D Jessica Jones, like if Sherlock Holmes was super messed-up and kind of a juvie, and then I went from there, and built around a monk.

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MATTHEW MERCER: So I've been DMing most of my life, so I don't get to create a lot of characters--

MATTHEW PRINCE: You create characters literally every day.

MATTHEW MERCER: Well, that's--but that's the difference between training your player character, which is a long investment. Yeah, but sound point.

MARISHA RAY: You just made Orly.

MATTHEW MERCER: I did. Well, no. The community made Orly.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: That was a communal effort.

MARISHA RAY: You contributed.

MATTHEW MERCER: Literally a communal effort. For me, when I have played, I tend to wait till everyone else creates their characters and then see what's missing. I'm a fan of filling that void. Like, I tend to play support, in that regard. Like, I want you guys to all find what you enjoy, and then I know I'll find fun in whatever will make this a well-rounded experience for everybody. Besides, there's nothing worse than going to, you know, a gaming table, and everyone shows up with same character.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, see, glue is so important. And this campaign we--in the first one, we were like, "Make sure that everybody has something that hasn't been repeated," but I think you were the only one, for this current campaign, that was like, "Don't pick that, 'cause somebody already has it." But we were hiding it from everybody, and I was like, "I want to build a team though. I want to make sure that we're, like, balanced."

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MATTHEW MERCER: I didn't say don't pick it 'cause somebody else has. I said you can overlap classes. Don't worry about that, because you can build, you know, two people of the same class in very different ways, and we're seeing that now with Caduceus and Jester. They're both clerics, but they're two very different types of clerics. But that also involves having a little bit of knowledge together, and you guys were all being so secret trying to keep your characters from each other. I was doing this delicate dance of like, "Okay, how do I make suggestions or nudge them, so they don't end up accidentally showing up with the same characters, but not tell them what to make?" You know, so you guys actually did a pretty good job of finding different paths, though, I will say.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: We got lucky.

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah, actually.

MATTHEW PRINCE: So you haven't created characters super recently, but I am very interested in kind of hearing about how you build up a world. Like, you have this amazing gift to just kind of set the stage and to create these incredibly vibrant locales. You're like a wizard in Dwarven Forge. Like, you just have all of these skills to, like, build up, you know, environments, and people, and worlds.

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Like, how do you approach that? Like, how do you start? It's like, "Well, there's going to be a town, and there will be some people in it, and then this person is a farmer who has, you know, serious father issues or whatever." Like, how do you do it?

MATTHEW MERCER: It depends. If you're just building in a void, if you're just like, "I'm gonna build a world. I don't have a story attached to it. I don't have players attached to it. I'm just building a world," then it comes to--it can be very overwhelming to think of the large scale of things. Some people do better creating the cosmic end of it first. You know, "Let me create the pantheon, and the gods, and the creation myth, and then, from there, I can work down." To me, that's very overwhelming for a lot of people.

PERSON: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: It's much better to start small. Like, "All right, I want to make a mining town." And say, all right, "Well, this town makes a lot of money off its mining apparently, so there's mines. I know there are mines nearby. A lot of people here probably work in some form of mining or selling supplies and tools. All right, so I'll make some supply and general stores that at work in that avenue. People live here, so there has to, you know, be a means of eating, so maybe there'll be some farms."

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And so you start building out kind of the very gentle kind of ecology of how that city will work, and then you start just seeing what different factions in there might work. If there's miners, they probably have some sort of union or a guild that runs them, and they probably have competitive elements inside there. And if there is commerce, of course there's probably going to be some people that work, you know, to thief from that commerce, to try to make a living without putting in any of the effort. Or they couldn't get a job, so now they're trying to do what they can to survive. Maybe they're organized, as well, so then you start creating, like, a thieves Guild.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: See this is why, when I hear that you read rocket science in your spare time, I'm not surprised. Like, "What? What?" It's incredible.

