

Sorry - once again we haven't fixed this yet. Transcribing is hard and we are tired.

Speaker 1: Hello and welcome to Haunting the Narrative.

Speaker 2: 50% of Haunting the Narrative.

Speaker 1: The good ones. The good ones. The European ones. Now I feel really sorry for Meg and Lizzie because I actually adore them.

Speaker 2: Not that I don't adore you. And they were really nice about us. Ah yeah. I know time.

Speaker 1: Anyway, Marade is here with me tonight in case you didn't notice from the voice. And the sarcasm. And we are here to chat about Scarlet and Brown.

Speaker 2: Yay! Sorry, I got distracted by another notification. But yay, Scarlett and Browne! I know you did everything. This is worse than being on a team's call for work. Are you checking emails right now? No, I swear I'm not.

Yeah, no. We're here to talk about Scarlet and Brown and we're going to be more hyperactive than normal because it's quarter to eleven at night and both of us have to work tomorrow. Well, at least I do. Natasha has to get kids to school and things. So yeah, without further ado.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I have to work tonight after we finish recording this. Oh my god. Yay!

Speaker 2: Oh, I'm great being an adult. I'm questioning your life choices so hard. Anyway, we're going to actually deviate from our usual Lockwood and Co. programming and we're going to talk Scarlet and Brown.

Speaker 1: Nobody agreed to my proposal that we should do about 800 deep dive episodes on this series.

Speaker 2: Because we're doing 800 deep dive episodes on another series and I have a life.

Speaker 1: Wait, isn't podcast something where you just kind of exponentially add them and then it gets easier? I don't know. Anyway, we are so off track. I listen to other people's podcasts and they all get off track in the intro and I think, haha, we're not that bad. And apparently without Lizzie and Meg to guide us, me and my raid are that bad. Apologies, everybody. Let's get into it. Right?

Speaker 2: Why are we talking about Scarlet and Brown?

Speaker 1: Why are we talking about Scarlet and Brown? Because we really liked it. That's why. Look, we read Lockwood and Co. We obviously liked Lockwood and Co at least a tiny little bit.

I'm kind of ambivalent about it. Yeah, I know. I know.

There are better things, aren't there? But anyway, since we kind of liked Lockwood and Co, we thought, well, we'll give Scarlet and Brown a shot too. And also, we were just kind of lukewarm on Scarlet and Brown. So we decided to do at least one episode, maybe about five more episodes, but get episode in this podcast.

Speaker 2: I've already had an idea for another one, even just talking through the outline for this episode. So yeah, it's trouble.

Speaker 1: So my 800 episode master plan may still yet come to fruition. Anyway. But since that's not actually part of the plan, this episode is going to be a little bit ambitious, like our very first Lockwood and Co episode, which was about Lucy. And we talked about everything to do with Lucy. And it just felt a little bit scatterbrained compared to our later episodes. But we're going back to that. We're going to do it deliberately this time around.

We have no choice.

There are spoilers everywhere in this. We have no choice exactly. We have no choice. There are spoilers everywhere in this episode. We are assuming that you've read the books. We're not going to recap through all three books because they are quite jam packed with narratives, themes.

Yeah. It would take us more than an hour to go through it enough so that we can then talk about these characters. We're just going to talk about the characters. If you read the books, great.

If you haven't, I'm sure you'll have fun. Are we going to start our sporadic Scarlet and Brown deep dive series of episodes? Because they're going to pop up here and there over the next couple of months. We're starting this series off with a talk about the characters. Why are we going to talk about the characters? Well, it's because this series, this story is beyond anything else. It's about characters.

Speaker 2: It is really like personalist. It has a great cast to be fair. The overall cast is really engaging. You've got the central characters, Albert and Scarlett, the eponymous Scarlett and Browne, but you also have their friends, Eddie and Joe, the kind of cantankerous old man and his mute granddaughter. There's even a kind of like Kipps-Lockwood sort of combo character.

It's like if you put Kipps' patheticness in Lockwood's body and you produce Mallory, who's the greatest character ever written, I will not be accepting criticism. No one touch my terrible son who has every disease. But there aren't any animal sidekicks. Although, to be fair, have they ever had an animal sidekick? The Bartimaeus trilogy had a non-human sidekick. The Lockwood and Co had a ghost sidekick. So there's no non-human sidekicks. I think Mallory actually doubles as the non-human sidekick, even though he's a human being, technically.

Speaker 1: I was going to say maybe Edie, because she's a child and anybody with children knows children, are delightful, loving, wonderful creatures who are also kind of what the hell. But also possibly it could be all the half psychic, super powered up humans, but there's more of them than normal humans.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I suppose there's a little bit of transhumanism in this series. I mean, there's nuclear reactions and mutations and all the lines are a bit blurred and fuzzy there. So anyway, let's have a very brief talk about the story.

Speaker 1: Okay, so the story of Scarlett and Brown, it is... I suppose it's kind of marketed as a Western, because here in the UK we are a bit obsessed with Westerns.

Because they're good.

And they're fun. I guess they don't really hit very close to home for us.

No, that's true.

But the story is not actually some grand epic that you might think it is. I mean, you think it's going to be a hero's journey in many ways, which I guess it kind of is, except the conclusion of the story is not the conclusion of the story.

