

The Devil's Library Episode 15 – “Bloom”

[Intro Music]

Ligeia

Good day, beautiful blooming flowers of sin. Welcome to our new episode. You will understand why I'm greeting you in this beautiful flower ish. Floweresque botanical way. Uh, don't worry, I'm not alone here. You don't have to listen to just to me. You can stay here and listen to actually proper clever people. I have pike with me.

Pike

Hail Satan.

Ligeia

See what I'm dealing with. Welcome Leraje

Leraje

Fuck snail tapenade.

Ligeia

Don't snails by the way. And welcome Lithos.

Lithos

Hail Satan.

Ligeia

Oh God. Okay, there we go. Ah. Uh, and my name is Ligeia. What are we doing today? This is. You will suffer with us because I chose this book. So I am scared after my decision to, to go through John Ward, you know, so I am scared what's gonna happen today. I again chose a book.

Before I read it, I. My, my thinking process was I want to bring something that is more like springtime or the season, which didn't work well because it's far from spring, it's hot, everything is dead and dry. So. But yeah, that was my process of thinking. So we are going to talk about the uh, short book.

I think it's a novella, it's not a novel. It's by Delilah S. Dawson and it's called Bloom. It has a beautiful cover. I think it's a beautiful picture. That was another reason why I chose it because. Huh, huh. I like to look at it. I would say at the first glance, which you confirmed when we like had a little chat here and there.

Uh, at the first glance, this reads like uh, romance, love, uh, story. It's a sapphic story. So we have two girls that fall in love and you know, the first half or maybe more than a half of the book is focused on their relationship. We have two main characters. The first one is Rosemary Ro.

She's a literature professor and she's like trying to heal after a breakup with her boyfriend. So she moves away. She's starting a new life in this little town. And uh, this is exactly like creating that slow, peaceful little town atmosphere that makes this book kind of even more romantic and you know, like very cottage core situation.

Everything is beautiful, you know, colours. We have a lot of descriptions of what we can see and smell and touch and you know, so that's beautiful. Then we have the other character which we as uh, the, the, the Ro. Girl. She meets her at the farmer's market. And this other girl, her name is Ash.

She is selling her products, which we can talk about later. Everything is homemade. Again, she is absolutely beautiful. It's it's, you know, we. We will

talk about what makes sense, what doesn't make sense, but. Yeah, so they fall in sort of love. One falls in love more, a little bit more deeper than the other one.

But they are together. They start meeting up at this beautiful cottage of. Of ash. And then like the, the. The final part of. Of the book, we start to see the psychological and body horror. I don't want to spoil it yet. I know this is, this is kind of like the plot situation.

Pike

You want us to help you spoil it?

Ligeia

Well, whatever you choose now, it's in your hands. I don't know. Are we spoiling the ending?

Leraje

We always do. We always spoil the books. We might as well.

Ligeia

Okay.

Pike

I feel like the listener would be disappointed if we didn't.

Ligeia

Yeah, right.

Pike

We have to ruin the reading experience completely.

Ligeia

Yes, please. Okay then. So what did you guys think?

Leraje

I thought this was a novella that would have been better as a novel. It was. It felt a bit cramped in places and, um, I think it would have been better and it wasn't. I didn't hate it at all. But I think it would have been better if there'd been more time given to.

Before the events in the novella started and more time taken, especially at the end.

Pike

Oh, I don't know about that. Think about it. So this book was 90% them eating nice organic food and you know, enjoying a nice, uh, middle class lifestyle. And then it was 10% when things actually start kicking off. If this was a novel, that would be a lot of cupcake eating.

Leraje

M. That's what I mean though. There should have been more story. It felt to me like there were whole bits of the story that were kind of like dangled in front of us and then just never mentioned again. Things like, um, the missing girls subplot. What the happened there?

Pike

Oh yeah.

The Jesse character. I mean, she was there and then she wasn't there and it was like a relationship with her mom wasn't really explained. A relationship with her ex, uh, what was his name? Erik. All right. It didn't end well, obviously, but I just felt there was a much more to say about all these things and that would have helped with my other.

The other main issue I had with this, which was Ro's character, the character of Ro, which felt, uh, quite underdeveloped and not very realistic.

Ligeia

Okay, so I, I think the summary was done. I can go.

Lithos

There was definitely an abundance of cupcake and cupcake and um, and prosciutto and whatever else eating and description of candles. And at one point I actually wondered, has the author ever been to one of these farmers markets? Because they're not as romantic as that. It's overpriced jams. And there was definitely too much of that and, uh, not enough characterization, really.

I mean, I would say that row definitely felt one dimensional and sort of like rather sort of teen fictionish at times. Almost like fanfic, like, you know. Oh, yes. Oh, she's. Ash is so lovely. She's so beautiful. And the butterflies are billowing around and all this. And it's like, oh, uh, for God's sake, is this Twilight that.

I mean, it's. It had potential to be really good, but even. Even the bits that kind of led up to the horror, I felt were quite heavily signposted, like, I saw. All right, okay, there's going to be a torture room in the cellar. You know, uh, that was, you know, so.

Pike

And it didn't disappoint you.

Lithos

It's not a particularly original sort of idea. And the way you make it really good and original is you flesh out the characters, which is the one thing that was missing for me. It was like, my God, Ro, you really do not strike me as sort of, uh, a learned academic. And your poetry really fucking sucks.

Leraje

Really fucking sucks.

Ligeia

Jesus, that was bad.

