

# The Devil's Library Episode 16 – “You Weren't Meant To Be Human”

[Intro Music]

Pike

Okay, so this is the Devil's Library with your Devil's Librarians. I'm Pike, and we have here Leraje.

Leraje

Hail Satan.

Pike

Ligeia.

Ligeia

Hail Satan.

Pike

And Lith0s.

Lithos

Hail the worms. Hail the worms.

Pike

Oh, spoilers already. So get ready for spoilers as usual. If you do want to read the book and haven't read it, then don't listen to this episode just now. You can always come back to it later. We are— we were reading a book called You Weren't Meant to Be Human by Andrew Joseph White.

And what is it? Well, it's a grotesque storey that takes you through absolute hell, but it highlights human strength and ability to survive. I think it's also a coming-of-age tale, albeit a dark one. Crane, the main character, is an autistic trans man who runs away from home and joins a cult worshipping a body of giant maggots and flesh flies that feed on cadavers and refer to their followers creepily as children.

Crane is in an abusive relationship and falls pregnant, whereby the cult demands that the child must be born. Here, the forced pregnancy nightmare is inspired by the fall of Roe v. Wade in the US. The storey follows Crane brain's effort to make sense of his life whilst his body is going through the unwanted changes and everyone wants to use him.

So strap in for some body horror, pregnancy horror, self-harm, suicidal ideation, bad people, and disgusting flesh-eating monsters. You have been wormed. Wormed. Wormed.

Lithos

I've been wormed!

Leraje

Fucking have I already?

Ligeia

Check yourselves.

Pike

Yeah. Okay, so these are— you are the survivors of this book. Congratulations.

Ligeia

Yeah, thank you.

Leraje

Yeah, Jesus Christ. I don't remember so admiring a piece of art that I absolutely hated all the way through for every page. It was traumatic reading this book. Really fucking traumatic. But it's such a well-written book and he's such a talented author. But yeah, I can't honestly say this was a book that I— I really think enjoyed is not the right word for it at all.

I admired it. I think that's the best I can do.

Pike

You delighted in it?

Leraje

I think delighted might be a little bit too strong, but I thought it was a very well-written book and he's obviously very talented, but Goddamn, it was hard going, this book.

Pike

Yeah, it deals with one of my, I guess, personal fears ever since I was a teenager. I remember thinking that pregnancy is just the worst thing that can happen to a person, which it obviously isn't, but forced pregnancy is, is pretty, pretty high up there. And, uh, yeah, this This really went into my nightmares.

Leraje

The poor man had no choice. He didn't make— I can't remember him making a single willing choice throughout the entirety of the book. Just like everything was forced upon him or taken away from him in some way. It was a difficult read.

Lithos

Yeah, it was unrelenting in its horror. I mean, it's like there were no spots of light. You know, most of the other horror novels we've read, that there is either some dark humour or there's moments of lightness in there, or, you know, it goes from happy to dark. This is just like beginning to end, wham, right in the face horror, awfulness, gruesomeness.

But I agree, the author is phenomenally good with words. I mean, it was quite, you know, even quite compelling read that drew me in at times. And then I had to put the book down because I went, I can't read any more of this. It's really well written. It's really drawing me in.

I want to know what happens next, but I do not want another chapter of this today. Yeah, because this is, this is fucking grim.

Leraje

It took me nearly the whole 4 weeks to read this book. book to finish it. I mean, there's so much to admire in the skill of the author. He did a really brilliant job. I think, to be honest with you, I'm still kind of a bit in shock from it, from it all.

It was hard. It was hard getting through it.

Pike

How did you find it, Ligeia?

Ligeia

Ligeia is very silent. How do I— it took me a long time. to get through it. I was tempted to not finish it.

Leraje

Mm-hmm.

Ligeia

It's a great book because I keep thinking about it now. Thank you very much. I did not need this, but I don't want to really say much because this is public, but there has been so many triggers that were really cutting deeply into me. I feel like I need to celebrate I finished it.

But the book is great. The book is great. Everything. The pregnancies, forced pregnancies, rape. It was well written. I'm happy I read it because I, I knew about this book and I would have been really tempted to read it. So it's done. I'm happy. I'm happy. But also, what the fuck?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

What the fuck? How did he, how did he? Managed to be so on point.

Pike

I think that's because he said it was him going to his darkest places. And I think that's why it— because I don't, I haven't experienced the things that the main character has experienced, but I also felt like there were a lot of moments that felt so recognisable.

Lithos

I think that's one of the clever things about the book is regardless, unless you've led a perfect life and everything's been sunshine and roses for you, because this person has suffered so much and has gone through so much and has so many sort of hang-ups, neuroses, sort of mental health issues that at some point you are going to hit on something that charms with you where you go, I remember that time in my life, particularly when I was young, when I felt like that.

Leraje

Yeah.

Lithos

If that makes any sense.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Pike

Yeah.

Leraje

Yeah. I mean, there were specific situations that did hammer on my personal, a couple of my personal triggers as well. Yeah. But I think—

Ligeia

That's a good sound. Sorry, sorry.