The hero's journey. You know, they do start a rebellion, but this isn't The Hunger Games. The rebellion is not the point of the story. The heist or the bank heist or robbing is not the point of the story. When you start reading the books, you kind of think this is a story about maybe Albert coming into his powers, Scarlett coming into her morality, then working together. And they're going to win over the evil that controls the world. And it does kind of happen. Some of them does happen explicitly, but it's like a side quest.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it's not really. The focus isn't really on taking down the system. It's kind of like something that sort of do accidentally in the process of trying to do more important things like reuniting Scarlett with her brother and stuff.

Because it's, I mean, ultimately what it's about, it's about very damaged, very hurt people learning to trust and love and connect with people and to accept support. So yeah, that's the reason we liked it so much, I guess.

Speaker 1: I love how you just delivered that. Yeah, so it's a beautiful story, honestly. I kind of do think that we need some more stories like this. But then, you know, when people actually set out to write stories like that, it normally comes out preachy. This isn't preachy at all. It is absolutely gorgeous. It's wonderful.

But the fact that this story is about those two people, rather than all the heists, blah blah blah blah, is why it's so important that we need to talk about the main pair themselves. Yes, Scarlet Brown. Yes, did it have a ship name?

Speaker 2: I think people call them Maroon because color theory, if you mix brown and Scarlet, you get the color Maroon, which is kind of a yicky color, but it's a cute ship name. It is.

Speaker 1: It's a cute ship name, but it's also impossible to Google.

Speaker 2: Yeah, if you look for Maroon fic, you're gonna probably get RPF about Maroon 5 and no one wants that.

Speaker 1: Oh my god, does anybody ever write RPF about Maroon 5?

Speaker 2: I don't want to know. No one tell me, please.

Speaker 1: I'm sure they do, I'm sure they do.

Speaker 2: No, no, no, no, no, no. We've gone too far down this tangent already. I'm pulling a Lizzie. Stop it.

Speaker 1: I was just gonna say, I have once upon a time, I heard the theory that Maroon 5 had sold their souls to the devil because they have a million number ones, but they're nobody's favorite band.

Speaker 2: This is true. I mean, they're tuneful. They're tuneful. I like some of their songs, but anyway.

Speaker 1: Anyway, they are not Albert Browne, who is who we're gonna talk about first. Yes. I know the title says Scarlett and Browne, but we're gonna go with Browne and Scarlett. And also, why is Scarlett her first name and Albert gets his last name in the title? It's the whole like Kamala vs Trump thing again. It really annoys me.

Speaker 2: I think it's because it's the cute color thing. It would also be too much if they both had color first names or both had color second names. It's kind of a pleasing kind of symmetry, but not too symmetrical.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I get it. I actually like that it's called Scarlett and Browne as well. It's a very cute title. It's very clever.

Speaker 2: Also, no one calls Albert Browne in the books.

Speaker 1: And nobody ever at all calls him Browne.

Speaker 2: He's such an Albert. If ever there was anyone who deserved the name Albert, it's a little bit like his name was Eustace Scrubbs and he nearly deserved it. His name was Albert Brown and he fully deserved it. I love him to bits, but never was there more Albert Brown elittle man.

Speaker 1: My dad's name is Albert actually. If I was a boy, I would have been called Albert III.

Thank God you weren't a boy.

Natasha: Albert is actually nothing like my dad. Albert is very, very, very sheltered. Or at least this is how Lizzie and Meg put it in the mini episode that they did a couple of weeks ago, which was supposed to encourage you to read Scarlet and Brown. Hope you've done your homework. Exactly. Did you do the homework for this episode? Because if you didn't, you're missing out.

Speaker 2: Did you complete the reading assignment? If not, fail. You can do some extra credit though. My fics in the comments. You can leave a comment. That's your extra credit.

Natasha: You don't write Scarlett and Browne fic.

Mairead: I could do it.

Natasha: No, Lizzie does actually. Lizzie does.

Speaker 2: That's true. Review Lizzie's fic and we'll let you make it up.

Speaker 1: When they said that Albert is sheltered, what they actually meant was he had zero experience in the world, but not because he was, you know, a protected little teenager, but because he grew up locked in basically a tortured house. You know, from the time he could remember, he was living in a place called Stomor. Stomor is it seems between a, you know, it's kind of presented as a cross between a psychiatric facility and a prison. And the inmates are there. They're not allowed to talk to each other. They go from their rooms to, you know, experiments, which is like torture and they're back to their rooms. And that's kind of his whole life. You know, sometimes he goes to the canteen, sometimes he goes to the day room, like a common room where they can hang out but not talk to each other. And that's his whole life up until the time that he breaks out. But it's not quite as clean as that.

In book three, they actually go back to Stonemoor and Scarlett's, Scarlett's point of view and she's describing iron posts with chains and whips and it is nasty. Like it's a full on torture facility that he's raised in.

