

The Devil's Library Episode 11 – “A Blackened Heart A Blackened Soul”

[Intro Music]

Ligeia

Hello everybody, welcome to our new episode. Welcome to the Devil's Library. I am here today with my dear friends Pike, with Leraje, Hail Satan. And with Lithos.

Leraje

Hail Satan.

Ligeia

So what, uh, are we doing today? So today, this episode, we are going to explore a work, a book, um, with a name. It has a name. Okay. Are you ready, guys? This is a book by John Ward. A blackened heart, a blackened soul. And this book is so completely new that we had to actually wait until everybody was able to get it.

Uh, so it was our first read for everybody here in this group. It was my choice. I chose this book because it was new and it was a challenge. It is always a challenge to find a book that my dear friends didn't read, specifically some of them. So I was really tempted by this prospect and maybe it blinded me a little bit.

And I also really like the cover and the name. So as I'm saying, uh, it is a book, uh, that, that promises, correct me if I'm wrong, but in my mind it promised like dark intensity and it was inviting for me, um, into like a world that would be conflicting and challenging and philosophical and psychologically, uh, what's the word?

Intense. Right? Yeah. So these were my expectations. I, I'm really excited to hear yours. Basically, I'm not going to talk about the plot of this book, but I will just say it touches on themes of, uh, alienation, transformation, maybe inner conflict and how certain people or like people in this book, deal or not, deal with their, with the conflicts in them.

We will have a closer look at the ideas, the style, the writing, and like the whole experience that we had reading this book. I don't know. Are we ready to go?

Leraje

Oh yeah.

Lithos

Oh yes.

Ligeia

Ready as I think this episode will be.

Leraje

Ready. Ready. More than ready.

Ligeia

Very different from anything we have done so far. So. Yeah.

Leraje

Um, so you all finished the book, didn't you?

Pike

Yes, of course.

Leraje

Mhm. I did not finish the book.

Ligeia

You know, go away.

Pike

Yeah, go finish it, then come back.

Lithos

No staying power. It was too terrifying, wasn't it?

Pike

I think it's fair to give John a little disclaimer, you know, warning in case he's listening. Uh, so I don't know if you're listening, John, but if you are, this might not be a very kind review of your book, so you might wish not to listen it and preserve your mental health. Look after yourself.

Lithos

Yeah, I'd like to say that there's a couple of things. There is nothing that we've got against, uh, an author trying their hand at something different, uh, normal, um, small specialist publishing houses, per se. And we are not the kind of people, and this is not the kind of podcast where we deliberately pick something that we can sort of, um, tear apart just for the fun of it.

We, we do not enjoy reading bad literature and we, we try and pick good books and we try and give positives. So um, yeah, but the warning up front is it is not going to be a good review, I'm afraid.

Ligeia

Like why I chose the book, it was not intentionally to be bad or anything. I didn't know.

Leraje

But by the same token, all that said, we're also duty bound to be completely honest about the experience we had reading these books. And um, this is why we will never accept books that are suggested to us by authors or publishing houses. Uh, because we want to do things our way. We're not, we don't do adverts, we don't do sponsorships, and we won't be.

You can happily suggest things to us, but we will happily say no. And um, not read your book and not read your suggestions for books because this is what we want to do, not what someone else wants us to do.

Pike

Yeah, Hail Satan to that. Okay, so Leraje, why did you not finish the book?

Leraje

Um, because it's dreadful.

Pike

At which point did it break you?

Leraje

At which point did it break me? At which point did I think, this is it, I just cannot carry on with this anymore. About 10 pages into the second half of the book when we have the time jump from uh, John as an 8 year old to John as a 20, whatever old he is.

I don't know, um, I don't know

Pike

why that upset you. Because he's exactly the same at 8 years old as an adult.

Leraje

Yeah, well he certainly, his inner voice is exactly the same. I mean as an 8 year old he has a fantastic vocabulary.

Lithos

But he doesn't know what 'cassock' means.

Leraje

But yeah, doesn't.

Pike

Mhm.

Leraje

Know what cassock means. He doesn't know what the word 'awe' or 'awestruck' means. Doesn't know what the word, uh. What other words have we got? Smart 'smirk'.

Lithos

That's what they do in Middlesbrough when they go out for a cigarette.

Leraje

Go out for a smirk. It's just, I'm sorry John, to be blunt, but it's a bad book. It's badly written, it's badly edited, if it's been edited at all. It's certainly not been proofread.

Lithos

No, I don't think there's been any editing. There's not even been proofreading.

Leraje

No.

Lithos

Um, and uh, there are, it's Full of grammatical errors as well as misuse of words.

Leraje

Uh, it's just out and out mistakes as well. Not just wrong word choices, but out and out mistakes. I mean, there's. There's a passage where, um, the main character, John's grandma, it gets possessed by a demon and she starts cooking something on a stove in a possessed kind of way. That's what possessed people do, apparently.

Start cooking stuff. And according to the author, a rabbit and a hare are interchangeable animals. They are the same animal. He uses the same word, the word rabbit and the word hare in the same paragraph to describe the same animal.

At various points, things happen, we are told from the character's position, happen in a blur.

And um, then within the same paragraph, we get detailed explanations of exactly what happened. So it's kind of. Well, did it, did it go in a blur or, or what? I mean, what happened? There's a specific point when, uh. Let me get to my notes on this. A nurse called Sierra tells one of the other characters, Father Rosario, about an attack that.