MATTHEW MERCER: And when you have that structure--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, God. [laughter]

MATTHEW MERCER: Then you can start working on personalities, and so, you know, you work on who the heads of these guilds. Who are the major players in, you know, the politics of the city? Who are the people that would be the most likely for the players to encounter to be positive, you know, quest givers or to draw them into the narrative of what kind of conflicts you've created in this town? And what individuals might be the antagonists?

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What powers, outside of the people and the political structure, are threats to the lives of those that live there, and how does that tie into the mines? And so it's just kind of starting with a small structure, and then start rationalizing how it would work together; filling in the gaps of what's missing to make it feel like it's living and breathing, and then, from there, decide where the conflict would arise. And then you have a town, but once you have that town done, you make another. And what's in between that journey from town to town? You have a trip there. Are there hills where bandits live? Is there an area where, you know, a bunch of owl bears have been roosting, and last season they had a lot of kids or whatever, and now there's an owl bear, you know, overgrowth, where they're just, like-- they're attacking people left and right? You know, and then you just expand and expand. That's all I think about these days. Guys, it's a problem.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: That was five words or less, right?

MATTHEW PRINCE: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I often think of owl bear ecology as well so.

MATTHEW MERCER: See? Yeah. The things that keep us up at night, man.

MATTHEW PRINCE: So the common rule of thumb I've heard is, for DMs, you know, for an hour of game time, there's usually an hour of preparation.

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What's that ratio for you?

MATTHEW MERCER: That's changed over the years.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Okay.

MATTHEW MERCER: It used to be that way. I'd say for an hour of game time, was an hour of prep, for the many years I was running my own. Depending on--sometimes a little shorter even, if it was like, "Oh, it's just me and three of my friends, and we're just gonna be improvising our way through this. It'll be fine." When we began doing the show, and it began to find an audience, and I realized that there are people creating wikis, and, you know, checking over all of consistencies in my world, and having arguments over forums about, you know, different facets of the universe, I'm like, "Oh, no. I have to make sure this is all consistent now." So I'd say my prep time has probably doubled, just because part of it is the creation process, and the other half is me paying very close attention to my internal lore, and to keep it consistent with everything I've already said. And that involves sometimes going back and researching through my old notes and double/triple-checking things. And I put out a campaign guide, you know, a year and a half ago,

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and that was a new experience of going through all my old madman scrawlings from campaigns, you know, and sessions past, and going, "Oh, God. I have to make this legible to a normal human being. Oh, God," so I had to deconstruct all that. It's been a very unique adaption process definitely.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Cool. So D&D can be a very personal experience. The attributes that you can kind of create or add to your characters can be deeply personal, sometimes of a very sensitive nature. Kind of the moment that kind of is freshest in my mind is Sam Riegel playing Nott, having this real issue with coming to terms with being a goblin and just feeling uncomfortable in his own skin. What are your thoughts on D&D as being this kind of unique game where these kind of issues can kind of come out, and they can kind of be explored in a safe way?

MATTHEW MERCER: I mean, I think that's one of its biggest strengths.

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I think it's a safe space, especially when you have a group of friends that you've come to trust at the table, to step into the shoes of another person, whether it be someone that you want to be more like, or somebody that is not like you at all, but you want to try and connect with and empathize with experiences outside of your own personal ones. It's a place to explore these themes safely, and talking amongst each other, and when anybody crosses a line, you discuss that, and talk about it, and that

person learns about boundaries, as well. It's a really great place to learn to fine-tune empathy and self-esteem and really discovering the things in life that you appreciate and the things in life you want to change. And it's been that for me, for the past 20 plus years, and even just--and at the same time, finding friends that you feel comfortable enough to go and explore that with. Like you know, this guy, before we started playing, I knew you passingly from projects we had worked on, and it was like, "Oh, yeah. Travis. He's that big guy who, you know, probably beat me up in high school." Like, you know.

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TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, no.

MATTHEW MERCER: No. Well, I'm saying that's what I--you know.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Okay.

MATTHEW MERCER: That's what I assumed, because you were--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Give me your lunch money, Matt.

