

The Devil's Library Episode 14 – “The Wasp Factory”

[Intro Music]

Lithos

Hello and welcome to the Devil's Library. Today we shall be discussing the Wasp Factory by Iain Banks. And with me I have Ligeia.

Ligeia

Hail Satan.

Lithos

I have Pike

Pike

Sail Hayton.

Lithos

And I have Leraje.

Leraje

Hail, uh, confused Satan.

Lithos

Um, and I'm Lithos. Hail Satan. The Wasp Factory is the first published novel by award winning Scottish actor Iain Banks. Um, he previously unsuccessfully attempted to get his science fiction novels published and this was published in 1984. He would go on to publish many more novels as Iain Banks. Uh, with his science fiction works credited as Iain M Banks.

I, uh, will give a trigger warning for this episode. Right. The book features graphic descriptions of animal cruelty as well as infanticide. And there will be plot spoilers as per usual. You've been warned. The direction this novel will take, um, is pretty much revealed from the start as we learn in the first chapter that the family at the centre of it, the Cauldhames, descendants of hitherto wealthy Scottish landowning ancestry, are far from normal.

Uh, the main protagonist Frank, a near 17 year old, has protected the small island where the family's house sits outside, uh, the fictional Scottish town of Porteneil. With sacrifice poles sporting the severed heads of local wildlife, he is dispatched with his arsenal of self constructed weaponry. Uh, the entire story is a first person narrative from his point of view and consists in large part of him describing the acts of atrocity he's perpetrated on the local fauna as well as on his own relatives.

And details his particularly egotistical, misogynistic and borderline psychopathic worldview. Other protagonists.

Pike

Did you say borderline?

Lithos

Well, okay, psychopathic. Other protagonists include Angus, his father, a grouchy ex hippie who was also biochemist and his relationship with his son seems pretty impersonal and cold. Uh, Frank's older half brother Eric, who's confined to a psychiatric hospital that he escapes from at the start of the novel, and Blythe, Paul and Esmeralda, who are all murdered by Frank at various points in his youth.

He also has one friend, Jamie, who has dwarfism, um, and whose main function seems to be his drinking body. We follow the story of Frank and anxiously

waiting for his extremely and violently disturbed brother. That makes two of them to make his way from his escape to the family home, leaving a trail of burnt and mutilated dogs in his wake.

With a, uh, book building up to the unexpected revelation of a carefully kept family secret, namely that Frank's genital mutilation in early childhood at the hands of the family pet, old Saul is Not all it was made out to be. And if that sounds like a lot of fucked up shit, it is.

And there's more. This is a book that slaps you in the face and leaves you wondering what the fuck did I just read? So long. Intro over. Had any anyone, uh, else read it before I read it a few decades ago? I know Leraje has read it. What about you? Pike and Ligeia

Ligeia
Was my first.

Pike
Yep. First read.

Lithos
Okay.

Pike
I was recommended this book many, many, many years ago when I was maybe, I don't know, 18 or something at a music festival by a drunk girl. And I've been carrying that recommendation around with me ever since. And finally I got to read it.

Ligeia
Yeah, I knew about this book as well and it was on my to be read list. So I'm happy. I'm done.

Lithos
You've done it. You've done it. You got through it. You got through it.

Ligeia
I had to power through this.

Lithos
Uh, it is, I mean it is kind of like. And, and part of the, the stuff that makes it even more upsetting I've found is the, the bleak humour. I mean it's not written sort of completely because it's written from Frank's point of view. It's not completely impersonal. He's kind of like puts jokes in and it's like, oh.

But yeah, he is a psych.

Ligeia
Very Scottish humour. I love Scottish humour, by the way. So that helped. That helped a lot. But coming it come that coming from Frank, I was chilling. Out.

Leraje
This is about the. I think this is either the third or the fourth time I've read it. Um, and every time. Yeah, and every time I finish it, I think, why the. Did I reread that? Uh, I mean, no, it's so well written.

Lithos
But yes.

Leraje
And um, he, you know, it's such a. Just the fact of the book that it. How it exists at all is kind of like. He's a really good author. He's a really good writer, but the book itself is just awful. And I don't mean it's a badly written

book. I mean it's just kind of like so upsetting in so many ways on so many levels.

Ligeia

Um, he achieved his goal, I think.

Leraje

Yeah, it's a great book, but I'm not sure it's a very enjoyable one. Do you know what I mean?

Ligeia

I will never read this again. I'm sorry. It was so hard for me. I. I don't know. Guys.

Pike

Do you think this is a horror book?

Lithos

No.

Ligeia

By definition, no.

Pike

Torture porn?

Lithos

It's not torture porn.

Ligeia

Horror.

Pike

I mean it can. It is classed as such sometimes.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

I'm not sure this. I mean when I think of torture porn, I think I like movies by Eli Roth and people like that. So like Hostel and that and movies like that which to be honest just bore the pants off me. They're just. I don't see what they're for. But um.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

And I don't think this book descends to that level of kind of like nihilistic, you know, cruelty and sort of murder and pain just for the sake of it. There is a definite story being told and there are points being made.

Ligeia

That is true. But yes, this is why I continued. You know guys, like I texted the group after like 40 pages in, in the reading and I was like, you know what guys? I'm reaching my limits. Even though I'm a corrupted. This book was a challenge for me because of the animal cruelty.

I, I just really. I had to put it down. I had to go and play with the cats, had to go for a walk and I was still feeling sick and I couldn't eat. This never happened.

Pike

I hope your games with the cats were, you know, I was not trying.

Ligeia

No, no, no, no, no, no, no.

Lithos

Didn't involve petrol cannons.