That John's possessed grandma had made on John. I'm, um, quoting directly from the book here. "She went on to tell me the grisly details that Johnny outlined to her. How she ate the skull of a wild, partially cooked rabbit, and then went on to say that Edna made him also a piece of the hare and, um, threatened to cut off her finger if he didn't comply.

She then told me how Edna lashed out at him verbally before finally having her seizure."

One page later. This is the character Johnny talking about the same event. "The medics tended to my grandmother and occasionally attempted to ask me what happened. I couldn't find the words. I felt numb, empty. So I sat in silence."

So which of those two things is true? Did, Did Nurse Sierra get all the details? Or did Johnny sit there in total silence and didn't share any of the details?

Lithos
Telepathy.

Leraje
This is a bad book.

Pike
Actually, before we go into granular detail, maybe, I don't know. Ligeia, do you want to say a little bit about what the book is about? Just so the listener. I will need some idea what we're half.

Ligeia
Because I've read this quite some time ago now. This book is about Johnny. Ah, at the beginning that the first half of the book is about Johnny being 8 years old. As we mentioned, he is dealing with trauma, um, which, if we can say that like it started probably with uh, like a car, uh, crash when he was sitting in the back of the car and his parents were in front of.

Of him and they crushed and his mom died and his father was like, ended up disabled, uh, and in a wheelchair.

Lithos
I've.

Ligeia
I'm not sure if anything else with him. I think he was like, okay, he just couldn't walk anymore.

Pike
Right.

Ligeia
He was not completely paralysed. Possessed, yes.

Ligeia
That. This part was not clear to me. Uh, help me here. Like, I thought this whole thing started here, but as the story. The word evolve. I don't know. But anyway, uh, continued, probably is a better word here. I thought maybe he was just possessed even before and the whole thing happened because of him or I'm not really sure what the point was because even the ending, I.

I don't understand what was happening. Was this just the trauma? Was he seeing things but then the other people were dying? I. It was.

Pike
What was quite clear, I guess, out of all of that was that a demon latches.

Ligeia
So you think he latches 8 years

Pike
old and then m. Not before? Um, that's the thing.

Ligeia

Like, I'm not sure.

Pike

Well, might have been before. But from his childhood, a demon follows him around and everyone he loves dies. And the demon tells him, oh, I'm going to finish off everyone you love and then. And then I'm going to come and take your soul. Ha ha ha.

Ligeia

Uh, I really like how you were

Pike

saying that's pretty much the. The whole.

Ligeia

Exactly. At that moment, like I'm taking your soul and your cat appears.

Lithos

Yes.

Ligeia

I love that. Anyway, so, yeah.

Lithos

Mhm.

Pike

Mm.

Lithos

It's not clear because a cursed doll appears in. In there that seems to have been inhabited by the spirit of his dead mother. And. But the bizarre thing is, halfway through the book, it suddenly switches. He's grown up, he's in a relationship. They've been together for years. They've been married for 11 years or something.

His wife's expecting a baby. But that demon seems to have done nothing between the age of 8 and 30. Whatever he is now, he's completely got over the trauma. There's been no mention of what happened in the intervening years. Did the demon go on a sabbatical? Did he go on a break? And then.

Yeah, and then when his wife becomes pregnant and the demon starts to show up. Well, no, it doesn't show up. Then the demon shows up after, they go gh hunting and. And find another. And find a room with dolls and his cursed childhood doll is in there and the demon turns up. So the demon somehow also linked to the doll, but not linked to him.

He only comes up when the doll's there and The. The John's there. Something like that. If it sounds confusing, it's because I'm very confused by what this was about.

Pike

Does your experience of watching all the horror films not inform that particular question?

Lithos

Well, I think it informs it in the sense that he's obviously taking tropes out of various horror films and. And jammed them all in quite randomly, it seems. It did not make any sense to me. What? What? And. And in the end, the demons called Malfass. I think something like that. Um. Ah.

What. What he does. And in the final scene, John. I mean, these are all spoilers, but listener. Uh, you know, you're not going to miss anything because I would not recommend that anyone read this book, honestly. You know, So I. I

will just say what happens in the end. John hangs himself in front of the priest.

Ligeia
No.

Lithos
And. And then there's no explanation as to what happens to the demon. The demon seems to go poof. He doesn't go into the priest. He possesses people. And then when John's dead, he's done. I don't know.

Pike
That's because the power of God wins out in the end.

Lithos
Oh, because he hung himself in the church.

Pike
Yeah, he hung himself in the church. But in that moment, the priest was supposed to lose his faith, but he regained his faith. Uh, you know, doubled force.

Lithos
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes. He is now super priest. He is Father Rosario, the, um, slayer of demons or whatever. He likes ice cream. That's all I can remember about Father Rosario. He likes his ice cream.

Ligeia
Also, if. If the mom's spirit is in the doll, why is he also seeing her in the, like, doorway? And, and you know,

Pike
Mom's spirit is not. The doll

Lithos
is either shows up as his mom or other people.

Ligeia
Yeah, him. It. That. I don't know. I don't know. It was a little bit trying too hard, you know, it was like there was no space for any. Like it wasn't developing in any way. It was just all over the place and every. Everything.

Leraje
No, I mean that's. There's no development in this novel at all. Um, there's a series of horror tropes shoved into a narrative and with no explanation or no reason. There's a doll. There's a doll there because there's a doll. Uh, there. It's a possessed doll because this is a possessed doll. Uh, you know, now I have no problem.