MATTHEW MERCER: And scene. But you know, through this game, you know, I'd trust you with my life. Like, you find these friends that you go through these experiences together, and you find like-minded individuals that have been through these adventures with you, and I don't know. There's no other bonding experience quite like it, in my opinion.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. I genuinely believe that D&D can improve almost every aspect of your life, in some way, shape, or form. I mean it's helped me with decision-making under pressure. It's helped with leadership abilities. I mean I genuinely think we kind of had this realization a few months ago that our team and our company works so well together and has done so well because we've been playing and working together as a team, in this make-believe fantasy setting,

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fighting dragons and being in the trenches with each other for years. So when we have this imaginary memory formed together of us taking down an empire or fighting dragons, then you're like, "Oh, we can easily tackle this contract. We can do that. That's something we can get through together." And even to the therapeutic benefits of D&D, and we hear a lot--and I am a big supporter in people using Dungeons & Dragons for special needs kids, or people needing therapeutic benefits, or like you said,

to kind of work through things. It kind of gives this alternate reality where you can take risks and experience things, and you can fail without real-world repercussions, so it's great. I love it.

MATTHEW MERCER: I think, to that point, too, a lot of people, when they start playing the game, it begins as fantasy fulfillment.

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It's, "I want to make the best character I can, and I'm awesome. I'm the hero." And you begin to learn that, in most cases, in order to survive and to see the story through, you have to know what you're good at, what your friends are good at, and respect that place when that is necessary. And through that, you learn wonderful team-building exercises and knowing how best to work within that team. Know what your strengths are, when to step forward, and when to step back and let somebody else step forward, and that plays directly to how we've all come to this company. When we all decided to--we realized. Didn't decide to. We realized we had to make a company. Like I said, everything's been reactionary. We're like, "Okay, what's everybody gonna do?" And that would be a hard place, in many times in my life with other people, where it's like, "Well, we all want to be this. We all want to do this." In this, we all fit right into our roles, because we all knew what we were good at. We all respected what each other was good at, and it was, like, the easiest creation of a company I could ever have expected. And I owe a lot of that, I think, to us having the experience of gaming together.

MATTHEW PRINCE: So I do want to kind of switch directions momentarily.

00:29:01

So Travis, throughout the month of November, you've been sponsoring Operation Supply Drop. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yes.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Why you got involved in it?

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah. So obviously, Veterans Day is just one day in November. But I remember, back in 2013 was the first time that I heard about Operation Supply Drop. They're this great charity that--they really support military families and members through active duty, through their transition into civilian life, and then afterwards. I have a very deep military family.

My father, my uncle, my brother all served, and I've seen, sort of throughout the decades, the impact, I think, that the military has had on their lives. And when I saw what Operation Supply Drop was doing with these crates, these drops that they'll do at forward operating bases, out at certain, you know, other training centers, the impact was just immediate. And I remember my brother being out in Afghanistan and saying, you know, we got this crate in today, and it had an Xbox, and it had "Call of Duty." And all these guys that I've been bunking with, you know, we have a certain level of tightness, but when we sat down at the end of the day, and things had been maybe hairier than we had expected.

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We came in exhausted. We were able to play and sort of have that level of escape together, and we really felt like we were back home, and it really rejuvenated us for the next day. I was like, "Man, that's so important." And it's not just, you know, video games, and it's tabletop stuff too. They also send, you know, D&D and other things that, you know, put people at a table together. You know, promote eye contact. You know, let them communicate and engage with each other in a way that I just don't think they would without it, and they've really moved past that, to also providing these skill training centers, so they teach them how to put together a resume. What can you expect in, you know, the workforce, and job interviews, and things like that. And I think those are skills that are kind of grossly lacking when people find themselves out of the military. People go in for a variety of reasons, you know, whether to serve, or to find their way into college, or something like that, but you never really know what you're gonna come out of the military like. You know, sometimes it leaves a little mark, and sometimes it leaves a big one. And I think that these sorts of charities are just so important to make sure that we're letting the people that serve something that's larger than themselves know that we are, you know, thinking about them as well.