Leraje

Uh, I know what you mean about the kind of, like, teen fiction character. It felt like she was a character written for an Instagram audience. And I don't mean that in a derogatory way. It just felt very superficial.

Pike

Now this feels a little unfair. She wrote that poem to hide the. Her SOS message. She did. She didn't write it too.

Lithos

Oh, I meant the first one. The first one that she posted, uh, which I. I can't remember. I don't. It's not very memorable, but it's like four or five lines and it's. Yeah. Teenage tripe, right?

Ligeia

Yeah. So we agree that there could be, uh, much more work done around the character.

Leraje

That's why I think it would have been better as a novel if she'd taken the time to sort of like, really develop Ro in particular as a character before the events of the novella started. I would have cared a lot more about Ro, but everything she did was a cliché. I mean, the whole thing about she's a literature professor and her two favourite, the only one real, uh, literature character, uh, uh, writers that she mentions as Shakespeare and Bronte.

Was it?

Ligeia
Yes.

Leraje

And it's like, Christ almighty. I mean, give us some depth. Don't just whack the first two biggest names of English literature that you can think of on the page. Give her a little bit of interest. Make it, you know, make her interested in her in Melville, for example, or you know, someone a little bit off the sort of like cliché path of Shakespeare and Brontë.

She just didn't feel very well put together at all.

Pike

I thought her most believable side was her post breakup side. You know, where she says that at least going to the market felt like getting out into the world. Uh, the, the bit where she, she's just coming out of this relationship that went bad. I thought, okay. That someone has experienced it before writing it.

That was my uh. Well, I thought Ro's best bit.

Ligeia
Mhm.

Leraje

I didn't necessarily have a problem with the kind of like romance side of it at all. I thought some parts of that were really very well written. She, she reels, Dawson reels off this cracking line which I'm m trying to find.

Pike

It's the first line of her poem.

Leraje

No, it's not. She is obsessed. She is compelled. She is called. She is a selkie and Ash has her skin. I love that line. That uh, is just a brilliant line. It really sort of like encapsulated to me this kind of. I mean you said it was love. L, uh, I don't know if it was.

I think it was just pure infatuation, at least at the start. And that that line sort of like encapsulates that. It was kind of uh, like it was like she was addicted to ash.

Ligeia

The word is limerence. I think for this like you are. Absolutely. Yeah. Because, because they didn't have time to establish any real deep feelings that I will call love. But it's still read as a love story. I don't know what else to call it. Romance. Yeah. You know what I mean by love story?

I, well this is, this is a question like what. Where does it, where is the, the edge between being just in love physically or like, you know, attracted to somebody so much that you actually really feel the obsession or whatever that is and then where does it change to love and something that is much more beautiful and complex?

You know, in books, you know, sometimes it's not. It wasn't in this book. It was, it was a short story. That was not enough time to establish any sort of love. I agree with that. I didn't mind that. For me that was like, okay, I'm going to read a uh, savage tale of passion.

Which was not there by the way. For me.

Pike

Yeah, but that got cut out there.

Lithos

Was. I've got a quote here, which is they. When. When they actually get down to the Sapphic bit and they kiss and then Ash kneels before her. Uh, and dot, dot, dot. Yes. It's quite a night. Once they're done eating. Dear God. Yes. And that's it. That is so. It's like eating.

Ligeia

Right, okay.

Lithos

Such a puritan way of kind of describing it. And. But the author, I think, has got. Has got chops. She can. She can write some really good stuff. There's some really well written stuff. The bit at the end as well, with the horror, it's kind of like, really drew me in, you know, it's kind of like the excitement of, like, uh, please don't let me get found in the cellar.

And it's so uneven for me because I thought there's some really well written bits and then there's loads of sort of. All I can call it is sentimental tripe, really, you know.

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

Um. For want of a better word. And yeah, if you'd spent time focusing on the good bits, the good bits of her writing and then going into some depth about the characters, it would be so much of a better novel because, like I said, it's not a original story. It's been done before.

So you've got.

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

Puts another spin on it to make it special. Yeah.

Ligeia

So it wasn't just me. I'm so happy because I think a lot. A lot could have been done, as you said, like maybe some sort of a history of the characters and what they have been through, but also going deeper in the actual erotic side. Like, really, please describe what's happening and how they feel.

Why. Why are we going that way? And then we are too shy to say anything. Why choosing this topic then? You know what I mean?

Pike

Because the real passion was for the, you know, human fat cupcakes.

Lithos

I couldn't help thinking back to. To sort of in comparison to Heather Parry and. And again, her story was not necessarily an original one because, you know, someone being locked in the attic, uh, you know, it's been done before. But what she did was she went into massive depth. She wrote beautifully, she developed the characters and the, the.

The. The lesbian romance that was in there was quite beautifully described as, well, the whole thing. What turned what was actually an idea that's been done before several times into something really astonishing, special and beautiful.

Lithos

And that was the talent of it. And I, uh, feel like this was a massive. Miss you. You could have done something with this, but it's just like. It's something to read on the beach,

Ligeia

you know, it was so rushed. So rushed.

Leraje

Again, I know I've said it two or three times. So this is why I think it would have been better if she'd fleshed it, uh, out into a full 500, 600 page novel. Going back to the fewer cupcakes with. Well, I didn't mind that too much. I mean, I think. I think she was trying to say something with that.

I think she was trying to say something about sensuality and sort of.

Lithos

I don't think cupcakes are sensual. It might just be me. I really. You know, they can be. I mean, the french pastry.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

This is where I'm at my analysis. Yeah.

