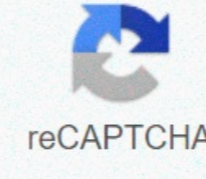




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## Matt mercer campaign guide pdf

Listen/download here: Whether you know him from his hundreds of titles as a voice actor, his fan favorite role as Dungeon Master on Critical Role, or just to be charismatic on the loose, there's a good chance you're familiar with contemporary pop culture icon Matt Mercer. What you may not know is that Mercer can now add Published Authors to his business card thanks to his collaboration with publisher Dungeons & Dragons Wizards of the Coast for a new campaign guide. We chatted with veteran voice actor and D&DMatt Mercer about all things Critical Roles, long-running RPG, live-action, livestreaming featured on Twitch, in particular the opportunity he had to bring his unique and imaginative world to life through Explorer's Guide to Wildemount, a 304-page campaign guide that allows gamers anywhere to join in to create their own unique adventures. (Find it at your local game store/bookstore here) While we geeked out about all things D&D, Dunamancy, and Mighty Nein, Mercer also took us to speed up the team's production process behind the scenes, from how coronavirus has affected their timelines to updates on their upcoming animated adaptation, Critical Role: The Legend of Vox Machina. Listen, or read below, for all that and more! Pictured through Critical Roles, Wizards of the Coast First of all, thank you very much for taking the time out of what I'm sure is a crazy busy schedule to chat with me today. Before we talk about the exciting new projects you've provided for all kinds of D&D players out there, I just want to check in to see how you personally, and your Critical Roles team, are doing as we're all currently weathering this pandemic and find out what life is like in its current state. So how are you guys? We're holding on. We survived. It's growing very fast as it happens to everyone and now we're mainly focused on making sure that we and our fellow people's companies are taken care of. We do all the work from home and keep on top of things and just make sure everyone is taken care of. So it's been a lot of just an overhaul... The workload doesn't change, it's just the location, the means to achieve it have drastically become a vortex of chaos itself. So hang on. Hang in there. I must have heard that. Does quarantine really affect how you and the team produce your show at all? Is there a big change? Matt Mercer: Yes. We don't produce any streaming content. We went dark, in part because in times of shifting infrastructure and technology needed to drain it, among all of us ... On it will take us to find out, all the updates from the governor and everything in L.A. is basically deadly more like very specific media-based and news-based news come through and it just becomes too much of a dangerous liability with the number of crews we need to get in there, so everything will fall apart. So for the purpose of just keeping everyone safe, everyone is cool and kind of riding this out we've gone dark as far as most of the new content and we're currently in the process of figuring out what to do while this remains unspecified. So we evolve as we talk what the next stage is. Well, on the bright side of this, a lot of people stay home, people have a lot of free time on their hands and they're really looking for new content. So for people out there who may not be familiar with Critical Roles or D&D campaigns that you and your cast are filed how do you explain that to newcomers who see it for the first time? Matt Mercer: Definitely. Well, first of all it's a great time to start because you're not left behind. So this is me and a group of my friends, we're all professional voice actors in cartoons, video games and other kinds of media and we started playing D&D about seven years ago and about five years ago we started streaming online. It's become a bigger thing than we ever expected. So only every week we play live on Twitch, barring the current darkness from the COVID scenario but only those of us who play Dungeons & Dungeons Dragons and it's improvised storytelling, it's actors diving into deep narratives, it's just me fleshing out the world and providing interesting challenges and scenarios and it's improvised storytelling at the table with dice sometimes telling how things are going to go and it's kind of a wonderful risk not really knowing what's going to happen at the moment and that's what we're doing. Epic fantasy story with friends at the table. And it was fantastic. For people out there who might listen because they know you from hundreds of your animated titles or video games or just the kind of pop culture zeitgeist in general, I highly recommend checking it out, definitely from the beginning. This takes us to Explorer's Guide to Wildemount. So it's a new campaign guide you create along with talented people from Critical Role and Wizards of the Coast, publishers of Dungeons & Dungeons Dragons. Before we get into the guide itself, how do you feel now that this guide is really available for people to get their hands on physically? It's still sinking, really. It's a wild scenario. I think the change from then to now is, I'm happy to see people excited about it. You know, previously we were excited at the prospect but now it's really getting into people's hands and I'm starting people who are partially into reading it or have finished reading it or developing a campaign based on it and ... You know, there's always something to worry about when you