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So this month Critical Role has paired with them. If you have any interest, you can go to Critical Role--no. Critrole.com/osd. And we have a video and some more information there, and we're donating all the way through the month of November. And I just-- I love the organization, and I think we're gonna do a charity, like, first-person shooter stream, because I...

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, yeah.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Used to be decent at those and now kind of suck, so we're gonna let people hop on and abuse me for a while, so yeah.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Yeah, so I'm super happy with, like, all of the charitable works you've done or that you've fundraised for, and so you've had Pablove. You've had Operation Supply Drop obviously. 826LA has been a long-time recipient to your kind charitable givings. I'm interested in kind of knowing what drives all of this charitable giving? Because, like, one thing that really, you know, attracts me and, like, a lot of other folks, I'm sure, to Critical Role is that you're always, you know, looking out for the nonprofits that are, you know, helping the local area.

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You're always looking out for other people, and it's not just a matter of, "Okay, we need to make the next dollar. We need to make the next dollar." It's, "What can we do to make our community better?"

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, I think we realized pretty early on that, as the spotlight on Critical Role got bigger, we had the ability to affect really positive change in the world. That was something that was really important to all of us. 826 was something that we started--who was it that first found?

MATTHEW MERCER: That was Marisha...

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah that was Marisha right?

MATTHEW MERCER: Actually.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah, it was a "me and Taliesin" tag team.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, and it's--

MARISHA RAY: We knew that one.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: And they have 'em all throughout the nation, but it was something that I think really benefited from a very unique, you know, perspective that we have. And when sort of the response was as big as it was, we were like, "Man." We kind of went around, and we were like, "What are our individual charities? Like, what are the things that we would want to focus

on, given the chance?" And so we're trying to work our way through that and find ways to just give back more. You know, it's one thing to just say like, "Yeah. You know, let's make as much money as we can, and try and grow this company, and do all those things."

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But on the inside, the thing that makes us feel good is when we have those connections with each other, and we, you know, foster positive empathetic, you know, fans, and communities. And to us, these sorts of charities just embody the things that we really think are important.

MATTHEW MERCER: Well, consider too, like, a lot of what we do with our stories and our company is try and, you know, tell tales of heroism and inspire other people to rise up and be their own hero. But this is a world where there's not always the opportunity to do so, or find places where you can really contribute, you know, and be that hero. And I think charitable work is one of the great ways that you can do that, and so, not only does it give us the opportunity to help out, but really the community--give them the opportunity to, you know, no matter what chaos they're in, no matter what business is consuming them, they can actively contribute to changing somebody else's life and then see the effect of that through this community.

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And community's such a big part of this. As much as it's like, us, our company, and our game, and everything, like, we may be, like, the beating heart of this thing, but the body and the world around it is the community that sprung out of it. And the sheer amount of positive, good enforcement and work that all the people that have rallied around the show have done, it dwarfs anything that we could ever hope to do. And I'm just so proud of being a part of that.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. It was so, like, self-explanatory. Like it just--there was really no other option. It felt like it just presented itself. As soon as we started making just these--you know, an appearance fee from the show, we were like, "This is Dungeons & Dragons." This is...

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: We were doing this anyway.

MARISHA RAY: Weird. Yeah. And you know, so it only felt natural to be like, how can we spread this in any way, shape, or form? So and then that's why we also--we encourage people so much to

go down to 826LA or an 826 branch in their area, and to teach kids D&D, and start a D&D club.

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And we kind of initiated one at 826LA that's still going on, and we've heard of several in other 826s. Sanctions.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah cities.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah cities. Branches. That's the word I was looking for.

MATTHEW MERCER: Branches.

MARISHA RAY: Branches. That it's taking off there, too, which it just warms my heart.

MATTHEW PRINCE: Thank you for all of the charitable giving you do, the shows that you put on every week, and thank you for being here. And now we'll open it up to audience questions, so...

MATTHEW MERCER: What's your name?

RULA: My name is Rula.