Quantanimal. Maybe worse.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it is. It's yeah, but without, you know, the semblance of human rights compliance. I do, like, I do agree that actually that Albert is kind of sheltered in a way. Like he's sheltered from the like this post-cataclysm world in that he's one of the few people whose early experiences are sufficiently horrible to make this world like the ruined mutant world that the story takes place in. He finds that beautiful because his past experiences are so awful. He can actually appreciate the beauty. Like, like when he gets out of Stomor, being free is like so amazing that he can see beauty in all sorts of like weird and wonderful things. Like there's that scene in book one where they're riding down the river and they're attacked by these spear toothed birds and one nearly kills him and he looks at this dead bird and he's fascinated by its beak. He's like Scarlet, isn't that beautiful? He's just like he sees beauty in the thing that just tried to kill him, which is maybe maybe a little reflection of his relationship with Scarlet there.

I don't know. He does have the capacity to see beauty in very dangerous, damaged things. So the thing is that that torture kind of made him one of the few people in the world who could receive that world awful as it is as a gift. And that actually makes him a force for like positive change because everyone we meet in these stories is like they're either trying to keep the change out.

So like the Dr. Calloway's, the faith houses, the towns, they're all like clinging to this sort of old country English vibe and resisting the changes that have come into the world. Or there are complete other extreme like the Brothers of the Hand. Is that what the gang is called? I know that the word brothers in there in hand.

Speaker 1: Yeah, the brothers of the hand. The gang, the criminals, they're, you know, they've kind of totally given into barbarism. Like they're outside the rule of law. They don't believe in it. And that's kind of the position that Scarlet herself is in when we meet her at the start of the book. So Scalbert, there's a ship name. Albert is one of the few people we meet who actually wants to live in the world as it is. I think maybe Joe is the only other one that we meet who has this kind of radical acceptance of the world. And like, it's heavily implied, I think it's implied that his granddaughter is in some way connected to the tainted. Whether it's that all kind of psychics are in

Speaker 2: some way like like the tainted, like it's just a degree of mutation, or whether it's, I don't know, somehow he ended up with a tainted granddaughter. It's unclear what he does accept her and love her anyway, despite her being, you know, one of these deviants that wouldn't be acceptable in the towns. So anyway, we're not talking about him, we're talking about Albert. So Albert is actually capable of living in the world as it is.

He's capable of accepting things. And that's what he gives to Scarlet, which I think is so important. And that's why she wants to keep him with her. Among other reasons, obviously, I think he also reminds her of her brother. But that's it.

Speaker 1: When you talk about Eti actually being part of the Tainters and Albert accepting the world. This is something that sort of struck me from my very first reading of book one is that

Albert seems to belong to the New World. Yeah. You know, whatever deviation he's got, however he came into his powers, his genetic makeup is a bit different.

But he fully belongs to the New World. Scarlet kind of fights for her place in it. And she doesn't fight to control it or to keep out as much as a lot of other people do. She kind of works with it, which is a lot like how she works with Albert as well. She works with him. She doesn't push him to do this or do that or whatever. She works with what she's got. But Albert just seems comfortable with it.

Speaker 2: Exactly. Yeah. It's a completely unique attitude. But it does. I mean, I think it takes him a while to... He's not perfect. Like those definite things that are not right in there. Yeah.

Speaker 1: He's not in any way shape or form, like equipped to survive in it when we first meet him. But he does like he'll look at the ruins at the burnt out areas at the dead zones and he'll be fascinated by them. He'll find some kind of beauty in them. And he won't be as unsettled as Scarlet or another character would be. And I always find that he just seems like he's part of the landscape in a way that Scarlet is just...

Speaker 2: Yeah, she's kind of fighting against it. She's kind of prowling through it when we will talk about that when we get to her.

Speaker 1: But despite Albert's calm with the landscape and the world that he's in, he's got some big time PTSD from the whole torture house upbringing thing. It kind of fades away a bit once Callaway dies. So a lot of it, I think, is tied specifically to her. Which makes sense because she was kind of the prime torture and it seems very much like she was kind of brainwashing, grooming, programming him in a way to sort of see her as... You know, both a source of fear and a source of validation, the only source of validation and acceptance. So you know, please her and your life will be better.

Please her, that's the only thing that you can hope for because that's the only positive feedback you're going to get is when you please her. And when she appears in book one, he just completely freezes up. He panics completely. And that's not the only way that he's really vulnerable in book one. When we meet him, he's got no muscle mass, he's got no stamina at all. Which obviously is because he's been in a prison his whole life.

You know? And like, like Maread was saying, he has no understanding of how the world works. He's been sheltered from that aspect of it. But when we do meet him, he's, you know, he's having to climb out of buses, he's having to walk across, he tracks across the forest and the fields with scarlet.

He jumps into a river, he's floating the other river, he can't swim, he can't do any of this, he can barely keep up with her. And it is because he's been like locked in a room his whole life. And I actually really like that he's written that way because I think a lot of media will kind of say, oh

yeah, this person's never left this room. And yet they know all of this stuff and they keep up with the escape and all of that.

Whereas Albert's constantly lagging behind. So I think it's more, I don't know how realistic his mindset or anything is, but I think it's a very good semi-realistic depiction of, you know, how, you know, how somebody in his kind of circumstances may, you know, actually act. And I like that they put that in.

Speaker 2: Both Albert and Scarlet are like really, really interesting in that they're allowed to be subversions of kind of maybe typical expectations. Albert is allowed to be completely weak, like completely, completely weak and useless.