Pike

I'd say they were sensual maybe to start with, but after Ro has kept them in her fridge for a week.

Leraje

Yeah.

Pike

When she's eating, how m long do you think it's okay to keep a cupcake for? Because I would say two days max. Second day. It's already getting a little, you know, dry.

Lithos

Yeah.

Ligeia

But pike, hold on. When I imagine myself when I am in love or infatuated by somebody, I would keep them for like a year and just snip them.

Pike

Would you eat them, though?

Ligeia

I would eat them. After a year. I would not even be sick. Because, uh, that would be like, this is my connection with this person. I think that was what she was trying to say with that. Like, she. She stopped thinking in a rational way, if she ever did in this book. I mean, Rosemary, she was not the most rational person on earth.

Maybe I am thinking too much of about what. What the author was trying to say. Maybe she would be surprised that, oh, that was a mistake that I did that. You know, like, that's a stupid thing to do. But my mind is like, yeah, this is the real passion. I would actually do that.

And she would be like, yeah, I don't know.

Pike

I thought she was just bad with food and that's why she didn't question it. Tapenade was in cubes. That's not what a tapenade is.

Lithos

Yeah. That really had me puzzled. I thought, what a lumpy tapenade, which is chewy. What kind of olives are in there? And of course, makes sense later on, but why would you put snails in a tapenade? Why not bake them into one of your cupcakes or something?

Leraje

I got a theory about that, but I just want to. Going back to the kind of like, erotic or non eroticness of this, did anyone else get the impression that maybe Ash was asexual?

Ligeia

I did nothing about Her? No, but. Okay, continue.

Leraje

Because she kind of like. There's this thing with the Jesse character. She sort of like expresses disapproval of Jesse's kind of like overt sexuality on her own Instagram page.

Lithos

Mhm.

Leraje

So that was the first thing when they actually finally get down and start bumping uglies. She is always the. Sorry. Sorry. She's always the, uh. She's always the giver. She never receives anything from Ro.

Ligeia

That. That just always. That was weird. Yeah.

Leraje

She doesn't seem to want or need much attention.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

Sexually, um. And I think going back to what I said a minute ago, but having the theory about the whole tapenade thing, I think she poisoned Ro on purpose to avoid having a sexual encounter with her that first night.

Ligeia

Oh. You seem think that was the reason? I couldn't find why.

Lithos

Oh.

Leraje

So, yeah, I think there's an argument to be made that Ash is asexual. M. Which I thought was quite an interesting way to take it.

Lithos

Also, she's a psychopath. So.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

Whether, you know, whether the psychopaths are on the whole, asexual in the traditional sense, you know, that's not how they get their thrills, is it? Um, but I think, yeah, it's not a love story so much as you mentioned, Leraje, a

kind of infatuation and bordering on obsession that, um, Ro has developed for this girl in.

In the sense that she actually puts up with a load of bullshit she wouldn't put up with from men. You know, it's not a love story if one of them says from the word go, these are, um, my boundaries. Do not enter this room ever, and then blanks them at, you know, the market.

And that's. That's not a love story.

Pike

No, that's Bluebeard.

Leraje

That is Bluebeard. Yeah.

Ligeia

Maybe. Maybe this is exactly why, as I said, I had no idea what I'm gonna be reading. And I thought it's gonna be just a, like a story. But the story was not, uh. It was not feeding me in any way. So I decided to look into this in my strange way of, uh.

I don't know if the author was thinking about any of what I saw, but I started to think maybe this is more of like a poem situation, which we know she was not good at. Bear with me. Bear with me. Of course, there is a lot of, uh, description of food and handmade, uh, homemade products and comfort foods and beautiful pastel colours and scents.

And again, maybe this is just my mind, but I saw so much mythology, like honey and what it Represents and how it's always sexualized because it's sweet, it brings pleasure, it is healing, it preserves. And it has been with. With the human, all kind of religion, whatever. Honey is always present when we want to talk about, like, sensual traction, whatever that is.

Pike

Yeah, Honey trap.

Ligeia

Yes. And like, you know, carnivorous plants. The femme fatale, which I think, again, I saw in Ash, sort of like she is in. In botany. So I saw the pollination and the exchange that happens in nature. And. And I saw these two girls, and I was thinking, ash is representing this force in nature that.

That works in plants, in flowers. She is attracting, she is inviting, she is seducing the, you know, the, the insect, whatever, which is roe. And. And she. Roe is only seeing that beautiful flowering face of, of the plant when it's the most beautiful. It's the, uh. The scent is absolutely gorgeous. And she is stupidly thinking, this is, this is the whole ash.

This is what I'm getting. And it was only that little face she was. She was portraying. Okay, come here. Uh, I'm gonna only eat you. So. And she did. And it. This is happening in nature. And I thought, this is such a beautiful metaphor. If it is. If it's not, well, I'm still seeing it.

So it was beautiful. It was becoming beautiful for me when I started reading it in this way. And also how she. She took that approach of bringing the queerness into this, because usually the botanical, the flowers, the plants and how they reproduce in Western art, it's usually representing like, the stereotypical heterosexuality. Like we have two parts and one is that.

One is that, which is not true. It doesn't have to be. There is so much chaos. And, you know, something that is so beautiful in nature is that it. It can't just be that, but it represents in art. And I loved that she brought this

queerness into that because the, the horror of the story didn't come from them being gay.

That didn't necessarily need to be. It could. It could have been a boy and a girl. It could have been whatever. I don't think that was the horror based on that. But she brought it there. And I loved that little detail that, uh. Okay, we can still be looking at this sexuality in, in the, like the, the.

