

Episode 167: Spice Up Your Worldbuilding, ft. NIA DAVENPORT

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[0:00]

M: You're listening to Worldbuilding for Masochists.

C: And we're wondering why we do this to ourselves.

ND: Because we have to find something to do to fill the time when there's trash on TV. Hi, I'm [Nia](#).

M: I'm Marshall Ryan Maresca.

C: I'm Cass Morris.

NB: I'm Natania Barron, and this is episode 167: Spice Up Your Worldbuilding.

[Intro music plays]

C: Listeners, we have another *fantastic* guest with us. I am super excited about this one, having had the chance to chat at ArmadilloCon. Nia, please introduce yourself to our listeners, tell them a little bit about who you are, what you do, what you write.

ND: Hi, I am Nia Davenport. I write in both the adult fantasy and the YA space. In the adult space, I am N. E. Davenport, I write science fantasy and I have recently branched over into the romantasy space, 'cause I've always been a smutty bookish girl at heart. So I'm thrilled to be here now!

[Cass chuckles]

ND: My upcoming novel is called *Our Vicious Oaths*. It is a literal knife-to-throat enemies-to-lovers romantasy with fae.

NB: Oooh, love it.

C: Excellent. Yes. Perfect. [laughs] I love that. I have been ranting a lot in recent months and years probably, honestly at this point, about the enemies-to-lovers that are really just like rivals. Or, Marshall, that...

M: He said—he said...

C: He was like—

M: He said a mean thing to her once.

C: One time. Yeah.

[Marshall laughs]

C: Yeah, like that TikTok you sent me. "He was really rude to her this one time." And it's like, that is not enemies-to-lovers. If they have not tried to murder each other, you don't get to call it that.

ND: I was just gonna say, if someone doesn't try to stab the other person at least three other times, you don't get to call it that.

C: Yeah. We need blood. We need some blood in the water.

NB: Or if there's just really high stakes, right? Like. If you fall in love with this person you will lose your whole family. Or you might cause someone to die. Or. You know.

C: Upset the magical balance of the world, or...

NB: Yeah.

C: Or something.

M: Somebody should be getting stabbed. One way or the other. [laughs]

C: Heyoooo.

M: In the process. [chuckles]

NB: Yes.

C: And *that's* the theme of our episode today. But before we get into that, Nia, we like to ask our guests, just sort of broadly, what is it that you love about—

M: Why is it stabbed and not penetrated?

C: Hey, we like, you know, whatever. Um. [Laughs] There's thrusting involved either way.

[Marshall laughs]

NB: It's all in the hand. Wrist.

C: Nia, we like to ask our guests...

[Laughter]

C: What it is you enjoy about worldbuilding? What are sort of your favorite things about worldbuilding, and to worldbuild?

ND: So I think one of the things I enjoy most about worldbuilding is just creating. I like to play in a secondary world space. So creating a new world from scratch where literally the sky can be any color that I want it to be. Or people can have horns or people can have... Like, literally, the world can be whatever I make it. You can have gods who are planning an escape and have turned humans into their puppets which is always a fun time.

NB: Mm hm.

ND: I can bring in, just rich historical lore that isn't necessarily like, I guess, that I chain to our timeline and our physics and our history. This is where I will tell you I am not a hard scifi girlie at all. [Laughs] I am always like, "because magic," that's why we're able to defy the laws of physics.

M: Valid.

NB: We're *all* about it.

C: Yeah.

NB: Because it's cool.

C: Because hand-wave. Because I said so.

M: How does the spaceship work? It works well. [Laughs] It works very well.

NB: This is my dollhouse and if you don't like it you can go home.

C: There are other books.

[3:57]

C: Alright, this is the point where I intercede with our warning for perhaps gentle-eared listeners. As we did with our [horny-on-main episode](#) we did earlier this year. We are warning you now that while this podcast is always rated explicit because we have fucking dirty mouths. This one is probably gonna be extra spicy. So. Listen at your own comfort level. That's important. [Laughs] In all of the things we'll be talking about today.

M: This one's a ghost pepper.

[Laughter]

NB: Yeah. Yeah.