Leraje

Yeah, I think in— I do think that this is a very important book, and I do think people should read it. I just don't think people should go into it blindly, maybe.

Ligeia

Oh no, no, no.

Leraje

People should know what it is they're getting into, because it's not— I mean, this is probably the most challenging read that I've had in a very, very long time.

Ligeia

Yeah. For me, absolutely.

Leraje

Yeah. Which is not to say that I didn't admire it, because I did admire it, and I admired the author's personal bravery in writing about things and subjects that were clearly massively difficult for him, both as a person and an author. But God, it was difficult at times. Very difficult.

Pike

I wanted to tell you, Uh, I mentioned it before the podcast, but I, I just wanted to tell you how I came across it.

Ligeia

Hmm.

Pike

Uh, I was in someone's house and I saw this book on the table and said, oh, is that, is that a horror book? Is it good? Because, you know, we're, I'm reading, uh, some horror books with a bunch of people and I would like to bring something. And the person just, just sort of paused and said, mm.

And I, I, I thought, I said, oh, is it not good? And they said, no, no, no, no, it's good. But, you know, it's got trigger warnings, so do take them seriously.

Leraje

Yeah, good advice. Yeah. I will say as well that there are a list of trigger warnings for this book on the author's website, and I'll make sure that link is in the show notes. If you do intend to read this book, please go to the website. Please read them because They are necessary.

Pike

And do not do a search for whatever miasis is. You would spell it as M-I-Y-A-S-I-S, and do not under any circumstances spell it, type it into your search box. You will regret it.

Lithos

Yes, I did. I got the feeling that this was a book where this is something the author had to get out of his system. Yeah, right. That's what this book came across as. And I think personally, this— or I gather, am I wrong in thinking what they've written before has been young adult fiction only?

Leraje

That's right. Yeah, yeah.

Lithos

And that it's their first sort of adult book and they needed to get this out their system. And I hope they write another adult fiction book because I think there is better to come when it's not all absolutely horrendous, depressing horror all the way through.

Leraje

Well, this is the thing. I mean, he is clearly a really good writer. I mean, the talent just shone through, but I think you're right though, Lithos. I think this is probably something that he's wanted. I mean, he's took it, you know, obviously that specific subject is not, you know, there are no fucking worm invasions and hives and stuff like that.

Ligeia

That was not scary for me. That part was just, yeah, there, fine.

Leraje

It was a plot device, I think, more than—

Ligeia

Yeah, the real stuff, that was too real. Yeah.

Pike

different to what you expected when you just looked at the book, read the back cover?

Lithos

I've stopped doing that now because on a couple of occasions I've done that and then the book is completely different. Like, I think I mentioned—

Ligeia

Oh yeah, this is nothing. This is nothing.

Leraje

Dripping with delicious horror.

Lithos

Yes. I mean, you know, it's like, so I'm not doing that anymore. I'm not even going to look at author quotes. It's like, if I want to read it, I'll read it and ignore the blurb.

Leraje

Yeah, I never read them anyway, to be honest with you. It's just—

Ligeia

But yeah, if you— if I just read it now, that says nothing when you compare it to what the book is.

Pike

I think it's a bit similar to how I introduced it at the beginning of this episode. And when I read it, I thought, oh, I hope it's gonna be good because you know, a bit of sci-fi, a bit of maggots. Um, it just sounded, oh, this is gonna be the most gruesome thing that somebody can write.

Like, it's just going to be a bit of an edgelord wank. That's what I feared. Well, I feared the author was just going to try and gross you out as much as possible.

Ligeia

With a wank. Okay.

Pike

Yeah. And it surprised me that it wasn't quite that. There was a purpose to it.

Leraje

Oh yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. You asked a minute ago, did looking at the COVID prepare you, prepare us for what was, you know, the contents of it? I don't think anything apart from the author himself coming around to my house, sitting me down and saying, look, be very careful when you read this book.

I don't think anything could have really prepared me for what was Inside it. It was, uh, it was a lot. It was very effective, let's say that.

Ligeia

Yeah. And I have learned a lot of things from the point of view of the trans person.

Lithos

Hmm.

Ligeia

I was walking outside a lot after, like, not even, like, a full chapter, like, a few paragraphs, and I needed to either play with the cats or, I don't know,

watch something, call somebody I love, or, you know, like, Please, is this world still here? What are we doing? Tell me nice things.

Yo. Okay.

Leraje  
I remember you and I talked too Ligeia briefly.

Ligeia  
Yeah.

Leraje  
And we were like, Jesus Christ, what are we going to talk about when we do this episode?

Lithos  
I think after what you mentioned there, Pike, you know, with thinking, oh, there's an author trying to gross us out. I think the one thing ironically about this book is, although it is horrendous and goes into extreme gory detail, not one page of it was gratuitous.

Leraje  
No, no, it wasn't.

Lithos  
None of the violence was gratuitous. None of the descriptions of sort of abusive sex acts were gratuitous. Everything was there for a reason. which really elevates the book, in my opinion. This is not just horror for the sake of grossing people out. You know, this is not some sub-Cronenberg type thing. This is like— maybe that's unfair.