The ecosystem she created. Like the garden was actually the unconsciousness. Am I making any sense anymore?

Leraje
Yeah, yeah, go.

Ligeia
Yeah. I. This is what I thought is. Is happening. And it was like I found so many new layers. When I started looking into this, I got actually completely lost because this is one of the topics I absolutely. I am obsessed. I have been for six years. Like the botany and the sexual aspects of how we see.

See the parts of plants and how they behave and how they can work. You know, we. We use them for the aerostasis, for the sexual thing in a way that we can be a little bit more brave when we use them. Instead of talking about people, it still brings the, like, the innocence, the, um.

You know, it's not us. It is in the nature. It is beautiful somehow it's in. In people. Like, we think when we talk about sexuality in people, it became dirty. It's always dirty.

Leraje
Right, right. So you think the kind of, like the. The more kind of, for want of a better word, the botanistic aspects of us.

Ligeia
Uh, yes, yes.

Leraje
Was a way of illustrating that. Uh.

Ligeia
Yes. How. How that works in nature. How it's. It's. It lies. Like, I really like the aspect of the pollination and the. Like. She was a predator and she was selling this one state that was beautiful. And how. Ro didn't read the room and she. She actually didn't. She did not fall.

She did not fall. Am I right? What am I missing? What am I saying wrong? fall. Yes, fall. For like a whole person. Ash was not a whole person for her. She only saw a little beautiful arrangement that she created. It was an architecture of a person she wanted to see in front of herself.

She was absolutely ignoring all the red flags. Weird stuff rules. Come on. Who would be with the person who is like. The first thing you say is, oh, uh, by the way, you are not going that. I'm like, that's the first thing I'm doing.

Pike
That's the last thing you're doing then as well.

Ligeia
Well, that would be also the last thing of. And that will be the end of the book. But you know what I mean, like, yeah, like a normal adult person who has been in a relationship would not deal with that. They would be like, okay, that's the last thing I'm doing with you.

Bye.

Leraje

I think she. When I say she now, I mean, uh, Delilah Dawson, the author. I think she tried to explain that not. Not really that well, but I think she tried to by saying that Ro was so confused by the fact that she found herself having the hots for a girl, uh, when all in the past all she'd done was, like, fallen for.

For men that she didn't know how to behave and she didn't know what to do. And she was so unsure of what the right thing to do was. When you have A relationship with someone of the same gender as you. But I don't think that was, I don't think that was enough of a reason for her to sort of like carry on acquiescing to these increasingly bizarre red flags, uh, that Ash was, was putting up.

Lithos

Well, there was, there was very little mention of Ash's personality in this.

Ligeia

There was nothing.

Lithos

There's. Ro goes, oh, you're beautiful. You're so beautiful. Your hair is beautiful, your dresses are beautiful, you smell beautiful, your cupcakes are wonderful, your charcuterie is fantastic. And that seems to be it. And I was thinking, my God, you must be easy to please if that's all it takes.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Do you even like this woman?

Lithos

Yeah, exactly. It was like there's hardly any conversation and the little bits of conversation there are is like Ash going, these are my limits, don't cross them. And I'm like, you know, it's that. No, that's not love. And, and that really, you know, is, you know, if that's all it is, you know, you just want someone beautiful that makes nice cakes.

Um, I'm sure there's plenty of people like that in the world. I just, it just, I found it weird that there was no mention of her being attracted to her personality in any way, shape or form.

Ligeia

This is why I started to think it's. It's a different story than that.

Pike

I thought that quite early on. Um, I thought, you know, but I just took it for a romance cliché. Uh, I thought, wouldn't it be nice to have a romance story story for once where the character is not entrapped by this dazzling beauty that just knocks them out. That was very fan fiction, but maybe is even put off by the person's appearance and then, you know, gets, uh, drawn in by the power of their personality or something.

It would make for a much more interesting. And then you can bring in the appearance.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, we can't compare these two.

Pike

But I thought the story was, uh, an allegory, actually.

Leraje

Mhm.

Pike

I thought what it was really about and that really cracked me up when I thought that when I finished reading it, I thought it's about middle class problems, you know, um, jobs in academia are problematic. Long boring office hours, no difficult career progression. All you have to look forward to in life is your farmer's market on the weekend.

You have to make your own toiletries because commercial products are full of chemicals and all that and so on, so forth. And when the solution is quite literal in this story, eat shit and die.

Ligeia

Yeah,

Leraje

That's Very.

Lithos

Oh, fantastic. That is good.

Pike

Probably not intended that way though.

Leraje

I think I put in the group that I was. It was. It was during the. The last heat wave that we had and so not this current one. The one before. I was up all night and I went through it listing all the literature, uh, and poetry references that I could find.

Pike

Oh yeah.

Leraje

Did anybody else do that?

Ligeia

I know some. Um, no, I only have a few because I knew you would do this. Oh yeah, I have four.

Leraje

Go on, let's hear them. I want to see if we did the same.

Ligeia

Okay. I found um, the poem by Christina Rossetti. Goblin Market. Yeah, you did too.

Leraje

The Goblin Market.

Lithos

Yeah.

Leraje

That was the biggest one. Yeah.

Ligeia

Okay. I have it as a biggest. Then Rebecca sort of.

Leraje

Oh yeah.

Ligeia

Where I don't know how to, um.

Leraje

I think the sort of like being a new place in a new. Being a new person in a new place and sort of it's the.

