

The Hidden Bookcase Transcript
This Is How You Lose the Time War by Amal El-Mohtar and
Max Gladstone

Morgan

Welcome to The Hidden Bookcase: come through and get cozy. Pick
a book, your favourite book, that's the one that opens this room.
Inside you'll find a warm fire, a loving cat, and a wide skylight to the
stars

Sorren

And a dangerously high to-be-read pile.

Morgan

I'm Morgan, I use they/them pronouns, and I am a price greater
than rubies.

Sorren

I'm Sorren, I use he/him pronouns and I am a letter that can't be
read without ruining the seal.

Morgan

We've been friends for over a decade and always swapping books.

Sorren

Typically we take it in turns to recommend one another a favorite
read. This time we're rereading a mutual favorite to fit in with our
sapphics in space theme for the summer.

Morgan

So today, let's get to talking about...

Sorren

This Is How You Lose the Time War by Amal Et-Mohtar and Max
Gladstone.

Morgan

Sorren... How do we talk about this book? (Laughs)

Speaker 1

I don't know. Our format's already out the window because I actually don't know which one of us read this first, even- Was it me?

Morgan

I think it must have been you. As with all things that we discovered in our teenage years, you read it slash watched it slash consumed it.

Sorren

I literally have no idea when I first read this. I don't know. But also, actually, I added on February the 2nd, 2020 to GoodReads and then I finished it on February the 15th. So maybe that was a reread? But I'm- I'm pretty sure I've read it four times. So I think that that's not accurate. So probably I did actually read it as a teenager. Do I know why? I don't- I don't know. I don't remember if someone recommended it to me. I don't remember if I saw it on the internet. No clue.

Morgan

My date added is June 13th 2020.

Speaker 1

There you go. Maybe I just saw it in the bookshop and picked it up. I'm really like... I'm lost now. I have no idea.

Morgan

I feel like I probably most likely found it on a Tumblr post of like, sapphic things. I feel like sapphic sci fi posts on Tumblr, as with A Memory Called Empire that we did in a previous episode, I feel like that was a very common thing to see. I have a vivid memory of seeing it on the shelf in Forbidden Planet in London and going, "Oh, I really want to buy that... Oh, it's 10.99 for 200 pages. I'm not buying that."

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

And I think maybe I might have gotten it for Christmas in that case.

Sorren

I also- I listened to it initially, I listened to it every time until this time, and I decided to read-read it this time...

Morgan

Mm...

Sorren

To see if the experience would be different. So maybe I just came across it on Audible or something and thought: "This looks interesting." Who knows at this point. (Laughs) But we- we read it.

We both read it. At some point we both read it and loved it.

(Laughs)

Morgan

Mm-hm.

Sorren

And are we going to explain what it's about?

Morgan

Two agents from rival possible futures, communicate through letters on battlefields and slowly fall in love.

Sorren

I think that's pretty good.

Morgan

I mean, they fall in love quite fast, to be perfectly honest. But...

(Laughs)

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

Fast and slow, because it takes them like, hundreds of years, but also...

Sorren

Mm...

Morgan

Like, four letters.

Sorren

Yeah, exactly. Hundreds of years, but only a few pages.

Morgan

You know, they've been flirting on and off through the battlefield...

Sorren

Mm...

Morgan

For centuries beforehand, so I feel like they're allowed.

Speaker 1

Exactly. And then obviously, we won't- Well, I suppose this is a bit weird, because usually we don't start spoiling things until after we've got through a blind but we have no blind. But if you've got to the end of this book, you also know they've kind of been flirting forever.

Morgan

Hm. Yeah, cut off now. Spoilers, everybody! Leave!

Sorren

We're just going straight into it today.

Morgan

Yeah. They've been flirting since the beginning. They saved each other's lives.

Sorren

It's a cycle... They're flirting again.

Morgan

They couldn't have lived without having already done these things.

But also, they only lived because they'd done... Like- Yeah,
timey-wimey nonsense. Beautiful.

Sorren

I- To be fair, I feel like, as far as time travel goes, and we know- I've said it on the show before: I'm very, very fussy about time travel. If it doesn't make sense, I get annoyed. I feel like this makes sense.

To me it makes sense.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

Time travel's not real. Let's get that out in the open before somebody says, "Hey, Sorren, what are you talking about?" But to me, this is coherent, which I think is the most important thing, to be fair.

Morgan

Yeah, it feels like fate.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And it's close enough to fantasy... That it's all good. If you try and think too hard about time travel, it- it never makes sense if you actually think about it for longer than like, four seconds. So if you lean into it being more fantastical, I feel like you can have more fun.

Speaker 1

Yeah, because I think if you're reading this as allegorical for soulmates, or fate, or something, which is kind of what it's doing...

Morgan

Mm...

Sorren

Then you probably are having more fun than if you start going: "Well, if somebody created the universe, who created that person who created the universe?" You end up in that infinite loop.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

And to me, that kind of makes sense. I feel like that always gets brought up as a thing that like, "Ah, it doesn't make any sense for there to be an infinite chain of creators," and I'm like, "There could be. I don't think we can comprehend it."

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

But that makes sense to me. Or- There being an infinite time loop. I can't understand it. But why should I have to understand it for it to exist?

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

We're getting rid of philosophical immediately on the show. (Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughs) I think the fact that the entirety of this is very soft magic system vibes, in terms of like, how the future works, how their abilities work, how they exist in the world, how they travel up and

down thread or through different universes, because it's so soft in its description, and it's basically just poetry...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
It's all- Like, it's all good. It all fits the vibe, so it doesn't feel out of place.

Sorren
Yeah, if it was trying to explain in great detail how all of this moving around in time was working, and even how these letters are sort of being written... Like, you have a sort of, again, like a soft understanding, like an emotional understanding of how it works, in terms of like, you have like a vague, "Okay, it's something to do with DNA sequencing. That all makes sense. You know, it's patterns, it's that kind of thing.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
But if you think about it too much, then it gets confusing, but you're just not supposed to.

Morgan
You're not supposed to, there are spiders and wolves and eyes in the stars. And that's legit.

Sorren
That's just how it is. I think with the time travel aspect, it's interesting to have something that is predetermined, because I feel like that is the issue with almost all storytelling. Like, I feel like when you approach a story, there is that element of: "This is always gonna go in a certain way." How do you keep your audience invested in such a way that it feels like there isn't a predetermined ending? And this has one and it still works.

Morgan

As my creative writing professor would say last term, if I can see your hand, it's bad. Because you know how it's gonna go the whole time, the audience knows that there's a predetermined ending, but it's all about making the audience forget that your hand is the one moving the actions.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

So all of the cause and effect and consequences need to feel set up. Which is why you can't have deus ex machina unless deus ex machina is the point. Because then that's just your hand going: "And then this happens!"