I've said countless times, I've got no problem with a lack of explanation for. For things. But there's always has to be a certain logic, even if it's the nightmare logic of dreams. But there's no internal logic because there's no internal narration to this.

Ligeia
Like not having all the information and having space for your own thoughts and reasoning and opinions. Um, and there is a different story with this book where at one, like on one hand it is over explaining that's how I read it, but it's not really saying what it's supposed to be saying. There is no solution to anything.

There is no climax to anything. I have no idea why any of that was happening.

Leraje

I went through kind of a number of stages reading this. I mean, at first I was kind of like, oh, there's quite a lot of unforced errors in this. And then it got kind of amusing to collate and pinpoint the errors. And then the reason I stopped reading this, it was just getting to the point where it became beyond amusing and just got annoying.

Lithos

It was, it was a very, very painful read, I found. And I really had to stick with it in the end. And the last few chapters I just had to kind of skim read and kind of. Because there's an awful lot of internal monologue exposition kind of thing.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

And what the author has done is there are main characters and he writes one chapter from the point of view of one, then one from the point of view of the other, and then. And keep switching characters and each character he does in the first person voice. Now that is quite an audacious, uh, thing to do, especially if you're.

You're not that good an author. I mean, because if you're doing it in first person, you have to inhabit that character. And if you switch every chapter and do every subsequent chapter in a different character, but in the first person, then you have to also change the voicing. And there is no change in the voicing of the characters.

All the characters have the same internal monologue, the same voice, and the voice is quite clearly his. And that is piss poor writing. I'm, um, sorry, to be honest, but it's awful. And it was really irritating. It really, really got to me in the end. It was, it was, you know, I, uh, was like gnashing my teeth at the end of some chapters going off.

Does this not end? And it's long, it's 320 pages and an awful lot of it is just drivel. Internal monologue, really badly written, misused words. Sorry, I'm going to stop here because this is just annoying me again that, ah, I actually fucking spent money on this and wasted time reading this.

Leraje

I mean, I think Your point about that? The kind of like internal, the idea of using every chapter from a different person's perspective and them all being first person narrative, that immediately limits your ability to develop a character. There's no character development. They are all interchangeable. They're the same person with different names.

Pike

I would also say that it does take uh, the reader out of the story if uh, the character is narrating how they're dying in first person. It's possible to do that, but it takes a lot of skill. And before you learn to run, you need to learn to walk, which means before you need to, to do advanced literary writing, you need to learn.

Well, let's just start with learning to write in English.

Leraje

Mhm. Yeah, I completely agree with that. M. One of the tricks to sort of like doing that, that what you just said there pike, about uh, describing your one's own death in first person, you've got to care about that character. And I didn't give any flying fuck about any of these characters because none of them had any actual character.

They were just cardboard cutouts wandering through a series of events.

Pike

I thought was quite funny that in the author's note at the very end, um, the author says sort of, oh yeah, you know, sorry about the dog. I tried not to make it gruesome, you know, I tried. I know this is a sensitive subject and in the story the dog is just found dead.

That's pretty much it. Every other character is like bleeding out on the floor, I don't know, twisting their arms, back words, bones breaking, the neck spinning, the whole of shebang. The dog just dies.

Lithos

Dog just dies. Yes. Yeah, it is. And I think the, the point at which you gave up Leraje, I can kind of like see where that was because that was a point when I was really going, I'm gonna, I'm gonna struggle finishing this. And I think that the bit where it, where the second bit starts, the description of their relationship.

Leraje

Oh, uh, Jesus Christ.

Lithos

The worst kind of like Hallmark perfect romance. And you're going, yeah, they've been together 15 years and, and they're still like, oh, you're perfect, you're so wonderful. Oh, I can't believe it, you know. Oh, uh, you're so, you know, and it's like you've been together 15 years. A realistic relationship. Right. People argue, don't.

It was just so.

Leraje

And um, again that's, that's one of the constraints of doing the first person thing, having no skill as a writer as well, is that there's no chance to develop these characters. There's no point if you're doing both of them first person. The chances for them to interact with each other. The whole book is tell ah, not show.

And it's kind of like there's no, um, A good way to show the development of a relationship between two people is to have them actually fucking interact with each other. The way they say things or just fucking...

Pike

Or just fuck.

Lithos

I think, I think he makes a, uh.

Leraje

The thought of reading a sex scene written by John Ward fills me with horror.

Lithos

Well, I, I, I'm trying to remember. There was one bit where they obviously came back from the meal or something and, and they had sex. And, and the description he uses to, to say that they'd had sex was. It doesn't describe it in any way, but, but I can't remember the phrase. The turn of phrase again now was terrible.

Um, I might have made a note of it.

Leraje

Did they reach the summit of their love or did they.

Ligeia

They were dripping with love.

Pike

I have a theory about their relationship and that it's kind of key to how it turned out.

Leraje
Go on.

Pike
So, um, whilst Lithos, uh, is looking for the, that perfect phrasing, I'll say that. So, you know, how you said the relationship is seems unrealistic and, um, sort of odd in that way. There is a bit where he says, you know, oh, you know, ever since we met, we just, we told each other the deepest dark, each other's deepest darkest secrets.

And at that point I went liar a page ago. Because it also says that yes, she was my best friend and I, we told each other our deepest, darkest secrets. I said a, uh, page ago you said your best friend was the dog. M. A page later you are going to say how you didn't, uh, talk about your trauma over because, uh, well, he didn't say he didn't want to ruin the vibes.

But something along those, those lines.

Leraje
This is what I meant by the unforced errors.