Ligeia

Of course not. Because that's exactly like the, the animals, they don't understand, they don't know they can't escape, they don't expect anything bad and the innocence in animals is just something else. So I had to really push. But I understood that there is a reason why I'm reading those words and I will get to, to why this is in this book.

So I'm um, I'm really happy I did it. I feel so powerful now. I can read anything.

Leraje

It is one of the major criticisms of the book that you know, kind of like there's a kind of. As far as I can tell, there's two schools of thought about the animal cruelty that. The first school of thought is it's completely unnecessary and over the top.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Um, and the other school of thought is that animal cruelty is a hallmark of sociopathic behaviour. I mean it's, it's literally on the FBI checklist for yes. Um, serial killers. So to not include that would be disingenuous to the character of Frank.

Pike

Yes, I agree with the latter because me too. He was funny and very logical and there were a lot of qualities, um, that made Frank a very, in some ways very likeable character. And if animal cruelty wasn't there or it wasn't as good gruesome and intense. It would have tilted too much into, you know, into the wrong direction.

Leraje

The animal cruelty by itself is bad enough, but the. I mean, and this again, I'm um, not. None of this is a criticism of Banks as a writer at all. In fact, it's. It's mainly. Maybe it's a compliment. It's the matter of fact way that Frank describes not only what he does to the animals, but also to his human victims as well.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah.

Leraje

I mean to him, the way he talks about it, there's always like, kind of like this vein of black comedy kind of like running through it and it's quite, you know, it's just like things he's talking about the way we would talk about our day, our average day sort of thing.

Ligeia

Mhm. That was too much.

Lithos

Yeah. He's outlining the sort of like these are trad. Sort of signs of later becoming a serial psychopathic serial killer. Well, he was your animals as kids. And then you have an overinflated view of your own self. Tick. Um, you're convinced you're right about everything and you're smarter than everyone else. Tick. Um, yeah.

You've always. Someone else is always to blame for what you've done. Tick. You know, all those things throughout the novel. It's like, yeah, he's never wrong about stuff.

Ligeia

Yeah. And he also created this whole mythology.

Pike

But that logic that underpins all his actions I think is where the writing is so brilliant. Because if it was just a character who goes like, yeah, I hate animals and I'm gonna make them suffer, it would feel a lot more one dimensional.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah.

Leraje

Because that's not how a sociopath thinks. I mean they are literally stand ins. They're kind of like, you know, to use a phrase, they're meat puppets to people like Frank. They don't, they don't really exist even. They're just there to be kind of like used and abused.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

There's nothing evil about it. Apart from the fact that he is a sociopath. Psychopath, whatever. He doesn't hate the rabbits. He doesn't? Well, maybe he does a little bit. Um, and in fact, at one point in the novel, he actually keeps rabbits as pets.

Lithos

Wasn't that his younger brother's pets though? I believe.

Leraje

Oh, were they?

Lithos

Yeah, I think, Yeah, I think they were Paul's pets. And Paul was the younger brother he murdered. And then there's that scene where the way he murders him is he finds an unexploded bomb and he gets his little brother to play games to bash it with a wooden plank until it explodes, basically.

Um, and leading up to that, he's kind of describing quite calmly, he knows he's going to do this to his brother, he's going to murder him in some way that, oh, he's very cute and isn't he nice little boy. And he was quite happy and it was great spending time with him. And then he goes and kills him.

You know, it's kind of that way of describing just cold. Whatever's going on in his head. It's like, it's fine, you know, this little walk's fine. But in the end he's going to get killed and that'll be fine as well. Mhm.

Leraje

It's just something he did that day.

Pike

I thought what was a bit odd is he oscillates, right. So on the one hand he'll say something. Well, well, that was just a phase or, you know. Yeah, well, I had to kill Esmeralda for statistical importance. Uh, but then there are other moments where he describes it as. I'm not quoting here, I don't remember exactly, but how.

But like as heinous crimes and this. Terrible things that he's done, which is a. It's a big contrast. I don't know how you read it. I sort of assumed he was using the words, thinking in the words of other people at that.

Ligeia

I think he wanted to be important.

Lithos

Yeah, he was, he was kind of like bigging himself up. Heinous crimes, go, how cool am I? I've committed these heinous crimes. You know, I'm, um, tougher than anyone else. And that's a constant thread running throughout that.

Ligeia

He's.

Lithos

Everyone else is so much dumber than he is. You know, in his mind, nobody lived

Ligeia

on that island, so what the. He was the only one. Of course he was. He was the biggest of the biggest killers and psychopaths because there was nobody else. I wanted to kill him,

Lithos

see the

Ligeia

violence, see the violence. Now I want to kill him,

Lithos & Leraje

see the violence inherent in the system!

Ligeia

What happened?

Leraje

We both quoted Python at the same time.

Lithos

God, that's. Blokes of a certain age, that is.

Leraje

Yeah,

Lithos

yeah, he is. He is rabidly misogynistic. He does. He has the lowest possible opinion of women, which is ironic, considering the ending.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Lithos

The ultimate irony.

Ligeia

That part I was not expecting, I have to say.

Leraje

It's. I mean, obviously you reread a book, you already know the twist, you already know what's going to happen. I'm trying and I keep trying to remember the first time I Read it. Did it, did it surprise me? And I think it did. But it also, it became obvious to me at some point that there was a twist coming.

But I didn't foresee that particular twist.

Ligeia

Now this one, I did not expect that.

Pike

I really didn't like the ending. I thought the last chapter was confusing. Uh, you know, the off. It's almost like the author starts speaking and here I will explain this whole thing and the twist also. I don't know, it just, it felt a bit amateurish. I don't know, maybe because it's the first novel, but it sort of, I don't know, it didn't feel very believable or natural or like, oh, it makes sense, you know.