MATTHEW MERCER: Hi, Rula.

MARISHA RAY: Hi, Rula.

RULA: I'm a big fan, you guys. We watch every week. One of the things about being voice actors, your voice is more associated with the characters that you guys play. But now, because of D&D, and because of Critical Role, and everything that you guys do, your voices are more associated with your faces than anything else. How has that changed things for you guys? Like, can you even walk out on the street now?

MATTHEW MERCER: We can. It's a little harder.

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It's definitely--it's changed things dramatically. One of the things I used to enjoy about voice-over was the anonymity where, you know, I could just vanish and not have to worry about that. And I would say, while things have changed, it's not bad, because we have a community of amazing people, and the times that we do get recognized, it's very respectful and very like,

"Hey, sorry to bother you. I just wanted to say I like what you do." You know, maybe, "Can I get a picture?" And it's like, "Sure," if I'm not like, you know, in my pajamas at a Ralph's at, like, 3:00 a.m. trying to get, you know, toilet paper, but--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Please tell me that happened.

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, so it's a new experience definitely. And it can be a little overwhelming at events. We're still kind of adjusting to the growth that this whole thing has experienced, but it's different, but I can't say that it's negative.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, we double-take a lot. Like the Starbucks that I go to all the time. When I was going through the drive-through, the guy was like, "Morning, Grog." And I was like, "What?" [laughter]

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And you wish you had, like, ordered maybe something cooler than, like, a mocha Java chip frappuccino.

MARISHA RAY: Sometimes it pays off though. Sometimes you'll be at a bar, and you'll, like, order a couple drinks, and then the bartender's like, "It's on me, Beauregard."

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Whoa.

MATTHEW MERCER: And you're like--yeah, that's happened.

MARISHA RAY: Yes, please.

MATTHEW MERCER: We call it nerd "Fight Club".

MARISHA RAY: Yes. Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: Because there are times when that happens--I've been at amusement parks where, all of a sudden, you know, somebody who works there will be like, "Hello, would you like to come to the front of the line?" And I'm like, "Yes. Yes I am."

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yes we would.

MATTHEW MERCER: Yes.

MARISHA RAY: I feel like we should follow this.

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah. "This way, Mr. Durden." You're like, "Oh, okay."

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: "His name is Robert Paulson."

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: So it has come with it with a couple of really cool, unexpected little benefits. If anything, just 'cause we get to meet critters in the wild and be like--and really kind of see how far-reaching this community is, in places we never expect.

PERSON: Hi.

MATTHEW MERCER: Hey.

PERSON: So I know that there are a lot of rule sets for Dungeons & Dragons, as well as other tabletop games, and knowing them all is a part of the playing the game,

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but at the same time, just kind of making it accessible and just enjoyable for everyone. So I was wondering what kind of house rules, if any, you run with.

MATTHEW MERCER: I've run with the few, especially when we started. Because when we first started playing, we were Pathfinder, which is very crunchy and rules-heavy. And then when we went to streaming, and fifth edition had come out for a while, and I heard that it was actually an improvement over previous editions--a little more streamlined--I was like, "Let's please move to that. Let's shift over," but because it was also a new system, there was a lot of things we were still learning, and the players were, you know, carryover from Pathfinder, so I house ruled some things for the benefit of a larger group. I know, like, healing potions technically--or drinking a potion is supposed to take an action in the system, but I didn't want there to have--when you have eight, you know, seven to eight players, to have one person's whole turn be drinking a potion, then wait, you know, seven other rounds and enemies to come, before you get to do something. So I was like, "Bonus action's fine." That way you can still do something cool and drink the potion. So it's more things that are minor tweaks to just make it more fun and involved for the players.

