

The Devil's Library Episode 4 – “The Left Hand of Darkness”

Lithos

Hello and welcome again to the Devil's Library podcast. And with me this time I have Pike.

Pike

Hail Satan.

Lithos

I have Ligeia.

Ligeia

Hail Satan.

Lithos

And I have Leraje.

Leraje

Hail Satan. Oh dear. Try that again. Hail Satan.

Lithos

And, um, I'm Lithos. Hail Satan. And, uh, this, this book, uh, this time is one I've chosen, which is the Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin, which I've chosen because I am a fan of sci fi. And I am ashamed to admit I have not until now read any Ursula, uh, K.

Le Guin. Has anyone else? I know you have leraje.

Leraje

Yeah, well, now we have.

Ligeia

Well, now, this was the first previous.

Lithos

Prior to this podcast.

Leraje

Yeah, I had, I've read, um, this one and um, another one in the Hainish cycle, but I can't remember which one.

Pike

I'd read some short stories.

Lithos

Okay.

Leraje

Oh, yeah, I've read some short stories as, uh. Well, that's true. Yeah.

Ligeia

Okay, so it's only me then. I didn't. I haven't read anything. This was the first.

Lithos

Well, well, it's not only you. I. I have.

Ligeia

Oh, okay. Okay. Okay. Good, good.

Pike
It's good to have people who are coming in fresh.

Ligeia
Yes, that's the word.

Leraje
Fresh linguinas, fresh linguinas.

Lithos
That sounds like something on, on the menu.

Ligeia
Yeah, they're still in Guino.

Leraje
Who wants to have a go at, uh, summing this book up?

Lithos
Oh, Christ. I don't think. I don't think it is sum up able.

Ligeia
Oh, yeah. This is like how.

Pike
Well, the back cover gives completely the wrong summary.

Ligeia
It does?

Lithos
What a surprise.

Pike
The back cover says two people are walking on ice. Now, this doesn't start until something like three quarters of the book.

Lithos
Absolutely.

Leraje
Do you want me to have a go at summing it up?

Lithos
Yes.

Ligeia
Oh, yeah, go ahead.

Leraje
So the Left Hand of Darkness is set in the very far future. It's been theorised around about the year 4800 BCE. It centres around, um, a character called Genly AI, who is a member of a loose federation of planets, one of which is Earth, where Genly Ai is from. And, um, they're called the Ekumen, this loose federation.

And whenever they discover a planet with life on it, they send what they call, um, first. He's like an envoy, basically, but they have a particular name for it. Uh, so again, I goes to this planet called Gethen, uh, which in Earth, in terror language is basically winter. It's very, very cold, basically all the time.

And, um, the place where he lands is a country on the great continent. There's two countries on there. Uh, one of them is called Karhide, which is where he goes. And the other one is. I can't remember. Starts with an oh. Or I can't. Well, I do know, but I can't pronounce it.

Lithos

Orgoreyn. It's called Orgoreyn. The people are. Orgota, aren't they? Yeah, Orgoreyn

Leraje

It just won't fit in my head that word. I don't know why. Um, and he is kind of like the. The envoy, the ambassador, um, to try and persuade Geth the. The planet of Gethen to join the E. Their loose federation of planets. And he has a particular supporter in the name of a character, a Gethanian character called Estraven.

And we pick up the novel when Genly Ai has been on been in Karhide for about a year and it's the day before he's got an audience with the king of Karhide to try and persuade him to join the Ekumen. Does that sound okay to everybody?

Lithos

Yep. Yeah, it is. And um, yep, part. Part of the. Certainly that the confusion. It. It will take. If you haven't read this yet, lots of spoilers coming. And it. It does take a while to get into this book. And part of the problem is the naming because, um, yeah, he's. He's called Estraven, but then he's called Serum and his real name is.

Full name is Serum. Rem. Uh, Estraven, which I believe the Estraven is what they call the hearth or the kind of tribe or which family doesn't really apply, does it? It's kind of. Yeah, the clan or whatever. And Serum is his real first name. And I think Rem here means. Comes from.

Leraje

Or whatever he himself calls it. His land name.

Lithos

Yeah, that's it. His land name. So yeah, they refer to them as Hearths, um, which is kind of like not really a home. People are. This is where it gets complicated. How to explain this? These people on this planet have no gender. Um, three quarters of the time they are neutral. They have no sexual organs apparent.

And then they go into something called Kemmer where they get. They develop sexual organs. But they could be male or female.

Ligeia

Yeah, they can't choose.

Lithos

Then they have sort of a week of wild rotting and then they um, uh, turn back to genderless and are completely disinterested in any matter sexual and regard generally I. As a pervert. Because generally AI is male and is permanently in Kemmer as far as they're concerned. Kemmer being kind of like on heat Am I about right?

Um, in that?

Leraje

Yeah, that sounds right to me. Yeah.

Ligeia

For m A pervert.

Pike

Because he lives there for years and he. He doesn't have sex. He doesn't, yeah. Have any relationships or anything.

Ligeia

Yeah. So. So even though for them he is a pervert, he is actually a very, how would I say that, like, subdued guy. Like, if people have not read this, I don't. I wouldn't want them to think that this book is about sex or whatever. Like he's this pervert. And going into that, hoping for something like that would be a mistake.

It's not. I mean, I was happy it wasn't.

Lithos

If, if Netflix or HBO turned it into something, then there would be a lot of shagging. They completely ruin it.

Ligeia

So it's not about that.

Leraje

Le Guin said she, uh, wanted to see what would happen if she wrote a novel in which she removed sex and gender from the equation completely.

Ligeia

M. Well, but this is where we get to a point where, um, you know, the question is, did she?

Leraje

No, she did the opposite, in my opinion, because one of the major themes of the whole book is this inability of Genly to really form close bonds with the body.

Ligeia

I was more concerned about the grammar, which was an issue. Like shortly she wrote the book and she came back to the topic of the pronouns. Mhm. Because she only used male pronouns.

Lithos

Yep.