Leraje

Yeah, I agree with that, to be honest. Rereading it now later on, um, um, it doesn't feel very organic. It does feel like, look, here's the point of the novel, you know, and it's kind of like, all right, thanks. You don't need to actually fucking hammer it into our heads. You couldn't.

Ligeia

So you.

Leraje

There could have been a different way.

Ligeia

You think the point was what?

Leraje

Of the whole novel?

Ligeia

Yeah

Leraje

I think the point of the whole novel was a kind of like an exploration of misogyny more than anything else. You know, how one person's misogyny, and I'm talking about Angus here, not Frank, uh, created above all else, another misogynistic person, who. That is Frank. And it was kind of like, so Angus, uh, the dad, he sort of assumes this hubristic role as a kind of like as a creator.

He decides another person's fate entirely. Not just the twist ending, but also not registering. Frank not giving them the chance to do things like, uh, have a national insurance number or have a job or all these things are sort of like taken away from Frank. So Angus has kind of like created this creature of pure misogyny based on his own misogyny because he wanted to, uh, do away with all women from his life.

That's how I saw it anyway.

Pike

Mhm. I have two theories for what it's about.

Ligeia

Okay, go on.

Pike

The first one is rich people are deranged, but that would be simplistic. But the second one is, I think the book was about what is. And you know, that's not taking away. It was about misogyny as well. And you know, it can be about a lot of things, but.

Leraje

Oh yeah, I don't think it was just one thing. No.

Pike

Yeah. But to me, uh, the main theme was that it was asking what is natural or unnatural I think that's why you had those beautiful descriptions of nature that you know, were interspersed with the violence and um, you know, the killer logic and the Eric's thing with the worms and uh, all those psychopathic musings about power.

Anyway, that's my take.

Lithos

Yeah, I thought there's also kind of. It so got me thinking about the whole nature versus nurture thing. I. What makes a psychopath, right? Was he born a psychopath or did what happened to him when the dog mutilated him when he was 5 years old? And then his father's subsequent sort of feeding him hormones without his knowledge.

A five year old, you know, feeding him all the male hormones and then his father's kind of attitude and behaviour. Did that turn uh, him into a psychopath? You know, it's like how much of this was just innate. How much of this was created by his environment?

Ligeia

Well, I have a different theory. I went through so many theories in my sleepless nights that the last one I ended up with this morning is me. Well, I went through all the stuff like I was questioning if the brother Eric even existed. The phone calls didn't sound right to me. Uh, the, the whole phone situation, how it went, how nobody else ever heard the phone ringing.

And this discussion was just confusing and went the way where the identity got confused. Even he was almost talking to himself. So I don't know if they really happened. For example, like the brother probably existed because many people mentioned him. But I'm thinking he was using this Eric brother as like a uh, shadow's self, a mirror to not deal with things that he actually didn't want to deal with in himself.

And like there were moments where it just didn't make sense. For example, the whole coming back to the dog attack created the whole identity for Frank. He. This is the theory I came up with. Like I think the book, I, I think the theories might be endless. But my theory for now is that I'm thinking this is like a metaphor or a story of how we as humans are able to take a moment and build the whole like justifiable situation for violence.

Even though if we go back and we learn that that moment was probably false or never existed, we still go through the violence and we continue building on that. So and for the Eric and his like how he was burning dogs, I can't even say this, that's uh, so bad. Why dogs? You know, like he wasn't doing, if he was doing that, we don't know.

This is all coming from Frank. So I don't know. But if he was killing dogs, only the dog plays a, like, a really important role in this story. So I'm thinking, did. Did that mean that Eric also believed that this horrible attack damaged his brother so much that he became this monster and it was too much for him because he was described as a very sensitive, uh, emotionally, somewhere else than his brother Frank, person who wanted to be a doctor, wanted to be helping people.

So maybe this, when he saw through the horrible facade of his brother, it was too much for him and he just lost his sanity. And the dogs were like, this impulse, almost the symbol of, like, the decay of the family. Because I don't think it made sense how he was studying to be a doctor.

He was a student, he was an adult. And now he was in this situation that was also horrifying, uh, with that child he was taking care for and the maggots eating the brain of this child, which I don't think it happened, or if it

happened, that could not have triggered the whole situation or, like, for the rest of his life, he would not have lost his sanity in this one moment.

It is just not plausible for me. So I think that was also, like, a picture that was created in Frank's head because he was obsessed with decay and corpses and maggots. If you can, like, remember, maggots were everywhere. And this situation with this child is so weird. Um, I don't think a student of medicine would just, like, completely break.

I don't think so.

Leraje

And, um, the fact that it happened to a child as well.

Ligeia

Yeah. So I'm thinking he actually meant that this meant for Eric. So seeing the rotten brain of his brother and who he actually was, and that's why he didn't want to come back. I don't think he ever escaped any hospital. I don't think so. I don't know. These are just like, my. I am so confused, but I'm, um.

I really think this is about a criticism of the perceived masculinity also and how funny it actually is at the end.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

So. And. And the violence is all based on that belief. Like, I am a man. I am the alpha. Uh, so look at me. I will show you. I will show everybody.

Leraje

He does try to be the manliest man that ever manned.

Ligeia

Right. Right.

Lithos

I mean, I think he definitely escaped. I mean, although it would actually make less sense if he hadn't escaped because the police officer comes over. It's not just that no one else hears a phone call. His father is. And he tries to get there and he actually stands at the bottom of the stairs and listens to the.

Ligeia

I think the police officer was looking for him. This is why his father didn't want him home. I think everybody knew he was the one who was killing everything. That's what I thought. Like they were looking for him or, uh, they're like, I don't know.

Leraje

It is true that there's no third party confirmation of.

Ligeia

No, it's all just his. I mean, you can have theories, as many theories as you want. I think it's, it's. I think he brought it away.

