

Medicinal valley's blush chat

Speaking: Immy Smith and Maria Christodoulou

File Length: 00:23:15

Transcription by Keffy

[00:00:00] Soft harp music plays.

Maria: [00:00:04] We are here to talk about the lovely drawings you have behind you.

Immy: [00:00:07] And your lovely botanical descriptions.

Maria: [00:00:07] I was going to say they're lovely, and then I thought, no, no, don't toot your own horn. Wait for someone else to say it.

[00:00:17] So, medicinal valley's blush.

Immy: [00:00:20] Yeah.

Maria: [00:00:20] Did you enjoy working with that plant?

Immy: [00:00:22] I enjoyed working with medicinal valley's blush. I thought it was a good starter plant for our flora of Horizon Zero Dawn because it's based on a plant that actually exists here. So, quite a few of the plants, as far as we can tell - I mean, it's not like we've finished identifying everything, especially the fungi. Who knows what the fungi are, yet.

[00:00:43] A lot of the plants are not found in the UK. It was nice to start with something that had a UK analogue that I could actually go out and look at. And when you were talking about things like the leaf veins, it was nice to have something where I could go out and look at related plants with a hand lens, so.

Maria: [00:00:57] Yeah, so, I also wanted to start with something familiar in that sense.

Immy: [00:01:02] Yeah.

Maria: [00:01:02] And it did look different, I mean, a little different. The colours were a little bit different. Quite a few differences, but it was something that I recognised and I felt happy as a starting point because then I could try all the different ways of describing it, get used to the actual style of the notes and capture the voice we wanted to capture with the particular, perhaps person that was collecting them.

[00:01:25] So that started off as an interesting exercise because the first thing we did was I wrote the botanical description.

Immy: [00:01:31] Yes, you did.

Maria: [00:01:33] And that may have caused you to get a book or two from—

Immy: [00:01:38] Although—

Maria: [00:01:38] From the shelves.

Immy: [00:01:40] The thing is, right... Puberulent, that was the word that got me first. I was like, I have no idea what this even means. And then once you've had to look up one thing, then that caused me to look up everything. I was like, is a herbaceous perennial really what I think a herbaceous perennial is? And then I was looking up every other word in a botanical dictionary. Questioning the very nature of plant existence.

Maria: [00:02:01] And you felt like a better person, right? It's all—this is all—

Immy: [00:02:05] I know what puberulent means, now.

Maria: [00:02:09] You'll find yourself in a quiz where your life depends on that question and suddenly, you'll be thanking Maria.

Immy: [00:02:14] There's going to be some internet pub quiz that I'm in one day and its going to be like—

Maria: [00:02:20] It's going to be beautiful. Beautiful. So, the actual reason I used the technical terms was a) because it's fun to torture you. But, most importantly, b) because that was my comfort zone. If I could use the precise words to describe it as a starting point, then I had an actual entity that I could then imagine being in the field and making notes for as a particular individual. So, to me, that was a good solid foundation that then I could mess up by trying to explain it in sort of non-scientific jargon.

Immy: [00:02:52] You're not messing it up. It's just making it accessible, Maria.

Maria: [00:02:52] Yes. Exactly. Exactly, but when I do it, it becomes messed up. It's not the process of the problem. It's the interference by me that's the issue.

Immy: [00:03:08] What, you mean like making all plants laxative just because you can?

Maria: [00:03:12] Okay, that happened once and it may happen again, I'm not going to lie to you. It may happen again. But when I have that power, I'm going to use the power.

Immy: [00:03:22] It's a good job you weren't the pharmacologist here, really, isn't it.

Maria: [00:03:25] Really is. That's way too much power to give me.

Immy: [00:03:28] Too much power for one person to have.

Maria: [00:03:31] Exactly. So, after we've done the notes there was a whole question of something that's never observed in the actual game, which is seeds and seed heads.

Immy: [00:03:43] Yes.

Maria: [00:03:43] We talk about on the field description, and there is a lovely example of it on your drawings as well.