put so much of yourself into something that someone won't enjoy it as much as you'd expect them to and that anxiety must have faded a little bit seeing how many people enjoyed it. So it still stinks and it's still a wild reality that I don't quite understand how I ended up here with this happening, but I now just enjoy the fact that so many people enjoy it, especially in such anxious times now. Image through Critical Role It's interesting that you have what it's like outside of a super successful career. Obviously, this side project is turning into something much more; we can talk about a Kickstarter campaign for an animated series that raised over \$11 million, which just sort of blew minds in and of itself but... I guess it's more of an existential question, but how do you stay humble, but then also how do you stay hungry to keep creating, to move on to whatever the next level? That's a good question. From a humble point of view, I don't know, self-loathing is helpful. I mean it's hard to determine. I don't know, I'm so grateful for the things I've had in my life. You know, I didn't grow up with a lot of things and the fact that we've been able to turn something into a purely successful kind of people we love and the family of our choice, playing games, having fun together is surreal and that's also the whole point of why I think it has resonated with people. So we all go into business together and make sure that the main tenet is that we still care about each other and that we're friends before business and so on, for me a lot of it's just making sure that what we do, we believe in it and that we do it right by everyone we work with. That's a big thing. The responsibility is there too for the people involved in our content, especially when the world is as chaotic as it has been in recent times. You know, want to make sure that we continue to be a light for the people out there who need it and I think from my personal point of view, I don't know, I'm just a big nerd. It's been my whole life. I grew up with geek culture as my culture and being a part of it, I was really appreciated and also understood that at some point to get it all going for granted. So just appreciate every moment that it's there and try and do my best with whatever platform I have for the time I have. It's kind of, I think, a question of humility that's more As far as keeping hungry on it, I don't know what else to do. If I don't do this professionally, I'll do it as a hobby anyway. You know I love playing roles, I love the performing arts. I love writing and telling stories and playing games and friends and now it's just the means to share that joy with so many people around the world. That responsibility is obviously bigger and the stakes are higher because we have employees and health care and all that sort of stuff depends on the storytelling elements now but yes, I will still do it. So not so much that I was worried about losing my hunger. It's about making sure that I don't work too much on my own and to ever take the joy that I'm inherently out of it anyway. That's a good answer. You've put this campaign together, but they're also based on the legend of D&D, which is there to start and rules for campaigns and rules for games that have been around for decades now. Now you can make this tome that people around the world can check out and create their own version of this world, too. So this is the kind of really interesting creative cycle that eats back on it. What a high-level view of this book, especially for someone who has never played a D&D campaign or haven't they seen the Critical Roles episode? Is it still accessible to them? If you've never played D&D, it's still accessible. If you're a fan of the show and want to learn about the legend and history of the world, the details of the location and the various factions and communities that are there. Even if you don't know what D&D is and you just want to see the structure of the fantasy world from a social and geographical point of view and kind of sink in a place you know, it's a little more fantastic and different than what you're used to doing, then it definitely serves that purpose as well. I've been very careful to present it unlike an instructional college study book in any way, more than information but still with narrative flair and written to tell its own story in information throughout. If you are a fan of Critical Roles but not necessarily a D&D player, this is a great place for you to immerse yourself in all those detailed stories and find out more information about the world because you have kind of followed along with campaigns, characters and religions and the Pantheon and various societies and all the various secrets and possible hidden locations and places that will never be seen in our campaign because it's so much broader than just the stories we play Now. You have all that at your fingertips, which is really, really cool. If you're a D&D player and not a fan of Critical Roles or don't know about it, all of this still exists as an invitation to take anything from this world that you want and use for your own campaign to take inspiration from, separate and take your favorite inspiration pieces from the tome and put them into your own session. Not to mention having a bunch of new character options and New spells, new types, I almost want to say, quantum physics or the kind of astrophysical affairs designed for them. New creatures, new natural things. There's a lot for anyone to draw from whether they're familiar with Critical