Leraje

The fact that it's the first person and the first person happens to be Frank.

Ligeia

Oh, yeah. But, uh, who is a psychopath? So what can we say?

Leraje

Yeah, I like that though. I like that theory.

Lithos

It does exaggerate his prowess at certain things. Like, you know, he's best with weapons and he's so accurate with his slingshot. And I certainly thought some of that is like, yeah, you're just bigging yourself up here. This. You're not actually that brilliant, you know. Um, the wasp factory itself is probably a lot chunkier in construction than he made it sound.

Leraje

The thing that got me about all that was his constant. These are my experiments. This is how. This is my method for deducing the answer. You fucking gave everything up to fate, mate. I mean, are you a scientist or are you a mystic? What are you?

Ligeia

But he was an experiment to his father, so I think this was his way of coping with that. He knew something was wrong, I think, and the father was awful. He was lying to him about, you know, he was trying to teach him, but also he was giving him false information just for funsies.

Leraje

Do we think that Angus was worse than Frank in some respects?

Lithos

Well, he's a shit father, that's for sure, you know. Okay, so he got lumped with Frank by, by Frank's mother, who was by all accounts also a terrible person. Um, but, you know, he. All he seemed to do was like occasionally ask him about, oh, how many stairs are there in the house?

Or what's the length of a table leg. And then criticise him, um, for doing stuff wrong and then just sit there and make sort of grunting noises while he was reading the newspaper. So he was, um, you know, your traditional old style boomer parent for what?

Pike

I think all of that was compensated by nutritious vegetarian meals.

Lithos

Yeah, I mean, he does. Frank does have a terrible fucking diet, you know, Freezer burgers and mhm, oven chips and that's all he seems to live on. So that might also contribute to his. His mental health or ill health.

Ligeia

I must also say, I really enjoyed that part of. I. I'm not sure how important that was. The description of many pages where he was drunk. The descript. I have never read better description of how it feels to be up like that.

Lithos

Yeah.

Ligeia

And it went for so many pages because lasts. It lasts for days if you do it. So I, uh, really enjoyed how we. He went into that, like, oh, God, yeah, I am with you. I know where you are.

Lithos

He sees the street sign and he thinks, uh, this is what I said to my friends in quite clear English. And then it goes on for a whole paragraph where he describes the history of the street sign. And then his friends go, did he say something?

Ligeia

Oh, whatever. Okay. That was good. That was good.

Pike

My favourite bit, which I found funniest, was where he compares puking to pregnancy.

Lithos

Oh, God, yes.

Lithos

Yes. I don't remember that because it was. He's talking about throwing up so much that his muscles went into spasms.

Ligeia

Oh, yes. He was there. Oh. Oh, poor guy.

Pike

It's. It's funny because it's kind of. It feels kind of accurate in the way he describes it, you know, involuntary, alive, like a baby kicking. And you think, well, actually retching is those two things, you know. But it also really shows his. Really in character. Really shows how alien he finds women.

Ligeia

Oh, yeah. And when he said, like, he was holding this friend on his shoulders and the girl was talking to him and her breasts were in his face, and he's like, I almost puked. Okay, okay, go. It was so funny. But it was explained at the, um, end, like, I guess so bad.

I mean, the misogyny was actually so over the top. It was some. Sometimes funny because I was. I could see, like, okay, he. He's overdoing it. So everybody can see this. Oh.

Leraje

I think. But yeah, I think that was part of his character.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Everything was kind of like over the top.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

And, you know, you get the feeling the person he's trying to reassure most of all is himself.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

That he's this kind of like, manly man.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

You know, he hunts, he shoots. He fish it. We just shoot. Yeah. He's got a crossbow fishes and, you know

Lithos

Air-rifle as well.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

So you talked about the funniest bits. What. What were the most upsetting parts of the book for each of you?

Leraje

Um, I've got one that's maybe a bit left field.

Ligeia

Okay.

Leraje

The portrayal of Eric's mental illness was shit, to be honest. And was not accurate for how psychosis and schizophrenia is at all. Which maybe lends weight to Ligeia's hypothesis about it being a figment of Frank's projection.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, I do, I do believe it was like 90% of what we saw of Eric was Frank's up mind.

Leraje

It did upset me a bit for the first time and m. I just became acutely aware of how this kind of like stereotype of psychosis means danger and violence. And it's kind of, it's quite misleading. It didn't make me hate the book and it didn't make me think Banks is a bad writer.

Uh, but, uh, you know, and it is his first book and he was trying to make a particular point and I get that. Uh, but I just felt he could have maybe put a little more work into researching, uh.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Lithos

Oh yeah. There is a possibility that Eric did actually escape and was trying to get back, but that it wasn't dangerous and that was actually. Frank had been setting fire to dogs.

Leraje

That too.

Lithos

That Eric possibly was. Yeah, he was feeding the kids maggots and force feeding them maggots and worms and stuff. That, that would make kind of sort of in a way explain partly kind of like would go back to what, what set it off, him seeing that happen to that child. Um, and uh, but the burning dogs thing definitely didn't fit in with it.

Why, why is he burning dogs? What's he got against dogs? Because the only one who's been a dog is Frank.

Pike

I, I assumed it was protectiveness. You know, Eric was the older brother.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Pike

And Eric didn't, you know, wasn't there to save um, Frank when it happened.

Ligeia

Yeah. And then he saw what his brother was becoming. So maybe he thought, oh, it's all because of what happened to him, which never happened.

Leraje

I think I just felt that out of the three main characters in the book, Eric was the least developed and the most caricature of three.

Pike

Yeah, I agree.

Lithos

Yeah. He was definitely just there kind of.

Leraje

He was a plot device.