Immy: [00:03:51] Yeah, they will—

Maria: [00:03:51] Why do we have seeds? Why do we have seeds?

Immy: [00:03:53] Yeah, we don't see seeds at all in the game. We just see flowers. So all of the plants have a tall, single-spike flowerhead in the game, but no seeds. But seeds are important.

Maria: [00:04:03] It makes absolutely no sense for anybody who is trying to describe plants or other organisms, yes, including moths, I guess. They have seeds, too. I don't know about their seeds, but I'm sure they have them.

Immy: [00:04:17] Um. We'll have that talk about the moths a bit later.

Maria: [00:04:24] But it doesn't make any sense for somebody who wants to describe the plant to not describe it in all the sort of phases you're going to see. And the seeds are an obvious one. The fruit and the seeds are very obvious in a botanical description. It could not be missing.

[00:04:37] So, essentially what we did is we made it up based on the plant that we recognised as the origin for this particular—

Immy: [00:04:43] Yeah. And I think it's really unlikely that—it's not the Nora are not going to know if it has seeds. Even if we assume that our healer has taken liberties with their illustration and it doesn't usually have seeds and flowers at the same time, they would still have drawn them in there somewhere, right?

Maria: [00:04:58] And they would have made at least a note on it. It's something that they would have described somehow, because also it's quite... that particular plant, it's quite obvious when it's gone to seed. It's not like a big secret.

Immy: [00:05:09] Also, I think it's fair to say there are various things flying around in the air when you're walking through meadows in the game, and maybe they're

insects or tiny little gnats or something. We don't see enough insects, but they've got to be there, right? Who's pollinating these things, otherwise? But I also think a lot of them could be seeds floating through the air, like around here, you'd see willowherb seeds in the summer floating along on the breeze.

Maria: [00:05:33] Do we have any machine pollinators? That is the question?

Immy: [00:05:36] That is an interesting question. Wait, do any of the plants that have spiky seed heads or ones with hooked seeds. We should definitely look into that when we're looking at the other plants. Because, there are flying machines and machines that would be grazing and brushing through plants. This is a good thought.

[00:05:55] But, back to this plant.

Maria: [00:05:59] Yeah. Dispersing and pollinating. Two different things that we need to look into how they do it. But that's back to the plant, so. This is where we have the seeds.

[00:06:06] The other question that was I referred to... I gave them a code. I gave all of them a code.

Immy: [00:06:13] Yeah, the accession number.

Maria: [00:06:13] Including your moth.

Immy: [00:06:14] Including my moth that I made up.

Maria: [00:06:16] We need to talk about your moth.

Immy: [00:06:19] Hey, now.

Maria: [00:06:21] But one of the reasons is that I've come to believe that if this is our collection that's done by somebody who has a scientific interest like the case of the healer, they would find a way to record it.

Immy: [00:06:33] Yeah.

Maria: [00:06:33] And whether they will refer to these numbers as serial numbers of accession numbers, that's up to interpretation. But in my head, accession numbers made more sense because we know that, spoiler, from the background, the origin of the population is linked to biological experiments which means that, in that sense, some of the words that may be available to them, materials around them, would be accession numbers.

Immy: [00:06:59] I mean also if you...

Maria: [00:06:59] Because that's something we use in biology.

Immy: [00:07:01] If you make a note of something, you want to be able to find that again, so I presume they're going to index it in some way, because there's a lot of biological resources that they could be making notes of. You want to be able to find the thing you're looking for again. So I don't think it's unreasonable to think of some form of index.

Maria: [00:07:16] Exactly. I felt very strongly that they needed to have a serial number. In fact it was one of the things that I just did to start with and didn't even discuss this with you. It just showed up to you with an accession number at the top. Its like, what's happening?

Immy: [00:07:28] I mean, I know better than to argue with some of these things.

Maria: [00:07:32] You're learning, finally.

Immy: [00:07:33] I've spent too long in the Herbarium.