Roles or not, and if you're familiar with Critical Roles and Dungeons, I mean, this book is definitely made for you. Image through Critical Roles At that end of the spectrum, there's definitely a lot of content that will please your fans and D&D, but also things that will surprise people as well. You mention different types of spells and new types of approaches to magic, you just mention the effects of gravity and the effects of time. Can you decipher that? Matt Mercer: Right. Yes. So I grew up with an interest in quantum and astrophysics, just being a hobby reader growing up. So for me it was an aspect of magic that I wanted to explore a little more and give it its own unique feel and so I developed a kind of umbrella of all sorts of magic called Dunamancy based on this energy Dunamis and it was a miracle of potential and actuality. This is the potential power of things before a choice is made, before the effect actually takes the world around it and harnesses the potential energy to disrupt and adjust the basic basic elements of the universe. And so much magic is based on gravity manipulation and density. Much of it is based on manipulation of local time and its parts. Some of it has to do with probability and adjusting the timeline to better fit the vision you may have in the future as opposed to letting the world take it and then being able to take it into your own hands a little bit. So it gives a little more in the esoteric realm. So there are spells that deal with, you know, at higher levels like local terse black holes, things that manipulate the battlefield through adjusting the gravitational pull from different directions, or destroying it with infinite density, or locking objects in place so that it is not affected by gravitational motion or density. There are spells that deal with adjusting the creature's place on time and avoiding them to another moment in a few seconds unaware of what has happened in the interim, the ability to give players the ability to adjust their fate in moments of time, whether it's individual or multiple. So a little less fireball classic elements or lightning and a little more weird and spaced, I guess you could say. To get super-nerdy at that point later, manipulate time and spatial reality and the pull of gravity and density... that seems to be the OP type. So how can you balance this power? Matt Mercer: It's just kind of over the years I've tried the abilities of homebrew characters and spell designs and used comparisons with existing spell and creation levels that nothing overshadows the same spelling-level abilities. So for example, like Graviturgist, which is one of a subclass of wizards focusing on gravity. They don't call black holes at the top of character development. Their low-level abilities include adjusting localized gravity where suddenly a group of enemies within a 10-foot radius may have ... Gravity may have doubled for such a short time that their movement slowed down and they took a bit of devastating damage from just the intense weight at the time. They have the ability that they can adjust the density of the target, whether it's a creature, an object, it can be half its weight or twice its weight. So if something is too heavy to grab now twice as easy to lift or if one of your friends needs to get somewhere quickly, you can lower the density by half and they can actually get somewhere faster because it weighs less. So it's like utilities, small-scale things but when they get stronger down the road, they can finally... As if they see a friend attacking an enemy, they can increase the gravitational pull of that weapon towards the enemy who does additional damage to the punch and force, or if the enemy falls they can cause them to fall for more damage as you pull them harder towards the ground they slam into, eventually being able to become the kind of horizon of their own event where the radius around the friend becomes destroying gravitational energy. So as the ability to scale from small manipulations to low-level elements of the world around them, it's even bigger and like time magic is always a bit, pardon the reference, wibbly-wobbly and dangerous if not well cared for. The idea here can't jump back in time. That's always where things get messy. Manipulation of time, not so much about being able to go back in time more than adjusting its flow, adjusts the place of a person in it. So for example such Chronurgist wizards have abilities where as they can put enemies into temporal stasis. You can lock them up in a moment for a round where they don't realize the passage of time, they don't do anything, their turn is gone, and if nothing spoils or touches them, for them, it's like nothing has passed but you've all been able to move on for a short time. The ability in which they can cast spells and when a spell has been released, they can lock that spell into a small mote of energy and then hand it over to someone else. So at some point later it can be to release the spell from the moment it is cast at a point in time much later. Then eventually they have the ability to have a very, very short and highly realized period of time kind of retreat for a moment in fate to give a possible better result where they can kind of choose one of the few timelines and then take a take that seems best to their advantage and then choose the one to the timeline that continues. So again, it scales as it develops and its effect on time and time manipulation is quite local and controlled enough to the point where it doesn't become so