Ligeia

Yeah, it's like the. I will have to think what I meant by it because I can't really. Okay. Anyway, that's a challenge. Uh, then I have Carmila Carmia. But it's not really that prominent. It's just. It's Sapphic. It's a little bit of like the seductive female. The attraction between them, which obviously Carmia is a vampire.

Vampire risk. It's the love and danger and it's like it can't end well, you know, like you. You have that tension there. And of course she mentions Hannibal, so that's not a.

Leraje

No, that was the biggest one for me.

Ligeia

Yeah, she mentions it, so. Yeah, tell us yours.

Leraje

Um, well, you mentioned the Goblin Market. Yeah, I mean that was the second biggest one. The biggest one was for me was the Hannibal. Hannibal Lecter.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah.

Leraje

Um, there was two bits for the Hannibal. The first one is obviously Hannibal the Cannibal. Ash is also a cannibal. And the second bit in this, in the second Hannibal Lecter novel, the Silence of the Lambs novel. The secondary serial killers. The Buffalo Bill character, ah, his real name is Jame Gum G U M.B. Ashley's second name is Gund G U N D And ah, I thought that was far too close to be a coincidence.

Ligeia

That's a hidden gem.

Leraje

I think so a little Easter egg. Um, so yeah, the Goblin Market as well. If you've not read the Goblin Market, it's. It's a story of two women who go to this Goblin Market and they're tempted by all these delicious looking feeds and stuff like that. And there's fairly Overt Sapphic themes throughout the poem, even though a bit worryingly, uh, the two female characters are described as sisters.

Pike

Yeah, enticingly, yeah.

Leraje

When, when Ro first encounters Ash, it's at a farmer's market, uh, which she describes as having a certain sorcery and which is otherworldly. So I felt that was a pretty blatant call to, uh, Goblin Market. You mentioned it earlier, Pike. Bluebeard. Massive callbacks to Bluebeard. Jane Eyre. I thought there was some callbacks to Jane Eyre in there as well.

Pike

What specifically?

Leraje

The end. I thought that there was the end. It was kind of like maybe not a direct reference to it, but there's that bit at the end when Ash, uh, is explaining her nefarious plan in a very James Bondish way, which kind of pissed me off quite a lot. But never mind, we'll get past that.

And Ro is struggling to sort of like come to terms with this new truth about Ash. Uh, in Jane Eyre, Jane finds Mr. Rochester, who is newly one armed and blind, and he says to her, am I hideous, Jane? And she says, very, sir. Uh, but you always were. And I thought that was a kind of play on that.

What else? She explicitly mentions Wuthering Heights, which is obviously about one of the most famous books about a toxic relationship. Didn't she at one point say that she wrote a paper on the theme of toxic relationships? Compreh. Comparing Wuthering Heights with Twilight. Which struck me as rather far fetched. But, uh, so yeah, that's all the ones I could find.

Lithos

How much of this are clever references and callbacks and how much of it is just pilfering ideas from old novels? Question.

Pike

Ungenerous.

Leraje

I don't think it, I don't think she was being overtly plagiaristic at all. No, I mean the most direct reference was obviously the, the Hannibal Lecter one.

Ligeia

But uh, yeah, but she, she mentions that at the beginning. So I think it was her daughter who like inspired her to write this book.

Leraje

Why are all the serial killers men? And she said.

Ligeia

Yeah, Is this the question?

Leraje

That's what her daughter asks.

Ligeia

Oh, right, yeah. Ah, uh, yeah, of course. Haha. Huh.

Lithos

Sorry, I have another question for you guys. Now this is not about the novel, but what I read in, in the bit at the end was the author. Thanks all the other people who read an early copy of the novel and then gave her quotes to put on the book cover. Right. Who are also authors.

And one of the quotes here from someone we've read a book by Rachel Harrison every Page drips with delicious dread, which I would say is false advertising, I'm afraid. And, uh, how do you feel about this sort of, like, thing that happens with novels where you have a group of author friends and they give each other good quotes and recommendations, um, on, on the back, because I've, it annoys me and I really don't like that right on the front of the book and it's like.

No, no, the delicious dread comes in the last 30 pages.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

What, what are you, do you think you're going to achieve by bigging each other's books up, other than selling a book on false premises and then also cheapening your name in the process?

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
I thought they were quite similar books in a lot of ways, so be honest with you. Not, not in terms of subject matter, obviously, but stylistically, I thought that. I found them quite similar. Quite sort of. Not an awful lot of depth to the characters. Feel a bit clunkily drawn sometimes.

Ligeia
Um, I must admit, I don't, I don't read these, like, I'm just looking. It's two full pages.

Leraje
No, I never read them either.

Ligeia
I, I don't read that because I don't care.

Pike
But on the cover Don't you look at the cover before you? You know, because you.

Ligeia
This here. Yeah, yeah.

Pike
When you first get the book right, you don't want to start it straight away. You want to look at the cover You read what the comments say on

Ligeia
the cover What the back of it.

Leraje
See, this is the advantage of me having ebooks. I just go tap contents, tap chapter one.

Ligeia
I was just analysing the, the composition of colours here. That's what I was doing. Yeah.

Lithos
Yeah. It is a beautiful. Whoever did the cover well done.

Ligeia
Beautiful.

Lithos
It is gorgeous. You know it is, but I, I, I just, I just felt I did not need that quote on the cover No. I did enjoy Rachel Harrison's book a bit more because I, I found the kind of, like, bitchy humour in it appeal.