Ligeia

He, him, M, his for everybody. So even though they were supposed to be genderless, you could, I don't know, I couldn't help myself to see them as anything else than males.

Lithos

I think my take on that is it's absolutely deliberate because it is written from the point of view of Genly AI, who is male and who kind of serves as, uh, kind of has an anthropologist's view of it goes in and kind of describes what's going on. Cannot get his head around the genderlessness.

So, uh, keeps referring to people by his own gender. And I think that's quite deliberate. She's quite deliberately going Genly AI is not. Or Genly, not sure how to pronounce it. Is not. Actually, um, is the one who really has the most problems. And the book is largely about him not being able to get his head around the fact that genders aren't predictable.

People don't behave according to his expectations of gender. And so he refers to everyone as he.

Ligeia

That's true. But we have two voices that switch. One is Genly and then this estraven. And he also is only using he. So that was confusing to me because he should be one of Those who don't really have genders. So maybe if the half of

the book was from the point of view of Genly and seeing everything mostly as male and then estraven using some, I don't know, maybe not a.

You know, not a neo pronoun or whatever. I don't know. This book has been written like 50. Yeah, 56 years ago. So it was awesome for. For that. I. I'm not taking that from her. I'm just saying this was a little bit confusing for me because if we are genderless, I couldn't really.

And I, uh, would be really interested to see if chosen neutral genderless pronoun was a she. Just to see how that book would. Would have been going.

Pike

You know, was mentioned somewhere. I think maybe there was a note.

Ligeia

To the text or. I think so.

Pike

She says, uh, that it's. It's not, you know, it's genderless, but it's using he not as a gender. But the way, um, you know, they would. You would say one.

Lithos

Yes.

Pike

Right. They're just referring to a person and it should be read as such.

Lithos

I. I'm pretty sure there was said.

Ligeia

To me that it is.

Lithos

There was something in there saying that along the lines of. Because what estraven is saying is obviously translated into English, but that in their own language there is no such thing as a male female pronoun. So it's kind of like the translation is kind of assuming the he pronoun, which at the time.

Yes. Would. Would. You know, in 1966, I don't think there was anyone who used they. Them pronouns. So had she actually done that, that would have been phenomenally insightful and a lot of foresight.

Ligeia

But I'm not familiar with the history of pronouns. Like when we started using more pronouns. I have no idea. So maybe this is really just a current concept, not even that common everywhere. Unfortunately for some people, this is still a big issue.

Leraje

I think, um, from what I've read about what she said about her choice to use he predominantly, um, she. I think she did toy with the idea of inventing a pronoun, but decided it would be too difficult to do.

Ligeia

Yeah. Yeah, probably.

Leraje

Uh, I also think from some of the things that she's written that she maybe regrets that choice and possibly wishes she had done that in retrospect. But, you know, she was a young writer.

Ligeia

She said one beautiful sentence. I can't really tell you where if this was written paper or this was like she said it somewhere. But she said I am, um, haunted and bedevilled by the matter of the pronouns, like, forever after this book, because so many people asked her this, and she must have been a, um, wonderful human being because she actually really thought about it.

She was not like, no, this is how I did it. And this is my book. You know, we know authors like that. I'm not gonna mention names, but, you know. But she actually really thought about it, and she regretted some choices, but in a way, like, she didn't come up with anything that would have been better.

But she was like, yeah, I understand what you're saying. And this is really something that's bothering me. And I think that is absolutely wonderful when people are like that, because we all need to grow and learn. And she was trying, and that was. That was the most important. So. So even if she uses the he, I love her for this.

I love her so much for this that she, you know, she did think.

Pike

Odd in the way she uses gender is the way once in a while she will describe some kind of emotions or actions as being gendered and as being feminine or masculine. And I found a lot of the time it just reads very. I don't know if it's the time that she was writing in, but it just reads weirdly, say, I don't know.

For example, um.

Lithos

Yeah, displaying a womanly traitor, whatever. But, uh, again, I think that is deliberate because she is writing from the point of view of someone who is imposing his gender. Gender preconceptions on a society which has none.

Pike

But sometimes it's kind of the opposite way when we talk about it today. For example, abstract thought at some point is described as. As being masculine. And, uh.

Ligeia

Do you have any examples? Maybe, uh.

Pike

For example, uh, there was in this attitude, something feminine, a refusal of the abstract, the ideal, a submissiveness to the given. And I. I think that nowadays we think, uh. Um, the capacity for abstract thinking and creative thinking that's sometimes associated with feminine. With the feminine rather than the other one.

Lithos

Yeah. But I. I took it, certainly from when I read it, I took this all as not being her, as her putting herself in the position of a man who could not get over his gender expectations and was always, you know, confused about what kind of, you know, is. Is this a man?

Is this a woman? They are displaying these traits or these traits because he just could not. And it took right until the end of the book for him to start getting his head around the fact that, no, I cannot put my gender expectations on these people. Um, and even by the end, I think he's still kind of Dubious about things like, um, which is mentioned right at the end when they meet Estraven's father and his son.

And there was incest involved. And he couldn't get his head around the idea that incest was okay in that society, uh, as long as you stuck to certain rules. Like you couldn't permanently or repeatedly be incestuous with someone. If a child

was born out of incest, then that would be the last time you would, um, go into what.

What they. What she calls kemmering with that person. Um. I, um, sort of have sex with that person, I think.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
Please correct me if I'm wrong.

Leraje
I say this every time. There's no right, there's no wrong. Every piece of art is entirely subjective.

Lithos
Yeah.

Pike
Except this one.

Leraje
Yeah, sorry, Pike, you're right.

Lithos
There was also, um. I don't know. I'm assuming the full word that I've got in the book from her is actually wasn't written for this edition. I found that very interesting because it kind of goes into describing her idea of. Of science fiction. And it's not just the gender in this that's revolutionary.

It's the way she does science fiction because, uh, at the time, science fiction was largely science fiction. So it. And. And she. She kind of calls it extrapolative. So it is the author extrapolating. If humanity keeps going on as we are and gets more technologically advanced, this is what will happen. Whereas what she's doing is speculation and kind of imagining, no, this isn't us.