Lithos

Yeah, he's a plot device. That's what I was trying to think of. Yes. Yeah, he definitely made little sense to me. What, uh, why is he doing this? Why has he suddenly turned from utterly brilliant after one experience into completely irredeemably violent and uncontrollable?

Leraje

Yeah.

Pike

I assumed that the way, the way the book would end was when his father called him. I thought there would be some kind of scene of mob violence when he said they got, you know, they caught him.

Ligeia

The ending was kind of weird.

Lithos

Leading up to the ending, I found it really good. Like the last few chapters before the ending, I was just like reading them like that. Page after page going, hell, this is building up. This is great. And then there's a reveal. But the last chapter, I would agree with you, pike, is almost like there's a bit too much of the, like the, almost like the, the thing that happens with, with a series, a season that they can't think of the ending for and they have to end it.

And they just come up with this action.

Ligeia

Big scene of explosion and burning sheep and the shed and this little boy, 17 year old Jesus, puts off the fire. Like everything stops. And then he, his brother is peacefully sleeping in his lap. I'm like, what? Yeah, what happened? I don't know.

Leraje

There is an element to that last chapter where you think, is fucking Hercule Poirot gonna come out in a minute.

Lithos

Yes, he did go on to write. To write much better novels, certainly. My opinion.

Leraje

M. I don't think Wasp Factory is a bad book or a badly written book, but I think it is. It's the first book by a very good writer.

Lithos

Yeah, well, he had written several science fiction novels beforehand and he said that himself. He tried for years to get them published. Um, and, and he was kind of at the stage where he went, no one obviously wants to buy science fiction, so I'll try something more mainstream. And that was his idea of more mainstream.

Ligeia

And he still talk about a teenage psychopath created this little island which could be like a planet, so somewhere in space and it's like this isolated.

Leraje

Yeah he has said that before

Ligeia

He did?

Leraje

Yeah, he did. I remember hearing an interview with him on the radio. Ah. And um, he, he described it in exactly those terms. He said, okay, they're not buying sci fi, but I'm going to the, the. The island could be an alien planet and Frank is an alien.

Ligeia

Uh, exactly.

Leraje

You know, he, he, he definitely had these sci fi tropes in mind.

Lithos

I think he actually mentions it in the forward to the, the, to the book as well. And the addition we've got certainly. Yeah, um, there's, there's a forward by him and. Yeah, just the idea that. Right, okay, I'm just going to try mainstream non science fiction. And it's like that dude, what he just wrote there, he's not mainstream.

Ligeia

No, please.

Lithos

You know, when this book came out, the absolute horror reaction from some people, it was like if some people hadn't overreacted to the extent they did, it would have just become a minor sort of cult novel and form. But it was like the absolute rejection by some critics of like, this, this is horrendous stuff that kind of catapulted him to fame and meant that he could then give up the day job and write full time and get his science fiction novels published.

Because some of the ones he tried beforehand, I think one he tried beforehand ended up being sort of rewritten and edited as use of weapons. Um, sci fi novel.

Leraje

Yeah, I think he's. I think it was use of weapons and player of games that he'd written a draught of or a novel and then reworked later on.

Pike

So what did you find most upsetting?

Lithos

Two things, really. I did find the most horrific part was a description of him, um, his brother Eric in the hospital looking under the child's skull cap. Because it's like it was kind of leading up to it and you're going, right, okay, something's obviously not right here. And then when he describes it and the reaction of everyone else, I thought.

And the image of that actually happening, you know, um, medically it wouldn't happen because maggots feed on dead flesh and there was no dead flesh. The kid just had a thin skull with a skull cap over it. So. But, you know, it's a horrific image. And surprisingly, also I found the description of the wasp factory itself really upsetting.

Even though I fucking hate wasps. And I did actually.

Ligeia
I could sense that from you.

Lithos
I did, actually, did actually as a kid when I got a chemistry set. Spend one summer torturing a couple of them with a Bunsen. Well, not the Bunsen burner, the little candle. So I shouldn't find it upsetting, but I did. Maybe because it reminded me of what a little shit I was when I was younger.

Ligeia
That sounds horrible.

Leraje
A number for the RSPCA should you...

Lithos
Wasps don't deserve an rspca. They're shits. They're the shits of the animal world. They can fuck off with their arse daggers.

Pike
Since we're in confession mode, uh, I went camping with, uh, my class at school, uh, and there was a group of boys that gave people, uh, a biscuit for every mosquito caught alive so they could torture it. And I sold them a couple. They would wrap them in paper and set them on fire and, you know,

Lithos
Mosquitoes. That's justified. I'll go. That's justified.

Ligeia
I mean, I would kill a mosquito, but not torture. It's just like prolonging the suffering is never. I mean, that is reserved for people. Come on.

Pike
Yeah, no, it's. I Felt bad, but I really wanted biscuits.

Lithos
Yeah, well, I mean, it's. You know, I think it's fair for biscuits. You know, it's. I mean, I wouldn't torture them these days. I'll. I'll just splatter wasp when I see. Likewise mosquitoes.

Ligeia
Gonna make a tiny note for Pike to keep everybody safe around you. Bring biscuits.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Okay.

Lithos
Would you risk it for a biscuit? It, uh, kind of gives a different sense to. To that phrase. A pike would. Yes.

Pike
Oh, yeah, well, no, no. Okay. That was in primary school. I'm older and wiser now. Said, you know, that was just a phase I was going through.

Lithos
Yes.

Leraje

Nothing less than two biscuits now.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
Referring to the murder of the three children. That was just a phase I was going through.

Pike
Yeah, we didn't discuss that at all. We were just like, oh, those poor animals. What about the children?

Ligeia
Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was awful.

Lithos
The first one, what was his name? Blythe.

Leraje
Blythe.