I mean, I think a lot of the gruesomeness in Cronenberg's films is there for a fucking good reason. But you know what I mean? It was not— it was not just there for the sake of it.

Leraje  
No, this is not some fucking hokey slasher. It's It's purposeful, it's directed, there's intent behind it. And, you know, that speaks to his skill as an author, I think. I do think he's got a very big future ahead of him as a writer.

Ligeia  
So would you read another book by this author?

Lithos  
Oh, yes.

Pike  
I would.

Lithos  
Fuck yes.

Ligeia  
I would.

Pike  
But not now.

Ligeia  
No, after a break.

Leraje  
I might read something else by him, but I would never read this again.

Ligeia  
This one? No.

Pike  
This one, you know, Ligeia, when you said that it was quite informative for you from, uh, sort of a trans perspective, for me it wasn't the trans perspective. For me it was quite informative in regards to autism. I think because my thinking about autism was quite primitive, I think. A lot of the time when I encounter information of what it's like to be autistic, it usually comes as memes that will say, you know you're autistic when...

and then it will say something that's probably true for autistic people, but it's also true for everyone else.

Ligeia  
Mhm.

Pike  
There is, for a moment, for a moment, sorry. There is at one point here when Crane is remembering about their life as Sophie, and Sophie reads Wikipedia articles about things that scare her and says, oh, it's the sort of thing autistic people do. And I was reading it and I thought, that's exactly the kind of thing that other people do as well.

I do that.

Ligeia  
Mhm.

Pike  
It's not, you know, it doesn't tell you very much what it's like for an autistic person. But then there is another episode where Crane gets, um, his shirt soaked.

Lithos  
Mm-hmm.

Pike  
And he does not like the sensory, um, side of it. And, and he says, to know what it's like not wanting to howl and sob when something doesn't feel right.

Leraje  
Mm-hmm.

Pike  
That suddenly That hit me so hard because I thought, oh, that's what it's like. Because it's sheer emotion, right? Howling and sobbing is sheer emotion. However, Crane is also an adult and Crane is reflecting on that as it's happening. I don't know how to explain it.

Lithos  
There's—

Leraje  
I mean, I'm not autistic myself and I'm not intending to speak for autistic people here, but 3 people very, very close to me are autistic. And the sensations that they have, 3 things like what you were talking about there, the sort of like the wet shit or whatever it happens to be. It's not— it is that sensation, but it's also the inability to regulate that sensation.

It's the inability to deal with the emotions that it brings with it. One of the autistic people I know, for example, can't stand the sound of barking dogs. And for a long time, I thought it was the volume because this person is nonverbal and can't tell me. So I thought, okay, it's the volume.

So I would take them a different way if we went for a walk. But it turned out it wasn't the volume. It was the tone. It was something in the tone of the way that the dog was barking. So it's that. It's the inability to regulate the environment that you happen to be in.

In Crane's case, it was the wet shirt.

Lithos  
Yeah.

Leraje  
But it might be something like a label in the back of the shirt. Maybe the tights, the socks are too tight around someone's ankles.

Lithos  
Yeah.

Leraje  
It's the wrong sort of material. You know, all these things.

Ligeia  
Everything together also.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Ligeia  
There are combinations of that. Yeah. I have autism at home. I like all of this. It's, it's so many little things that are specific for that one person. And it's combination of that. And if you also have ADHD and you might be trans, it's a whole cauldron of things that Nobody else has the same thing.

You need to learn how to navigate through that, and it's so not easy.

Leraje  
There were large portions of this book when— well, there were various points in this book when I just wanted to go and take Crane and take them somewhere that had no sensory input and just sit them down and tell them that everything was going to be okay. I just felt so awful for the poor man all the way through this.

Pike  
I just wanted to say, I think that why that was quite revelatory for me, that bit about the soaked shirt, is because we all know the ex— what it feels like when you can't take it, something anymore. When you can't take it, it reaches the point where you just, you can't exist in that moment with it.

But it's just that the trigger is unfamiliar to a person who's not autistic.

Ligeia  
Yeah. Right?

Pike  
So, yeah, so you can imagine, but you can draw the bridge between one thing and the other and imagine it. I just thought it was a very, a very good scene that for me was very, very useful.

Leraje  
Yeah. I mean, in a similar way, I very much liked the fact that Crane was voluntarily nonverbal. And voluntarily is a very loaded word there, but, um, I did like that, and that gave me a lot of insight into at least 2 of the people that I'm, I'm close to. Um, so that, that was— I mean, and I don't mean to



reduce this book to like some kind of autism instruction manual because it most definitely is not that.

Ligeia  
No.

Leraje  
But, uh, there was a lot of very valuable things in there.

Pike  
That's, that was also an interesting moment for me because my partner at one point, many years ago, just was fed up with people and stopped speaking for a month. And we both just learned the alphabet and communicated in sign language. And I can imagine that it can be when you're in everything around you is unbearable, it's like that it can be soothing to do that.