Lithos
Each other, everything. But he didn't mention the possessed dad or the doll or.

Pike
So that's why she didn't tell him when she was going through all the demon stuff. And I think maybe, uh, if they had a relationship where instead of just going, oh, babe, get a pizza, babe. Oh, snuggle with me, babe, they actually had an honest conversation. Maybe she wouldn't have killed herself and then maybe he wouldn't have hanged himself

Lithos
in the end anyway, I've had the expression it's John and I had closed out the night with some much needed passion.

Ligeia
Is It. Sweet.

Pike
That's so sweet.

Leraje
Wow.

Lithos
I mean, what, What? What? You know, that's so romantic and erotic. Closing out the night with some much needed passion, you know? I mean, uh, use that one next time I have a wank.

Ligeia
Yeah, please wait.

Pike
And can we finish? This topic just keeps coming up.

Ligeia
Uh,

Lithos
sorry.

Leraje
Lithos' eyes dropped to the floor as. No, no,

Pike
as a swan.

Ligeia
Bees.

Lithos
I've just got some examples here of. Of misuse of words. Right? Where. Where he's, um. I mean, he calls his peripheral vision. His peripherals. Like, it would happen quickly, in the blink of an eye, out of my peripherals. Which is. What. What. What is even that? A mixed hodgepodge. Well, hodgepodge is a mix.

Um, and then a couple of kids came zipping past me, snapping me out of my reverence. Reverie is the word reverence, you know.

Pike
Ah.

Lithos
And it's just constant. Meghan's premature exodus from this world. Exodus. Does she contain the peoples of Israel? No.

Leraje
Exit. Exit. Fucking hell. Oh, there's a lot. There's a lot.

Lithos
I mean, uh, uh, constantly. And it's like, someone buy this man a dictionary. Get a thesaurus. When you start writing, these are essential. There's not even an excuse that you have to buy in paper. Go online. Collins website. Very good online dictionary. It's free.

Pike
But I would like to commend John for not using AI that is true.

Lithos
That's true. That. That is true.

Leraje
There was a point when I did think, is this book AI written? And I thought, it can't be, because even AI would be better at writing than this.

Pike
Yes, but it would not be. It would be really boring if it was written by AI Whereas, uh, this was at least really funny in places.

Leraje
So start. Start of chapter two. Father Rosario says, do you believe in ghosts? The question still sat heavily on my conscience. Why is it on your conscience? You have done anything? Do you not know what the word conscience means? That's not what it means. The constant awestruck and being in awe. So, dictionary definition of awe.

"A feeling of great respect, sometimes mixed with fear or surprise". Here is Johnny describing his dad attacking him. "The figure that was doing this was my dad. I watched completely awestruck as he pulled a long chef's knife out of the block on the counter." What?

Lithos
M. Hey, dad. That's awesome.

Pike

Rad.

Leraje

And then later, during Edna, his grandma's possession, "I watched in awe as she nonchalantly hummed an old tune, frantically reaching for a spatula and working whatever she had sizzling in the frying pan." Which was the aforementioned hare, ah, rabbit.

Pike

Also sometimes it has positive consequences that, I mean the, the language mix up. So I don't know if you thought that way, but I thought this was a very right wing American novel. It does come up in, in weird ways. But, but then there is a moment where he's talking about Meghan's pregnancy and it's, it's very um, he uses very inclusive language, which is nice, but he says something along the lines that I would never understand.

Understand uh, what? The woman's bond, uh, with their child when they go through their pregnancy, which,

Leraje

you know, gender neutral language. John, well done. Um.

Pike

Oh, there. Yeah.

Ligeia

Noticed that.

Leraje

I don't think he was intentional.

Pike

Eh, well, we have to commend him for something.

Leraje

Yeah, yeah, yeah. If we're going to condemn him for accidental words, then we got to commend him too.

Pike

What was a place that you found funny.

Leraje

Most uh, of it until it began to annoy me past the point of no return.

Lithos

I ah, mean the malapropisms were funny. I mean I found them quite funny because they were so. You know, HIPAA would have had an absolute heyday if this was still a functioning facility. Field day, not heyday. Heyday means something completely different. You know, it's like and, and bear in mind, you know, there are two people on this podcast for whom English is not their first language and they found it atrocious.

Pike

That's Lithos and Leraje.

Lithos

That's unfair. Just because he came from the West Midlands.

Pike

I thought it was very funny when um, in a great piece of comedy where Edna calls Father Rosario at night. So she says that she, she thinks he's going to be getting ready for bed or probably asleep. And she phones him up and. Hello. He replies groggily. And she says oh, is this a good time to chat?

Leraje
You've already called me. Bit late for that.

Pike
Hello?

Ligeia
I'm already up, you bitch.

Lithos
It's three in the morning. He was clearing his browser cache. Yeah,

Leraje
it's Google searches for church porn. Nun porn.

Lithos
Yeah.

Leraje
Um, what about the way that an 8 year old talks?

Ligeia
I couldn't uh.

Leraje
An 8 year old said this. "I cautiously rolled out of bed, exited my room and began to walk down the long corridor towards the end of the hall. A small night light within the bathroom illuminated the hall under the dimmest of lights". And also later on an 8 year old also says, "...noticing the slow trickle of dark viscous blood still escaping from the gaping wound in his neck".

Ligeia
Um, Absolutely.

Leraje
An eight year old.

Ligeia
I don't know how nobody saw this as an issue.

Pike
What. How.