This. What if something was completely different? Like, there's no gender.

Leraje
She was very big on thought experiments. She described a lot of her work as thought experiments. And like I said earlier, this idea of what a society without sex or gender, uh, might be like, how it would act, how it would develop, what sort of cultures, uh, and social norms might develop from that.

Lithos
Yes, but.

Leraje
Yeah. So the gender thing is a big part of the book. Are there any others that we picked up on?

Ligeia
Yeah, I don't think it's like the main topic. She was trying to. It was nicely all over the place. It was there. But there were themes that were also at least the same, important. Is that a word?

Leraje
I think in terms of pure story, the themes are there. The themes of gender, the themes of politics, the themes of religion, they're there to put barriers in Genly's way. And that's purely in terms of the story of the story aspect of the book. Um, they're there to confuse him. They're there to make him not trust anybody.

But they're also kind of like commentary. I mean, there's a fairly large political theme. You know, we've got a monarchy, one country that's basically a monarchy, and another country which is basically this kind of like Maoist, sort of almost communist. Yeah.

Lithos
It's the Vogons.

Leraje
Don't read poetry.

Lithos
Extremely bureaucratic and. And obsessed with paperwork. Oh, yeah.

Leraje
With their own secret police as well. Which I thought was a lovely touch.

Lithos
Yeah. And. And they're the ones who also have shit food. Whereas the more disorganised royalists, who are constantly squabbling, um, are, uh, actually really good cooks. Another thing.

Ligeia
Yeah, yeah, that was a nice detail.

Pike
Karhide, uh, also had two different ways to. To how it was governed between, um, two different, um, prime ministers. Right. And that was juxtaposed. So you had ah, T type. I don't know how you pronounce it. I m. Read it as Tibe, um, described as a populist leader, uh, who likes to, uh, make big speeches, have.

Project his voice, kind, um, of push his agenda onto people and um, kind of, ah, invoke the language of patriotism in order to. To push certain things through. Which I'm sure, um, rings very. In a very interesting way right now. And then you have, on the other hand, uh, Estraven, who was, um, calm, preferred to do things quietly rather than, um, broadcasting about it.

Leraje
Yeah. I mean. Yes. His exile. Estraven's exile from Karhide came about because he was not considered patriotic enough. And it was Tibe. Tib. Tibe, however you want to pronounce it. You kind of like orchestrated that, uh.

Lithos
Tibe.

Ligeia
I like that.

Leraje
T B. T B sounds like a.

Ligeia
You think so?

Leraje
I thought you're saying like a really. A really weird ebay, not made it.

Lithos
Sound like a rapper.

Ligeia
Yeah. To me it sounds alien. A little bit like T Bay. Uh, they wouldn't necessarily follow the English.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
You know, so it's T bag. I don't know.

Pike
And if we're going into rappers, then Gendly will be Ganly I.

Leraje
It. I'm glad you did that. And nobody else.

Lithos
Yes.

Ligeia
That's funny. Oh, yeah.

Pike
How did you. As, uh, Satanists, how did you like the idea that was floated that.

Lithos
Yeah.

Leraje
Um.

Pike
What is it that atheism sort of makes God necessary.

Ligeia
Yeah, yeah.

Leraje
I thought that was great, to be honest.

Ligeia
It did make sense. Like talking about him and not believing in him is still mentioning him as. Yes, in a way. We need to talk about him not being. Not existing, which is sort of negated negating the. The whole thing of not even care. You know, I don't care because I don't believe in him.

But it's so hard to actually. But how else would you say that you don't believe?

Leraje
She's got this great line that uh, is something. And I'm going to paraphrase it because I haven't made a note of it, but she says something like if you're on the Karhide road and you turn around and walk away from Karhide, you're still on the Karhide road. Which kind of like sums that idea up of even if you reject something, you're still talking about it, therefore you're still acknowledging the fact that it's.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
Yeah, there is. I mean there are sort of touches of. Of sort of point, uh, sort of religious concepts in there. And one thing I did wonder about not having read any of the other books in, in the sort of heinous universe that they're called, this um, sort of cooperation organisation of various planets are called the Ekumen.

And I couldn't find a passage, but at some point there was something in there which made it sound like there was a religious aspect to the Ekumen. It seems a strange name to pick if there isn't a religious subtext.

Leraje

She chose it. Her dad was an anthropologist, as you. As you mentioned it, us. And he.

Ligeia

Uh.

Leraje

It's. It's an old. Oh, uh, shit. I'm probably going to get this wrong. I think Greek word. Possibly I'm wrong about that. Or maybe Mesopotamian, I'm not sure. But it basically. And they were kind of like a sect, uh, the original word. And she just took this word and borrowed it and shortened it to Ekumen.

Yeah, but it's kind of like. It basically is kind of like a loose affiliation or sort of like.

Lithos

Oh, right.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

Something along those lines.

Pike

There's no right or wrong here, so feel free to invent Greek words.

Lithos

There is something I, uh, will put in or we will put in in the show notes, which is a link to a podcast which specifically talks about Ursula K. Le Guin's father, his anthropology and how it influenced her books. The K in K. Le Guin being, um, short for Kroger, which is um, her uh, birth surname.

Um, so the podcast is called the Last Archive. I would highly recommend it as a podcast. Anyway, it's. It's a really good podcast that just goes into all manner of uh, different ideas and the. The episode is called. The word for man is Ishi. Ishi. Link will be provided. But Yeah, I don't know.

Did you all listen to the podcast or.

Leraje

Yeah, I did.

Ligeia

Yep. Yeah. Didn't manage that.

Pike

I don't know if it was, um. Because I listened to the podcast, but reading the book afterwards, I almost felt like there was too much anthropology in it.

Lithos

Yes. It was definitely written with a heavy slant on the anthropological detail. Yes.

Pike

Random insertions of folklore, um, creation myths and whatnot.