Leraje  
I think if you can't regulate what other people do, then the only thing you can do is regulate what you do. I think that's, that's the way that it happens. Again, that's me saying that, a non-autistic person. So I don't know that for a fact. I just think that might be a reason.

Pike  
I don't think that's necessarily just for autistic people. That makes sense in a lot of different circumstances. You can't control anything about your life, right? You'll control something that you still can control, even if it's not necessarily what you would like to control.

Lithos  
I think there's also this thing, the impression I got, which was that they did not want to— when people are talking and then saying, well, how are you doing? How do you feel? Or whatever, just didn't want to say it. And the easiest way to not have to explain how you feel or what you're thinking is just to not say anything, you know, to actually go, right, okay, you know, which can even for someone non-autistic like me, you know, there's been times when I've like gone, okay, look, I just don't want to fucking explain this or talk about it.

Ligeia  
Yeah.

Lithos  
At all. Can you just lay off? You know, and if you feel like that all the time when people are talking to you, it's like You know, I kind of really understood that side of it as well. That was really good. It's just so many good things in this book. So many, you know, good things is not the word.

Valuable, valid things in this book. Yeah. Not good. They're horrendous, but so well explained in a way.

Pike  
Lithos has enjoyed his miasis.

Lithos  
Let me have a check. It's still there.

Leraje  
Are you worm-free, Lithos?

Lithos  
Uh, yes. Yeah, I think the worms and, and the flies, you know, at first I thought, oh, you know, is, is this going to be explained? And then by the time I'm halfway through, I'm thinking it's not going to be explained and it doesn't matter. No, they're just a metaphor for a cult.

For me, it was a metaphor for a cult that takes in vulnerable people. Which is how all cults operate. They take in someone who's vulnerable, who's, who's at absolute rock bottom, and then they control them and make them feel even worse. And so the worms were just like a way of like not specifying a particular cult, just saying this is a cult and this is how cults operate.

They will wait until you've absolutely got nowhere else to go. They'll take you in and then they'll fucking use your emotional vulnerability to control you in every which way they can and not let you out. And in this case, not let you out without literally hunting you down and killing you and feeding you to worms.

Leraje

I agree with you, Lithos. And I also think it speaks to the kind of like the mentality of how they brainwash people, because up until the moment that Crane realised that the Hive wanted him to remain pregnant. He was kind of like, yeah, I'm very pro this whole situation, it's great.

Lithos

Right.

Leraje

You know, and there's this kind of indoctrination via the kind of good cop, bad cop. So you've got the good cop of the Hive and the bad cop of Levi, and this kind of like continual hammering away at people like Crane and other To use probably a wrong word, members of lesser status.

So like Crane, who are still valuable, but not— they don't have the kind of power that Levi had or the Hive itself has.

Lithos

Well, Levi was infected with a worm, and in a sense is kind of like, you know, represents in a way someone high up in the cult echelon. someone who does the controlling, because Levi was 20 shades of dick in every which way. You know, he's like, fucking hell, man. What a fucking— what a fucking baddie to put in your book.

He was like, absolutely no redeeming features whatsoever. Oh, literally nothing. At the end, even when it turns out the worm's controlling his behaviour, I went, no, sorry. That's no excuse. Still got absolutely zero sympathy for you, mate. I hope you die horribly. And he did.

Pike

Also, he was really—

Leraje

Still stuck on 20 Shades of Dick.

Pike

All right, I'll let you—

Leraje

Which is probably a bad phrase.

Pike

Digest your dick and—

Lithos

Sorry, Pike.

Leraje

Go on.

Pike

No, sorry.

Lithos  
A dickjestic?

Ligeia  
Cock tips! Yes! Finally something I understand!

Lithos  
Cock tips!

Leraje  
Back to Bloom, are we? Okay.

Ligeia  
Okay, okay, okay.

Pike  
I was hoping we could manage one episode with no cocktips, but no.

Ligeia  
How can you do that to me?

Pike  
We're back. We're back.

Ligeia  
Yes.

Pike  
So I just wanted to say that although Levi is the ultimate baddie, but also, and that's a great credit to the author's writing, you can still see what Crane sees in him because why he has that relationship in the first place, why he's drawn to him. And I thought that was very clever.

You read it and you go, oh, this guy is a total fucking asshole. But at the same time, you can see why he sort of ended up in that relationship with her.

Leraje  
Yeah, he kind of fulfils a particular need that Crane has to continue the kind of like self-abuse of his own mind and body, really, I think.

Lithos  
The zero self-worth that Crane feels throughout, like having zero self-worth. And then, yes, there's an abusive person, and that's the only thing that gets him off.

Leraje  
Yeah.

Pike  
Talking of which, the sex scenes were written really well, and that because there's one right at the beginning. I read that and I was so relieved. I was like, okay, if this author can write— so at the beginning it just seems like 2 people are having kinky sex, okay? Didn't go into the whole rape in a relationship thing yet at that point.

And I thought, okay, if the author can write a sex scene, they probably can write everything else because that's a very hard thing to write.