Lithos
Well, this is it. I mean this is a problem I think with the publishing house of obviously just taking the book on it.

Ligeia
Like have you. It's not even been a child that speaks words.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Like how you don't have to have children. Not the way they would speak. Speak.

Pike
I think there's a moment where a child is referring to unsettling revelations that. That's where I thought.

Ligeia
Hey.

Leraje

I think I um, mean also another. My favourite 8 year old quote is "...my dream from just moments prior had come to fruition".

Lithos
Oh dear.

Leraje
Hell.

Ligeia
I found very funny. Like the chapter where the grandma was alert, um, outside by the spirit or the demon of the daughter. Her daughter. The Susan was her name. And how stupid that whole thing was. Like, what do you mean you're following this? Nothing. And you know already. Are we, are we, are we really doing this?

Like she just opens the house. She leaves the house with the grandson in there with this whole trauma. Instead of like completely blocking out the house and keeping your fucking brain in your head. Like, okay, I'm not gonna listen to any stupid noises and everything is fine. Like I'm gonna just focus my brain to stay stable here.

No, we're going to open the door and leave. I think she didn't even have shoes and she would follow this voice. Mike. Yeah, I'm gonna.

Leraje
This voice of her daughter who she knows is dead.

Ligeia
Yes. Because that's what, what a normal adult person. We didn't learn that she had any dementia or anything. She was completely fine. But she, she.

Pike
Except for cancer.

Ligeia
Yeah. But that, you know, it wasn't brain. Mentally cancer.

Pike
Yeah.

Ligeia
So what was that? I. I don't know if it was funny actually now I'm saying it. But I couldn't, I was just. I couldn't.

Pike
It's. It's weird. I thought another. You know, the plot point that, that I found really weird was uh. There's a property developer. He buys and disused all the orphanage that he wants to develop into housing. And then his workers stop working because it's haunted and they're scared. So what does he do as a real property developer?

He scours uh, ebay. Ah. And finds um. And vintage shops and finds haunted dolls all around and he buys them all up and he puts them all into a room in that house and then invites paranormal investigators to come and hang out there.

Leraje
Yeah. That was the dumbest way possible to try and reintroduce Lucy into the story. Yeah.

Lithos
Lucy being the doll. Yes.

Leraje

Lucy being the possessed doll. Yeah. Is it any shock for us to learn that John's other career is as a paranormal investigator who loves spooky dolls? Yes.

Pike

Not John Tinsley, but John Ward. The author. Yeah, it was a bit of a shocker, I'm not going to lie.

Lithos

Yes. I mean, it's. It's. It's kind of. There's just so many sort of. Why did that happens in. In the whole book? Um, apart from. Because, you know, if. If there was the occasional misuse of words, that would be all right. But then he tries to up the game by coming up with inventive metaphors and each one of them falls flat on its face, metaphorically speaking.

Pike

Are we gonna do favourites,

Leraje

favourite bad metaphors or just favourite bits of bad writing?

Lithos

In general, bad metaphors, I think. Yeah, there are some. Some. Come on.

Pike

If you have some notes.

Lithos

I don't know if I hit the listener. Just.

Pike

What? Lithos told us ages ago to find the best ones. Did no. No one else do that?

Leraje

No. No, I didn't. I don't remember.

Lithos

I did, um, because you guys, you

Ligeia

were still reading it and I was like, I'm not going to reread just to find a. You know. Come on, guys, have mercy with me.

Pike

You chose the book. Why do you want mercy?

Ligeia

Okay,

Pike

Okay. Uh. So, Lithos, do you want to go first, just in case we chose the same one?

Lithos

Well, I have. Early on. I think this was the first one where I went. Oh, my God.

Ligeia

Um.

Lithos

"An unsettling feeling crept up my spine, like a worm inching its way to the surface after a heavy rain."

Pike

That's quite poetic.

Lithos
Gran is dead.

Pike
I've got this. And it's. It's two sentences, but they did go one after another in the text. "The edge of the wood line looked like the toothy grin of an anglerfish in the inky depths of the ocean". "The humid summer night caused my clothes to cling to my body like barnacles on the bottom of the vessel".

Ligeia
This is in the book.

Lithos
Oh, my God. That is great. That one is great. I, uh, must have. I didn't even make a note of that one.

Ligeia
Uh, we have a winner.

Pike
I just have one more. One more, please. "A crippling apprehension grew inside me like the great Olympic torch."

Leraje
That's the winner.

Lithos
That wasn't in there, was it? I don't even remember that one.

Ligeia
What is he talking about? Who knows?

Leraje
Oh, that's. That's my favourite. That's Brilliant. That's verging on brilliance, to be honest.

Pike
Me and Ligeia are taking notes and improving our English. This is how we're gonna speak.

Lithos
Well, I think actually there would be a place for this book in sort of creative writing classes to go, this is how not to write a book. These are the mistakes to make. Because I think it covers just about every mistake an author can make in a book. You know, inconsistencies, plot holes, um, bad characterization, bad use of English, bad metaphors, um, terrible grammar.

Um, the amount of times that it's. Is used wrongly with an apostrophe or when it should be. And there's actually once it's used as an. It's as the possessive form.

Leraje
Yeah.

Lithos
Um, in the same sentence twice. Once correctly and once incorrectly. And. And it's like basic proofreading. Even just a grammar checker in. In a modern grammar checker would have picked that one up. And it's like, did. Did. Was. Was there any effort put into checking any of this? Or did he just bang it out and go, oh, that'll do?