He's not a macho hero at all. And Scarlet, I mean, we'll get to this a bit more, but she's allowed to be wild and rough and, you know, she's the hard drinking, hard gambling, rootin', tootin', cowboy girl, you know? So it's very much a reversal of the expectations and yet it feels completely natural as well.

But yeah. I do think it's, again, there's always this kind of tension in Strauss' writing between, I'm writing for middle graders and I'm writing about these really dark topics. So like the fact that Albert is like a long-term torture victim and is feeling the effects of this all throughout Book One.

It's a little bit played for laughs in that it's not directly, you have to think about it to realize how awful it is. He doesn't think to question his physical inability. He just admires Scarlet's capability and she doesn't feel sympathy for his weakness either. She just irritated by him. I mean, I think actually she does feel sympathy, but if anyone shows weakness around her, it inspires feelings of protectiveness, which inspires us. Not so much weakness as vulnerability, like kind of true vulnerability, but anything that kind of makes her feel protective reminds her of this brother who she lost. It makes her really defensive and irritable. So I think a lot of her initial anger with Albert is to do with him reminding her of her brother and that making her simultaneously drawn to him and like upset and angry with him. That's my theory.

Speaker 1: Say, I just think Albert's really fricking annoying.

Speaker 2: Oh yeah, there's that too. When they first meet. There's that too. You know, Scarlet's like, we have to keep walking or we're going to get caught by a militia and like hum drawn quarters and Albert's like, yes, but look pretty rock. Yes, but my feet hurt. Oh, but I'm so hungry. Oh, but I'm just not fast enough. Oh, but I just and he's just he's not apologetic about it at all.

No, it's true. And that's kind of again, like maybe the self centeredness you'd expect from someone who's never really been allowed to interact with other people. There is a little bit of the world revolves around me in the first book.

But yeah, I mean, I think there is it's kind of almost there in its absence. Like if you look at Scarlet's internal monologue carefully when she first meets Albert, there's a lot to do with like

with his helplessness and his his youthfulness. Like she describes him as a boy and she emphasizes his being younger than her, which just really makes me feel that she's thinking of of Thomas and she makes this fairly uncharacteristic decision or well, what seems to be in contradiction with her normal behavior, this decision to like let him come with her.

And again, I really I do think that there's a little memory that she's resisting there. But anyway, sorry, I'm now leading into the second half of the episode, which I'm not supposed to be doing. It's 10 past 11 at night. I accept no responsibility for my actions after 10pm.

Speaker 1: I don't think it's the time that's causing this. Okay, you're obviously just a Scarlet fan.

Speaker 2: I am. She's great. I love her.

Speaker 1: I like them both, but I have to admit, like the more I reread it, the more I tend towards Albert.

Speaker 2: I mean, I like them both. I think I think what I really like is how they interact with each other, which is it's a little bit like Lachael and that it's really hard to talk about the one without talking about how, you know, they're they grow into each other.

Speaker 1: Once you start talking about their growth, you really can't talk about them about the other because it's just so heavily intertwined there. But before all of that growth starts, you know, I love Albert, especially because he's so you know, he comes what happens like Scarlet saves him from a bear and he and he starts thinking that Scarlet died. And so he starts like basically delivering a soliloquy to her on the hillside. And then Scarlet says, hey, I'm not dead, but he thinks the best of him. He's going so bad, please so bad.

Speaker 2: It's really funny. I don't know what it's almost Shakespearean. Like, but he just I mean, I suppose again, he kind of talks like someone who's learned to speak out of like a book, which, you know, if you're only interactions are with people who are like torturing you like

Speaker 1: they're torturing and yeah, and brainwashing you then.

Speaker 2: Yeah, that's probably explains why his speech is a little bit funny.

Speaker 1: But he's just he just he's got this big innocent vibe and everything's wonder, everything's gratitude. That's one of the reasons why he's so annoying at first because it's all like why died and empty head, no thoughts. That's the impression you get. Exactly. And then like even in his POV because Scarlet Brown, if you haven't read them, they switch POVs. Yeah, his POVs as well, like his early ones, it's all complete fluff essentially and how you know how this beautiful girl saved him.

He never schools are beautiful, but you know, it's waxing miracle, man. But then there's just these throwaway lines, like he goes, he's just following her whistling to himself and he puts his

hands in the pocket of his prison trials and settles into his Scarlet's mind. Yeah, like wait, wait, wait in his what? Then he do what to Scarlet's mind?

Speaker 2: Yeah, like wait. Yeah. Scarlet, like as we're like slowly discovering him and being like, wait, wait, there is there's something a bit off about this guy. What's going on? He's not what he seems on the surface. Scarlet is also going through the same process, which is quite fun.

Like she goes through it at the same time as the reader. So, you know, there's the militia, this militia. Oh, how do you say that word militia militia militia militia.

Speaker 1: Yeah. There's militia tracking Scarlet because she robs the bank.

Speaker 2: But then they keep like chasing them. They keep chasing them. And she's like, this is so weird. Like, why is everyone, you know, why are they this desperate to get their money back?

Speaker 1: Exactly. Because normally the militia and she's robbed enough banks to know normally the militia will follow you for a certain distance. But because the wilds are super dangerous, eventually they go, we're all going to die or maybe they all die. I don't know, but they go back.