Leraje
Yeah.

Lithos
That was better to my particular sensibilities. However, you know, she went down a lot in my estimation when I read that, because I thought, yeah, you're obviously mates with the author, uh, and you've given her a good writer.

Ligeia

Right.

Lithos

Have you even read the book? Every Drips with Delicious Dread is an absolute fucking non truth. By. By.

Ligeia

You know, where, where it's not, it's not this book. It's not.

Leraje

What did we all think about the ending of the book?

Pike

The. You mean the little twist at the end?

Leraje

No, from kind of like the bit Where Ro turned the aircon back on from that section onwards to the end.

Pike

That was the bit that I enjoyed.

Leraje

That was a bit. I hate.

Lithos

I thought that was the best bit.

Ligeia

It was predictable. I don't know.

Leraje

I thought it was the worst bit. I thought it was the worst written, devoid of any tension and.

Lithos

Really? Yeah, I thought it was quite well written.

Ligeia

Yeah. I couldn't. I like m. Um, until now. You didn't do anything against her will. Like a stupid puppet. You can't face her. You can't. You. You don't have. Obviously you don't have balls, but you know what I mean? What the fuck? Now you are actually going there when she's sleeping. Where is this coming from?

Just wake her up if you are so scared of her. And then she finds this guy. I couldn't believe that. That was like. What?

Leraje

The bit that got me was like she's gone down to turn the AC on and then she's desperate to get back upstairs before Ash knows she's down there.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

You just turned the air conditioning back on, you prick. How is she not gonna notice that?

Ligeia

Right?

Leraje

She knows where the switches are.

Ligeia

That was like. Are we okay? Hello, are we home?

Leraje

Yeah, I didn't like the end at all. I thought it really let the whole thing down.

Lithos

Yeah, no, I just quite enjoyed it. But it might, might have been that it was a bit of light relief at the end where the horrors actually arrived.

Ligeia

Yeah, there was a little bit of horror.

Lithos

Enough of this lovey dovey stuff and cupcakes, cakes and eating charcuterie out in the garden. You know, it's like this is what I've been expecting to happen a lot earlier. Um, and again, yeah, it did seem rushed because it was left too late and you've only got so many pages to do it.

You know, she. She could have snuck back up. She could have done what? I mean, there's so many other possibilities.

Ligeia

I needed more of that. At least like half, half, half romance. And then like I needed more of that dread.

Pike

I agree.

Ligeia

Right.

Pike

Yeah.

Leraje

It has to feel like a betrayal of Ro's investment in Ash. And it doesn't feel like that at all. No, it just feels like a tacked on cliché horror ending to me. The whole thing.

Pike

But the romance was clichéd as well. It sort of.

Ligeia

Oh yeah.

Pike

Follows from one to the other.

Leraje

Yeah. But I can, I can sort of. I don't really read romance, so maybe it's because I'm not familiar. I don't know. Maybe because he's not familiar with that genre. I could sort of like handle it a bit better. But the, the I just felt it was just very unimaginative. And the bit where, uh, Ash is explaining her nefarious plan to Ro was just like, yeah, uh, are we in a James Bond novel?

Lithos

I mean, well, yeah, if that was, uh, but I hate that in any book when, when, you know, rather than actually in the story leading up, you pick the bits together and figure out what, what their motivation was like the villain goes, ha, ah ha. Before I kill you, I must tell you everything about my past life that the author couldn't be bothered.

A feed into the story. It was, there was a bit of that. I mean it. But it was also, you know, so heavily signposted. Of course she was going to find the guy as soon as the guy turned up at the wall. And then, you know, it turns out that Ash has gone back and then Ro goes there again and then he, there's his car and without any sign of him.

Ligeia

And I thought, right, really stupid.

Lithos

Like, you know, she's disposed of him. Yeah. And, and Ro's, like, oh, well, maybe, ha ha, he's gone and taken a bus or whatever and he hasn't got his.

Pike

Oh, I think I, I enjoyed the, the ending because I, you know how I can't watch horror films. I'm very curious about them, but I really can't. They're just too scary for me. So this was like, this was being so cliched and coming on top of all the cupcake nonsense. It, it felt very safe.

You know, I could, it was creeping me out, but I could enjoy it because.

Ligeia

Okay.

Leraje

Which is the exact opposite of how horror novel should make you feel towards the end. You should be utterly freaked out and scared to turn the next page.

Pike

Going back to the hike, wasn't that a really American, uh, situation? Right when they say, uh, oh, you know, the trail is about three miles, is that okay for you? No one in the UK would ever call that a hike.

Ligeia

No, a walk.

Pike

A Ramble

Ligeia

stroll. That is so true.

Lithos

Yeah. That's a walk to the shops.

Leraje

I tell you one thing I did like about their, the kind of like, uh, erotic type stuff that they nearly did but didn't quite do and then later did. It was always done quite. They were always sort of like checking in with each other that consent was given and consent was being offered.

And I quite like that because it contrasted m. It presented a really much needed contrast to Ash's character of her not giving consent to sort of like, well, you know, force feeding Ro bits of people, basically. And, uh, constantly crossing her boundaries by calling her Rosemary when she clearly did not want to be called Rosemary.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Um, and I thought that was a nice contrast into Ash as a kind of like romantic, sexual person. And Ash the serial killer person.

Ligeia
Mhm.

Leraje
God knows she needed some depth.

Pike
There is a good exchange between them at one point where Ash says, oh, so do you want me to be rough or do you want me to be, you know, soft? And. And Ro says, rough, but like, not painful. And Ash is like. Okay, I thought that was some very nice negotiation.