Sorren

How did you find this on a reread from that point of view?

Morgan

I enjoyed it. I think I don't remember how I felt when I first read it. I kind of just was like, "Wow, I feel emotionally moved. Time to- Time to move on now. Oh, boy!"

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

Whereas I feel like this time it felt more cozy.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

I didn't remember that they'd saved each other in any way.

Sorren

Ah, okay.

Morgan

I just remembered that at the end Red broke into Garden.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

So I knew we were going towards that point. And I completely forgot that the Seeker was Red. I thought the Seeker was each other, like checking up after each letter.

Sorren

Oh, interesting. Okay.

Morgan

And then I was like, "No, wait. Of course. Of course that-" because they would have just said.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

"This is Blue. This is Red." But obviously it's somebody else who's been obfuscated from the narrative for a reason. And even when, like she confronted herself and then jumped off a cliff, I was still like, "Who's the Seeker? I don't remember." So my... (Laughs) It was basically like reading it for the first time.

Sorren

(Laughing) Fair enough. Because I'm in the position of like... I think this is my fourth reread. So I'm like, I know it fairly well. So I was like, "I remember who the Seeker is, I remember how this ends."

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

But it was really interesting seeing all that foreshadowing. I feel like I get something out of this again, every time I reread it.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

Like I would reread it again tomorrow. And not complain. I'd be happy to do that. (Laughs)

Morgan

Yeah, I feel like I would love to reread it now that I remember the things.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

Because it is so carefully threaded that it doesn't feel like a surprise when everything falls into place.

Speaker 1

Yeah, everything's been laid really delicately, like to the point where I was like, "Oh, I remember how this ends." But then I was still missing some of the foreshadowing until after. Like, when Red is breaking into Garden. I was like, "Oh, yeah, because earlier Blue basically explains to Red how to get to Garden." But when I was reading that passage, I forgot that that needed to be communicated so that Red would have a reasonable way of getting into Garden.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

Like it was just so beautifully written and so natural that I wasn't like, "Oh, actually, this is like an infodump. Like, this is necessary lore and setup." I was just like, "Wow, I'm being carried along!"

Morgan
I wonder...

Sorren
Mm-hm?

Morgan
The author's names are in blue and red. Do we think that corresponds to which character they were writing? Or do we think...

Sorren
I feel like I looked this up at one point, and I feel like the answer was yes.

Morgan
Because the prose feels so fluid the entire time. I didn't feel like I could discern two different writing styles, clashing, it felt like one very unified voice.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
Which is very impressive, obviously.

Sorren
I feel like I found this in an interview at some point....

Morgan
Are they married?

Sorren
(Laughing) Not to each other.

Morgan
Okay...

Sorren

(Laughs) So I mean, yes, technically. I do think it's, um... Obviously the fiction is fiction, and you can like, make a project with anyone but I... It's so intimate and so romantic.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

That I don't know how it feels as the spouse. I don't want to speculate on their personal lives.

Morgan

Like my old D&D group, our DM was dating one of the players and me and the DM would have full on 10 minute, like, romantic conversations, because he was also playing my wife, but we'd have these whole really emotionally charged conversations and like, went back and forth, and back and forth, and people cried... (Laughing)

The DM's girlfriend's just sitting there- Eventually, the DM's girlfriend got involved in the polycule. So you know. We vibe.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

Her character, I mean...

Sorren

Yeah, I was in-character exes with a friend, while his longtime girlfriend was the DM so that was also a fun... fun dynamic, even though we had a very unhealthy in-character relationship...

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

So it wasn't like romance was going... Sometimes- sometimes romance was going on. There were- There were moments. (Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughing) I feel like we get so into the characters that it doesn't get awkward as people. Or I feel like maybe that's just me completely missing social cues. For me personally, as an aroace person... Maybe- maybe it's that, or maybe it's the autism, I don't know. But I feel like whenever I'm in my character I'm so in my character that I just completely forget that the people opposite me are like, my friends. I just think of them as their characters. And I really do get into it that way.

Sorren

I think same.

Morgan

It's the writers in us.

Sorren

Yeah. So I'm sure that they had something similar if they did take turns, and I'm trying to, I can't seem to find an answer on that....

Sound Effect

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS ON.]

Sorren

Sorren from the future here, this was really nagging at me. And I tracked down a review in sci fi magazine Strange Horizons that states the Gladstone wrote Red, and El-Mohtar wrote blue, which does track from what I know of their writing as individuals. But also the reviewer doesn't really give a source for that information. So take it with a grain of salt. And if anyone does have a source, please let us know. We're very curious.

Sound Effect

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS OFF.]

Morgan

One thing I did see in the author's note, because obviously, if anybody exists in the queer, sci fi/fantasy world in any way, they've consumed Steven Universe in some form or another.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
And obviously, you have Sapphire and Ruby in that. And that is a very important relationship, and they are blue and red coded characters. And lo and behold, at the end of this book, it goes: Thank you to Amal's parents generously tolerating our occupation of the living room table with exclamation point laden notes and singing Steven Universe songs."

Sorren
Amazing.

Morgan
They have in fact consumed Steven Universe, the Ruby and Sapphire, and Blue and Red correlation is there, potentially,

Sorren
The more I think about that, the more it makes sense as well, because of the whole coding of like, Red and Blue being like, the same person in terms of having each other's DNA. And that metaphor being used of them having helixes wound together towards the end of it. And to those who are not familiar with Steven Universe, this is technically Steven Universe, but it's been like 10 years.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
So you know, it's not the big one. So I feel like we can say that Garnet is Sapphire, and Ruby's amalgamation: a third character, who enjoys being one person most of the time, rather than the two

separate people that make her up. So there's definitely some- some resonance there.

Morgan

And I felt like their character coding is also fairly similar in sort of like, rushing in and being fairly destructive.... (Laughing) and impulsive versus the sort of... take the time look into the future, see what's happening.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

Figure it out from there.

Sorren

I always forget how funny Red is.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

What's the thing she says in her first letter, hang on... "Thus we braid strand six to strand nine and our glorious crystal future shine so bright, I gotta wear shades, as the prophets say."

Morgan

Honestly, that first letter, I read that and was like, "Gideon the Ninth, is that you?"

Sorren

(Laughing) Gideon the Ninth! It's so Gideon the Ninth coded. They would- they would get along.

Morgan

Oh, absolutely.

Sorren

It's about the yearning.

Morgan

The yearning whilst also somehow sounding like a cringe teen from mid 2000s Tumblr. It's the multitudes.

Sorren

Exactly, exactly.

Morgan

I did love all of the inserts, or like, "As the prophets say," and then insert random 21st century reference.