Ligeia

Yeah, true. But she managed to create a really beautifully diverse world. Like so many cultures, so many dialects. She really did pay attention to these details. Like, I. I don't read that much science fiction. Actually, almost none. And also movies. It's not my usual genre, so maybe I'm wrong, but from what I have seen, or like, little margins of stuff, isn't it usually like, uh.

It doesn't have to be necessarily a kingdom, but like one leader or. Or like one group of the same leadership, whatever. But here it was, like, so diverse. Like, this was a prime minister, this was a king. The culture was different. The. The, uh, customs were different. Like, the. The etiquette was so different.

He was so confused. And we followed, uh, the story on this guy trying to communicate with all these various, um, I don't know, people.

Lithos

There is this Star Trek, Star wars kind of standard where they turn up, you know, especially Star Trek. They turn up on a planet and everyone from that planet is the same. All the Vulcans.

Ligeia

Yeah. So. So it's not. It's not really. I'm not completely wrong here, right?

Lithos

No, no, no. The kind of like the idea that. That has been lacking in. That is lacking in an awful lot of science fiction is. Yes, humans go off to. They. All. The humans that go off, they all. They all speak American English for a start. And then they head off somewhere and on that planet, everyone.

They have a universal translator, but everyone speaks the same language. They all dress the same, they all look the same. And the idea that, you know. Well, that's. That's obvious. Patent.

Ligeia

Yeah. And I think this was beautiful because it didn't show just like. Like little steps in the society. In one. One society in one culture. But she really tried to experiment here. That was very enjoyable to me, but also confusing.

Leraje

So, yeah, there is a point where you think, hang on, where is he now?

Ligeia

I've got every. Every third page that what now?

Lithos

I've got to say it was one of the slowest reads I've ever done because I had to keep going back and checking things. And then, um, that's why in the end, I got a digital copy as well, just so that I could do a quick search through and go, oh, what does that mean?

Oh, who was he? Oh, right, you're using his first name now.

Ligeia

Yeah, exactly. Like this little change, uh, confuses me so much because, you know, I didn't have that much time. Like, this month was a little bit hectic for me. But, uh, usually when you read a book, there are a few. Few names and characters. Here. She. She was changing how she addresses these people again.

People. I don't know if there are people.

Leraje

They are. They're humans.

Ligeia

Yeah. But also.

Lithos

Yeah, they. They are all referred to as human.

Ligeia

Like, what is the definition? That is also one really interesting point. Like, do we stay humans when we lose one of the major features that makes us human?

Lithos

The permanent horniness? In this case, not really. According to. Well, according to the people on that planet, they thought you must be permanently horny if you have your sexual organs all the.

Ligeia

Oh, yeah, I know people like that. Yeah. But it's not all of us. You know.

Leraje

I don't. I don't think they ever. I don't think either side either on get the Geth and the Gethanian or the. Or the Ekumen side. I. Maybe I missed it. I don't know. But I never. I didn't pick up on any kind of, like, idea that they didn't each think the other was human.

Ligeia

No. For me to address them is. It is weird to call them human even though they. They are human. Yeah. You see, I am confused. I am a horror girl. This is. This was too beautiful.

Lithos

Well, you don't. I mean, I. I'm a big sci fi fan and I found it very confusing. It's not, you know, this. It is a. A very complex and confusing read. And I. I think, you know, credit has to be given to her when you consider this was 1966 and most science fiction was spaceships and pew, pew, lasers and humans in the future where they've.

Technology has solved everything or they've had to fight the Martian invasion or whatever. She's kind of gone. Nah, not doing any of that. I'm just gonna completely pull this idea out my ass and make something of it. And that was not science fiction at the time.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

And even, you know, the big authors like, um, uh, Isaac Asimov that I read when I was much younger, it's. It's kind of largely bullshit science fiction. It's all about technology will solve everything in the future. And if you look at specifically someone like Isaac Asimov, most of the important characters in his Books are men.

M. So you know, it's, it's.

Pike

I am not going to have any dunking on Asimov. We are not gonna dunk on Asimov here.

Ligeia

No, no, no, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna. I know his name. I know he's an author and he's very famous. I, I have not read anything, so I, I can't. But maybe this comes to the point what we mentioned before, like the introduction in the book where she says for her, her science fiction is not predictive.

It's descriptive of the presence. This is how she saw it. And maybe some authors, I don't know if it's Isaac, I don't know. But maybe some of them were more interested in like the future. Not predicting, but playing with that idea.

Like how could it be in 500 years? I don't know. So maybe that's, that's the difference.

Leraje

I don't think she was interested in the technological aspects of what life would be like in the future.

Ligeia

I didn't have that feeling.

Leraje

There's no technology.

Ligeia

No, I mean like we know there is a ship.

Leraje

There's a ship and there's the ansible.

Ligeia

Um, there was no description of the, the actual like how. Not really.

Lithos

M. And it was kind of like no, it takes some years to get anywhere.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

Ships don't, don't find magic warp tunnels where they kind of pop up somewhere in two days time. They've all got to go into hibernation. And you know, he's, he's stuck there.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

In the end. Because the amount of time it would take to get back to where he came from. Yes. He'd be in hibernation. He, he'd be that age.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Lithos

That he still is. But everyone else, everyone he knew would probably be dead.

Ligeia

Yeah. And also the communication he had, like he, he made that call, whatever. And he wasn't sure if that's gonna work, if it did work. So it was like meh, I did what I could. Let's see, let's wait. That I, I found that very interesting that she didn't, you know, force this idea.

Like oh, I will show you all these buttons and this is gonna uh, you know, these lights and everything is gonna be looking at him like oh, this is so cool. No, it was like I will do what I can. But let's, let's see.

Leraje

I think that that to me was kind of like uh, uh, a uh, sort of device to show eventually uh, Genly trusted estraven. Because all the way through the book people were saying to him, just call the ship down. Just call the ship down. Then we can believe you.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

But he kept putting. He said. Kept saying, no, no, that's not how we do things.

Lithos

Ah.