Ligeia
Yeah, on the scale. Ok, so which tools can I use on you? Which cabinet of tools?

Leraje
Sorry, not the bone saw.

Lithos
Is it the rabbit or the anal intruder?

Ligeia
Okay, so are, ah, we pitchfork. Forking. Pitchfucking.

Leraje
Yeah, let's pitchfuck.

Ligeia
Yes.

Lithos
Let's pitch them Forks.

Ligeia
Right, yeah.

Leraje
So anal intruder. What's your pitchforks?

Lithos
Who's anal intruder? I'm sorry, we're all waiting to see.

Leraje
I wanted to wait and see who would answer that, but never mind.

Lithos
Uh, I'll give it. I'll give it a five. It's light entertainment.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Pike.

Pike
I also wrote down five, so I'm not copying Lithos. I wrote it down before we started recording. I think it had some, uh. I think it had some redeeming qualities. There were moments, but on the balance, I think maybe the author shouldn't have bothered.

Leraje
Ligeia?

Ligeia

I think like four. I was expecting so much more. I did like the story, but it was disappointing in the horror field. It was not scary. Uh, the ending was rushed. I needed more around that. I wanted to be in that last. I don't know how many pages. I wanted that to be longer.

I wanted to be there. I wanted to go through those rooms down there. I wanted the guy to. Well, he was suffering already, but I wanted to be present. Like it was just like, oh, he already doesn't have his limbs. I wanted that to be a part of the book. How he is losing those limbs.

Sorry, this sounds horrible, but, you know, like, this is body horror. Where was it? It happened without me. What do you mean? Everything happened without me in this book. The sex doesn't happen. I can't see anything. I can't feel anything. Like it's like I was supposed to feel emotions, something so I didn't feel fear.

Lithos
The delicious dripping dread.

Ligeia
Yes. Well, what's wrong with that? I wanted that. This is why we have words and we are writing a, uh, fucking erotic scene to do something to the reader. It didn't do fuck. I mean, it didn't really do fuck. So.

Leraje
So literally.

Ligeia
Yeah, nothing. So, yeah, I don't want to be bad, but it's 4.

Leraje
I also wrote down 5. Completely uninfluenced by both pike and Lithos.

Pike
Oh, you copied me.

Leraje
Yeah, I did, yeah.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
I thought there was the bones of a good story. Ha, ha. Of a good novel there. Ah. If she. I think Lithos is right that she's a good writer and there's some really good bits in it, but this, the overall, the novella was not developed enough. The characters were flat. Bits of it, like the missing girl subplot that I said earlier just went nowhere and were dropped with.

With no explanation. It just felt haphazard and sort of like, slung together. And the ending was not good for me.

Ligeia
Yeah. If she went more into that, like, uh, allegory or metaphor that I started to.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Be finding more like Freudian. I don't know, even Lacan or, you know, the uncanny of nature. And using these two people to. To deal with that, that could be a really beautiful thing. But we would need to go really into the descriptions and that didn't happen.

Leraje

Yeah, the whole thing just felt like a snapshot rather than a photo album or a painting.

Ligeia

Yeah, it just felt like a really vanilla sex. Like.

Pike

Okay, so would you say that it was like the, uh, apotheosis of, uh. And of airport fluff?

Ligeia

I mean, it's not for everybody. Like, I think it might be too much for people who don't read any horror. It might.

Lithos

Yeah. I think. I think the bit at the end might be. Might take it beyond airport fluff territory, but.

Ligeia

And then one scene with the animal cruelty. That is really.

Lithos

But if you're into your horror and you want something easy to read on holiday, then, you know. Yeah. It's the kind of thing where you. You can really switch off your brain because not much is going to challenge it.

Leraje

I said this to Ligeia earlier today, but the most fun I had with this was finding all the literary references and Easter eggs and all those kind of things rather than the actual story, which is a shame.

Ligeia

I had to put a layer of my own imagination onto, uh, this book. Probably that's what I did. And then I was having so much fun. Like, this was interesting, but I think it was just my projection. So that's 10 pitchforks for myself, thank you very much.

Pike

Isn't that how romance novels work?

Ligeia

I don't know. Probably.

Leraje

Good point, Pike. That's a very good point.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Um, so, listener, we're going to try and do A little bit of a new thing. Now we're going to tell you things that we've read alongside this book. Not alongside it, as well as this book. And just give you a brief idea of what we thought of those. Ligeia, do you want to go first what you've been reading this month?

Ligeia

I don't know how familiar you are with T Kingfisher and her book. Do you know this author?

Pike
No, tell us.

Ligeia
She's very famous and I think I have almost all her books. I really like her writing style. This is, uh, her sort of retelling of the Fall of the House of Usher by Edgar Alan Poe.

It's her take on that book. It's not like it's inspired. It's clearly. Obviously she is not hiding it. And in this one she is using, uh, fungi. It's a fungi. Horror. It's. I was going to say cute. Um, it's really nicely done. I love her because she brings a lot of humour. I should probably bring one of those books for our.

If you don't know them, I think.

Lithos
Do you want to tell the listener the title? Because they can't see what you're holding up on the screen.

Ligeia
I'm showing you everything. Okay, so the book is What Moves the Dead.

Leraje
Okay.

Ligeia
And uh, I think I told you what moves to that.

Leraje
Uh, and so you would, you would recommend it.