powerful that it actually derails or messes up the campaign, as is very likely if you're not careful. Images through Critical Roles, Wizards of the Coast It's one thing to put all this together with your friends; it is another thing to be able to put a guide in someone's hands and then hope that they can make sense of it. So how much do you have to tweak in play-testing? Matt Mercer: A little tweaking, not too much. Luckily much is on the shoulders of publishing partner, wizards of the Coast. They have a much larger set of testers and processes for them, which I don't have access to. So much of this will be my flesh out design and collaborating with designers on wizards for any kind of smooth song or tweaks where it seems like. This is a pretty solid version of this. Now let's go ahead and release it, into the highly controlled wildfire that is the play-testing group, all under a non-disclosure agreement, and then they take it for a month or two and it's tough, lightly putting through its steps, going all their notes and feedback on it and then from there we make adjustments accordingly and from their balance like Jeremy Crawford and then Dan Dillon and the guys over there it's kind of a master of game mechanics... and they all worked with me to get it as tight as possible, with all the rules already in place as if it were in the world without breaking it. And that's pretty much a short process there. It was so crazy, but it sounds like a dream come true, for years to just like reading those guides and then putting your own campaign together, but for now actually creating one and being half-god of your own world... I don't know, it just blows my mind from this side of the conversation. I'm mine, too. Keep. I mean when they sent me a physical book by post about a month ago and I had to see it in my hand, it was very emotional and very real. It's like I'm having a brief experience outside the body right now. Kind of flashed back to my 15-year-old self where the table trip really started and it was as I said before, still processed. It's going to be a while. They'll be in like the seventh edition of D&D At the time it was kind of like sinking in like, yes, this is my thing. Mercer: Yes, seriously. You're not wrong. Now talk about some nuts and bolts of this guide, too. It comes in over 300 pages. You've got four early adventures for people out there. You've got three new sub-classics you've had New magic style you talk about, 20-some new creatures, and then you've also got great details of all kinds of history and world legends. So it sounds like you pretty much went all-in. Does it all go into this project or do you look something for the future? Everything goes in for this special arrangement. Wildemount is just one of the few continents in Exandria and I definitely have another campaign in mind for another campaign on the way. Will they ever be books or not? I don't know, but for this I don't feel like I'm kicking everything out in the tank. Definitely an all-in though. And, what I'm happy about is that the structure we developed in the process of making this book definitely, if anything, made me more inspired to develop aspects and details but... And it inspired me to develop a future campaign for the game with such elements and details that I am now ... such a process to write it that was previously just some kind of crazy scribble and word document scattered on my computer is lost in the ether. It's the difference between a professional and someone who's being investigated for who knows what with all the crazy white writing and it's like, What's going on here? One of these days that might confuse a detective is really heavy. Exactly. Just like, No, no, no, ... It's D&D, it's okay. Have you seen Stranger Things? Matt Mercer: Perfect. Is there a discussion about future expansion for this particular guide or a story campaign set in another area in Exandria, another region of the continent in the world, something like that that you can talk about? I don't know yet. It's just a great effort to get it out the door and over the book, working on the idea of having access to a number of very interesting and fun utility spells, and the ability to inspire and help your teammates, and generally be charismatic who can walk into social situations for better or worse make them dynamic. Sounds spot-on. I would definitely like to a bit about critical role animated series, The Legend of Vox Machina. Not only can you bring all your adventures to life through streaming on Twitch with your friends, you can now put those rules and tools in the hands of people with Explorer's Guide to Wildemount. Now, we'll also see the first campaign type you've lived in animation. As longtime viewers of the series, people have been waiting for the animated version for a very long time. So what can you tease about this? I mean, the last we heard, you had a very successful Kickstarter campaign, Timouse was on board as an animation studio, Amazon Prime had a sequence of 24 episodes, and you guys had a fantastic writers room assembled. So something new has happened since then or are you stuck in a pause like all the other productions now? Production is still ongoing. The good thing about animation is that many people can still work from home. So we did a lot of video meetings. It's between everyone. It will be like approval, design approval and so on. So the show went as far as it was concerned but now, I mean, it's going to be good. It's still a strange thing, as a person who grew up loving cartoons and initially