Leraje

And then right at the end, he, uh, did. And he only did I, in my opinion, because he grew to trust Estraven as an individual, as a person.

Ligeia

And he said that. Yeah, yeah.

Pike

Bit late.

Leraje

Yeah. Bit late.

Lithos

Yeah.

Leraje

Well done.

Lithos

Yeah. And he also was going to make it a condition, um, when he met the king, he, uh, was going to make it a condition that. Yeah. Um, he's. That he's only going to call the ship down, um, after they've pardoned Estraven. But of course, they killed Estraven, the bastards.

Leraje

The.

Ligeia

I was not expecting that to happen, to be honest.

Lithos

No.

Ligeia

That surprised me.

Pike

It was very quick.

Ligeia

It was. Yeah. It was just like so many pages before it was this. You know, I don't want to spoil.

Pike

Anything, but we already spoiled everything.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Okay. So the.

Lithos

You know, the survival book podcast, you know, you haven't read the book, you've kind of.

Ligeia

That's true. That's true.

Lithos

Podcast wrong. You listen to something else.

Ligeia

So you know what I mean? That when they were moving through the snowy thing forever and ever, that part felt like I'm reading 800 pages. And I know that was done on purpose. I know that was. That was the purpose of how slowly, like, we were supposed to feel, how.

Leraje

Horrible this was, how horrible it was, and also the kind of, like, build up. They were forced to trust each other and they were forced to get to know each other.

Ligeia

Yeah. Yeah. But then his death was like two words.

Lithos

Uh, yeah.

Ligeia

After all this long read, he. He just dies like this. I was like, oh, my God, girl, why did you kill him like this?

Pike

I had to read it twice because I was so gobsmacked.

Ligeia

Right.

Leraje

Do you think Estraven knew, uh, that he was. That he had to die? I think he did.

Ligeia

From. From the beginning of the journey or.

Leraje

When I think towards the end, I think for him, you think he thought that the only way he could possibly force this issue because he knew that Genly would. If he'd still been alive, Genly would not have called down the ship until Arghavan had forgiven him and pardoned him.

Lithos

Arghavan being the king. Sorry.

Leraje

Yeah, the king of Karhide.

Lithos

Yeah. And. And the king would not have forgiven him.

Leraje

No.

Lithos

Um, that. That became clear because he asked him. He asked for him to be forgiven posthumously. And. And the king was like, no, yeah, that's true. You know, we'll see about that later.

Ligeia
Oh yeah.

Lithos
And then it. There's a suspicion also that he skied down the slopes towards the guards. And you know, when Genly tells. I uh, think he tells the king that it's like, what do you mean? He committed suicide. And suicide being one of the worst things you could possibly do on that planet. You know, he's going, did he kill himself?

That you know, you can't. There is nothing worse than that. There's nothing more dishonourable because they're big, big on honour.

Ligeia
Yeah, that was interesting.

Leraje
One of the main concepts of the book that we haven't talked about. Yeah.
Shrifgethor.

Ligeia
You can say it.

Pike
Define, define it please.

Leraje
Cannot do that. Uh, I don't think anybody can because we're not Gethanian.

Pike
Well, sometimes I think the closest definition is face

Lithos
M or shadow. Didn't they mentioned also using the word shadow as. As uh, your kind of your presence, your standing.

Leraje
I thought uh, inventing a name for it or whatever. However the you supposed to say it.

Pike
Say it again.

Leraje
I can't spell it.

Lithos
Shift gristle. Is it Shift gristle? I'm gonna look it up now. I want to look it up.

Leraje
Shiffy Giffy. Let's call it Shiffy giffy.

Ligeia
Oh no. What was that with.

Leraje
Oh, that drink thing?

Ligeia
Yeah. Oh, I hated that. I hated that so much. It was out of anything in the book. That name was awful.

Lithos
I think some shift.

Ligeia
Just keep trying.

Leraje
Uh, no, I can't say the word. I just cannot say it.

Ligeia
I'm not going to even try.

Lithos
I'm looking. I'm reading from the wiki entry. And. And the behaviour of people in Karhide is dictated by Shrifgethor. An intricate set of unspoken spoken social rules and formal courtesy. But I believe he does say, um. The. The narrator Genly does say at several points. He can't really explain it in words.

It is kind of this thing.

Ligeia
Um.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah, I do. I think it's one of those things that unless you grow up in that culture, you might understand it on an intellectual level, but you're never going to really understand it on a kind of like instinctual. How to behave, how to interpret it kind of level.

Ligeia
Mhm. Yeah, something like that. How did you feel about that? I forgot what they called it. Um, mind reading. Like mind communication. Yeah. That was interesting to me. Like it was again, she did a great job with how. It wasn't easy. It wasn't like a magic uh. That he could. He could he could just perform.

He wasn't sure is it going to work?

Leraje
Like yeah. Cuz again he had to. Didn't he say at some point he had to, he had to learn it as well?

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
They had to go to a school or a class or something.

Ligeia
Something. Yeah. You had to learn anything. I would like to have this ability.

Leraje
I would not like to have this.

Ligeia
I would.

Leraje
I'm glad it does not exist because it would be monetized by people like.

Ligeia
Okay, yeah.

Pike
But also you can't lie when you are speaking. That is useful.

Ligeia

I, I thought it was very purifying that idea. The, the concept of that was amazing. And how did you feel about this whole concept of uh, society with no gender? Was it something like. If you can imagine that being real, is it making you feel more anxious or do you think oh I love this.

You loved it. You would want to maybe us to be.

Pike

I would like that.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Pike

Love that. Yeah. I would prefer it if it was like um, a cosplaying of sorts. So you just sort of slide into one, slide into the other.

Ligeia

But you couldn't choose. Would that not bother you? Like, because that's what I understood. They couldn't choose if they are going to be. The camera would be a male. Like until it started to happen, they didn't know what's going to happen to them.

Lithos

Yeah. And when it starts happening, whoever you are nearest to who it's also happening to, they kind of like you pick up on the person who's changing gender first.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Lithos

And then develop the opposite one. That's the way I understood it.