Lithos
Um, whether he intended to kill him or not, was it a different matter? He was. He was pissed off because Blythe had set fire to his brother's pet rabbit.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
And Blythe had a fake leg, uh, because he'd lost it in an accident and he'd stuck an adder in the leg. Now, adders are not known to be lethal. Snakes, however. No. They, uh. However, they can kill young children if the bite's severe enough. And of course, if it's stuck in his leg and he put his leg on, he's going to be bitten several times by the snake.

And it could actually arguably have killed him. So, okay, whether that was intended as murder or just happened to be because he was just looking to punish him. But the next two were, uh, increasingly. I mean, Paul was kind of happenstance that he thought, oh, there's a bomb, right. They'll blow my brother up.

But Esmeralda was planned well in advance. He built a special kite for her. He sorted it all out. So each one was increasingly more elaborate and more thought through. You know, first one, maybe an accident that you died. Second one, definitely not an accident. But would he have killed him if he hadn't come upon the bomb?

Um. Uh, and then the third one. Yes, absolutely premeditated and totally and utterly carefully planned in advance. Yeah. Horrifying.

Ligeia
That little girl, I couldn't. She left like, she. She had flowers in her little hand and, like, how. And the little brother, the way he spoke like that baby English like, what is breakfast? I was. I'm like, no, please, I can't. I Can't continue. This is not going to get h. Babies. No.

Sorry, guys. Sorry. I, uh, that those were the moments where I was like, I needed to get braver and braver to go through those pages and I'm like, why am I doing this? I can't do this. Horrible.

Pike
Did you research the adders or did you just happen to know?

Lithos

I didn't, I didn't know that. I was surprised. I knew that adders exist on these shores and that their bites can be very painful, but that they're not lethal. Um, and I thought, well, does that make any sense? So I did look it up and it said, yes, in very rare cases. It can be in the case of very young children or, you know, very frail elderly people who, uh, who haven't got a healthy heart or whatever, you know.

Yes. But it's extremely rare in the same way that, you know, people do get killed by bee stings.

Pike

One bit that I found puzzling was one Angus comes out of his study and his pupils are dilated and there's a strange smell. Did you have an explanation for that?

Lithos

Weed? Yeah, he's an old hippie.

Ligeia

Weed.

Pike

Does it really dilate pupils?

Lithos

Yes.

Pike

Doesn't it just make you look droopy?

Leraje

It does dilate pupils, yeah.

Pike

Okay, I discarded that one. Uh, but yeah, that sounds most likely.

Lithos

I mean, it could be any number of chemicals he'd taken, obviously being a biochemist. And when Frank eventually gets into his study, there's all kinds of medications and stuff around there, so he could have been taking anything.

Pike

I thought LSD was most likely, but I couldn't figure out, you know, what would.

Lithos

There wouldn't be a strange smell though. Yeah, but he did, I think he did find, um, LSD in the lab because he talked about he found a little plastic baggie with some bits of paper in it's like. Oh, yeah, that was acid.

Pike

Yeah.

Leraje

I've seen people discussing this book online and there's been accusations of transphobia. Think that's valid?

Lithos

No, no, he's not trans.

Ligeia

I was trying to see the point and I think they mean like, because what happened to Frank that, that his, his father was trying to change his. Her hormones artificially or chemically, whatever. Uh, this is what made him a beast and a

monster. But I don't think this was in the book. I think it's, it's nitpicking and far fetched theory for me.

I did not read it like that.

Pike

I don't think you can read it like that because in the end when he goes into that little rant that I disliked so much. Uh, he sort of says, well, kind of. I mean, it's very hard to understand, but it sort of implies that the murders are a coping mechanism or something. So it's really talking about trauma, not gender identity as such.

Ligeia

Yeah, but the trauma might be coming from the, the forced, you know, but

Pike

that would be change anything. It doesn't have to be.

Ligeia

Yes, yes, but I think people are seeing that and thinking this is transphobic. Yeah, I don't see that.

Leraje

No, I don't see it either. But I do understand why people might be concerned about it in this. For the same reasons that I was concerned about the portrayal of Eric's psychosis.

Ligeia

Yes, yes.

Leraje

I think it's, it's in lesser, uh, hand, in lesser skilled hands. It might easily have been seen as saying, yeah, trans men are psychotics, uh, or, uh, dangerous. But I think the difference here is that as, as you know, I don't want to sort of like talk for a community here, but as I understand it, trans people are aware from a very early age that they are not in the right body and they then might go on to make the conscious decision to transition in some way socially or medically or however.

But Frank never has that autonomy and consent is taken from him from day one.

Lithos

Yes, yes, in fact it is. You know, you kind of like going, well, no, he's actually not in any way trans. He has been spiked with hormones by his father against his will, um, to try and kind of remove any aspect of femininity which isn't. Is not transitioning. It, you know, it wasn't.

I don't, I don't really see how it can be seen as being transphobic. It's a, it's about a up family and, you know, the father treating his son like some kind of biological experiment.

Pike

M. Yeah.

Lithos

For his, for his own, for his own purpose. He didn't care about his son. He just didn't want his son to be in any way feminine.

Ligeia

You mean his daughter.

Lithos

Yeah, his daughter. Sorry. Yes. Yeah, he's, he didn't want his daughter to be. Yes, sorry. Just getting used to calling Frank Francis. Yes, Frank is Francis.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Pike
To entertain for a moment, uh, that idea. I will say that if this book had been written by another famous Scottish author, I would say, oh yeah, that's totally transphobic. And also she's fucked in the head

Leraje
Would have been shit as well.

Ligeia
That is true.

Leraje
I think it's something we, we needed to discuss because I have seen, ah, people from the trans community say they consider it to be transphobic.

Lithos
Yeah, so have I. Yeah.