wanted to get into animation as an artist when I was much younger, to now engage in animation from different sides is completely crazy. But the whole team is very talented. Everyone we involved was very nice. And I think my favorite thing is that it's a lasting Christmas when we do a meeting of approval, so I can see all these amazing artists designing and creatively coming up with visuals for the places I make and have them take them and bring them to life in a way that's much grander and more beautifully and interesting than I could possibly do. This is an amazing piece of collaboration. But we're going forward, we're sailing through in the first season, which follows... There are two early episodes which is an entirely new story. It's a kind of unique story that no one's seen in our stream at least, and then we have a Biranwood arc that develops for the rest of the first season, which is kind of the first big kind of narrative arc that kicked in when we started streaming our way back in 2015, but that would be great. We ended up getting the casting tuned, we got the production animatka back and it was awesome. What kind of behind the scenes with that? Because you're DM for the show, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're a showrunner. So what's the behind-the-scenes creative process of how you decide which stories to deal with and who can write new one? I'll give you a little. I mean, creative, which is our choice, means we're beran. Me and my players, we are all creative partners in Company. So we got together and we worked with Brandon [Auman], who was our showrunner, to figure out what's the best way to tell these stories and then we worked with the writers room to then beat the seasons, episode after episode, and arc characters by character arc in the sense of a classic animated writer's room, but we're all present for, one, guiding the story to make sure that the beats that matter to each of us as players and as creators are met, and to help with the adaptation process. And it's an adaptation process because we have hundreds of hours of gameplay that we have to condense into, for season one at least, 12 episodes between 22 and 25 minutes. That's a lot of condensation you have to do. So part of the adaptation process is working with this writer. Part of it is being present to help guide the story, being present to answer questions about world legends and being present to encourage and help define what parts of the story are most important in the core and heart of the things we have to say. What things can be changed without really underestimating or diluting the narrative and the core of the story. What things really can't be changed and working with everyone to get it to a place where it's something that's still very much a Vox Machina story that everyone watching together knows but is also unique in its own right, has some surprises, and every change we make is just a change that makes the story better for this medium. So it became a big part of what I've done as far as the writers' room is concerned in making up the story. And then from there it comes to all design approvals whether it's like character design, location and background design. Whatever is culture in the world. It's like being a legend and an expert of the world on it, which I guess I am because I rented. That's weird. And then also script approval. All of us, the whole cast go through every script as they go in and give notes on the dialogue to make sure that it's natural and just as important to the character's personality as possible. It's a very, very collaborative process and it's kind of cool that we can all get involved in every step of this to make sure that it's something we're all confident and really excited about and have been like that every step of the way. It was a big distraction and a big tease, and I'm sure fans, myself included, are looking forward to seeing anything and all we can get as we approach the release date. Can't wait to show you. Yes, of course. But I'll remission if I don't give you the opportunity to talk about the great community and critical role fans who have the opportunity to submit some of their own artwork to this guide. I think you're saying half of the artwork is actually actual fan community. Can you talk about that a little bit? Matt Mercer: Right. Yes. I mean the main thing about Critical Roles is, it's fun, it's great and I'm really proud of everything we've done, but it wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for the amazing community that came around it and supported us and supported each other. If I'm proud of anything Critical Roles has done, I'm proud of the community we've created and the people who have been a part of it. So any opportunity we have to raise others, to work with community members to try and kind of share in that opportunity with the people that have been with us, we'll do our best to do it and as part of that, as soon as we have this conversation with the Wizards about the book, that's a big important part of it. I said, We have so many really talented artists out there that we've seen in the community, can we involve them in the book? And the Wizards said, All right, give me a list of examples and links. So I created an extensive list of community artists who have submitted to our gallery that we've just seen their work online, they may have worked with our art books and other things. I sent them to the Wizards and they chose from that list and we managed, in the end, to have close to if not more