C: On our spicy scale... [switches to a Southern accent] This one's gonna be hot, I feel. So yes, we are talking about sex and culture. And sex culture. And sexy cultures. And the culture of sex. And all of those wonderfully exciting things. Because we all enjoy talking about that. Nia, you said it's been sort of recent since you made the jump to romantasy. Can you tell us what made you decide you wanted to go into that arena.

N: Okay. That was actually a lie, because it hasn't been recent.

[Nia and Marshall laughing]

NB: Just recently published in?

M: Recent in terms of the publishing world.

C: There we go. There we go.

N: So, recently in terms of the publishing world, because I've always been a diehard romantasy fan. Even before we got this trendy romantasy label, back when paranormal romance was this big, amazing, explosive thing. And even urban fantasy with a heavy romantic plot. I yell about [Alanah Andrews](#), and [Nalini Singh](#), and [Jeanine Frost](#), and [Chloe Neill](#), who are phenomenal paranormal romance authors. So I've always been here, and even before I published, I feel like some of the first novels I drafted were romantasy novels, they are shelved and will never see the light of day, because while they were terrific on the romance, they probably were very shitty on the actual plot [laughing], because I hadn't gotten there craftwise yet. So I feel like I finally got back to this full circle moment. It's like a homecoming, this is where my heart and passion has always lied and I'm just super thrilled to finally be publishing a romantasy novel.

C: Aw, that's so great. I love that. It's a homecoming.

[Marshall and Nia laughing]

C: I love that. I'm working on my first what will be – hopefully – published romantasy. But for me it was coming up through the fanfic ranks that I wrote many, many, wildly inappropriate things [laughing] in that field. Which also, I can't say that they'll never see the light of day. They're out there, but they're not currently connected to my actual name, so... Shut your mouth, Marshall.

[Cass and Marshall laughing]

C: He figured it out

[Marshall laughing]

M: To be fair, it wasn't exactly...

C: It wasn't that hard. It wasn't that hard. If people know me well enough, it's not that hard to track down. But you shut your dirty mouth Marshall Ryan Maresca.

[Nia and Cass laughing]

M: I will tell no one, sugar.

NB: Well, it's interesting, because I've been thinking about this myself, because my own journey was a bit different, because I came out of lots of religious trauma...Well, it's religious trauma coupled with the first books with sex that I ever read were Stephen King novels. So that just creates a lot of weird cognitive dissonance [laughing] when trying to build it out, and one regret that I have is that my first novel totally in the romantasy – at least adjacent – right before publishing I cut back on some of my sexy scenes, because I had this moment of like, if I actually say "penis". [Laughing] There's just this line, right, you can kind of allude to penetration or hardness or all these things, versus the actual happening. There's all these levels of spice.

Now I don't care. People – it's funny – when they read a book, particularly [Queen of Fury](#), they're just like "there's a lot of sex in that book!" Sex is really important to these characters, and that's where they're at their best and most vulnerable. But I do feel like we're in an age right now where there's a lot of pushback against that stuff as well. So even though romance is continually being minimized – and has been forever – it's also really important to be doing it right now. That's what I was thinking.

N: I agree.

NB: It's kinda revolutionary, in a way.

N: Yeah!

NB: It's the "fuck 'em", but not like that.

M: Most of my books are not sexy at all.

[Natania laughing]

M: Except for [Velocity](#).

C: You put all of the sex into that one. [Laughing]

M: I put all the sex into that one. But at the same time, I still have that Catholic guilt, mixed with knowing that my mother reads everything, and so...

NB: I don't have that, I don't have that. So...that part.

M: So she was like, “So that one’s very...racy.” Yes, it was, mother.

NB: So Nia, when you’re writing, and finding that balance of the physicality, the sensuality, the lust, and the plot, how do you shape that as you’re worldbuilding?

N: So, for me, I have grown from being a notorious pantsner, to where I just opened up a blank doc and was like I’m going off of vibes and feels, and where we go, we go. And I found that writing romantasy, I cannot be a notorious pantsner. So I’ve had to flip it and really learn to plot hardcore, because, to me, everybody has their own difference of opinion. But I love when the fantasy plot is as intricate and as prominent as the romance plot. So I wanna make sure that they both are shining at 50/50 level, instead of one eclipsing the other. So I’ll literally have a spreadsheet where I just outline and I plot to where I’m like, “Okay, this is the inciting incident, this is the rising action, these are the plot points along the way. Here’s the climax. Here’s the conflict. Here’s the resolution.