Leraje

I think that's something that's. That's worthy of discussion. This. I mean, all authors make mistakes. Of course they do. That's why editors exist. That's why proofreaders exist. This book, as we. We all said earlier, has clearly not been proofread or edited. And I'm not trying to sort of like, say that the author's writing is therefore good and would have been okay if it had been edited or proofread because I don't think this novel is salvageable. But surely someone must have said to him, uh, it just defies. I, uh, don't understand how it's been published.

Pike

The book lists two editors, right? Ostensibly, two people edited this book. Was.

Ligeia

Was this before they. I'm sorry, did it.

Lithos

Was it. Was it actually editors or. I mean, there's a bit at the end where he thanks people for reading the alpha version or something like that. There's actually editors. I didn't even notice that at the

Pike

beginning of a book where it has all the publisher's notes, it says, edited and proofed by Victoria Kishka and Charlene Dutois.

Leraje

Okay, well, wow.

Pike

Victoria and Charlene have a lot to answer for, if it exists.

Lithos

Yeah. Don't give up the day job would be my advice.

Leraje

That's incredible that two people have apparently proofread this.

Lithos

Maybe they just. Maybe they're just scamming and maybe they just charged him money and went, yeah, it's fine. Great.

Leraje

Yeah.

Pike

I mean, that could happen. Um, my mother had her book translated and asked me to have a look over it and maybe edit it a little afterwards. I pretty much had to rewrite the whole thing. And that's a professional, uh, translation agency that charged a lot of money. M. New M offers do get scammed quite, quite badly.

Lithos

Yeah, exactly. I mean, there is a distinct possibility there because, you know, there is no way any kind of editor, uh, would have let this pass and they would have made massive cuts because there is. There is the potential of actually having done a decent story with this, had it. Had it lost about 100 pages for a start.

There's. There's an awful lot of superfluous stuff in there, you know, and, you know, the writing had been a bit snappier. Um, and this is another problem where, you know, the scenes where something terrible happens and things happen in rapid succession and, you know, it looks like it's building up to something and then he throws in a whole load of unnecessary verbiage to slow the whole thing down again.

And it's. The pacing was just all over the place.

Leraje

And these are all things that a good editor, apart from the grammar side of things. A good editor would pick up on that as well.

Ligeia

I think that's. That's too easy for John, because this is his own language. He should probably know better.

Leraje

It does.

Ligeia

Like, uh.

Leraje

No, I do know exactly what you mean. I mean, it. It defies like, you can't logic to

Ligeia

think that translation, if you don't speak the language or it's not, uh. Yeah, level. But if it's your own language, there is no excuse to not know what

Leraje

the word conscience means. To not know what the word awe means. To not know what the word smirk means. Yeah. The difference between the possessive. I mean, all these things.

Pike

Perhaps write scripts instead. He clearly thinks about it very. I mean, we said it's a lot like. There's a lot borrowed from various horror films, right? There is, um. Yeah, yeah. We have, um, what, somebody climbing backwards with a limp, sort of broken up the stairs. Which is Exorcist, right?

Ligeia

Yes.

Pike

And then there is, uh, the Hat man, which is Babadook, right?

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

Yeah.

Pike

And then the paranormal investigator and wife team, which is Conjuring.

Ligeia

Then we have Annabelle.

Leraje

Just about everything from this book is borrowed from the Conjuring. There's a. There's a guy with a hat in the second Conjuring film. The husband and wife thing is from the Conjuring. The doll is Annabelle from the Conjuring.

Lithos

I mean, my Thought, uh, towards the end was this is something I could see Netflix chucking out as one of their horror offerings.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

You know, not, not one of the good Netflix offerings, but one of the run of the mill ones that they chuck out, you know, because.

Ligeia

And what did you guys think about, uh, the self advertising qualities?

Pike

That was a killer for me.

Ligeia

He lost me. Like, that was a complete. Like, I can't.

Pike

For the benefit of a listener, at one point in the book, the main character walks up to two boys and one of them is reading the author's prior book. And then we have the character goes, cool book,

Leraje

but only after a smirk had spread across his face.

Lithos

Yeah, yeah, the, the, the, the Ms. M smirk that was possibly the most egregious misuse of the word over and over again. And also grinning from ear to ear. You know, it's like, you know, when the demon's looking particularly malicious, it's grinning from ear to ear and it's like, no, no, it. What?

The demon's a Cheshire cat.

Pike

Another, uh, self aggrandizing moment is where at the very end, the author dedicates a whole page to a single quote by himself.

Leraje

Yeah, well, I didn't get that far. So, yeah, I wasn't punished by that.

Lithos

Uh, yeah, that's, you know, and it's something true like evil exists. You know, I, I can't even remember what it's called.

Pike

It says, "sometimes evil wins. That's the real terror that lurks beyond the shadows". John Ward. Well, he was clearly very proud of that thought.

Leraje

Yeah, I mean, he's right that evil exists. It's just. It exists in novel form.

Lithos

I mean, that, that's like a line from a really bad heavy metal song.

Pike

Oh, now you're just praising him.

Leraje

Uh, Slayer are going to do a concept album about this book.

Lithos

Yeah. Iron Maiden.

Pike

Should we talk briefly about the gender stuff in it?

Leraje

Yeah, go ahead.

Pike

For example, how do you think a miscarriage happens?

Leraje

Yeah, I think that might have been. Was that the final. I can't remember.

Pike

I'm gonna quote this, I think, because it's.

Lithos

Yes, that was.