Speaker 1

I feel like this has that thing of um... Which episode was it? Oh, it was A Memory Called Empire, which came out earlier in our summer season, just two or three episodes ago... But we were talking about academic references versus modern references. And I feel like this blends them together in such a fun way. Because you get loads of like, you get like: Blue-Dabba-Dee...

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

(Laughing) When Red is addressing Blue. But then you get a lot of like Romantic poetry and art. And...

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

It's just a nice braiding of those things- And a lot of science as well, which I personally really love.

Morgan

Yes, I did feel like I was slowly more and more putting this in my light academia folder.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan

Just for the sheer amount of cross referencing. There was one particular reference. I don't remember what it was, but I was like, it's a reference that isn't explained. And like, I know, most references aren't explained but there was a specific one was like, this has to be dark academia coded at this point, because I understood it only because of like, some random TV show that I'd watched.

Speaker 1

Was it the Death of Chatterton painting? Because that doesn't get explained, but it's really important.

Morgan

I just vibed over that. I didn't even look it up.

Sorren

You missed that? It's the mural, when Red is like, "Oh, you died in this specific position." It's that painting- I'm sure we looked at it in English class...

Morgan
Maybe?

Sorren

Because he has the blue trousers and he has the very dramatic pose in the open window. If you're listening to this, and you have read this book, and you haven't seen the painting, I would recommend Googling it. Who's it by... Henry Wallace. It's Pre-Raphaelite, apparently... The internet's telling me that I didn't know that off the top of my head. But it has that dramatic composition that Red eventually recognizes and the Blue would definitely have recognized because she's such a nerd. I would get along with her I think.

Morgan

(Laughs) Yep. Nah, I think this is definitely dark academia.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

Like, the stuff about Blake scribbling apocalypses I studied that poem so many times, in so many different ways.

Sorren

Yeah- I mean, there's an Ozymandias reference in like, the first letter so... (Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

And then it comes back at the end.

Morgan

That is so true.

Sorren

And I will say Morgan knows my, uh, very sad experience of trying to go to a book club for the first time because they were doing this book and this being one of my favorite books and everyone there turning up and saying that they absolutely hated it, and that they didn't get through it... Pretty much, I think one person finished it out of about 20, which hurt my feelings deeply and made for a very awkward vibe, because you know, you're- you're new there, and then everyone's like, "But what did you like about it?" And you don't really want to talk, because everyone disagrees with you, and has already stated that they disagree with you. (Laughs)

Morgan

Mm....

Sorren

But that said, I do think that this book is a little bit marmitey in terms of... It's not very accessible on that front, like I think you can get away with like, if you know, some of the references, it's fine. I think if you genuinely know none, and I know for some of the people that I was talking to at that book club, like, they didn't go through the English education system, for example. So they were like, "So much of this is just going over my head, I have no anchor point. And then on top of that, you know, I'm an ESL speaker, it's using a lot of florid language, fancy vocabulary." Which is something that I love, but I appreciate that if you're having to stop to look up like a bunch of words, it is going to be annoying. So I do kind of understand where people are coming from on that front. I think it gets that kind of criticism, and I think- I wouldn't say it deserves that criticism, because I don't feel like every book has to be for everyone. But I understand it.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren

So when people say that I'm kind of like, "Yeah... but I love it, though." (Laughs)

Morgan

It's very much a niche book. And I think it... I'm gonna put my foot down and say is academia of some description. When I first read it, I must have just... I mean, we all know on this podcast now, if I don't get something, I just vibe over it until it makes sense. Or I assume that it didn't need to make sense. So I can go through a book without understanding half of it and still be like, "Yeah that was a solid read."

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan

Whereas now... I found the reference that I was talking about earlier. And it's just, "She thinks of ortolans as she chews." And I had no idea what those were before I watched Hannibal season two. And now I'm like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know about the cloths you have to put over your face because you have to hide from God when you're eating them. Yada-yada-ya." And that would not have hit in any way when I was 20. Whereas now I'm like, this makes sense.

Sorren

There's stuff I pucker up on every reread as well. Yeah.

Morgan

One- (Laughs) One reference I did really love, which is not even a reference, I just find it funny, is when she talks about how no one can ride the Circle Line forever.

Speaker 1

(Laughs) I laughed at that as well. Maybe you can Red!

Morgan

Well, you can't any more now that they've not made it a circle. But...

Sorren

That's true.

Morgan

But I found it deeply funny. I liked the fixation on England because it meant I understood more of the references.

Speaker 1

Yeah, I was thinking about that. Because I was like, on the grand scheme of things, it does sort of seem a bit counterintuitive, because it's like we're dealing with all of time and space here, essentially. So why are we spending so much time in England? But then that is also my frame of reference. So I was like, "Well, this is useful for me personally."

Morgan

I think to compare it to another book that also deals with, sort of, time, that got criticism for that specifically was *The Invisible Life of Addie La Rue* by VE Schwab.

Sorren

Oh, yeah.

Morgan

Because obviously, she exists- spoilers for that book, people- um, but she exists over three centuries. And she has to keep moving to different cities, because everyone is forgetting her all the time. And the only cities she spends time in are like Paris and London and New York, and like, she only spends time in western cities and people were like, "Realistically, this doesn't make much sense. And you're really like, cutting out a huge swathe of like, time." Whereas this book, when they're talking about influential philosophies, when they're talking about different points in Earth history, at least...

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And how important they are to deviation. There is a lot more diversity a lot more globality in all these different references that are coming in which I really appreciated.

Sorren

Yeah, that's a very good point, actually. Because when you get into those little nuggets of information about like, how a different strand has gone, you get a lot of like, very different worldbuilding if you like, like you get a world for example, where Native American populations have been deliberately inoculated against European diseases so they don't become ill or the currency collapse of- I want to say the Ming Dynasty?- might not occur because of trading between them and Polynesian communities. There's a lot of thinking about how the world could go, which doesn't feel eurocentric, which

is very refreshing. Even if we do spend time in London. I think it kind of- I think it balances out like, it feels like a personality quirk of Blue's.

Morgan
Yes.

Sorren
That lets you get insight into her and get to know her.

Morgan
Yeah, London is definitely a her thing compared to everybody else.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Yeah. Which is why Red likes to watch it burn. But... oof!

Sorren
Exactly. Damn. I do love how they're very, like intense, sort of in an aggressive way about each other and even acknowledge it in text. It's just fun. I think sapphics don't always get to do that as well. I think there's sometimes like, "Uh, they're- they're cute and they're holding hands!" And these guys are like, "I want to eat you."

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Brackets, flirting.

Morgan
Honestly, it is so Hannibal coded and I love it. It's so insane, psychosexual, but also psychosexually obsessed with each other mentally rather than physically, y'know? Which I really enjoy, because obviously...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
They haven't had sex, which is not the be-all and end-all.