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As we got into the second campaign, and people got more comfortable with the rule set, I've leaned off the house rules a little bit, but honestly, sometimes, if it just makes for a cool moment, I would rather go with that than the stringency of the rules. If someone has, like, a really cool idea, and they want to do this interesting thing, and I'm like, "Well, in order to do that, technically they have to athletics roll for this thing, and it's probably not gonna work out." I'll be like, "No, but it's a cool idea. Go for it and roll." And it makes it more interesting, and the players get to have fun with it, 'cause at the end of the day, while it is still a game, it's more than you and your friends trying to have it good time and tell a story together. And even I'm still learning. I'm still finding that balance, and you know, sometimes I'll be like--I'll look at stuff on the Internet. People complaining about how, "Oh, they messed up these rules." And I'll be like, "Oh, man, I got to get better at enforcing those rules." And then I do enforce it, and I'm like, "Man, that's not as fun." You know, so I'm still finding my balance, sometimes, as I go too.

PERSON: Awesome.

PERSON: Yeah, so Dungeons & Dragons draws very heavily, both kind of mechanically and flavor-wise, from kind of your traditional Western "Lord of the Rings" fantasy.

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With all of your backgrounds in kind of, you know, anime and whatnot and your work there, is there anything you'd like to see D&D draw from that pool of stories, or how do you incorporate it into your storytelling?

MARISHA RAY: That's a good question.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Well, I mean, I asked Matt at the beginning of the campaign, as I was struggling to find a character voice. I had done a session that was, you know, just kind of this, like, southern drawl. And I was like, "Matt, can I do that in a fantasy world?" And he was like, "Why not?" And we're like, "Yeah, why not?" So you know, I think, as long as you don't get into--I mean, well, no. I mean I think almost anything can pop in there. I mean I think, as long as it fits the flavor. And even Percy's, you know, electrical inventions near the end of last campaign were, you know, a nice dip into things you don't see very much of.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: You know, and the firearms too.

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah. I mean, even just looking at the bloodline of D&D, there are adventures where 95% of the adventure is going through, like, a subterranean tomb, and unlocking magical artifacts, but if you happen to go in this one chamber, you find this strange metallic craft with a--

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You know, a deceased creature with smooth skin and some sort of a--looks like a firelock pistol, but it shoots energy. Oh, shit. They just put aliens in your D&D. So like, you know, there's a classic bloodline of toying with different genres and stuff. For me personally, because it leans so heavily into, you know, Anglo fantasy and the very "Lord of the Rings" thing, as we've played through, our first campaign was definitely meant to be an introduction to D&D for most people at the table that had never played. So I kept it very classic fantasy, and the more we played, I've kind of wanted to pull in other cultural inspirations. I would love to, at some point down the road, explore more of Marquette in our world, 'cause I mean I grew up loving, you know, Arabian Nights and a lot of ancient Sumerian/Mesopotamian religion, classic Middle-Eastern history and mythology. I think it's so grossly underrepresented in modern media, and so I'd love to incorporate elements of that down the road, as well. A lot of Eastern philosophy and Eastern mythology, as well, is wonderful and doesn't get a lot of love.

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You know, and no matter what you try and create, there's gonna be some cultural touchstone it comes from. All work is derivative, on some level, 'cause we're inspired by what we experience. And we either are--in creating something new, we're creating something that is a series of other small shards that you've merged into a new combination. So I just--I want to see things that don't get represented as well.

PERSON: Hi.

MARISHA RAY: Hi.

PERSON: I have a question kind of mainly for Matt. I'm an aspiring DM. I run...

MATTHEW MERCER: Awesome.

PERSON: Two different D&D campaigns, which is way more stressful than I thought I was gonna be.

MATTHEW MERCER: I feel you, man.

PERSON: I have a question. I am having trouble finding, or rather, getting to a segment where I can bridge that gap, because a lot of people come to D&D for different reasons and are interested in different aspects of it. But what I enjoy is that each one of your characters--you guys are so committed to being that character and sharing that space where you can be--kind of, like, let the walls down a bit.

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I wonder if there's any tips or ways to kind of foster that environment, to kind of create that, so that they are comfortable, 'cause you can't force it.