Pike

I double. This is, uh, this is John's, uh, wife. "I doubled over the toilet and heaved all the contents that had been resting inside my stomach and broke down into hysterics". So she, this is her miscarriage. She throws up her baby, presumably. And then she gets hysterical. And I will say that the offer at the end in acknowledgments says that he, uh, consulted one person specifically for healthcare related stuff.

Leraje

Um, that's not how the human body works, John.

Lithos

Well, there's so many. That's not how. I mean there's also the whole book. That's not how trauma works, John.

Ligeia

It's nice. It can be sexual. You can't get pregnant through your mouth and you don't get. Give birth through your mouth. You do not miscarriage through your mouth

Pike

in a horror novel. You do.

Lithos

Yeah, I just. That uh, that, that surprised me. He comes home and finds her lying on the floor and there's no mention of blood or anything. Which usually he's, he's very keen to mention any occurrence of blood.

Leraje

Um, yeah, but his wife is perfect. She would have no doubt cleaned and gone through the entire home knowing it would upset him.

Lithos

It was. Yeah.

Leraje

In their hallmark card based relationship.

Pike

Yeah. And Jon is perfect too. Right? How do the we know that? She, she sees him and she falls in love with him immediately and his attractiveness is described. First words are strong jawline,

Ligeia

which is

Pike

such a, a very specific kind of guy, uh, kind of thing. Because in real life women will notice will care about 50 other things before they get to the jawline.

Lithos

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Pike

I mean, Internet, some Internet men are obsessed with their jawlines. Yes.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

Uh, yeah. His wife, the chapters written from her point of view was so off the mark and unbelievable and it was, it was terrible. It's like, do not write from the perspective of a woman. You know, you have to be a really good author. If you're a man and you want to write from the perspective of a woman, you've got to really know your fucking stuff.

And this was terrible. This was his ideal of what his ideal woman would be anything.

Ligeia

And this is where I was really thinking, um, how you pike, uh, mentioned like the possibility of the right side of, you know, thinking in America. I don't know, the way they think women think is some, some m. People. Right. It was just absolutely like, where are you pulling this out of? Like, is this coming from your heels?

Like, are you. Where what, what? I don't know.

Lithos

Talking about pulling things out of other. He even tried to do the Exorcist swears bit. And I did notice he throws a couple of swears in, uh, occasionally when, when things get really bad and, and it's completely incongruous and doesn't fit. And, and the bit where that he tries to do the bit in the Exorcist where the girl's wanking herself with a crucifix and goes, your, your father sucks, your mother sucks cocks in hell priest and he tries to do something like that with his wife when she's possessed, going, oh, is this the pussy you'd like to fuck?

Or something like that. And it's like, oh, uh. Jesus Christ, man. That's just terrible. It's just terrible. This is not. It worked in the Exorcist. It doesn't work here. Just throwing in sort of like obscenities and swears at random.

Pike

Okay, but explain to him why it doesn't work here, why it worked in the Exorcist but not here.

Leraje

Oh, that's because William Peter Blatty knows how to write a book.

Lithos

Yes. Yeah, it's. It's. That's kind of. Yeah. Why doesn't it work here? Um, because it just seems to. There's nothing particularly leading up to it. It just appears in the middle of nothing. You know, all of a sudden she's possessed. And then all this happens. And then, you know, and this is like, you know, the.

The incongruity of events. You know, the whole thing with the massive time span where the demon doesn't show up. And then when they show up, it suddenly happens. And then there's no lead up or anything like that. You know, whereas in the Exorcist there was a lead up to that. You know, she was gradually getting worse.

Here it's just suddenly his wife's going, yeah, yeah, I'm disgusting, me. You know, it's, uh, like, I suck in hell, Karras.

Leraje

I mean, John. Yeah. I mean, I think that ties back to what I was saying earlier about there being no character development. It's kind of like each character is this little cardboard cut out, uh, that John is marching through these various scenarios. There's no reason to care about any of these things. They just.

They do thing A and then they do thing B. And there's no emotional connection. There's no internal logic. There's no reason. The reader's not given any reason to care about why these things are happening or why we should find them shocking.

Lithos

You also know, you know, when the second part started and he was talking so lovingly about his wife, I thought, right, okay, she's gonna die. Baby's gonna die. Yeah. The only thing I got wrong in the end is I thought he was going to kill the priest and carry. That was a twist, him hanging himself.

That was the only plot twist I didn't see coming. Everything else was like fucking signposted so heavily.

Pike

Are, uh, we ready for pitchforks yet?

Ligeia

I have one more question. If I. Okay. I think I know the answer, but maybe you will surprise me. So do you guys think if we forget about all the like writing skills and stuff, just the plot and the story as a story. Do you think um, the author was actually trying to say something about human nature or am I being too nice?

And if, if what was he trying to say?

Leraje

I think that's, I'll answer that with answering that question. Uh, and the answer, my answer to that question is I have no idea what he was trying to say because I don't know what the point of the novel was.

Pike

I think, I mean I don't want to guess at the author's, you know, own life and how it connects to the story, but I think there is some kind of perhaps pain, uh, that you wanted to talk about that uh, is maybe real. And in the end what the book was saying to me, at least it was saying, uh, evil exists in this world.

Um, and you shall, you should pray, you should, um, you know, you should bring in uh, God and what was it, the Archangel, St. Michael and all that. Because in the end that's the only thing that works. Yeah, it's a very American, um, sort of right wing Christian, uh.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Pike

Thing. It's because evil is real, evil is another people and we have to fight these other people essentially.