Speaker 2: They don't follow for very long. So then, you know, she has this great moment of like kind of confronting the people who are chasing them going like, are you really that desperate to have your money back? And they're like, what are you talking about? What makes you think we're after you? And that's the big reveal of like, what the hell is Albert? Like, what's going on with him?

Speaker 1: That's not even the big reveal.

Speaker 2: Well, no, it's not. It's not. But it's like kind of the first of like the it's one of the first moments that makes you go, what? God in the books. And there's a lot of those. Yes.

Speaker 1: And it just, it slowly dawns on you, right? Like when you reread it, you can see like Scarlett's actually really off put when she comes across the bus that she finds them in because it's blown outwards. So something came from inside and she thinks that's weird, which it is weird.

Speaker 2: It is weird. But then Albert comes out and he's so completely defenseless and useless that this couldn't possibly be connected to him, except that it is. So there's, yeah, there's all these great clues.

Speaker 1: And it just slowly dawns on both Scarlett and the reader that he's actually really dangerous. Yeah. He's super dangerous. And by the time Scarlett finds the wanted poster, it's

like everything clicks in your head. And he's like, oh, that makes so much sense. But at the same time, it's completely shocking.

Speaker 2: Yeah. It's another, what moment? Like I said, there's a lot of them.

Speaker 1: The writing really is super, super clever in that. And you know, like we said, like a lot of the book is Albert's point of view already. And despite it being an Albert's point of view, it doesn't reveal the mystery. And it doesn't feel forced. It doesn't feel like, you know, stowards like consciously or deliberately avoiding these kind of thought patterns.

Speaker 3: It just feels very natural. Supernatural.

Speaker 1: It does kind of make me think of, I don't know how many people listening would have heard it, but there was an interview a while ago. I'm not sure how long a while is there. Was it clustercon?

Speaker 2: I think he definitely read some little snippet of the second, how he had originally planned to write the second Lockwood & Co. book from Lockwood's POV. So he read this tiny little snippet from his POV, which is very fun. Yes.

Speaker 1: I love that as well because Lockwood's POV in that is very energetic and kind of bouncy. And a lot of thick writers don't write him like that. So sometimes when I'm writing Lockwood pick, I go back to that and I try and think, okay, you know, where was he actually at at this point in the story? I don't know, I think it was in the series. But the reason why Strad didn't continue writing it from Lockwood's POV was apparently partly because it would reveal the mystery. All of the mystery about Lockwood's backstory, all of that, it would reveal him unless he deliberately made him think about other things and it just wouldn't work. It would be too sad. He couldn't make it work, so he quit the idea.

But he's obviously made it work here with Albert, which I love. I love seeing writers grow. And it's like Jonathan Strad, the first time that I read the Lockwood and Co series, I was reading these going, these books are a masterclass in storytelling. And I think myself just by reading these and trying to write thick for these, and you know, I think that I have become a much better writer because the pacing and the, you know, the seeding, everything is completely on point. The more you look, the more you find. But it is nice to see that even like a writer of that colour can improve. There's always space to improve and you get better and you find yourself able to do things that you weren't previously able to do. You're encouraging. It is. And if we had Meg here, I'm sure she would say so. I hope one day he decides to finally write us a kiss.

Speaker 2: And then I will say, no, he shouldn't do that. I like that he doesn't write kisses. No, I genuinely, I have a big rant about this. And Lizzie and Meg aren't here to stop me, so I'm going to say it. Like, no, no, no, like my theory on this, right? It's like a kiss, like in writing, it's kind of, it's a commodity. Like, you know, they're so overdone that like a kiss isn't necessarily a moment that's, or it's not, it's not a moment that's necessarily specific to a couple. Like the surrounding

circumstances and their reactions to it may be, but like, there's only so many ways that you can write to people, like putting their lips together.

You know? So like when I'm reading like 90% of the time, my eyes are just like skating over like any description of a kiss. Like, it's, I'll be honest, it bores me a bit. And particularly if you... See,

Speaker 1: that's really funny to hear because I have constantly, consistently actually heard in thick writing circles, like people are scared to write kisses. They're worried about getting it right. It's hard to write a kiss. Oh really? Yeah, especially... They should let it stop them more.

Speaker 2: Sorry, being horrible tonight. But like, I mean, the thing is a lot of the time, like in, in, in, in not just in thick, in all sorts of writing, a kiss, like on TV and in movies as well, the kiss is the shorthand. These characters are intimate now.

They've had their big moment and this is what shows that they're now intimate with each other. But to me, that's just lazy writing. You have to find what, what good writing is, is finding the specific thing, the thing that really says something about these characters and that situation that they're in, and then only, that the thing that could only be them, do you know? And Stroud is really good at writing these moments of like hyper specific intimacy that could only have that level of intensity, of meaning and of force, like, like emotional force coming from these two characters. And I think those moments like stay in my memory far more effectively because of it. Like, I mean, I'm thinking of some lock-lil moments in the empty grave, but I'm going to say that we have more lock-lil episodes coming up. No, I pick one, pick one because I'm trying to think of one. Okay, for me, the absolute stand out is the moment in the empty grave when Lucy comes in and like sits on Lockwood's armchair and he's reading his parents' lecture and she leans over and she flicks off his light and she kind of says, are you still up or something like that?