Maria: [00:07:36] I do have a question. I can see your sketches. Why would somebody who makes field notes use colours in their sketches? I know people do, and I know some people don't, and there are some people like me who can't draw and they just throw a diagram at best.

Immy: [00:07:50] It's just practice. It's not that you can't draw. Let's not have the can't draw, practice, practice argument again.

Maria: [00:07:57] No, no, no, no, no. But like, I never spend the time to learn how to do this properly so I do a diagram instead. And I would position leaves and lines. But my question is, why do you feel it's important to add colours? Why do we think that particular Nora healer would be keen on adding colours?

Immy: [00:08:17] For one thing, I think they have lots of materials available to make a field kit that includes coloured stuff, right? So I have a field kit that includes a small watercolour set, which you will be familiar with, because it used to live at Herbarium RNG with me. So I have that, that I would take with me. And it's fair to say that different people do their field notes in different ways, I would usually sketch in the order pencil, ink, watercolour, or pencil, ink, something coloured. I know not everyone colours things in the field, but I would try and colour them as soon as possible after I'd taken them. Like even if I didn't colour them on the spot, as soon as I got some time to not be doing anything else, I would colour them because I think colour is something that fades from your memory quite quickly.

[00:08:59] Maybe that's the wrong description. Basically, I think you're more likely to remember a roughly accurate representation of the colour if you note it

down straightaway. And unless you have a colour chart, like one of those Kodak strips are something that you're taking with you when you're taking photos in the field, you're not going to have any more accurate representation, right? If you do take a colour strip and take a photo of holding a colour up to the plant then you can digitally reference it when you get home. But unless you're doing that your memory is going to be the best thing you've got and you're going to remember it more accurately the sooner you describe it.

[00:09:35] So I would try and mix and colour at least some of it as soon as possible. You don't have to colour the whole entire plant and if you're taking like a watercolour kit with a foldout palette in or something you can mix some colour up, colour a little bit of it and be like alright, that's the right colour. And then when it dries out, it's still on your palette and you can just add water and use it again, so.

[00:09:51] But I have some nice paints that are made by Esra Alhamal who works under the name Bristle & Brush and they're actually earth pigments made from earth and clays and that kind of thing. But I think matched pretty well to the colours of the landscape in the game. So it was really easy to imagine a Nora being able to easily make collect paints in that colour. And it comes in a little tin and little metal pans that are held on with magnets. And with all the machine parts, and you know, stuff like that, you could really imagine how the Nora would be able to recreate something like that, it would be really fun actually, to try recreating the Nora healers' field kit, somehow.

Maria: [00:10:28] I love the fact that what you want to recreate is the field kit. And what I want to create is the measurements that they have, you know, how do they measure things.

Immy: [00:10:37] I mean—

Maria: [00:10:38] We have different interests, seems like.

Immy: [00:10:39] If you're making drawings in the field, measurements are important, too. I would normally like take a ruler and write down measurements, because I quite often draw by drawing a crosshairs and measuring from the center of something outwards. But yeah, tell me about your measurements, because you're a little bit like...

Maria: [00:10:55] So I found that surprisingly distressing—

Immy: [00:10:58] The lack of units.

Maria: [00:10:58] The idea that I didn't have the vocabulary for the units that they could be using. And in my head, they have very clear, very specific units that they're

using. In my head, they exist because they are advanced, they know what they're doing. They have measurements, they have ways to describe how you're going to find this particular plant or where the machines are hiding. They have ways of communicating these things.

Immy: [00:11:24] Yeah.

Maria: [00:11:24] I just don't know them. And this comes in contrast with the fact that I've also been told when I'm in the field, and I even take a picture of a plant to actually put something that I know is a standard measurement next to it. So it's usually a pound or whatever coin you have in your pocket.

Immy: [00:11:38] Like this, I would use something standard as well. Even if you're just putting you know, something you have in your pocket, like a box of snacks or something. If you take a photo of it next to something.