MATTHEW MERCER: You can't force it, no. And it's not something that happens immediately. One thing I recommend is plan, if you can, extracurricular activities outside of D&D, for you all to hang out and just become better friends. I mean going out and seeing a movie together, or going to a theme park, or going and doing different other board games that are more of a team-building exercise on the side, where the pressure isn't just you have to be in character, and we all have to be friends now right? Go. You know, where they can just be themselves, and then get to know each other a little better, and then when they come back to the table, they'll be a little more comfortable with each other, because they've had other experiences as a troop. And another is having a conversation outside of the game about what do you all want out of this game? What do you enjoy out of this? What do you think you'll enjoy out of this? You know what--get a feel for what everybody wants, and have them all talk about it in the open,

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because they'll also better understand what each player wants to get out of the story, as well. And that might adjust what they're--you know, what they're looking for. If they're like, "Well, I just want to go, and kill monsters, and get experience points and gold." And one person is like, "I want to explore the depths of the human condition."

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah!

MARISHA RAY: You know? Is hard to marry, but if both of them stayed out loud, maybe the first person will be like, "Yeah human condition's cool, too, I guess." You know, and they'll find a middle ground, but it's not your onus to figure out that puzzle in private. You know, you can figure it out together as a group. Have those conversations, and as long as everyone knows where they all stand, that also helps them feel comfortable not wondering what every other player at the table's looking for and going after. You know, they don't know their character story secrets, but you know, there can be unexpected antagonism at the table, if all the players have that disconnect and assume what the other person wants out of the game. So having those conversations openly, I think, are a really good tool to getting everyone on the same page and getting more comfortable with each other.

PERSON: Thank you.

MARISHA RAY: And like, it takes a while too.

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Like, you will see progress immediately, pretty much over the next several games, but I mean, up until pretty--I mean still, to this day, we'll still check in with each other and be like, "Hey, is it cool if we, like, do this type of thing?" Or, "Can we explore this?" Or if I confront you, I'm gonna come at you. Like, when after--spoilers--after Mollymauk died, and we had Ashley Burch playing with us, and I knew that Beau's reaction was gonna be visceral and angry. And so I went up to her, and I was like, "Beau is probably gonna want to come at you. Is that okay? Like, are you going to be comfortable and know that it's coming from a role-playing standpoint when I chew your head off, in about 15 minutes?" And she was like, "Yeah, absolutely. I'm here for it. I'm game for it." But it still, like, gave just a little bit of that expectation, so that she wasn't--

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, it takes away like, is this Marisha...

MARISHA RAY: Right.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Or is it Beau?

MARISHA RAY: Like, did I mess up? Am I ruining their game?

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You know, I didn't want anyone to think that. So I think just having a little bit of that. I mean, even when our game started

delving into romantic territory, we had to check in with each other, and have powwows, and be like, "Is this okay? Like, are we into this?" And yeah.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: It was more like, "What just happened?" [laughter] We've been, for like two-and-a-half years, no romance on the stream. "You know I'm in love with you, right?" And we were like, "What?"

MATTHEW MERCER: But that was a conversation that Liam had with me too. You know, like, they wanted to talk about it and be like, "It would be interesting, and my character could definitely go down this path, but I don't want to do that, if it's gonna be strange and make anyone at the table uncomfortable." And I was like, "As long as you're respectable about it, I'm sure it'll be fine." And it was hilarious. Your guys' reactions were hilarious.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Honest. [laughter]

MATTHEW MERCER: Honest. Good question.

PERSON: Thank you.

MATTHEW MERCER: No worries.

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PERSON: Hey, have you guys ever considered playing another system, other than the various editions of D&D? Has there been any interest in that?

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, yeah. Well, D&D is what our main campaign is, largely because that's just kind of where we started, and that's where the world has gone. And it makes sense within that space, but we've done a lot of one-shots and a lot of side games, where we've delved into--like, I've run--one of my favorite systems is Dead Lands.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, it's so good.