But it's just, it says so much about their closeness and like kind of her care for him and like just a kind of a sense of possessiveness and it just, it says so many things about them. I'm still thinking about it. I don't think I would still be thinking about a kiss, you know? And it's the same with the moment, if I had to pick a moment for Scarlett and Brown, which would be similar. There's a moment in the third book, which now I've only read it the once, so the details are a little bit like the exact details are a little bit hazy.

Speaker 3: I think I know what moment. They're after on, they're standing up on a ruin or something like they've climbed up to a high place to survey this compound that they're planning to break into to try and find Scarlett's brother.

Speaker 1: And they are 99% sure that they're going to die.

Speaker 2: They're 99% sure they're going to die. It's a real, well, this is it kind of moment. And like they're up there, the wind's blowing. I think the sun is setting.

It's a gorgeous moment. And he takes off her hat. So this is a thing that, you know, because Scarlett or Albert can read minds, which we'll get to as well. Scarlett wears this hat with an iron band in it so that he can't get into her head. So this hat is like the barrier that she's erected between the two of them, between him and her mind. And there's always a sense with the two of them that he's perceiving her more than she wants to be perceived. And yet she also she wants it simultaneously. There's like a push pull there of like, she likes it. She doesn't like it. There's things that she's hiding. But very often when you're hiding things, what you know deep down that what would actually make you feel better is for someone to look at them. So anyway.

Speaker 1: And it really upsets Albert as well because Albert is genuinely not reading her mind for this kind of stuff that she wants to hide. He's not taking anything that she's not giving. You know, and he avoids doing it. He will deliberately like look away and things like that. And he does bring up a couple of times that he's annoyed about the hat, but he generally just lets it be.

Speaker 2: But it's just such a gesture of like, she's so touchy about having her space invaded. Like for him to take it off is kind of like stripping her naked almost, you know, there's nothing between them like mentally. And he takes it off as well.

Speaker 1: He takes it off. Yeah. And she lets it. Every other time she takes it off for a reason, he takes it off.

Speaker 2: Yeah. It's just there's so much in it. But the thing is, like, he takes it off her, but he doesn't look he closes his eyes and he leans his forehead against her. So to read to read her mind because of the way his telepathy works, he would have to actually have his eyes open, he'd have to be looking over her head. But he doesn't look so he just there's this gorgeous sense of like trust and honor and respect and intimacy in it. And I mean, maybe maybe there are characters and situations in which you could do this with a kiss, but it's not Scarlett and Albert like this is the other thing between the two of them.

I like I really like I think there's like kind of a definite sense of like a special friendship and a special interest that's just kind of waiting for that moment to just tip over the edge. But they're both so hurt that I think they need a lot more time to heal before they can they can get there. So I wouldn't have liked to kiss between these characters. I also wouldn't have liked to kiss between Lachlan for the record.

Speaker 1: So see, I actually disagree. They're not in that I wouldn't have liked to kiss or anything like that. I actually think that in book three Scarlett and Bran have had many kisses. Not more secret slogging. Stop it. I think Albert and Scarlett have kissed plenty of times.

No, not secret slogging. I think that they're like together and it's just they're treated as a couple by everybody. They act like a couple scarlet just casually says, I love you. You know, she broke. Yes, she does. She says, and I love you for it or something like that. When he says, oh, yeah, I talked to the guy to interrogate him about your brother again.

Speaker 2: I don't remember that. But actually, I was thinking about like how like, no, sorry, we'll get to that.

Speaker 1: But yeah, like they they seem officially together. So like the big kiss that is when people get together that would have worked for Lachlan. Like you could have had a kiss in there for Lachlan and it would have worked. Would it have added anything?

I don't think so. It would not have added anything, but it would have worked. But the big kissing for Scarlett and Bran would not have worked because I think by this point, they basically were married for a good two years. You know, and they're past all of that. Do we like each other? What's going on? Will we won't we all of that?

Speaker 2: I think I think that yes, I'd have to reread. I've only read the books the once. So like I'm kind of halfway through my reread of book one.

Speaker 1: You've got to reread because when you get to book three, it's like, oh, they are like officially together. And it's at the point that this is old news. It's like when you've been with someone so

Speaker 2: long that it's just it's 25 past 11.

Speaker 1: Stop telling everybody the time. It's not 25 past 11 to the people listening.

Speaker 2: Hey, you're allowed timelines. I'm allowed to tell everyone the time.

Speaker 1: Anyway, anyway, let's get back to the topic at hand. We were talking about Albert actually being a dangerous dude. Okay. Why is he a dangerous dude? Why is he wanted? We did kind of talk about it a bit. So what's special about him, right?

Speaker 2: He has terrible hair. No, he has these powers. He has a certain set of special skills. I'm not going to do a little impression because it would be embarrassing. But like so and they're kind of gradually revealed to us again, like a little stroud's very good at like expanding things slowly keeping the tension going. So Albert does have like these like powers and he first admits that he can he can read minds like so Scarlet figures that out because he's behaving oddly. And she kind of I think she threatens to got him and then he's like, yeah, I can read minds. Yeah.