In Unison
They haven't even touched!

Sorren
Until Blue's died!

Morgan
And that- that line oh my god, when she's holding her, like, she puts her fingers through her hair and it doesn't feel like how it's supposed to. And that's like, the final nail in the coffin. Ooh! That line got me.

Sorren
It's so good.

Morgan
Oof!

Sorren
Agh, same.

Morgan
More psychosexual obsession, please, it's more interesting. I don't care if they sleep together, I want them to be in each other's brains.

Speaker 1
(Laughs) I liked as well that they actually sort of addressed that difference between sexual attraction, romantic attraction and platonic attraction, I think it's Red is, sort of, mediating on it and says, "I've had friends, like, intimate friendships, and I've had people I've slept with and this is something else." I thought that was interesting. Just to have it be sort of acknowledged in text.

Morgan
Refreshing.

Sorren
Yeah. Also I just want to say that I love that everyone important in this book is she/her. Like, gender is very, like, vague as a concept. Like, even when we were putting this in sapphics in space, I was kind of like- But... They are, they are, but also only kind of because of that's the label we would ascribe them. Like, they don't stay in the same bodies and stuff.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
So I don't know if they would be like, "Yes, we're lesbians."

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
But they feel like they belong here.

Morgan
There's that line at the very beginning of the book that says red looks again, something like a woman.

Sorren
Mm. And I think... I think it's Red who spends some time in Genghis Khan's horde as a man. And then obviously Blue is like, with a man for a long time. Presumably, she slept with him at some point. But there's also like a, that's not like her body because they're changing bodies all the time. Like it's a very vague, it's just a sort of a queer normative situation.

Morgan
Yes!

Sorren

How on earth is gender and sexuality going to matter in this context? It really just doesn't.

Morgan
Exactly.

Sorren
These are just the pronouns.

Morgan
Also not to go back to Steven Universe again. But again, very reminiscent of that with the fact that every single one of the gems is she/her, but none of them actually have a gender.

Sorren
Hm, yeah. And I liked that Commandant and Garden are also she/her when they appear, sort of, embodied. Like, they're a bit more concept to begin with. And then I think you get one example of Commandant being referred to as she/her about halfway through. And I remember the first time I was like, "Wait, hang on, what?"

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
Is it not like an organization, a governmental body? It's interesting that it's sort of like, a more direct relationship. But I think that's very fun. Because also it's kind of not... That's kind of a representation of what it is but just- just flows together very nicely, I think.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
There's no important he/hims in this book.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Even when Red is speculating about the existence of a God, she uses she/her, and I love that.

Morgan
(Laughs) The one thing they agree on across both the features, iconic.

Sorren
Incredible. How do we feel about... This- This is possibly controversial, but I feel like we should raise it. How do we feel about the kiss? Because I have... I feel torn on the kiss because I'm like, in one way, is it kind of weird that this ageless woman is now kissing this five year old? A little bit.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
But also, I'm like, "It's from such a pure situation of trying to like, save her life..." And it doesn't feel motivated in that way, that it kind of doesn't strike me as weird. But would I think it was weird if it was like, heterosexual. Maybe. But am I just conditioned to think that way. I don't know. I just wanted to throw it out there as a discussion.

Morgan
Mm. I did have a brief like, "Oh, okay!"

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan

Yeah. But I think because it... The reason like, the reasons motivated behind it.

Sorren

Yeah. So that you don't die later. Cheers.

Morgan

Yeah. But it is a bit like, could have done this another way, maybe...

Speaker 1

When she got sick, at least... Even like a teenager would be slightly less like... Like, an 18 year old or something.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

And you can imagine her not having joined Garden at that point in time, and even still seeing herself as a child, because it's like...

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

You haven't succumbed to 1000s of years of time travel and murder and...

Morgan

Exactly.

Sorren

The cycle of violence that you've been trapped in and stuff.

Morgan

Yeah. Especially considering the only kiss in the book. It's a bit kind of like...

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan
Mm-mm?!

Sorren
Yeah. I have seen it gain criticism for that, and I kind of get that I'm like, I feel like... Yeah.

Morgan
I feel like it would be less weird if Red had like, opened her up, and put shit in her and closed it back up again.

Sorren
Or even just like, cut her finger and dripped a little bit of blood in there or something.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
Because I'm like, if you have to give her like, a piece of you....
(Laughing) Then there's other ways to do that. I think that's it- It doesn't like, ruin it for me because again, it doesn't feel like she's kissing her from a motivation of kissing her, it feels like she's kissing her from a motivation of the ends.

Morgan
Yeah, she's throwing up in her mouth a little bit.

Sorren
Ew! Like a baby bird!

Morgan
Exactly. If we look at it from that perspective.

Speaker 1

(Laughing) Yeah, that improves it for sure. Just a little owl pellet deposit.

Morgan

Yes, birds on the cover, they communicate through birds, I feel like it could be an interesting way to sort of bring it full circle if they'd made that reference.

Speaker 1

Mm, y'know? And they do- They do do a lot of bird communication in that period of time when they're sort of like... Not most falling for each other, but I feel like that's there's like, a lot of relationship development happening in that situation where Blue is implanted, embedded even and then they can't talk for a while. Bird to bird conversation.

Morgan

I love that this book has a quote by Madeline Miller on the back.

Sorren

And Murderbot Diaries author Martha Wells.

Morgan

I'd expect that more though...

Sorren

That's fair.

Morgan

And I love to see it.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

But it's interesting to see a quote unquote "literary fiction writer," quoting sci fi, I think that's just a nice little sort of... Maybe we should destroy genre entirely.

Sorren

I mean Circe is also arguably fantasy. It's got gods running around.

Morgan

Well, exactly. Circe and Song of Achilles and Greek mythology, retellings, in general, are so like, on the cusp between the two. But sort of genre convention has gone, "Yeah, you can be literary fiction as a treat."

Sorren

Maybe because of the prestige of referencing Greek mythology because like, "Ooh, it's Greek mythology so it has to be serious," which is interesting, actually. Because now that you say that I- You know, something like... It's not a good example because it's YA, but like Raybearer, okay, that's referencing mythology. It's just referencing West African mythology, so- But it wouldn't get the same treatment. And fair enough it's not in a literary style, but...

Morgan

Daughter of the Moon Goddess, for example, by Sue Lynn Tan, that is shelved in fantasy, despite being a pretty beat for beat retelling, as far as I'm aware. Meanwhile, Song of Achilles, stuff by Jennifer Saint...

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

All these like, Greek mythology, retellings get put in literary fiction.

Sorren

And people talk about them very differently as well, yeah.

Morgan

Yes.

Sorren

I can kind of see that she'd be quoted on this because of the very poetic bent to both of their writing. Speaking of the poetic writing, can we just talk about the writing?