Maria: [00:11:48] So to me, it was an issue that we haven't got the right vocabulary for the units they're using. And I feel that that's something I will try to develop so that future notes actually have at least some sort of indication of what people are using.

Immy: [00:12:01] Yeah.

Maria: [00:12:01] Because paces and comparison to somebody's height are fine. But I feel if you have somebody who is so meticulous about you know how the glands are and you know, the position of the leaves, they wouldn't then say, and it's about yay high. It's a big—

Immy: [00:12:17] Plus, we know they collect lenses from machines, right? It's one of the things they harvest and can use. If you're looking at something like we use the example of a watcher lens, because they watch things. So we're assuming they have a pretty good lens.

Maria: [00:12:31] I know, I felt so good about that line. I was so proud of—

Immy: [00:12:34] But, you'd assume the watch would have a pretty good lens, but then you would want some comparison for that as well. You'd want some kind of scale? Like...

Maria: [00:12:44] How much? How much bigger? So...

Immy: [00:12:48] It's tricky, though. You can't—it's a game, after all. It's not really designed for us botanizing. So—

Maria: [00:12:53] Okay, first of all, everything is designed for us botanizing. I don't appreciate.

Immy: [00:12:56] Sorry. My bad. Sorry.

Maria: [00:13:02] Okay, moving on. I just feel that that sort of vocabulary and units is something that they would have.

Immy: [00:13:08] Yeah, me too.

Maria: [00:13:08] So I think it would be good to get an idea of what they're doing there. And, yes, it was more distressing than I expected it to be. But we followed through, we're all okay.

Immy: [00:13:20] While we're here, at the risk of making more editing and transcription for us, we could hypothesise about what type of units they might use based on what people have used in history. People have used units of measurement that come from plants before, maybe they'd use a particular type of seeds that was particularly consistent in length. For something like things you see down a watchers lens, maybe they would use the length relief or height of a plant. It's not like humans over time have never used those kind of things for measurement.

Maria: [00:13:47] Yeah, that's actually. Well, one of the other things we have is these machines are surprisingly consistent.

Immy: [00:13:56] Mm-hmm, that's a good point.

Maria: [00:13:58] So why wouldn't they be using for example, I don't know. A third of a watcher's leg?

Immy: [00:14:07] I mean, there are small parts and scraps that people pick up.

Maria: [00:14:09] Segment, it would be like spider leg, which has various segments. And we looked up the anatomy last weekend, and I forgot about it. So I don't know what the segments are called. They're all knees, though.

Immy: [00:14:21] Yeah, I mean, it's all knees.

Maria: [00:14:24] It's all knees.

Immy: [00:14:24] But it's all there's so many parts that they harvest, you could just have different units of length with things that are large or small or whatever. Like, if you're trying to describe a big plant, maybe you have a standard unit that's a third of a leg. And if you're looking at something small, maybe the size of a screw from a Strider's left ankle or something. You could find parts that match the scales you needed, I reckon.

Maria: [00:14:50] And not only that you could use... instead of using because we used, I think, paces, for the nearest population.

Immy: [00:14:54] Yeah. Yeah. That is how measurements are given in the game, right? It's so many paces away, isn't it.

Maria: [00:14:59] Yeah. Exactly Because you see the paces that you're away from a particular person, but that does vary.

Immy: [00:15:05] Yeah.

Maria: [00:15:05] With... so maybe longer distances, they could actually use strides of a particular animal.

Immy: [00:15:10] That's a good point. Yeah.

Maria: [00:15:12] Because that would be more standardised. I'm not saying that since we do have things replicate on their own. In that sense, we will have some variation, I'm guessing, but the variation will be small.

Immy: [00:15:22] Yeah.

Maria: [00:15:22] That would be my guess on this. So that would be a more consistent way of measuring it right there. Because my stride and your stride are different. So yeah, you can tell from this, but I'm taller, very probably.

Immy: [00:15:35] I'm just trying to think if there are any bipedal machines that would have a particularly good stride they could use. There's one of those that looks like a bird... I can't remember what it's called in the game, because I still think of it as the angry chicken. It's one of the ones you get acoustic shells from. I can't remember the name. I'll have to look it up.