Ligeia

Yes, but, but the first person didn't choose what they are going to become. So anybody, anybody, anybody could be a mother or a father to the child. And what was interesting, I was sort of expecting maybe a mention of like a gay situation. Why would that not be a possibility?

Leraje

Because she did pick up some flack, you know, uh, for that.

Ligeia

I'm not, I'm not. This is not a. Like, I'm not criticising it. I'm thinking maybe because it's fair criticism to be honest. Because is it?

Leraje

I think so. I mean if you've got this idea where if someone goes into kemmer, um, the person that they're with automatically assumes.

Ligeia

Yeah, that was the thing. Like what if there was a situation that I became a woman and the next person would also become a woman. Would that not be a nice thing? Just because it was the physical need or was it the need to create another life? And I'm not sure about which one was, you know, it was this camera only to.

To have a child. M. Because this is how I read it based on the. The heterosexual.

Lithos

Well, they also, I mean it M Makes it quite clear that they, they do talk about sex and Kemmer quite openly.

Ligeia
Very openly. I love that.

Lithos
Um, and the fact. No shame that yes there is. They actually do it for fun as well because they do use contraception. Yeah, that was also mentioned.

Ligeia
See, that's true. That's very true. And some of them, uh, somehow chose to be in this camera for prolonged time.

Lithos
Yeah, they're the perverts.

Ligeia
Yeah, that were the perverts.

Lithos
The perverts. When the seers get together, they have.

Ligeia
Perverts and some of them are in celibacy. So it's not just about the babies.

Leraje
We haven't yet talked about that little uh, section of the book with uh, what's his name?

Lithos
Faxe. Uh, the weaver.

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
What do you think about that little. Because that was quite. It's getting a bit kind of, uh, mystic there for a while.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
Yes. Yeah, it was, it was like, yes, they can actually foresee the future, but they kind of made a point of going, what's the point?

Ligeia
Mhm.

Lithos
Of, of asking us perfect uselessness.

Leraje
Of knowing the answer to the wrong question.

Lithos
Yeah, yeah, that's it exactly. You know, so people would go that they, they would do this kind of um, magic trance thing and then they would answer your question and but you have to pay them for it and you're only allowed one question and that's it.

Ligeia
And you have to think how you ask because.

Lithos
Yeah, exactly.

Ligeia
It's like, oh, I had this one, this one try and I it.

Lithos
And I think, I think facts also made it kind of clear to Genley that. Yeah, well, I think you, you've asked the wrong question here. Yeah, you know, you, you're going to be part of. But you've asked the wrong question. So what's the point of knowing the answer?

Leraje
Yeah, yeah, it's not going to change anything whether, whether the answer had been yes or no, nothing would have changed.

Ligeia
But this was again very genius from, from like the way she wrote this because again, she could have done it sounding like a fairy tale, oh, these are the fortune tellers or whatever. These people are magical. And it would have been, you know, we have seen that. But no, she, she changed it into something new.

To me at least this was a new approach to this whole prediction and knowing the future, answering questions about the future. It was interesting really. I, I would have loved To. To meet this, this girl Ursula, the way she thinks she thought. She is not with us anymore. She.

Pike
No, she died.

Ligeia
Yeah. So. Oh, we can't invite her. Well.

Leraje
I ain't got a Ouija board.

Ligeia
Me too. I lost my planchette.

Pike
Great. Let's have a seance. Live right now.

Ligeia
Okay. I have a candle. Let's do this. Let's do this. Mhm.

Leraje
Has anybody read any of the Culture novels by Iain M. Banks?

Lithos
Yes.

Pike
No.

Lithos
All of them?

Ligeia
No.

Leraje
Do you see the similarities?

Ligeia
I'm going with us.

Lithos
Yes.

Leraje
You can tell who she was one of his major influences on there.

Lithos
Yes, yes, I can, I can, I can tell. And he kind of like went with. I kind of like the part of the culture novels where it's about humanity. Uh, well, it's not actually humanity, some other alien race. Um, but they've evolved to the point where they've got massive hyper computers who do everything for them.

So they're pretty much, you know, they've developed drug glands so they can drug themselves with their glands and stuff. And some of the stories are about them getting up to ridiculously dangerous things because they're bored.

Leraje
Yes. And they can also, uh, to sort of like extrapolate. The greens. Yeah. They can change gender at will and choose which. Choose which gender. They.

Ligeia
Okay, I like that more.

Lithos
They are, they are very, they are very good books. And also kind of, there's. There's kind of dark humour to. Well, to everything Ian Banks wrote as Iain Banks or Iain M. Banks.

Leraje
Yeah.

Lithos
I think I've got the Wasp Factory down as one of my picks.

Ligeia
Oh, I've heard that. I've heard about that book. I didn't know it's this author.

Lithos
It's.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah, but it's fucking dark.

Ligeia
Mhm.

Lithos
It's. It's seriously dark. Right at the end of it you're.

Ligeia
Like, but I thought that's a horror book. Is this science fiction?

Leraje
So he wrote, um, he wrote his mainstream books under the name Ian Banks and he wrote science fiction books under the name Iain M. Banks.

Ligeia
Oh, okay.

Leraje

If you pick up a book and it's Iain M Banks, it's science fiction.

Ligeia

Jesus.

Pike

Couldn't one of them just change his name?

Ligeia

Exactly. Like, I already forgot what you said just now. Jesus Christ.

Pike

So inconsiderate. Inconsiderate.

Ligeia

Yep.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

How dare choose your gender?

Lithos

But yeah, that's the, the two religions, um, the Handara, they're the ones who do the trans thing. And then the Yamashita who believe in meshi, who was a Handara, but tried to. Someone came up and asked the question, what's the meaning of life? And you know, that is a forborn question from there on in, because apparently he got into the trance.

He saw the meaning of life and at that point knew everything about everything. Time mattered not. He saw everything all at once. And he is kind of their God. So the Ymeshita have Meshi as a kind of God. He's attained God's status by answering the question what's the meaning of life? And seeing it all in one and permanently seeing all sorts of.