Morgan

Yes, I love me some purple prose! I don't give a [censored] what everybody else says! Give me purple prose! Make it obscure, make it weird. Make it basically prose poetry. Give it to me!

Sorren

I'm on the same page. Also, I think there are moments in this where you get like, insane, beautiful economy of language, like some really simple turns of phrase that are the most effective. So it has both.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

They have the range as authors, they can do both. And then that means that all of it hits harder because they're using... They're not relying on one.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

A bit of language that is just like, no fancy vocabulary. This is Red's confession in the letter that is, "the last letter," in inverted commas, that she can write to Blue: "I love you. I love you. I love you. I'll write it in waves. In skies. In my heart. You'll never see but you will know. I'll be all the poets. I'll kill them all. And take each one's place in turn. And every time love's written in all the strands it will be to you."

Morgan

Yes!

Sorren

It's so good. What do you even want? I don't know what- I don't even know what to say.

Morgan

Everyone pack it up and go home. This is the best declaration of love ever. And actually, every declaration of love that you've ever said? Is actually now hers. She's taken your skin, have fun.

Sorren

Every other romance, sorry. There just aren't any more.

Morgan

Oh, it's so good. I love all of the poetry sort of lamp shading. Like one of my favorite quotes is actually on page three. And it's: "A fugitive becomes a queen, or a scientist, or worse, a poet."

Sorren

Yes. I always find that funny. (Laughs) Especially when it's being written by poets.

Morgan

(Laughs) Like yes, poets are... Poets are great, poets are insufferable, poets change the world. All of the above, is encapsulated in this meaning.

Speaker 1

It's also funny that that's coming from Red because obviously, Commandant doesn't really value art. That's something that we get told again and again. But then it's something that Red observes again and again, is that people do you like when the Atlanteans are fleeing the volcano, and she's like that, leaving everything behind except for themselves and the art. Another beautiful turn of phrase that again, is not complicated, but always strikes me and I remember it really well is Red explaining that they board the boats, "children and Gods first," because they're taking all of the idols with them. Love it.

Morgan

Like this book truly does not need to be any longer.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

It is the perfect length.

Speaker 1

I think pacing wise, it's perfect as well. Like if you showed this to me and said, "Hey, these two characters are gonna go from enemies to lovers, essentially, in this book purely through letters, and they're not even gonna see each other," I'd be like, "How on earth you're going to do that?" But they do pull it off.

Morgan

Mm. Most of the time, I'm one of those people who's like, "Enemies to lovers needs to take a whole series, and they shouldn't even think about even holding hands until book four."

Sorren

(Laughs) Yeah.

Morgan

If the enemies are already lovers in book one, that's not enemies to lovers. That's a speedrun. But this, this is allowed. This- this works.

Speaker 1

They're- they're just such good mirrors to each other, that it feels...

Like, the echoes of each other, in each other's letters, while still giving them both a distinct voice, which I don't understand how they do! But they do it!

Morgan

Mm-hm. I think also to a certain extent, it's the fact that most modern current enemies to lovers is A: heterosexual. And B: usually about an oppressor who is a man.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
And a freedom fighter who's a woman. And it's usually very tangled
up in a lot of...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Very unhealthy power dynamics,

Speaker 1
And I think also leaning very heavily on physical attraction as the
motivator. Like, often they'll like, have...

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
A tryst before they're even not-enemies anymore. They'll just be
like, "Wow, but like, we're just so attracted to each other and that
overpowers it." And I guess that is kind of the thing here, but
because it's not necessarily sexual- I wouldn't say it's not sexual....
(Laughing) Because they're being like...

Morgan
Mm, yeah, but it makes sense for them because they are two very
like-minded people on very equal playing fields, and no one else is
on the same playing field as them. Whereas several books I've read
recently...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan

Because I'm a big fan of enemies to lovers like, if it's done right. I've read a lot of fanfiction, for example. But some of the books I've read recently with an enemies to lovers plotline...

Sorren

I think here as well, they immediately have a knife to each other's throat, because if one of them exposes the other... So they're in this together very quickly, like immediately from pretty much when Red writes...

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

Her reply, that's kind of... They're kind of in it together at that point.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

They can't really betray each other without sinking one another. They're on an equal footing, and they both have this like, bone-deep isolation that they only recognize in each other, and that's the first person they've been able to connect to on this.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

And that feels very believable, somehow? I felt like it'd be very easy for it to feel manufactured so that they would have to be lovers. Does that make sense? If you're thinking about like, "How do I write these two characters in a way that they're on completely opposite sides, and then they become obsessed with each other? Oh, well, we have to give them some like matchy-matchy hang up, basically." (Laughs) But it doesn't feel forced. I'm not sure how that works. Maybe it's because they're not actually being completely upfront with each other to begin with, in terms of like, the hunger,

preoccupation, and then it sort of slowly comes out. And then you get little bits of acknowledgment. Like when Red thanks Blue for the description of the honey and the bread. It's a very subtle- I guess like it's very um... Show not tell, to the reader, which I think is also very dangerous in epistolary, because people are kind of writing about their feelings. But because these two are so repressed, they're kind of just talking around things and writing in circles. But if you're paying attention, you realize very quickly how completely on the same wavelength they are when they do little echoes of each other. There was another one that I had... Not from the letters, but another example of show not tell when Blue is reading one of the letters and also a little bit of foreshadowing here, um, and we get the sentences, "Briefly, she wonders if the hardness in her throat is poison, her inability to swallow around it anaphylactic. This does not frighten her. She closes her eyes against the alternative, which does." Like, now we know that they're in love with each other, and you didn't have to say anything about it!

Morgan

So good. Writing around the subject.

Speaker 1

Which I think is why it doesn't come out of nowhere, when they start signing... Well, one, when Blue signs her letters, "Love," and then Red comes back, which is also a fun little mismatch between them because Blue does it so subtly. She's just like, "I'm just gonna put it in my, uh... sign-off." And then Red is like, "I love you," like 100 times in the next letter, and then is like, "Sorry, if I misread it! But anyway, that was the vibe, right?" (Laughs)

Morgan

And then Blue's like "I've been wanting to say all these things all along, but you just say them out loud."

Sorren

Like the callbacks, where Blue is like, "When you said this, I'd really wanted to say this." And then she's like, "And now I'm gonna say this before you can get to me there first."

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
About the, um... I want to put the seeds on your tongue, which again, very gay. Homosexual activity, even in the future. I'm so glad.

Morgan
Just a little bit.

Sorren
Thank God.

Morgan
The future is just homosexual activity. (Laughs) Who is your favorite character?

Sorren
I knew you were gonna ask that at some point. I was thinking about it earlier. I mean, I know it's in our format, but still.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
It's so har- There's basically two options here, right?