Lithos  
Absolutely. Like, literally 90% of sex scenes I've read in literature are absolute dog shit.

Leraje

That is true.

Lithos

It is really hard to write, and that's where a lot of authors fall down, and you kind of go, well, you could have just not done the sex scene because that was really bad. And yes, they were all kind of like really— I mean, I'm trying to think of a word for the prose.

It was sort of really taut and sort of— is masculine the right word? Kind of, yeah, even in times it even reminded me of someone like Charles Bukowski in the sort of directness of—

Leraje

Muscular.

Lithos

Yes.

Leraje

Muscular prose.

Lithos

Yeah, it was, you know, but still very rich in its vocabulary and its phrasing. So yeah, really, really so, so fucking well written.

Leraje

I mean, it was very well written.

Lithos

In terms of actual style and language control, I would put this book right up there with Heather Parry's, just in terms of the actual, you know, the actual ability of the author to use language in that way.

Leraje

Go back to the sex scenes for a minute and what we're saying about How it is easy to make a sex scene fucking stupid and ridiculous. Do we think maybe that's why Bloom didn't have any explicit sex in it?

Ligeia

Yeah, possibly. She realised she—

Leraje

Because we said at the time it was a bit weird how it was a sapphic. I know this is not what the book was supposed to be talking about, but, uh, it did strike me that—

Pike

Yeah, it could have gone You see how it could have gone down the route of the flower of femininity, quotation marks. So maybe it was a good idea to leave it out.

Leraje

So we're all massively traumatised then, basically, is what I'm taking from this.

Lithos

Well, I wouldn't say I was traumatised by the book. I would say it was a hard read and there were certain bits that rang true for me for ways I have felt at particular stages in my younger life. Um, however, you know, it was so far out of my lived experience that I could kind of dissociate from what was happening, but it was still horrendous, you know.

And like, even at the end when, when he's pregnant and, you know, can't get out of bed and, you know, can barely bring himself to the sink to wash himself, I

was reading that and I actually literally physically felt grubby, like I needed a shower, like I was in that situation. I've been lying in bed for days and I'm grubby and I need to wash.

It was like so well described, you know, just you could actually kind of sort of put yourself into that headspace almost, but not enough for me to traumatise me, thank God. I should say, thank the worms.

Leraje

Thank the worms. That's another similarity to Carrie and Crow, though, because I felt very similar during parts of Carrie and Crow. Kind of like, oh, Jesus Christ, this is really— you know, I was like doing this a lot reading Carrie and Crow, and I did the same when I was reading this.

Pike

Yeah, it's very physical.

Lithos

Yeah.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Pike

What do you make of the title? You weren't meant to be human. Do you?

Ligeia

I really like the title.

Lithos

It was a good choice, I thought.

Leraje

Yes, the last episode that Ligeia and I did on our own was Books of Blood, and one of the books was— one of the— sorry, one of the storeys was called Revelations, and I didn't fucking understand why it was called Revelations, and Ligeia explained it to me. Um, and this title also kind of made me think about what it might mean.

Pike

Yeah, same.

Leraje

And I thought, one of the thoughts I had was that possibly this was something the Hive might say to Crane, that you weren't meant to be human, or about Crane's child.

Ligeia

The daughter, I thought.

Leraje

Yeah, you weren't meant to be human, you were meant to be a vessel for the Hive. That was the only thing, that was the only takeaway I took from the title.

Pike

I thought it was, it echoed a message that I thought was the main message of the storey that kind of comes up every so often that the world isn't, was not made for the likes of you. And I think that's also a message that probably most readers will be able to identify with, certainly when you're a teenager, but even as an adult.

Ligeia

Mm-hmm.

Pike

In some of the darkest moments you think, you know, it's— I am not supposed— this world is not for people like me. I do not belong here. And I— but what you are and what Crane is, is ultimately human, right? You're only human. And then if the world is not made for you, for people like you, if you're— if it's not so, you're not supposed to exist, then who is?

And I thought that was kind of the why. But I had to think about it because I, at first I thought as well, why, why was it titled that way?

Lithos

Yeah, maybe it's directed at the reader.

Pike

I think it's directed at everyone who has ever felt suicidal. So I think that thought that, you know, I'm an anomaly, this is abnormal, I just shouldn't exist is something that, I don't know, I think a lot of people will experience at points.

Leraje

It's almost— this almost sounds silly, but it's a very human book. This, it's a very kind of— it makes you think about your own humanity and what would you be prepared to do What would you do? You know, and I'm not— it doesn't— there doesn't have to be a, a hive, you know, a telepathic hive of fucking sentient worms or anything like that.

But in, in bad situations, what would you do? How would you handle things when there were so many— when the world was putting so many obstacles in your way? And I think a lot of that speaks to Maybe I don't want to— again, I don't want to put words in the man's mouth, but maybe this speaks to some of the life experiences that the author had.

Lithos

I think it does. I mean, yeah, they mentioned at the end in, in, in the sort of like the bit after the final chapter, postscript or whatever it's called, that a lot of it was from his own experience, his own feelings. Um, growing up. Um, so yeah, I mean, I think there's a fair amount of autobiographical stuff in there.