Maria: [00:15:51] We'll look it up.

Immy: [00:15:51] But there are some machines that you could think of like, yeah, this works in a way where it would be easy to judge it's stride.

Maria: [00:15:58] So this is this is the sort of thing I'm thinking of. Bigger distances and smaller distances that could be correlated with an actual machine, that would be a bit more standardised. And that would make all of them more easy to communicate, because everybody would encounter the same things. So yeah, this is why I felt so strongly about measurements and I wrote a whole blog post about it.

Immy: [00:16:20] It's okay, measurements are important.

Maria: [00:16:23] It's all fine, it's all good. And for our next adventure.

Immy: [00:16:27] We are going to look at freeze rime root. That's a particularly interesting one.

Maria: [00:16:29] And it's not going to be from a Nora healer.

Immy: [00:16:33] No. It's going to be from the Carja, who seemed like absolute jerks. I'll be honest, a lot of them. Culturally speaking, they seem a lot like Victorians. And like, I have issues with the Victorians.

Maria: [00:16:43] I mean, you and most of the world should have issues with...

Immy: [00:16:49] Yeah, I mean, fair play. They did wander around a lot sticking their dick in things.

Maria: [00:16:54] Yes. So. So we will be also not following the Nora in general for a bit, so that would be an interesting exercise for me.

Immy: [00:17:04] Yeah, I think a lot of the cultural stereotypes in the game, each tribe is given particular traits that I feel like, on the one hand, you want people to be able to understand what's going on in the game fairly quickly. So I can understand why. But they're all quite heavy handed, you know what I mean? They're very obvious and a bit, eh. But I can see that a Carja librarian or a Carja or in charge of scrolls would keep some interesting notes, maybe make some interesting drawings and diagrams. I wonder like... See, a lot of the time in the game, we see the Carja stuff being described as you know, scrolls. And at the beginning of game, we see someone reading off the scroll. So it might be fun to try and make some artwork on a scroll. Because for the finished art. We've used a hand-bound leather book made out of recycled leather to edit the artwork on to so it looks like the Nora healer's journal. I'm wondering if we can edit anything onto a Carja scroll. This will be fun. Don't know what I'm going to use. I'll think of something. Yeah. Also, it's a more pharmacologically interesting plant. I mean, it's just something more potentially toxic. So that makes it like fun to start with.

Maria: [00:18:14] Yeah. I mean, you know. Toxins, laxative properties. All these things.

Immy: [00:18:19] Yeah. I mean, the potions in the game, we don't actually see people drinking them, do we? So there's nothing to say that it would like... I think freeze rime root is used in making the freeze resist potion, right? So I think it could be a potion that you put on externally, that you apply topically.

Maria: [00:18:40] Sort of like a cream, for example.

Immy: [00:18:40] Yeah, I'm just thinking because freeze rime root is one that's really obviously based on a particular plant. I think it's the state flower of Colorado.

Maria: [00:18:49] It is, I think, yes.

Immy: [00:18:50] Blue columbine, can't remember the Latin thing. You're the botanist here.

Maria: [00:18:55] It's an *Aquilegia*.

Immy: [00:18:57] Right. They contain some toxic compounds. They're not really used in medicine anymore for that reason. So. I think it'll be interesting.

Maria: [00:19:01] I think there seems to be quite a lot of material. I think it'll be interesting to decide what they were using in the descriptions and you know, what would be the points of interest to them. Because everybody writes down the things that interest them, essentially. The Nora healer wants you to be able to go out there and know exactly what you're doing with it. The Carja scientists may be interested in other things. What happens when you put it in proximity with particular things or what happens when you try to grow it in a greenhouse? You know, these are things that have a completely different view and we need to decide sort of which way this is going.