Morgan
The real MVP of this book is Mrs Levett, I think.

Sorren
You're so right, actually.

Morgan
(Laughs) She is single handedly allowing these two gay messes to communicate.

Sorren

The guy that invents hyperbolic algebra, was it? No, hyperbolic geometry, I think. Him! No... (Laughs) Um, I think I have a slight... It's really hard because Red's so funny, but I think I have a bias towards Blue. Because I love her whole aesthetic.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

And also, I feel like the repression and the way that she talks and also her weird preoccupations are more relatable to me personally, and I don't know what that says about me.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

But that's fine. Are you on the same page?

Morgan

I think I am on the same page. I think also because at the end of the day, I think Blue changes Red more than Red changes Blue.

Sorren

Mm, mm-hm.

Morgan

I feel like this book is more about Blue than it is about Red because you're getting it through Red's point of view more than you're getting it through Blue's point of view. So you're more predisposed as a reader to fixate on Blue, because that's what red is doing.

Speaker 1

Yeah. Because you kind of... You spend more time with Red, even if it's not that much more time. Yeah. And also, yeah, Blue has always had that strain of Red in her, because as you find out by the end,

that was sort of predetermined. So her apartness is already a thing.

And then obviously, that is true for some extent, for Red as well, because she has her little, like, "I'm gonna go have a breakdown on a hill moment as a teenager."

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
All of that stuff. But yeah, I know what you mean, the fact that they both save each other gets me so much.

Morgan
I especially love Blue's moment of saving Red, I think because it seems like it comes as a surprise to her.

Sorren
Yeah, yeah.

Morgan
And it also feels like it makes logical sense at that point. And there's like, it's instinct, which is so interesting. And it's so like, sudden and violent. And then she just moves on...

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
And has to reckon with what she's done. It's so interesting.

Sorren
And then you get that scene of her lingering over the scar later, oof. And then also I love that she... She gets the story from Red obviously, so then again, we have this predetermined thing where like, this already happened by the time that Blue hears about it, but then Blue goes and does it. But she got the detail from Red about the wolf-like creature walking past slowly. And she like, does that, which is such a small detail. And arguably you could say "Well, I

mean, obviously she kind of has to at that point," because again, this is like, a time loop, essentially. Otherwise, the whole thing falls apart and doesn't make sense. But I feel like from an emotional point of view, it's this moment of her being like, "I'm going to take every possible step I can to make sure that we do meet and that everything goes this way," like in the way that they've been fighting for the strands to braid in a specific way for other ends, that's kind of the first time that one of them is taking it into their own hands and being like, "Okay, let me influence this in the way that I personally want it to come out. Because I know that I want Red in my life later down the line."

Morgan

And it also feels like giving her a moment of comfort.

Sorren

Mm, yeah.

Morgan

In a very different way to how she has been before because it's this moment of like, sort of breaks her immersion- like, breaks Red's emotion in this moment of loneliness.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And I feel like because she doesn't set out to do that originally, like, she's just on this planet, and she's guarding this thing. And then suddenly, there's Red, and like, everything falls into place for her, it makes it feel more like fate, but in an interesting way, rather than fate in the way of pieces on a chessboard, and the author's hand.

Sorren

Yeah, I could talk about it for six hours.

Morgan

The six hours sort of thing where we just go round and round in circles, like a figure of eight.

Sorren

Ah, that line as well about them being "Möbius strip bound," towards the end, speaking of figure of eights... I love it! I can't believe we haven't mentioned it yet. But obviously, the use of color in this book is just so fun. It's- it's such a like, simple mechanism to like code them both as Blue and Red. But they use it to such a clever extent by like, really picking and choosing what they use, like that moment where Blue is comparing Red to things. And then she says, "Oh, I find myself talking to you about things that are Red, but not sweet."

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

And the little addresses are so fun. The hexcode one always makes me laugh, I think it's so stupid.

Morgan

(Laughs) Yeah.

Sorren

And then the red sky at night one. And then later in the letter when Blue references feeling like she has to shy away from delight, because there's danger in delight, so she's gonna go for the warning...

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

That so.... That's just so gay. You're already falling in love with each other and you know it and you're acknowledging it and you're saying it.

Morgan
Mm-hm!

Sorren
And then also that bit where she's like, "Oh, I didn't really notice red before we took up our correspondence and now everything that I see that's red reminds me of you. The world sings to me in pebbles, and feathers, and blood." That's so good. I hate them.

Morgan
(Laughs) Leave some love for the rest of us.

Sorren
Leave some love for the rest of us! This was- Honestly, I don't think it's ever made me cry and then on this reread for some reason, I was really close. Especially towards the end. And I don't- I don't like, it wasn't sadness. It was just like, depth of emotion, I think. Like- like when people look at a painting and cry, I felt like it was that I was just like, "Wow, I'm so blown away by like, the craft that I'm gonna cry." (Laughs)

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
I didn't because I was in public. But...

Morgan
But it was close.

Sorren
It was close. It was very close.

Morgan
Yeah, I definitely cried the first time I read it. For the second time. I was like, I know they're surviving. It's fine. It's not gonna get me.

Sorren

Are you satisfied with the ending?

Morgan

I think, yes. I think because it feels like they have both gone through an emotional journey and have both come out as equal players. They've definitely moved.

Sorren

They've changed.

Morgan

They've changed, exactly.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

And also because... (Laughing) Also, because I just finished another book, which I did love, but just ends and you're like "That- that was half a story, my guy."

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

"Like, respectfully... That was half a story. Like I did give it five stars. And I did enjoy a lot. But that was half a story."

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

So I think this is more satisfying than that. Yeah. And it feels like there will be no other place to end it. Because essentially, you could go on forever, you know, like it could just keep going of them, like making this place together. And maybe you could do an epilogue of them, like sitting in the tea and drinking sun. But I think it's more

interesting to sort of go, "And maybe they went off into the sunset,
or maybe they died!"

Sorren

Sitting in the tea and drinking sun. I actually really- I know, that's
not what you meant. But actually, that's really... That's quite pretty.

Morgan

Did I say that?

Sorren

You said it like that, yeah.

Morgan

No! Let me say it again.

Sorren

You're in poetic mode, no, it's like at the end- Like, Blue dies, and
they're like, "She's wrapped in sunlight."

Morgan

You know, I'll take that. It's my- it's my inner poet coming out.

Sorren

It's your inner poet coming out.

Morgan

Mm-hm.