Ligeia

What did you think about the parents?

Leraje

Hmm, I don't know, because we didn't really get to—

Lithos

they were hardly mentioned. They only turned up at the end.

Ligeia

Yeah, but from, from what there was, I don't know. Me as a parent, I was feeling really hopeless and fucking sorry because I don't know, this book made me feel like whatever you do and try, sometimes it just, you can't really help the child. And that was the scariest part of that whole thing for me.

Lithos

Well, by all accounts, what Crane does say at the end when his parents turn up is they don't deserve this. They've been really good people. Yeah. So there were obviously decent enough parents. And the impression I got was that Crane thought back when he was Sophie that they could not understand or accept that he was not like the facade he was, or she was at the time, putting on.

Ligeia

But he was questioning, like, what if I have told them? Because he never did when he was still Sophie. He never He was questioning like, okay, so those days

when I was hiding all this shit in my head, what if I was actually talking to them and telling them?

Lithos  
Mm.

Ligeia  
And he never did. They didn't know. How, how do you know? You have a teenager at home, you know fucking shit. You know if they're home, you see the socks and jumpers.

Lithos  
Yeah.

Ligeia  
And that's it. That's it. For a few years, that's all you get.

Lithos  
I mean, I think the ending kind of makes it obvious that, yes, he's obviously going to have to tell them everything now.

Ligeia  
Yeah.

Lithos  
In whatever way he can. Don't know how they're going to feel about him turning up with a baby with a hole in its neck, but hey-ho.

Ligeia  
Yeah, the ending. Yeah.

Pike  
For a bit when I was reading, what was confusing me a lot was a lot of this talking about mutilation alongside talking about transition. And for a bit I made a note. I said, this, this is really confusing me. So was, was it that Sophie felt like a man, or was it that Sophie just didn't feel like herself and didn't want to— did basically— was it a desire to transition, or was it a desire to just not be who you are?

And I thought, that's a bit of an odd message that could very easily be turned into a transphobic message. And I thought that's a bit of a strange thing for the book to say. But then later on, uh, where you hear— you read more about Sophie's life, it turns— it explains it. Uh, it explains that it's that inability to talk to the parents, to be understood, to be accepted for, uh, who he is, that...

makes— that creates those mutilation, self-mutilation fantasies. That's at least the way I—

Leraje  
I think it's very— it's, um, I mean, you know, at my age it's difficult to remember what being a teenager felt like, but there are definitely— there definitely were situations when things happened to me that I felt I couldn't, uh, I couldn't talk to my parents about. And that's not big— that was no It's not a judgement on them or who they were.

It's just the fact that I think when you, when you have such a thing facing you that you, you genuinely don't know, even if you love and trust your parents, it's still very, very, very difficult, nigh on impossible to actually talk to them.

Lithos  
Definitely. I think, I think that's what you're describing there is actually quite common. A lot of people would say when they think back to that. Certainly,

I— most of what was important to me, I would not have talked to my parents about.

Leraje  
Mm-hmm.

Lithos  
Um, you know, I assumed they were going to be judgmental. In a lot of ways, I knew they were going to be. And I think a lot of teenagers go through that. So to have, in addition to that, undiagnosed autism and also feel like you're in the wrong body, like you, you feel wrong Right.

To have that on top of the usual teenage angst is enough to drive anyone to thoughts of self and acts of self-harm, I think.

Leraje  
I think it was a brave choice and a right— and the right choice by the author to — it would have been very easy to just turn Crane's parents into these kind of like, you know, Trumpy boomer-y type transphobes who couldn't understand their child. And I think it was narratively the right choice for the book that he didn't do that.

Yeah, because it then forces you to think slightly differently about Crane and why he did the things that he did or made the choices. What led him to that point?

Lithos  
Hmm, I thought, yeah, interesting. You know, you mentioned that he could have turned them into Trumpy-type parents. I did think near the start of the book, I thought, The political messages that are coming up in here seem to be quite heavily written, but then I realised as I got further on that literally only happened when he was with Birdie or communicating with Birdie in Aspen or remembering that.

And that was their obsession. They followed everything that was going on in the Supreme Court or whatever, the decisions that were being made. They spent a lot of their time discussing about politics, and then that deliberately fell by the wayside because 'Cause Crane was beyond caring about that. You know, it's like, no, I really don't care about your fucking politics shit right now.

You know, I have to deal with my own life. I thought that was quite interesting 'cause at first I thought, is this gonna be a really heavily written political message thing?

Pike  
Yeah.

Lithos  
But I think that was in deliberately just to show that their obsession with politics literally meant nothing to Crane. Who was in the state to be completely beyond caring about that.

Pike  
Yeah. I had the same feeling at that point. I thought, oh, this is a bit heavy-handed. Oh, is this where we're going? And then, you know.

Ligeia  
I skipped that part. I was so not interested in Birdie and the Aspen person. Sorry, I wasn't. I was skipping everything. about them.