Immy: [00:19:33] In game, especially in the documentation associated with the hunting lodge, you see them document things very systematically and document a lot of rules. And I think, yeah, I can see the Carja being very interested in keeping orderly records of resources and having some idea of measurements and quantity as well. So it's going to be... I'm curious to see how you'll define measurements there, too, now we've had this conversation about the Nora and their measurements.

[00:20:00] We're gonna have some fun reading through the texts in the game to try and work that stuff out as well, I think.

Maria: [00:20:04] I agree.

Immy: [00:20:05] Because there's a lot more written material in the game from the Carja than there is from the Nora where we've kind of taken the liberty of assuming that they keep written records.

Maria: [00:20:14] Yeah, because otherwise, we didn't really have...

Immy: [00:20:16] It would be a very short project, if I wasn't illustrating things, and you weren't writing things, to be honest.

Maria: [00:20:21] I was gonna say we'd have some difficulties with the illustrated field notes. But... just a thought.

Immy: [00:20:28] This is definitely going to be an interesting one. Like, I'm looking forward to this one.

Maria: [00:20:32] I'm looking forward to it as well. So yeah, hopefully we'll be releasing the final version of the medicinal valley's blush art with this

Immy: [00:20:40] And the moth!

Maria: [00:20:42] Moving on. And the moth.

Immy: [00:20:40] Just saying, there's a moth.

Maria: [00:20:41] Do you need to talk about the moth?

Immy: [00:20:44] I'm just saying we have a moth. I mean, where there are plants, there are insects.

Maria: [00:20:48] And a beautiful moth, it is. Yes.

Immy: [00:20:49] You.

Maria: [00:20:50] I... it's...

Immy: [00:20:52] You can't have plants without invertebrates or something to pollinate them.

Maria: [00:20:54] What I liked was the scientific decision to say add some hair. Look at it. Then, add a hell more hair on it, as well.

Immy: [00:21:02] Yeah. I mean, you know.

Maria: [00:21:02] It's what I did with the plant, as well. You know, I looked at it. I said, you know what it needs? It needs more hair.

Immy: [00:21:09] Why did you add hair to medishinal valley's blush? Medicinal what? I can't even pronounce things.

Maria: [00:21:13] Because... Okay, I will tell you exactly why. I did because the colours made me think of more arid environments. Its colours are a bit more muted. They may have to deal with high levels of sunlight. Yeah. And then instinctively and that happened throughout, I went into Mediterranean botany. Now it's like what do they have? They reflect. They need to reflect, let's give them some hairs. So I don't do it on purpose. I just you know, you can take the girl out of the Mediterranean but.

Immy: [00:21:41] You are a Mediterranean botanist, though. I think you kind of like get a free pass on that one.

Maria: [00:21:44] I'll try to behave for the next one. Especially because we have the word freeze in it. I'm like, you know. I can do this. It doesn't have to be a hot weather thing.

Immy: [00:21:53] Listen.

Maria: [00:21:53] This can happen.

Immy: [00:21:54] Listen. You can say you're going to behave but I would just like to point out that the Colorado blue Columbine is in fact I believe pollinated by a moth. I am just...

Maria: [00:22:06] Okay, you know what, this is gonna have so many different adaptations on it. This is fine. We're doing this.

Immy: [00:22:14] I think we're past behaving, here. I'm just saying.

Maria: [00:22:18] Nobody cares about us behaving.

Immy: [00:22:19] I mean, it's a Sunday project. Why would we behave? We're having fun playing video games and making it all up.

Maria: [00:22:25] Which is perfect as far as I'm concerned.

Immy: [00:22:28] Behaviour is overrated. Everyone should expect a lot of bad behaviour.

Maria: [00:22:30] I think that's good.

Immy: [00:22:32] Yeah. Are we done, then?

Maria: [00:22:34] I think so. I think that's longer than I anticipated.

Immy: [00:22:37] That's okay.

Maria: [00:22:37] It seems there's a lot to talk about.

Immy: [00:22:39] It has been lovely to talk to you, Maria.

Maria: [00:22:40] Excellent.

[00:22:40] Harp music starts to play in the background.