Sorren

(Laughs) No, I think I agree with you though. I feel like that is the
most logical end point where we've kind of like, come to the end of
the loop. And we understand like, how we got here. And we've had
this very clear character development, and then we know that they
get- Because you could probably leave it right before. Like, I think
arguably, you could cut Blue's last letter, but I think that would be
unsatisfying. I think knowing that they're going off and going to go
do their Bonnie and Clyde routine. And even knowing that the odds

are probably pretty insurmountable from everything you understand up until this point, it's still satisfying because you have that like, "Well, maybe there'll be okay."

Morgan

I think also because if you did leave it before Blue's last letter there could be people who argue that Blue didn't survive.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

And I feel like given the history of "bury your gays," I think it's narratively satisfying to be like, "Don't worry, she lived. But now they've actually got to get out alive, which is unlikely. So we're gonna leave them in this moment where they're both definitely still alive."

Speaker 1

Yeah. And they're together again, or together for the first time, pretty much, actually?

Morgan

Mm-hm.

Sorren

It's really funny that that's actually like, the only interaction that we get is Blue pretending to be a guard, basically.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

I just love the way it all comes together at the end, as well, with Red like, gathering all of the pieces of Blue so that she can get through into Garden.

Morgan

It's very narratively satisfying, to sort of walk back through the whole relationship.

Sorren

And I just love all of the descriptions of her like, first of all, just doing casual things like drinking the boiled water and then being like, cool, I'm gonna eat this goose heart or this spider or whatever. (Laughs) Like anything to get that piece of Blue. It's so good.

Morgan

To love is to be changed.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

Et cetera, et cetera.

Sorren

To love is to be consumed!

Morgan

Mm-hm.

Sorren

And to consume. Morgan, would you like to go first with your final thoughts on *This Is How You Lose the Time War*?

Morgan

I love this book. I love how different it is. I love how succinct it is. I think we need more purple prose. We need more poetic writing in sci fi especially. And yeah, I just want more like this, please. Thank you. I've been on a real sci fi kick recently, which has been very strange, but it was very refreshing...

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan
Sapphic sci fi specifically.

Sorren
That's the only kind that matters, let's be real.

Morgan
How about you?

Sorren
I could not agree with you more. This is one of my favorite books ever. It's definitely one that I answer sometimes when people ask me what my favorite book is, um... And it deserves its place on that list. I get something new out of it every single time I reread it. I could probably reread it every day for the rest of my life and still enjoy it. Yeah, I also desperately want more like this. I feel like it's given me such high standards for like short, weird experimental novellas that when they're not as weird as this, I get so disappointed.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
And when they don't commit to the bit, if you will... (Laughs) As hard as this does.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
So if you- if you're listening to this, and you're like, wow, I have a recommendation that's like This Is How You Lose the Time War. I am shaking you by the shoulders and begging you to drop it in the comments if you're on YouTube or message us if you're on any other podcasting platform. Please, please, I want to know what it is. Please, please. Thank you. In conclusion, you can bury me with this book and I'll be happy with that.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

On the subject of wanting more books like this, do we have any recommendations for people that love this?

Morgan

Well, first of all, I have to recommend my girl Charlie Jane Anders.

Sorren
Oh.

Morgan

I've been rereading some of her books recently in my sci fi kick. So All the Birds in the Sky, definitely a big one, if you like that sort of line between sci fi and fantasy being merged, and also time travel a little bit, kind of? And just kind of very poetically, nature based stuff, then that is a good one for you. It is heterosexual but it's written by a trans woman. So, yeah. And then I read her other book, I just finished today, The City in the Middle of the Night that doesn't have any, like canonically trans characters in it, but the main character goes through this very trans coded journey involving aliens. So I'm gonna put it on that shelf and be like, "This is basically a trans metaphor," and also she is a very repressed sapphic. So we love that for yeah. But yeah, that is definitely one of my recs.

Sorren

I mean, not to speak for you, but I feel that we would be remiss not to talk about The Locked Tomb.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

If you're here and still haven't read The Locked Tomb, what's going on? But like, the depth of the yearning, the themes, the apocalyptic

imagery, and vibes, and the poetry of the language, and then also sometimes the silly references to... Like, they just feel very similar.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
And the sapphics getting to be, like, unhinged about each other. In a codependent, desperate way.

Morgan
The sapphics consuming each other.

Sorren
Exactly.

Morgan
(Lauging) Quite literally.

Sorren
Mm. I just remembered something I wanted to talk about. Never mind.

Morgan
Can insert it in later?

Speaker 1
Well, I'll sneak it in and say that I... Nona the Ninth made me think of this but the way that Garden is characterized as very brutal. And not like a, "Woo, mother nature," thing. I love it. Make nature [cesnored] up, please. Because it- because it really is.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren

It desperately is. They're out here making zombie ant Nazis and stuff for their own ends. They're messed up. But that is- that is nature. So...

Morgan

That's actually also a really big theme in The City in the Middle of the Night, is this idea that physical engineering and bioengineering are the same thing.

Speaker 1

Oh, yes. Yeah. Which I feel like there's- it's prominent here. Like, if you think about it, in depth, Commandant and Garden are basically just the same in a different font.

Morgan

I mean, obviously, Steven Universe, people should go watch Steven Universe.

Sorren

Yeah. And also, I'll say that if you're like, late to the Steven Universe party, and you're like, "Oh, there's so much controversy about Steven-" Steven Universe does not as though the controversy it gets, I'm just gonna say that. You can come for me if you like, somebody that thinks that Steven Universe does deserve it. But I'm just gonna say that it was absolutely groundbreaking for what it was doing at the time, and that the music is gorgeous, and that it's so queer.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

I'm simply a huge fan of Steven Universe and I will- I will defend it.

Morgan

Yes. And also if you think that there's no way you can possibly have like, avoided all of the spoilers and you think you know everything about this show, I promise you there there are things you don't

know and there are twists that will absolutely kneecap you because I thought- I went in thinking that I knew all the spoilers...

Sorren
Ooh!

Morgan
(Laughing) And then Season Five sucker punched me in the face. I don't know how I went like, that long without knowing the season five twist. I genuinely, like...

Sorren
I was like, almost caught up and I got it, unfortunately. Just someone on Tumblr, untagged. But I was still like, "Oh!" And then I, you know, I still had a good time, when I was watching it.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
But I do think with Steven Universe as well, if you do- let's say you know, all the twists. They're still beautifully foreshadowed and stuff, so I think you will still get a huge amount out of watching it.

Morgan
Mm, I'd love to do a rewatch.

Sorren
I'm not one of those people that cares that much about spoilers if it's like, a good show or a good book. I'm just like, as long as it's executed well, I think it's still enjoyable.

Morgan
I'm one of those people who will actively look up spoilers and then get more excited because now I know when they're coming.