Lithos

Yeah. I think unlike Rosemary's Baby, which was written by uh, an atheist. I mean Ira Levin was Jewish but also an atheist.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

And that. So it's, it's a made up story. He didn't believe any of it. I think this guy actually believes these things are real.

Ligeia

I had that impression. Mhm.

Lithos

But if he's trying to convey the message that we need to be aware or whatever. Didn't come across. Not to me anyway.

Ligeia

That they go and you know, the ghost hunting. I don't know, maybe for people who believe.

Leraje

Well, I watched an episode of his ghost hunting show and uh, it is again. I watched the whole thing. Yeah, I watched the whole thing. I mean obviously minutes, it's over an hour long and um, literally nothing happens at all throughout that whole hour. Obviously because ghosts aren't real. But it does echo what pike was saying about this whole kind of Christian idea.

It's kind of like a new style of Christianity where uh, where ghosts exist.

Ligeia

Okay.

Leraje

But we should all turn to the light kind of thing.

Ligeia

Evil stuff. And you can conquer it with your faith in God.

Leraje

I mean like all these ghost hunters, they present themselves as experts and there's lots of don't try this at home type things. Um, because we are experts. And like, what are you experts in exactly? Because this is bollocks. But.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

That whole idea that pike was saying earlier about the sort of like Christianity of the book is echoed in his ghost hunting stuff.

Pike

Really? How does it come out in the.

Ligeia

I'm not watching.

Pike

In the video.

Leraje

Not explicitly. Nobody ever says you should do this because God said so, or Jesus thinks this. But it's kind of like the whole idea about the white light, the power of the white light and the power of, um, you know, they wear lots of religious iconography, uh, St. Christopher's medallions and all this kind of stuff.

Um, but to them that doesn't. Yeah, different, different God. Um, but that doesn't also. Interestingly, doesn't also contradict them in the sense they don't feel it's bad for them to do Ouija boards. They don't feel it's against

God for them to kind of like talk to the dead. And uh, so it's just kind of like this Neo Christianity, which is a bit of both.

And I think that's, it's um. They don't see it as a contradiction because they see themselves as experts. And I think what they see themselves as experts in is this Neo Christianity

Ligeia
to be the righteousness. You ask me.

Lithos
I didn't. I tried to watch it. I managed 20 minutes. And then one of the ghost hunters fell for the most obvious bit of cold reading I've seen in a while. And at that point I thought, um, you know, and he was going, oh, it was a really deep experience and really emotional.

And it's like the guy just did cold reading. He literally went, I'm getting a. You know. And then finally finds out the name. And the name he guesses is Steve. And it's like, that's not a difficult name to guess. Bit of advanced research on what your uncle was called, you know, especially if you're ghost hunters and you've got a web page.

I, you know, this is like.

Leraje
And all your names are publicly available and researchable on that page.

Lithos
Think you're really looking to prove that there are ghosts or whatever, you need to know what charlatans are and what a cold reader is and you know, my honest belief. I'm with Houdini, you know, and, and um, uh, James, Randy, you know, they're all charlatans. It's bollocks.

Leraje
All right. Okay. Pitchforks, let's do pitchforks.

Ligeia
Um, uh, I will give it a one for the cover I really like.

Leraje
Okay. It is a good cover. Yeah, yeah. Pike?

Pike
I'll give it a 2. It was not AI slop. So there was some effort there. And I will say that it was bad writing and the content was, in parts, quite hateful. There were bits that really put me off. So I'll give it a two.

Leraje
Uh, Lithos.

Lithos
Zero. Sorry, no redeeming features. I was so infuriated by the whole thing, it might not have come across zero. Nothing in this book is worth anything.

Leraje
I will also give it a zero. It is utterly irredeemable. And, um, I will also couple it with a quote from Edgar Allan Poe, which is: "I intend to put up with nothing that I can put down." And I did. Halfway through.

Pike
Well, John Ward counters with Baudelaire.

Leraje
I fucking doubt that

Pike

He does! At the end of the book. You know that Baudelaire quote about how the greatest trick that, uh, the devil has pulled.

Leraje

Yeah. Yeah.

Lithos

Yes.

Pike

Yeah.

Lithos

Is making you believe it doesn't exist?

Leraje

Does he quote? Oh, Christ. Jesus Christ.

Ligeia

Refreshing. We have never heard that before.

Leraje

Okay, right, so next up, it is Pike's Choice. So what are we reading next, Pike?

Pike

We are reading a, uh, Roadside Picnic, uh, 1972 novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, and a book that M. Tarkovsky's Stalker is loosely based on.

Leraje

Okay.

Lithos

Really looking forward to this one.

Ligeia

Me too. Me too. We need something good now.

Pike

It will, uh, be as riveting a reading.

Leraje

It's got a good foreword from Ursula K LeGuin, which is a good sign. Okay, so that's it from, uh, this episode of the Devil's Library. I've been Leraje. Hail Satan.

Pike

Uh, I'm Pike. Hail, Malphas.

Lithos

Sorry.

Pike

Pull yourselves together.

Lithos

You can't. Oh, my God.

Leraje

Don't say hail, Lucy. Please don't say hell. Um.

Ligeia

Do it.

Leraje
Go on, ligeia, do your hails. She can't.

Ligeia
Hail Lucy.

Leraje
No,

Ligeia
sorry, john.

Leraje
Dear God or satan. Right?

Lithos
Oh, uh, uh, hail, satan.

Leraje
See you next time.

[Outro music plays]