NB: Here’s another climax, but a different kind.

[Cass and Marshall laughing]

C: Different kind of rising action.

N: EXACTLY. And now I’m getting to spreadsheet two, where here are all the other types of climaxes and rising action. I forget the author’s name, but she’s a romance author and she has a website that gives you a [romance beat sheet](#). I forget her name, because I’ve been using it for like fifteen years at this point. I’ll have to look it up and we can maybe insert it in later. It literally will walk you through the meet cute, or in my case, the meet hate or the meet fucking, because for some reason my characters...They literally always start by smashing in the beginning. I’m a fast-burn girl so...

NB: Wow!

N:[Laughing] So I will have that, and then I will just go through the different romance beats of they’ve come together, and now whatever revelation rips them apart, after that “oh shit, we just smashed, but now we’re mortal enemies” like you get in [Our Vicious Oaths](#). But also like “we’re about to enter into a bargain, because the enemy of my enemy becomes my lover.” So there’s yearning and pining also – I always call it hate-fucking their way back to actual feelings – and then you get the more actual intimate, mushy, grand declarations once we get to that feelings part of the multiple climaxes.

[Nia and Natania laughing]

C: I had this conversation with somebody on a discord server a few months ago, that was like the difference between romances where they sort out their feelings before they sort out the fucking, or where they sort out the fucking before they sort out the feelings.

N: Yes.

C: Both are valid, but which one are you rolling with? And...yeah.

[Nia laughing]

N: I'm normally rolling with they sort out the fucking before they sort out the feelings. The feelings come later.

[Natania laughing]

M: I mean, that at least keeps it interesting throughout.

C: It's a different kind of complexity too, when it happens.

NB: It does.

M: Yeah.

NB: I am definitely not fast-burn, I am a slow-burn girl, but even when I think I'm being middle-burn, they're like, "Oh that was super slowburn." I'm like, but it was chapter four. [Laughing] It didn't take *that* long, but, for me, that's my demisexual brain too. Like, how can you touch someone if you don't know their innermost thoughts and feelings and how smart they are? I can't imagine that.

[Natania and Marshall laughing]

NB: But getting into a character's brain is important. This is why we're all different, right? We're all different in how we relate to these things. But I am writing a story now where it's not only just – it's the Tristan and Isolde story – where they literally do get on a boat, have sex. And now, it's so out of my normal way. I'm like, I guess if you really just like someone, you'll just do it right away. But again, asexual spectrum, it's just hard for me to get out of my brain. [Laughing] Not that I don't like horny books. It's not about that. It's just getting into that mindset. But that's part of what's fun about building cultures. So I'd love to hear a little about how you anchor culture around sex positivity, gender fluidity, presentation...How you shape the world and perception of sex, sexuality, etc.

[12:52]

[Outro music plays]

M: Hi, you. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Worldbuilding for Masochists* and letting us help you overcomplicate your writing life. If you want to know more about your hosts and all the fantastical books we write, including the new editions of my [Maradaine](#) novels and [Velocity of Revolution](#), Natania's [Queen of None](#) and [Netherford Hall](#), and Cass' [Aven Cycle](#), links to all that information is on our website at worldbuildingformasochists.podbean.com. We also have

an archive of all of our episodes and links to more information about the guests of this and every episode.

Also our anthology, [Traveling Light](#), is out. Filled with short stories set in the world we have been building on the show. We have stories from all of us, as well as Marie Brennan, Mike Chen, J.C. Pillard, Victor Manibo, Kate Elliott, Lindsey Carmichael, Valerie Valdes, and Mike Underwood. Links to purchase are on our website, and it's available on all the places you buy books in ebook and paperback. Also also, we now have a Patreon. Come check us out at patreon.com/worldbuildingformasochists, where we'll be giving you bonus content and surprises, and we would love any support you would have to give us.

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[Outro music plays]

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