MATTHEW MERCER: I prefer OG Dead Lands, but I ran a Savage Worlds, the newer version of it, for you guys, which is fun. Kind of--pardon--an old, weird West. She's run a number of Honey Heist games, which is a ridiculous one-page RPG. It's so amazing. Yeah. Like, I love a lot of systems out there. D&D is just kind of the classic one that I grew up with and was my

gateway to the rest of the systems, so I enjoy when we have the opportunity to try other things off of our main campaign.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah. I think just currently starting to dive into a new system and a new campaign, it would be, like, a commitment.

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TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah.

MARISHA RAY: It would be a discussion and one we're just not ready to have yet.

MATTHEW PRINCE: I do want to jump in on that. When can we expect Crash Pandas II?

PERSON: "Too Fast, too Furry-ous."

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, no. Oh, it's so perfect.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Too furry-ous.

MARISHA RAY: I'm looking at Regal on that one. Yeah.

MATTHEW MERCER: Yeah, we just have to pin Sam down; the weird fey creature that he is. And be like, "Run a game!" He'd be like, "Ha! You can't find me." Poof. Turn glitter and disappear. I'd be like, "No!" It's like a treasure goblin in Diablo III. You're like, "Catch him before he goes away. Oh, he's gone. No!" Yeah. Good question. Any other questions, anybody? Curious to-- oh, we've got a repeat question.

PERSON: So, we got to see Taliesin at Lost Con over the weekend.

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, nice.

MARISHA RAY: He's awesome.

PERSON: Absolutely awesome. I asked him who his favorite character outside of the party was. Maybe, you know, guest characters or characters that you've created, Matt.

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And I'm curious, of all of the universe that you've created, who's your favorite?

MARISHA RAY: Outside of parties?

PERSON: Outside of the parties.

MATTHEW MERCER: Oh, man.

MARISHA RAY: Interesting.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Mine's Victor, just because it was spontaneous for Matt, and it was just pure gold, in the moment. Like, I don't think any other story moment has caused almost every member of the table to reach for their cell phones and start filming you on stream.

MARISHA RAY: Yeah!

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Like, it was just so good.

MARISHA RAY: I think mine would have to be Raishan, just because she left such a mark on my soul.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Oh, yeah. Came out of one dirty.

MATTHEW MERCER: That was a fun villain. Oh, man. I mean, just from a personal standpoint, I think Shaun Gilmore was an important PC to me, partially because he was--because there was just a lot of--when you create an NPC that you invest a lot of time in, there's a whole bunch of their story that never gets told.

00:50:02

And so, in my head, there's this whole story for Shaun's life that, you know, you never get to see on the stream. And I'm like, "Well, one day, maybe I'll find a place to put that," but yeah. He just kind of naturally grew into this larger-than-life figure that I still carry with me, and he's pretty important to me. Other than that, villain-wise, like, the whole Delilah and Syllas Briarwood--their whole dynamic of, you know, a villain couple that--their reasoning for their villainous tactics and lifestyle is not to do with the need for power. It was purely the drive from one to save the other and then just still paying the price for doing that. And that was a really fun story to write and play out.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Who knows? Maybe we'll find some ways to dip into those stories of Shaun Gilmore and others.

MATTHEW MERCER: I hope so. That'd be fun.

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Yeah, wouldn't it?

PERSON: Yeah.

MATTHEW PRINCE: All right. Well, we are actually just out of time, so I want to thank...

00:50:59

MATTHEW MERCER: Ooh, look at that!

MATTHEW PRINCE: Our three guests, Travis Willingham, Mathew Mercer, Marisha Ray. Thank you so much for joining us.

MARISHA RAY: Thank you. Thank you all.

[applause]

TRAVIS WILLINGHAM: Thanks guys.

MARISHA RAY: This was great.

MATTHEW MERCER: Thank you guys for coming.

PERSON: Thanks for listening. If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can visit [G.co/TalksatGoogle/podcastfeedback](https://www.google.com/talksatgoogle/podcastfeedback) to leave your comments. To discover more unique and interesting content, you can always find us online at [YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle](https://www.youtube.com/TalksatGoogle) or via our Twitter handle @Googletalks. Talk soon.

[mellow music]