Ligeia
I would recommend her other books, but this is the one. I read this this week, I think. So there are. I think I enjoyed her other books more, but it's a tiny little. This could be. Mhm. This could be a fluff. No. Okay. And My Darling Dreadful Thing, that's another book by Johanna Van Veen.

I think that's how you read her name. Do you guys know her? No, it's again, it's Sapphic. Uh, she wrote another Sapphic horror book. I forgot the name. Uh, I have it downstairs. So this is horror. It's really nice. I would suggest this. It is a slow burn. Uh, there is a beautiful relationship between a girl that is abused at home by her mom.

She is forced to be hiding under the floor. Her mom is using her for like, uh, pretending to be this medium. She is not fed, she is suffering. She has no air, you know, oxygen, any, anything. And she creates the connection with this dead girl and they actually have a real relationship, like lovers.

Leraje
Okay, sounds good. Pike, what have you been reading?

Pike
You're going to make fun of me because I've been reading this for months, but that's how I read. Um, I'm Very slow. So I've been reading, uh, Donna Tartt's Secret History, which, uh, I'm very close to the end and I'm still waiting to see if it turns out to be what I think it is.

But I. So far, I think it's very clever. Uh, I think it's giving this aesthetic catnip. It's tapping into every first year literature student's wet dreams with creating this beautiful, beautiful image that you are as drawn as the main character is. And then I think, um, asks you. It fractures it and it asks you.

You know, is. Can. Can you live just for aesthetics? Is there. What if the moral bones, uh, of it are rotten? And what. You know, can you. Would you. How far would you go in justifying it just to stay with your fantasy? So, yeah, I'm waiting to see. That's what turns out.

Leraje

My main take from that book was that it's one of the few books I've read that successfully managed to make you hate every character but still be a brilliant book and still be a page turner.

Lithos

Yeah, it's fantastic book.

Ligeia

I bought it just because you're reading. So. It's waiting. It's waiting. Don't tell me the ending.

Pike

Oh, I want. I'm, um. I haven't finished it yet, so.

Lithos

Yeah, pike hasn't finished it either. We're not going to do spoilers.

Leraje

Lithos?

Lithos

I. Dear listener, I have been enjoying A la Chasse du Temps Perdu by Marel Praust whilst, uh, supping on soft, delicious madeleine soaked in tea.

Leraje

Oh, you should write a book about that.

Lithos

And I'm. I'm a slow reader as well, like pike. And I have been working my way through the second Vandermeer novel in the Southern Reach trilogy, which is, uh. I've forgotten the bloody title of it now. You can look it up.

Leraje

And is it. Is it as good as. Not quite as good as. Better as.

Lithos

It's a lot longer. It's kind of focusing on what happens when the expedition returns.

Leraje

Right.

Lithos

That you read about in the first book, and it goes into a lot more detail. And the main character in it is the person who is actually in charge at Southern Reach of investigating what goes on. And. And the only person that turns up that is actually, um, that he is actually allowed to speak to, that is actually worth speaking to is the main character in the first novel.

Leraje

Okay.

Lithos

Um. And it is. It is. It is good. Uh, but it's. It's quite, as I've found it, quite a slow. I'm a slow reader. It. I'm lazy, but I will get there. I'm gonna work my way through every book in that because I enjoyed the first one so much

Pike

and if, say a listener now thought I would like to learn more about the first book in this trilogy. How could they do that?

Lithos

Well, they could go back a couple of podcasts, um, in our series of book podcasts and choose the one that you chose at the time, pike, which was the very first book in the Southern Reach trilogy, Annihilation.

Leraje

M. Yeah, I remember that book. I love Annihilation. Uh, so I read two sci fi's this month. I read Slow, Slow Gods by Claire North, which is. It's. It's quite Le Guin-ish and it's full of ideas about late stage capitalism and gender and gender identity, uh, and uh, the slow ridiculous progress of humanity.

And um, basically, um, it's everything that your uncle calls woke on Facebook. And I've also been. I've also currently read in the Dispossessed by Ursula K Le Guin. I've read it before, a long, long time ago and I think I'm getting more out of it. The second read as I can appreciate the.

Ligeia

What is it about?

Leraje

It's the story of a physicist who is raised in an anarchist community. And his kind of. His comparisons with the anarchist community is, is on the moon of a planet and the planet is, is kind of like a very highly capitalist society. And it's about his struggles to reconcile the fact that his anarchist community can't give him the environment that he needs to further his studies.

So he goes over to the capitalist planet and um, shenanigans ensue, basically. Um, but they're both very good. Slow Gods was very, very good.

Lithos

Authority. That's the name of the book I've been reading. Sorry, say that rather than just go look it up.

Leraje

And our next read. Pike, it's your choice what we're reading.

Pike

You Weren't Meant to Be Human by Andrew Joseph White, which was suggested to me with a bunch of trigger warnings which obviously made it immediately enticing.

Leraje

Exactly, yeah.

Ligeia

Have you guys read it?

Leraje

No. Not started it yet.

Ligeia

No, no.

Pike

Have you?

Ligeia

No. So it's the first time, right?

Leraje

First time for all of us. Yeah.

Lithos

It's on its way through the post whenever it arrives. I ordered it yesterday.

Pike

Yeah, paperback just came out.

Leraje

Okay. So that was it. That was our take on um, uh, Bloom by Delilah S. Dawson. I've been Leraje. Hail Satan.

Pike

Hail Satan.

Lithos

Hail Satan.

Ligeia

Hail Satan, you beautiful flowers of decay.

[Outro music]