Yeah, it's kind of like monotheistic God, isn't it?

Leraje

Yeah. That was, uh. My favourite quote with the book is from that little section. I should read it out to you because I love it. There is neither source nor end, for all things are in the centre of time. As all the stars may be reflected in a round raindrop falling in the night, so too do all the stars reflect the raindrop.

There is neither darkness nor death. For all things, ah, are in the light of the moment. Their end and, um, their beginning are one.

Ligeia

That is gorgeous. I will never write anything like that. Beautiful.

Leraje

I just, uh, like to say that I really appreciate the round of applause I got there for reading out someone else's words. Thanks very much.

Ligeia

Well, who says it was for you? Sorry, Leraje. Hell, yeah.

Pike

Uh, let's have some more.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Who else?

Lithos

Yeah, favourite quote? Well, I've made a note and there are two. Um, they're very short, but they're on the same theme. And one of them is. No, I don't mean love when I say patriotism. I mean fear, the fear of the other. And the other one is, what is love of one's country?

Is it hate of one's own country? And I just found them really pertinent to what is going on in the world right now, which is why they stuck with me.

Pike

That's. So many people draw a line between patriotism and nationalism, but then others argue that there is no line. They both suck.

Ligeia

Oh, yeah, that is true.

Pike

Oh, uh, did he steal your quote? And he had two.

Ligeia

Yes. Yeah, I had the quote. Uh, Lithos just read. Uh, I had the same, but it was a longer one. You know, like, longer version. But that's. That was the summary of that. Uh, but yeah, I am looking for the other one and I'm not sure which one, so.

Pike

All right, you can go.

Ligeia

You can go.

Pike

When action grows unprofitable, gather information. When information grows unprofitable, sleep that's very useful.

Lithos

Yeah, that's a great.

Ligeia

That is. That is good.

Pike

It's a good way to put one foot in front of the other when things, uh, are overwhelming.

Ligeia

Okay, I found mine, but, uh, this is why I couldn't find it, because it's. It's actually quite a piece. If. Do you mind me reading this whole paragraph?

Pike

Oh, it's two pages.

Ligeia

No, this.

Leraje

Just that one paragraph.

Ligeia

This is. Anyway, you will understand. And I saw that again, and for good what I had always been afraid to see and had pretended not to see in him, that he was a

woman as well as a man. Any need to explain the sources of that fear vanished with the fear. What I was left with was at least acceptance of him as he was.

Until then, I had rejected him, refused him his own reality. He had been quite right to say that that he, the only person on Gethen who trusted me, was the only Gethenian I distrusted. For he was the only one who had entirely accepted me as a human being, who had liked me personally and given me entire personal loyalty, and who, therefore had demanded of me an equal degree of recognition and acceptance.

I had not been willing to give it. I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man. This spoke to me for personal reasons. And, uh, some of, you know, this whole gender thing is very personal to me because, um, one of my children is trans.

And I am worried how this world is going to treat my baby. And so it was hard for me to read this book because of all that gender thing, not because of me. I know where I am. I am a happy female. I wouldn't change my gender for anything. I am happy. But not everybody is born like that.

And in my head, in my heart, I don't judge this. I am curious. I want to know what people feel like. Even if it's fluid, it can be changing. And for me, I come from a place of loving curiosity. So if I ask about the pronouns, it's always because I don't want to hurt that person.

But, you know, what is this society that's going a direction? That is scary.

Leraje
Yeah.

Pike
I mean, this might not make you feel better, but it's a learning curve. We had those in the past. You know, we had to learn that gays exist. Hello. You know, and we had to learn that, you know, women. Women have rights. And it's always hard for people who are caught right at that intersection.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Pike
And it's Rough going. But we've almost always moved forward, uh, better in the end.

Ligeia
Well, I do hope so. But you mentioned something very interesting now. Did you say women have rights?

Pike
I'm sorry. Get back in the kitchen right now.

Lithos
It is a good quote, specifically because I think it is actually, you pick the quote that represents the main theme of the book. All the other bits about the society.

Ligeia
You think so you think this.

Lithos
To me, the main theme was the developing friendship, overcoming differences in culture. And that actually the person who usually you'd read the book from the perspective of is not the one who's being a dick. But in this case it is, um,

large parts of the book. Gendly is being an absolute dick because he doesn't trust the one person who has his best interests at heart.

And the reason he can't trust him is for the simple reason that he's neither man nor woman and that. That Genly can't handle. And I think that that is the main theme of the book and the friendship that develops.

Ligeia

When you say it like this. Yes, I agree. But I also see themes of. Like the sentiment of. No, no concept of war, for example. That was very interesting to me. And also it was not an ideal or perfect society, uh, in any case. But all the crimes or there was murder. There was.

Lithos

Yeah.

Ligeia

It was on such a small scale. It was not that, uh. Like World War. They. They never had that. They didn't know what they. What that means. And. And I think she was trying. Tell me if I'm wrong. Did she sound like she thought. Because there is no patriarchy, there is no war.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Was this set? Sort of. But do we agree with that? Because that is.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Do we? Well, you know, I don't think it's that easy. Simple. I don't think it's so pl.

Leraje

No, I don't think it's the answer, but it's. It's among the answers. So.

Ligeia

Okay. But it was in the book. You. You saw it there. Because this is how I understood what she was trying to, uh, communicate, I think.

Leraje

Well, again, it's all open to everybody's personal interpretation. M. I think she was. She was making the point that because it's a genderless society, the need for overt masculinity removed the need for overt.

Ligeia

Aggression, the competition between genders and between usually males. M. But this is such a cliché.

Leraje

You know, it is a cliché, but there's an element of truth to it as well. I'm not suggesting it's the sole cause of war at all. But it's. I think it certainly plays a part.

Lithos

I mean, she made it quite clear that, you know, when. When it was said that, well, they have no concept of war. Um, but there are tribal squabbles and people get stabbed.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos
And people steal. And yet there is violence and there is.