than half the artists in this book directly from our community and many of them continued to work with the Wizards on other books afterwards. So I'm excited to be able to bring people the opportunity to work directly with the Wizards and look like carving out another aspect of their career in continuing to work with them. That's pretty cool. I like to see things like that where fan fiction, fan art is appreciated and legitimized, which I think is a big thing especially with fanfic that some people still look down on it, or art fans, similarly. So I love that it's kind of legitimized and then brought into the professional sense and you're going to give back to the fans who gave so much to you guys, too. I just want to make sure to highlight that, yes, don't worry. It's something I'm really proud of and some of us will continue to try and do every opportunity we have. We are grateful that we had the opportunity to possibly lift others up. I'm a fan of all these things as much as they are. You know, I grew up going to conventions and queuing up to meet voice cast and people I admire. I grew up doing my own fan art and the things I was inspired by so if there's a cycle that goes back to being on the other side now and has that opportunity, yes, I'll take it. Definitely. What you want for your new and old fans professionally and Critical Roles to come out of this new guide, Explorer's Guide to Matt Mercer: I think especially I would like to, at this time, I want to be a source of escapism and a place where you can immerse yourself and lose yourself in a world of unique and different and varied and beautiful people as well as challenges and mysteries and magic and just be a place of solace and inspiration that might inspire you if you're an artist to create something driven by that world or if you're a writer

take something from there and run it or if you're even just a general consumer to take some inspiration from it and maybe put it into your life. I know I grew up inspired by a lot of the books and fiction I read. I mean, for example, the Nightcrawler of the X-Men, a lot of which I am today. I owe because the example of being just a good person in the face of adversity that he is. So, in the same way, if there's something I wrote, one of these characters, one of these stories can inspire people to try to be a better person in a world where it can be challenging and that's what I'm most looking forward to. That's a very high-minded answer to your question. On a more subtle level, I hope people have the opportunity to pick up this book, enjoy it, and if they haven't gotten the courage to run D&D Previously, if they were fans of the show and they could see familiar faces they'd spent a lot of time with, this would be a book to get you started running games for your friends. Completely. I know as someone who doesn't play a lot of D&D growing up, but I was in gundam RPG brewed at home with my friends that I still have super-beautiful memories of, have you ever dabbled in other genres for RPG? Maybe it's like a horror colored one-off or a sci-fi focus, or do you stick with fantasy? Matt Mercer: My main Critical Role campaign was fantasy from the moment it started. I've been playing RPG for over 25 years now and I've played in many genres. I've played hard sci-fi games before, as diaspora is one of those, I think, Stars Without Numbers. I play Traveller, which is a bit more sci-fi but looser, more fantasy/sci-fi. I have played Rift campaigns in the past which are their own muck cluster of everything. Like let's jam every genre in there and see what happens. Kitchen sink. So yes, I've played a lot of genres and I enjoy it all for their own reasons. Fantasy is just the kind where my heart lies as a Lord of the Rings kid growing up, it's one that really kind of draws me in. I really enjoy sci-fi. We only ran one shot in association with Bethesda and id Software for the release of DOOM Eternal where I had to run a vicious sci-fi one-shot where my players had to viciously attack a futuristic military base and, you know, every chance we had to mix and mess up the genre was always a nice little breath of fresh air and difference with swords and magic that we really enjoy. Of course, and it leads to unfortunately my last question for you today: Is there another project on the horizon that you are currently working on that you want, or are able to, give a signal boost? Oh man. Everything I've got on my plate right now it's pretty much spent my whole time. I mean, to signal encouragement, honestly, I would say because a lot of conventions and a lot of events are canceled throughout the year, a lot of companies and a lot of creators who rely on convention hall settings and dealers to make their money are really hardly hit by the Covid scenario. So if you have a chance, there are a lot of people online. I've improved on my Twitter as well. Many of these creators put up streams to show off what they're making, their products, and if you have a chance and you're interested at all, I would recommend checking it out and supporting them as you can in this difficult time. I love it. That's the perfect response. Thank you so much for all your time today. I want to wish you the best possible success for Critical Roles, for the animated series coming out, and for Explorer's Guide to Wildemount which is now available for fans out there to pick up and start your campaign. So sir, once again thank you. Well, I really appreciate it. Nice to talk to you.

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