Pike  
Did you skip the part with them in the— was it the warehouse? The farm building? Because that was quite a—



Leraje  
That was a strange scene.

Ligeia  
It was different.

Leraje  
That was very weird.

Ligeia  
Okay, describe. What did I miss?

Leraje  
Well, when they go— so Levi has set up, what's her name, Birdie and Aspen.

Ligeia  
Oh. Yeah.

Leraje  
And he said to Crane, right, unless you can get rid of him, I'm gonna fucking shoot him in the head, basically.

Ligeia  
Yeah.

Leraje  
I just thought the whole— I thought it was, in a very, very strongly written book, it was possibly for me the weakest scene in it. Because, okay, I know Crane punched the dude, but it's like, well, they kind of like, okay, so They went from very, very, very, very hyper-supportive to like, fuck you, in the space of about 10 seconds.

And it didn't feel— yeah, okay, again, he punched him. Not a good thing to do, but it just felt too sudden.

Lithos  
I also thought when I was reading that, I thought, are Birdie and Aspen playing up to this because they've realised there's someone in the rafters with a gun?

Leraje  
Maybe.

Lithos  
They're all being threatened. And then when they didn't and they buggered off, I thought, well, that's not very fucking observant of you, for people who, you know, are supposed to be— I don't know what, what was— one of them was, was a counsellor, or were they social worker or something? Not to have picked up from this person that obviously they weren't alone, obviously.

There was a threat, and I thought that's how it was going to play. But then when it played out that they just kind of like left and took it on face value, I thought, yeah, a bit fucking sick of you guys.

Leraje  
Yeah, something about that scene just felt a bit off. I'm not quite sure why.

Pike  
For me, that was understandable because Crane went out of contact for a long time. And there is a kind of fatigue that sets in when you are being really, really caring, really, really accommodating to somebody, you know, going to great lengths to make sure they're okay. And they sort of, they are, they do need a lot from you and you, you don't really get a break.

You don't really get the reward of seeing them okay. And your efforts are paying off and you can feel good about it. yourself. You're just putting in the effort and nothing's— they are still in a really bad place. And then when, uh, if you see them not making any effort, right, when it seemed that way when Ukraine went no contact with them, I think there is a certain kind of fatigue that sets in where you can just go, you know what, yeah, maybe I've done—

Lithos

yeah, that's a good point.

Pike

Yeah, but I have a different criticism. I think We need some more criticism on this one. Uh, I thought the register in which the hive spoke was very uneven. There is one point— so the hive speaks in this kind of, for a lot of it, refers to the characters, you know, my child, my children, talks about the rays of sun, describes the, the beautiful outdoors.

There's this almost weird spiritual alien kind of way of speaking. And then at some point towards the end, the hive goes, perhaps our child needs a firm fucking hand.

Ligeia

Spanking!

Lithos

That did jar when they suddenly got all sweary, went from like guru high and mighty kind of my child, beautiful sunshine of our lives to you fucking need a— yeah, that's true. That's true. Actually, that was a bit jarring.

Ligeia

What did you What did you think about the scene with Stagger and the bathtub?

Lithos

Oh, wow. Oh, okay. That was, that was kind of, that was, that was very sexual in its description.

Ligeia

I liked it.

Lithos

Um, considering, you know, the whole thing was like, he's— yeah, that was That was, that was well fucked up, you know, just the way it was described as well with sort of sexual undertones. And, you know, that, that Stagger seemed to be enjoying himself.

Pike

Was that when, um, when Crane was trying to remove the worms from inside Stagger? Yeah, I thought that was very personal because Stagger is— it's, it's like Crane's double, right? So they're both mutilated. They're both wrong. They're both near mute. They're both prisoners. I'm not referring here to Crane's trans thing as mutilated, by the way.

I'm talking— there is actual mutilation.

Lithos

About, yeah, about sticking his head in a pot of boiling water mutilation kind of thing.

Ligeia

Yeah. Yeah.

Pike

I just thought it's important to clarify. So it's almost, I don't know, I thought that was almost kind of almost masturbation and, you know, that sort of feeding from that fantasy of not being who you are and being completely changed.

Lithos

Well, I think the whole thing about stagger, like when they first appear and they're kind of like just the heavy hand of the hive to keep Crane in order. And then, you know, the transformation from that into someone who actually cares about Crane's well-being but cannot express themselves because the worms have eaten off his brain kind of thing.

I've found that very touching. I've found— I've really sort of felt for Stagger as a character in the end.

Ligeia

Me too.

Lithos

You know, he was like, you know, at the outset you think, oh yeah, okay, here's some muscle that the Hive have brought in, brainless muscle just to keep things in order. And then he actually literally ends up putting his life on the line for Crane.

Pike

I thought, Ligeia, I thought here you would say, oh, maybe that's, you know, maybe there was no stagger. Maybe stagger was just an expression because they, well, you, you always notice those kinds of things.

Leraje

I very nearly said that, to be honest.

Ligeia

See, you are Ligeia tonight. And also I think I will not remember what I, we were talking a little bit with Mirage about this. How did I say it? There was a phrase I used, like, it's like a BDSM mechanical machinery with like no end and no pleasure at all. Like the whole book was just like, fucking fuck.