Speaker 1: She gets the wanted poster and she sits down at the table over dinner and says, I'm really excited because you're going to explain all about this wanted poster or I'm going to cut you with my knife or something like that when they're sitting like in a restaurant.

Speaker 2: And this is that restaurant. I this is the moment when some server comes over and it's like, shall I bring you the couples eel and wine special?

Speaker 1: Yeah, we've like eels in a heart shape or something. And she's like, no, you're giving us sausage. Fish and chips.

Speaker 2: Yeah, but it is like it's a cool a very cool concept for mind reading in that like he actually sees people's thoughts. He doesn't hear them. So he has to have a visual on people to like save them. That's what it's called in the books like which kind of implies that his telepathy involves like a certain amount of interpretation. Like he people's thoughts are confused and nonlinear. They overlap and getting coherence out of them is like panning for gold.

You have to like filter things. So yeah, that's that's how his mind that's the first of his skills that we learn about. The second one is that his body is like crazy resilient. Like, you know, he can go through things that should kill someone else. Like, for example, probably the bus crash should have killed him.

Yeah. But it's not it is there, I think in book one, but it's not actually pointed out to us that, you know, he can survive improbable things until book two or three. I think in book three, Mallory says it explicitly.

Speaker 1: Yeah, book three Mallory says it explicitly in book two. I think in book two, he might say explicitly as well. She definitely hears about it from Mallory. But she starts to wonder about it before them because there's some massive crash or something.

Speaker 2: Yeah, there's the thing in the in the mind and like, yeah, there are definitely moments where he should be pulverized and he's not. But yeah, like the biggest scariest trait that Albert has is this telekinesis. So like by he's really struggling to control it when we first meet him, like it bursts out of him when he's when he's scared, he calls it the fear and it like literally it shreds people. Yeah.

Speaker 1: And this is because that's what sort of the stone wall the torture house taught him to do that they taught him to associate it with pain to associate it with fear so that he didn't like it.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it's it's it's kind of it makes him feel awful using his powers like it really drains him.

Speaker 1: But I think I think that's part of just making sure that he's only going to use his powers for their benefit, maybe.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Yeah, they're quite possibly. But anyway, like he does gradually he starts he has this power of telekinesis he can move things around with his mind he can do an awful lot. He he starts to learn to control it and to use it and he becomes less scared of it and by book three he's like full on like just casually torturing a guy with it and then he's like, hey babe, tortured a guy for you. She's like, oh, you're so sweet.

Speaker 1: Um, not exactly. That's what happened.

Speaker 2: That's kind of I'm reading from the book. She's not.

Speaker 1: She's not. They can't see me. I could be reading from the book. Anyway, I know she's not because I know that scene very well. Okay. Okay. Anyway, anyway. Yeah, his telekinesis powers absolutely like off the wall strong as well. So we see a lot of characters who've got telekinesis, but some of them can only manage like lightweight things or you know they don't have a lot of power behind that. Albert has a ton of power behind that. He's probably the strongest telekinetic person that we see in the books. He can like shift entire mountain size at one point he picks up an entire warehouse doesn't he? With like drops.

Speaker 2: Yeah. On my terrible son.

Speaker 1: We barely you know he barely breaks his word. It doesn't really cost him anything to do that in book three. We see they set up a bank heist and as they're leaving the bank heist they're getting shot at by like 500 guns on all sides and he is controlling the area around him and Scarlett as they move through the town.

So that none of these bullets hit them while simultaneously just destroying the entire town as they walk down the street. He's pulling the facet of buildings off. He's ripping up the road. He's doing all of this at the same time as they're leaving. Yeah.

Speaker 2: I hope the movies that they're supposedly making of these books I hope they have like a really good budget because I want to see Albert wreck the place. Yes.

Speaker 1: Yes. We want to see Albert wreck the place. I got I really I really hope these movies come out because I think he's going to have such a big fan base when they come out because like we were saying he's so sweet and hesitant and all that but also he just goes around killing everything. Well not goes around killing him but he can destroy a whole place he messes it up. He rips people to shreds. He is just the epitome of poor little meow meow.

Speaker 2: He is. He's the original poor little meow meow.

Speaker 1: I think you forgot what original means but anyway. Yeah. No I did. I think he will love him. The internet will love him. He invented poor little meow meow. Now a big thing about poor little meow meow is that they are kind of like morally very cool with killing people. He's a big girl. Yeah. He is so much. He's not morally cool with the idea of killing people when Scarlett's doing it.

Yeah. He's always like don't kill him don't kill him don't kill him but you know he's done it plenty and he's an excellent like before we get into his killing sprees I want to talk about how he's actually an excellent liar and I sort of think that's partly because when he's at Stomor he just doesn't have much connection with other people but because he's always sitting there he's just got all these opportunities to like watch and observe everybody and I think that must kind of give

you some kind you know combine that with his mind reading he's got an excellent insight into the human psyche how people think how people feel how people are likely to think and feel and he uses that to his advantage fully he's quite manipulative.

Speaker 2: Yeah I mean I don't I'm not sure if I describe it as manipulative but then again like the I haven't reread enough to like fully flesh out my thoughts on this.

Speaker 1: No he pulls it out you haven't read enough you knew we were doing this episode you proposed the date. Yeah she starts the episode saying did everybody do the required reading did she do the required reading did she help.