Sorren

Mm. I'm going to add another recommendation. Again, it's a book that we've done on the show, but it just meshes too well for me not to talk about it, because it's another weird little queer novella that does experimental things with form. And it's *In the Watchful City* by

S. Qiouyi Lu. It also explores that idea where you get- you get a little bit of this Blue, about being enmeshed in some kind of organic hive mind consciousness thing, city where everyone is sort of like, linked in some way, and an ability to sort of use bioengineering, if you like to like, move between bodies, etc. So that very specific thing also features so if you liked that idea, and that aesthetic, like if you were hearing about Blue recuperating, in her little gel ponds and thinking, "I want to see Blue chilling in a pond," then...

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
(Laughing) Then you should read *In the Watchful City*. If you're like, I just want a novel setting Garden, basically, that's kind of what's going on in *In the Watchful City*.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
And also a little bit more colonialism, exploration as well. But...

Morgan
I'm also just going to quickly throw in *All Systems Red* by Martha Wells.

Sorren
I was expecting you to recommend this. I'm so desperate to read it.

Morgan
We've got to read it, Sorren! It's so interesting in terms of gender and presentation and queer normative society, but then also still capitalism. Even with the queer normative society. It's like, yeah,

you can have seven partners, you are still an indentured servant, though! Have fun.

Sorren

(Laughing) Have you even have time to see seven partners if you're an indentured servant?

Morgan

Because you're all indentured servants together, Sorren, obviously.

Sorren

Aw, damn ethical nonmonogamy, non-ethical autonomy.

Morgan

(Laughs) That one.

Sorren

(Laughing) I was trying to do something there. And for those that don't know, that's the first book in the Murderbot series by Martha Wells.

Morgan

Yes.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

Which is quoted on the back of here. So...

Sorren

So you know it's going to be similar.

Morgan

You know the vibes are good.

Sorren

Yeah. It almost feels like cheating to recommend an author who's quoted, but I do it all the time. Anyway. So, so yeah.

Morgan

Oh, yeah. No, I do it all the time.

Sorren

Well, I mean, like, if you liked this, because of the language, you should probably read some Madeline Miller, I would say.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

You know, I would actually be more inclined to recommend The Song of Achilles over Circe in conjunction with this.

Morgan

Yeah, it's about violence, and romance and yearning...

Sorren

And the tragedy, and also that this is predetermined, and we can't escape our destinies.

Morgan

Exactly. "Name one hero who was happy, I'm going to be the first."

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

As somebody who wrote their dissertation on Achilles! Yes.

Sorren

Yes.

Morgan

It's about the little intertextual interesting things. And the fact that you as the reader know how it ends, and the gods know how it ends, and even the characters know how it ends, but they also circumvent knowing how it ends because they miss tiny context clues and foreshadowings, which even you as a reader might miss, because if you have a specific lack of knowledge of what certain stories are about... Oh, I could go on about that book for ages, even though I will never ever read it again, because I read it far too many times whilst I was writing, but also I could go on about it for years.

Sorren

Oh god, I also totally forgot the one we were recommending The Locked Tomb earlier, I wanted to reference specifically the chapter when they're in the bone cave, and looking at all of the bone mobiles and stuff. And if you were like, "I want- I want to hear more about these bone nuns," then you should definitely read Gideon the Ninth.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

Because honestly, that chapter just feels like it's set on the Ninth House. (Laughs) It's like, what are they doing there?

Morgan
What are they doing there?

Sorren

So that concludes sapphics in space summer, although it's always time for sapphics in space in our hearts. For the autumn period, which is August, September, October at The Hidden Bookcase, we are doing ahistorical autumn, which means we will be reading books with alternate histories. And we're kicking things off bringing on our very beloved editing assistant Kit Lovick, who is a big Natasha Pulley fan. So with him we will be reading The Kingdoms by Natasha Pulley which I'm very curious to get Morgan's opinion on. And, you

know, if you- if you love time travel, then- then stick around for this episode as well.

Morgan

Until then, you're always welcome through the bookcase.

Sorren

Don't forget to scritch the cat on your way out.

Sound Effect

[THEME MUSIC FADES IN]

Sorren

Thank you for listening to The Hidden Bookcase, a production of Planar Prod. On this episode you heard Morgan Greensmith and Sorren Briarwood discussing *This Is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone. You can find them both on Twitter @tithenai and @maxgladstone respectively, or visit their websites amalelmohtar.com and maxgladstone.com for more information. You can find The Hidden Bookcase on Twitter @HiddenBookcase and on Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and TikTok @HiddenBookcasePodcast. Find out more about Planar Prod at planarprod.com. Know what we should read next, or want to chat to us about what you thought of this episode's read? You can reach us at thehiddenbookcase@gmail.com, send us a DM on social media, or come chat with your fellow bookworms in our growing Discord server: the link is in the show notes. Want to support The Hidden Bookcase? Support us on Patreon for bonus episodes, audio outtakes playlists and other extras. Buy a book through our Bookshop.org page, or consider leaving us a rating or review or telling a friend how to find us. Your whispers the best way for bookworms to discover our show. For our next episode we'll be kicking off *A Historical Autumn* with *The Kingdoms* by Natasha Pulley alongside Kit Lovick, who edits on The Hidden Bookcase. We hope to see you then, and in the meantime you're always welcome through the bookcase.

Sound Effect

[THEME MUSIC RESOLVES.]

Sorren

Hi bookwyrms. Did you miss me? I'm just dropping back in to let you know about season three of Tranthologies which is now releasing wherever you get your podcasts. Tranthologies is a trans written anthology podcast with stories in pretty much every genre under the sun. Longtime listeners might be familiar with that name since Morgan and I have both written and performed on Tranthologies in the past, and there's a fabulous episode written by Morgan which is coming up this Saturday, July 6th, and I have an episode coming up this season as well. There is so, so much love poured into this show by a fabulous creative team and we'd be really grateful if you'd check it out. And I'm gonna let creator of Tranthologies, Alex Abrahams take it away from here.

Alex

Tranthologies is an anthology podcast written exclusively by trans people. If you want to experience trans rage...

Speaker 1

We are not made to regret existing, or the way we take up space. We are not made to be empty wells of grief and rage. We are not made to be anything at all. We are made for more than this.

Alex

Trans love...

Speaker 2

To the one who my heart belongs to. My thoughts are very much been with you this day...

Alex

Or trans joy.

Speaker 3

But we're not going to change the world overnight. That's not possible. So I think the best thing we can do is let ourselves feel joy, because that's what they don't want or expect us to feel.

Alex

We've definitely got something just for you. With over 60 episodes by different writers across different genres and experiences, you're bound to find something you love. Tranthologies Season 3 begins on the first of June 2024. We hope you come along to see what wonderful stories we've got in store for you. Join us, as we continue to celebrate trans lives and trans stories. But until then, keep being you every translation is beautiful and sacred. And we are so glad to share the world with you. Trans love, trans joy, trans power.