Like, leave me alone for a week now. Thank you very much. There's like fucking, fucking, fucking, and nobody's happy and there is no pleasure in anybody. Like, what are we doing here? Let's reestablish the fucking because it's not working for anybody.

Lithos

Yes.

Ligeia

Sorry.

Leraje

We need to pick a book with decent fucking in it. Yeah.

Ligeia

You know, like, like when you imagine like BDSM, the, the worst horrible space, which is like underground, dirty fucking tiled room where you can do whatever. This book took me there and kept me there for like 55 years. No air, no shower, just, just like I was there. I don't want to be there.

Thank you very much.

Pike

You have a pitchfork.

Ligeia

I have a bitchfork tonight. Fuck.

Lithos  
Bitchforks. Dear, oh dear.

Ligeia  
I don't know. Yeah.

Lithos  
That makes a difference from, from the dick-heavy talk from earlier.

Leraje  
Yeah. I've struggled with a pitchfork for this because it's like he's such a good writer, and from an artistic point of view, it's such a good book, and it is important, and I do think people should read it.

Ligeia  
Mhm.

Leraje  
But I just did not enjoy it at all. It was just too, uh, it was too painful in places. Um, so Ah, I don't know. I'm going to give it an 8, purely on the strength of the writing.

Pike  
Anyone else?

Lithos  
I'll give it an 8.5. Um, and I mean, just on the, the actual prose itself, I'd give it 10. The 1.5 taken off is because it was unrelenting, and I think whatever— I'm looking forward to the next novel he's going to write for adults. And I think just bring just a bit of occasional light into it.

And damn, excellent author, but 8.5 because something that is that hard to get through, I can't give a 10 to, even though I'd love to.

Pike  
Ligeia, do you want to do Bitchforks? You don't have to.

Ligeia  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, I do. So for the book itself and the message and how it's delivered, I would give it a 9.

Leraje  
Mm.

Ligeia  
It is speaking for people who fucking suffer and are hurt, and they need to be understood better, and they need more space. And this was fucking raw, which I love. But also, if I didn't have my baggage and my own pain, this would be awesome. So this is very personal. That is 9.

And for me personally, it's -15 because I didn't need to go to these places. So you choose, guys. Be wise.

Pike  
Choose.

Ligeia  
I don't know.

Leraje  
What's that, 4?

Ligeia

No, no, it's a 9. It's a 9. It's a 9.

Lithos

Look, this is the second time we've had to work out an average from your scores. Don't expect us to do maths at this time of night.

Ligeia

Listen, I'm happy I said numbers now and not like some, I don't know what. Please do not.

Leraje

What about you, Pike? What would you give it?

Pike

I wrote down 8.5. Uh, I thought it was very good. It does sort of— it does feel a bit like a first novel. I know it's not the author's first novel, but first novel for adults. Uh, I do think there are things to tighten up for the next one. But it was very good writing, and it's very modern in a good way.

Yeah, as opposed to modern where it just throws various symbols of modernity at you.

Leraje

So usually at this time, like we started last month, we talk about other books that we might have read. Did anybody actually read any other books? Because I fucking didn't.

Pike

I, I have read—

Leraje

Oh, go on, Polk. What did you read?

Pike

Because I went on holidays and on holidays I read this book and I read another book because I had nothing else to do. Right.

Leraje

Okay.

Pike

I was resting. Uh, I read the Lithuanian book, uh, called diserys, which is sort of short slang version for a dissertation. It was by a Lithuanian Lithuanian artist, um, who took some bits from his dissertation and then filled in various autobiographical detail and storeys from his life.

Leraje

Mm.

Pike

Um, about— it was about, um, some of it was him being homeless in Paris and, uh, living in a squat in, in Vilnius and, uh, doing doing art, trying to get into, um, into to study painting and, uh, just, yeah, it was really a collection of various thoughts, trains of thought and, um, little storeys and anecdotes from life, which I did enjoy.

Leraje

Right. Who, who? Oh, it's me. It is. Yes, it is. Isn't it? It's my, Choice.

Ligeia

Sorry. Yes.

Lithos

Yes. I hope you picked a cheerful one, otherwise—

Pike  
Otherwise change it now.

Leraje  
Next month's read, we are reading Willy Wonka and the Choc—no, we're not.

Uh, so it was my choice and I chose a Helen Oyeyemi novel, White is for Witching. Anyone read it before?

Ligeia  
Nope.

Leraje  
Cool.

Ligeia  
First read.

Leraje  
Okay. Right. So that's it for another Devil's Library. Yeah, we always say go read the book and enjoy the book. So definitely read it. Take note of the content warnings and admire the artistry within this book because it is very high. I've been Leraje. Hail Satan. Pike?

Pike  
Hail Satan.

Leraje  
Ligeia?

Ligeia  
Hail Satan.

Leraje  
Lithos—

Lithos  
Hail Satan. And remember, folks, don't try and eat your babies.

[Outro music]