Ligeia
There is violence, but it's not on our.

Lithos
But they haven't come kind of industrialised feuds to the extent of. So the concept of having an army is like.

Leraje
Yeah, it's all on an individual level. It's one person against one person. So it's an assassination or it's a murder.

Lithos
There's the border squabble at Or G. When. When Genly goes across and the house is sting and gets set on fire.

Ligeia
Yeah, something like that.

Lithos
Which really confused me when I read it because it was like he said he'd just woken up from a dream. And it's like a dream where you run away from a fire. And then I'm reading that and I'm going, 'this dream's going on for a bit. And then I suddenly realised, oh, no, no, this is actually happening.

Leraje
It really is on fire.

Ligeia
What a long dream.

Pike
Pitchforks.

Ligeia
Pitchforks, yes, pitchforks.

Leraje
Out of 10. Lithos?

Lithos
Am I going to be really boring and give it another nine? Am I judging them too high? I just thought it was an awesome work.

Leraje
You feel it. You feel it.

Lithos
Possibly. Possibly the best science fiction book I've read.

Leraje
Pike?

Pike
I'll give it a seven. Uh, I found all the anthropological stuff interesting, but I kind of felt like it came at the expense of character depth. It was hard for me to really get a feel for any of characters very much because they're also stoical and matter of fact about everything, irrespective of how hard things get.

Leraje
Ligeia?

Ligeia
I will choose to say it this way. Uh, I will give it a nine for how innovative the whole concept. Many concepts of this book were and how thought provoking. I loved the questions she. She asked. Uh, I don't think she came up with many answers. I don't think that was her goal.

That's not a criticism. It's just. I really like the questions and the themes and I think she was one brave girl. I love her for that. And the writing was maybe seven for the writing. For me personally, uh, there were parts of these books where I actually really struggled to not fall asleep.

And this is me, my ADHD brain, not being able to focus on so many names and planet and blah, blah, blah, you know. So please bear with Me, I know that for me, uh, books like this are really challenging because I really wanted to understand what's going on. But also my washer was going and my kids were texting and it just like, really, I didn't like that.

I had to go back and back and it was like the motivation. I was losing it because of that. So for me, the read was really challenging. But maybe I need to read it at some point in my life where I will have a lot of time during the day and read it slowly and just enjoy that book.

Leraje
And I will give it an 8 because I do love it. I think she set out what she achieved to do. She didn't. Ligeia, I agree with you. She didn't offer any answers. And, um, that was part of the attraction for me. I like that. As a big David Lynch fan, I like not having the answers handed to me.

Ligeia
His famous 'No'.

Leraje
Yeah. Uh, and it really, to me, it's kind of like that. That whole site, the hainish cycle, and that book in particular sort of like marked a maturation of the genre of science fiction. It went from being kind of like, uh, macho men running around in unexplainable spacecraft, zapping aliens, to something a lot more thought provoking and became much the best.

The whole genre became much the better for it. So, um. M. Next episode is going to be our Halloween Ah. Special. Do you want to tell people what we're going to be reading?

Ligeia
Okay, spookies, are you ready for this one? This is gonna be a classic read. This is a book called Rosemary's Baby and we chose it because the reasons. If you haven't read it, please read it or at least watch the movie or both. That will be. That would be the greatest thing because we are coming back to Satan.

Leraje
Hail Adrian.

Ligeia
Adrian. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But you know, like, we. We took a little break and now we. We need to get back to the. The roots.

Lithos
And if you listen to that podcast, you're all going to hell.

Ligeia
Or at least you are not going to heaven.

Leraje
Or possibly you're just gonna die and rot like everybody else.

Lithos
Yeah. Yeah.

Leraje
So. Yeah, so Rosemary's Baby will be next. We all watched the movie the other night, didn't we?

Ligeia
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. The original.

Lithos
Mhm.

Ligeia
It was really nicely shot. Yeah. So good. Beautiful. Beautiful. Also sort of funny in places, but terrifying.

Leraje
Have any of us read the book before?

Ligeia
No, I haven't.

Pike
No.

Ligeia
I am curious because I have seen the movie and I mean, have you, Leraje?

Leraje
Yeah.

Ligeia
You have read everything.

Leraje
I know.

Ligeia
Uh, okay, next time is the Bible. Come on.

Leraje
No, I've read that, too. Don't make me read that.

Ligeia
I know.

Lithos
Christ on the bike. We can spend. We can spend 10 minutes on the Bible. Just. You can spend 10 seconds and go, it's a load of bollocks. Pitchforks.

Ligeia
Zero. Misogyny? Yes. 10, 10 pitchforks. Maybe even more.

Leraje
So it's, um. It's written by a guy called Ira Levin. Do you know the other famous novel that he wrote?

Pike
The Bible?

Lithos
No.

Leraje
You want to answer that, then? No. He wrote The Stepford Wives. Sorry, Pike.

Ligeia
Uh.

Lithos
Ah.

Leraje
Sorry.

Pike
I had it

Ligeia
We can edit that.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah. You say the Stepford Wives, and I'll edit it in.

Ligeia
Just say it now. Say. Say it. Anything.

Pike
Is it by any chance Stepford...?

Ligeia
What? You are wrong.

Lithos
No.

Leraje
What are you talking about?

Pike
Oh, damn.

Lithos
No, I, uh, did not know, uh. Uh. Do you know what? For some reason, I thought John Wyndham had written the Stepford Wives.

Leraje
He wrote the Dulwich Cuckoos and he wrote Day the Triffids.

Lithos
Yeah. Yeah, that's it.

Ligeia
Okay. Yes. So, um, this was fun. I hope you enjoyed our approach to review this wonderful, not easy, uh, book. And I was here tonight with Pike.

Pike
Hail Satan.

Ligeia
Lythos.

Lithos

Hail Satan.

Ligeia
Leraje

Leraje
Hail satan

Ligeia
and I am Ligeia. And Hail Satan. See you next time.