Leraje
But yeah, I think the, the, the issue that we've all kind of like mentioned, you know, that idea of consent, autonomy and the fact that this was all forced on Frank is, uh, takes

Ligeia
away since he was a toddler. So.

Pike
Yeah, what this in a way that can be transphobic. Right. If you assume that being trans does not involve the psychological layer is just about the, you know, the physical or hormonal change in the body and you just strip away that whole thing that happens in the person's head and go like, well, that's the same.

Mhm.

Lithos
It's actually part of the reason I chose this because I could have chosen Iain, any of other Iain Banks other novels, uh, many of which are better. Um, but it was the. Because I've read it so long ago when it wouldn't. Wasn't seen as an issue. And having heard that, um, the, the, the sort of accusations of transphobia, I thought this would be interesting to read again and get other people's point of view on it and see if we see any transphobia in it.

And I didn't, um, and it's good to hear that neither did any of you, but, um.

Leraje
But, you know, none of us are trans.

Lithos
Yeah, no, no, exactly.

Ligeia
So it is an interesting point.

Leraje
Yeah, I, I can see how people might think it is. I personally don't think it is. I think the, the issue of consent and stuff just kind of like takes away from that.

Ligeia

Well, if it is transphobic, it is even more misogynistic. So. I'm sorry, like. Yeah, that, that was obvious. Right. I mean, it was criticising it in a way, but it was tough to read.

Lithos

I mean, I think Iain Banks made it clear that the father's misogynistic, the son is, and they're both absolute.

Ligeia

Yes, yes. I don't know.

Lithos

I should say, as it turns out. Yeah, you know, it turns out.

Leraje

I mean, one of the themes of the book could be seen as the construction of gender as a, as an idea, and how a misogynistic man can construct not just a male figure, but the worst kind of male figure. An actual misogynistic person themselves.

Ligeia

Mhm. Yep.

Lithos

Yep.

Pike

Can we talk about, um, Frank's religion, his spirituality?

Lithos

Oh, blimey. Yes.

Pike

What did you think of that?

Leraje

Well, you tell us first.

Pike

Well, there were bits that I really liked. It was a very good dimension to the book, I thought. I really enjoyed it. And I really liked Frank's, um, ritual, the way, you know, it included confessions and talking about what he fears, what he hates, what he dreams about. He basically just recited what he.

What he recited as his. What he call his catcheisms was just pure honesty. The person taking everything from inside themselves. And that's most secret than just laying down, which I thought was very cool.

Lithos

That was a bit when he goes to the wasp factory, wasn't it? When. Where he's. Yeah, he lays it.

Pike

Yeah.

Lithos

He's got to go through the whole thing because that's Is. Yeah.

Ligeia

His, uh, fortune telling device.

Leraje

But who's he. Who's he laying all this out, this information out to?

Pike
Well, you know, the was factory.

Leraje
Is that really confession?

Pike
I don't think it was confession. I thought it was his liturgy.

Lithos
M. Yeah.

Ligeia
I think he wanted to feel important and like he was imagining himself being this superhuman priest who understands the meanings of what he's doing. The crimes where becoming something more than just crimes and murders. It was like a, uh, universe was connecting to him or he was connecting to a bigger thing because he was the one, you know, like, he understood as well.

Yeah, I saw it.

Leraje
It's just him talking about. Sorry, go on, go on, sorry.

Ligeia
No, that's it. That's it. Yeah.

Leraje
I just saw it as an extension of him blathering about his own egotistical. You know, I didn't see it as. I can understand why people might see it as a kind of like, liturgy or a kind of like, confession or a kind of like. But to me, it was just some sad prick talking about how they like to kill people and how they like to hurt things.

Ligeia
Yes. Because after confession, you usually. You are supposed to. Or it's. You are expecting it by yourself that you. After confession, you are going to change certain things that made you confess. That was not present but liturgy.

Pike
Because I said liturgy is just a religious ceremony, right?

Ligeia
Yes. Yeah.

Pike
You didn't think that's what it was?

Leraje
No.

Lithos
Yeah. I thought he kind of, like, had quite detailed ideas about what needed to be done, in what way, what needed to be laid out. Uh, exactly in what way? Down to measuring afterwards where all the things went on the altar. Um, you know. Yeah, it was. It was liturgical. It wasn't just like, him doing something for the sake of egotism.

I saw it as him having a specific ritual he had to go through, and it had to be very accurate.

Ligeia
He had that order in everything he was doing. He was very logically present, and everything he was doing, he knew what he was doing. So this was just another

part of how his mind worked, and that was scary to me because it could create beautiful rituals, for example. But at the same point, with the same cold blood, he would go and kill somebody or a little creature with the same slow, logical mindset, like, oh, I'm going to pretend this.

This gun is a tail, or it's moving in the wind. And I'm going to wait. I wanted to freaking, you know, the. The bunnies, the rabbits. Like, I. I couldn't. Like, he is pretending that this is moving in the wind. I'm going to slap your face. Like, what are you doing? That's a psychopathic thinking.

He was playing with the bunny, with the.

Leraje

You know, um, this whole idea about things being placed in a certain position and at, uh, the same distance. Those are things that serial killers do.

Ligeia

Yeah. Slow.

Leraje

Some of them arrange. They. They do what's called posing the body after.

Ligeia

Uh-huh.

Leraje

The victim's dead. So coming back, they put their shoes neatly together and put them back to a particular side of the body. They put. You know, if the person's got a handbag, they might neatly arrange that. They rearrange their clothes.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Even apply lipstick.

Ligeia

Putting the clothes on. That was. That was the one I didn't see

Leraje

as particularly liturgical from.

Lithos

Yeah, but from the serial killer's point of view, that's liturgical as well, isn't it?

Ligeia

Yeah, that's what I'm trying to say.

Leraje

M. I don't see it as liturgical. I just see it as some sad prick trying to order the universe to their own. Trying to exert some form of control over their own patheticness. Really?

Pike

It could be both.

Leraje

Could be.

Lithos

Yeah.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

Maybe. I mean, I'm sure Frank, and I'm sure every serial killer thinks that what they do is vitally important and how they do it, but that doesn't make it important. That just makes them think it is.

Lithos

I did wonder at one point in the book, and that's when Frank does his. He describes in detail his morning routine when he gets ready, uh, washes and everything. And at that point I thought, I wonder if Brett Easton Ellis read this book before he wrote American Psycho and went, I'll do that, but I'll just go quite a bit further because there's that bit in American Psycho where he describes in excruciatingly boring detail his morning ablutions, uh, like, over a whole chapter.

And. And this was kind of like the same kind of thing. He's. He spends a couple of pages telling you exactly what he does, what soap uses, what he's got to How? Uh, he's got to get himself ready.

Leraje

I struggled with American Psycho for that very reason.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

That just the. It was so dull. I mean, I don't want to read a multi page dissertation on Huey Lewis and the News. I just don't. I. Yeah, I understand it's part of character development, but fucking hell.

Lithos

I mean, I think it's the one case, the one case I can think of where the movie is actually way better than the book.

Pike

M m. Do you want, do we want to do some pitchforks?

Leraje

Yes, let's do pitchforks. Lithos. It was your choice. What would you give it?

Lithos

I'll give it nine because I enjoyed reading it. Um, uh, it's very well written. I won't give it 10 because he's written but way better books. He's definitely worth checking out. They're not all as gruesome as this.

Ligeia

Okay, um, this is not going anywhere so I can say whatever. So for the brutal images I now own, I will give it -55. I don't want these images in my hands ever. I. Okay. But for the theories that I had to go through, I'm giving it an 8. It made me really think and rethink and think and rethink and it was fun to sit and have so many theories.

It doesn't happen that often. That is so confusing. Like usually there is like clear line and some, some little branches but this was like I went through five theories that were completely opposite. So for that. Yeah, great job. Eight.

Leraje

Okay, so that's adding those together. That's minus 47 then.

Ligeia

Oh my God.

Lithos

No. Well if you take the average, it's minus 23 and a half or something like that, isn't it? That's good

Leraje
Pike?

Pike
I will give it an 8 because although I didn't like the ending and I thought sometimes it over egged the pudding a little bit. You know where the father goes with a shotgun but then strangles the dog instead. I thought, uh, he just, he just did it. You're like, uh, I'll do something gruesome.

But, but didn't really. But I thought the character of Frank is, was really, really good.

Ligeia
Mhm.

Leraje
Okay, I'll give it a seven and a half. And um, I'm knocking off half a mark there for Eric's portrayal. But that's just a personal thing. I thought it was a very, very well written first book by a very talented author.

Ligeia
Yes.

Leraje
And I don't think I'm going to go back and read it again.

Lithos
No, I can't I might pick one of his science fiction novels for a future episode.

Pike
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ligeia
Let's see. Let's see. To compare.

Leraje
God, they're all massive, though, aren't they?

Lithos
Oh, not all of them.

Leraje
Player of Games is quite short.

Lithos
Fearsome Engine.

Leraje
Fucking hell. That's. I'm not struggling through that fucking book again.

Ligeia
That sounds promising.

Leraje
It's written entirely phonetically.

Lithos
Yeah, um, it is, yeah. Some kid who lives, um, sort of wild and it. I don't think it is entirely. Is it? There's. There's some different voices. Yeah. Um. But, yeah, he writes that. I mean, the title is Fearsome Engine. F E E R S U M E N D J I N N.

So it's written like that, like phonetically, how a sort of child who'd never learned to write would write. It does take a while to get

Ligeia
into, uh, some languages work like that. For example, my native language is. Exactly.

Lithos
Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia
That's how we work.

Lithos
Pronounced how it's written like Spanish. Yeah, yeah. Not every language is as shit as English. I mean, it is. It is. It's got to be real shit of a language to learn for anyone who's not born to it. Because nothing is pronounced the way it's written.

Ligeia
No. Um.

Pike
Now, the reason it spreads so much is because it's an easy language.

Ligeia
That's the reason. Yes, that's how it happened.

Lithos
Nothing to do with the British Army.

Ligeia
People went through the list, like.

Lithos
Let me see.

Ligeia
Let me choose. Oh, this one. Okay, good.

Pike
Well, uh, depends where. Okay. Depends where you are from. I misspoke there. Just delete it. Delete it!

Ligeia
No, no, no, no.

Leraje
Okay, so next up is Ligeia's choice. What we reading?

Ligeia
Oh, okay. Yes. So. Oh, I was not ready for this. I've forgotten the author's name. But we are reading something lighter. It's a short book. It's called Bloom. Ah. Uh, her first name is Delilah. I forgot. Dawson, I think. Delilah Dawson. And, um, I think we need a little palette cleanser. So it's.

It's light, it's simple. Let's talk about something pretty. It's a horror book, by the way.

Pike
But, yes.

Ligeia

It's not that bad. Dawson. Right. Okay. Yay. So it's full of flowers and beautiful things, and it's Sapphic. Yay. Let's do it.

Lithos
What? No wasps?

Ligeia
You will see.

Pike
Damn. Um, well, you can reread the Wasp Factory instead.

Lithos
Yeah, I want some burning rabbits. Now

Ligeia
read the book.

Lithos
Al Fresco Barbecue.

Leraje
Okay, so that's it for another edition of the Devil's Library. I've been Leraje.
Hail Satan.

Pike
Hail Satan.

Ligeia
Hail Satan.

Lithos
Hail Satan.

[Outro music]