Speaker 2: No I did maybe 60% of the required reading.

Speaker 1: Now anyway, anyway, no he is quite manipulative but because it's Albert it just comes out in little bits here and there and you always kind of second guess yourself and you think whoa and then he's back to talking about oh how pretty are the sunlight dancers on the leaves and you sort of forget about it, you gloss over it, it's a bit like Lucy saying I screamed, I screamed, I screamed at you, you just kind of gloss over it.

Right? But he does, the first thing we see him do that's fully manipulative I think is when he's talking Scarlett into taking him along in the backpice and he's leveraging his mind reading to manipulate her into it and he does it very smoothly. He's talking like a huckster who's done it a million times before and you know he probably hasn't. You know he probably hasn't but he pulls it off, he pulls it off really well and another one that kind of jumped out of me is in book two there is like a one bed scenario where they check into a hotel where Albert checks them into a hotel and he checks them into a room with only one bed and he's like oh it's the only one they had left, I don't think so. It feels very much like he did that on purpose, maybe not because, sorry maybe not because he was trying to get some, I think it's more just he wanted to spend more time with her. I think it's a bit more innocent than people would think but I very much think that he did it deliberately, that's the feeling that I get from it.

Speaker 2: My lack of knowledge of book two is letting me down here.

Speaker 1: He's just very unapologetic about it, again it's kind of glossed over that they're sharing the room and she's like you can sleep on the floor and he's fine with that but I don't think he does, I do think they end up sharing the bed because later on it's like oh she sits on their bed or something like that, you know that's, yeah it's the phrase, if they sit on the bed to go over the maps and everything and for the record I think this is before they officially get together, you know in my head they get together between book two and three, thank you. Well the end of book two is when Scarlett opens up to him and actually lets him into her past. This is true, this is true.

Speaker 2: Actually that is one part of book two that I remember really clearly is that hug they have outside the end which is really, really cool.

Speaker 1: And on the reread I think a lot of book two is like Albert kind of being like hey we like each other, hey we like each other, hey we like each other, what are we going to do about that Scarlett being like yeah but no. You know that's kind of the vibe that I get and obviously that's like the BCD plot because this is Jonathan Stroud book and it's just not that important but it's fun to have that running in the background. But anyway he's 100% unapologetic of the fact that he's booked them into one room knowing that Scarlett would not be happy about that but he doesn't care, he's fine with it which you know if it was anybody else would make him come across as a little bit of an asshole but despite that he is super, super, super respectful of people's autonomy I think and maybe that's because he had none growing up but like I said earlier like he doesn't read Scarlett's thoughts. There's a point in book two where like Malo is like what do you mean you don't know about her backstory like I know all the lore of course I know it all I just looked at her and he's like no I didn't and he was he gets really mad about it too because he sees that as a violation which is.

Yeah. But you know he's very respectful about it and yet he's super manipulative in a way that like Scarlett isn't Scarlett, well outright lie but she's not manipulative to the same degree that Albert is and.

Speaker 2: I'm not sure if it's manipulation or obliviousness in some cases but anyway sorry continue.

Speaker 1: I know I think it's all deliberate because he's such a planner, he plans things like how did he get out of Stonemore? Stonemore was like I said it's half psychiatric hospital, it's half prison and everyone in it is a bit like Albert like they can blow things up, they can make you know they can move things with their mind all of this stuff so obviously they've got a ton of security and he slowly you know puts together the plan he finds out about a flaw he decides he's not even gonna think about the flaw just to make sure it's protected.

He palms the sleeping meds, he sets this up so far in advance so that he can get out and that's just him kind of a nutshot so he's very strategic and at first that strategy isn't really worth a whole lot because he doesn't have much knowledge of the outside world but you know in book three there's a point where they're being chased by the tainted and it's too many it's like a bazillion of them they're not being chased they're kind of being hunted you know and he's the one that comes up with the plan in the field and in book three he does come up with quite a few of the little plans or you know he's got a mind for strategy. Yeah and like I was saying he's the immoral aspect of it like Callaway in book one there's this quote where she's talking to Scarlett about it and she's telling Scarlett that he's such a monster and she's like no he's not this is a thing in book one people constantly telling Scarlett that he's a complete monster which does seem overblown but does seem to also have a little bit of truth in it because she goes ahead she says to him here's the quote that Callaway says to Scarlett we have high security at Stonewall there's a series of courtyards lit by guard posts Albert forced the window at dawn walked across the yards one by one at the first guard post we found four dead men at the second two at the final

gates he met the warder Michael his main carer there was an altercation at the end of which the gates were blown out and Michael torn to pieces his pockets have been rifled his money taken.

Speaker 2: Yeah yeah that's pretty conclusive I mean the thing is you do have to filter that through the fact that it's coming through Callaway who's a psychopath. I mean Callaway's a psychopath. Yeah he has an interest in presenting Albert in the worst possible light so yeah.

Speaker 1: Absolutely but the facts as they stand and also I mean Albert is obviously trying to escape he's running for his life but we have seven people dead also he robbed them he robbed the corpses which was a very practical thing to do and it was good thinking otherwise he wouldn't have been able to afford the money for the bus that he then blows up but from his narration you would not think that he would be the kind of character capable of killing someone and robbing the corpse. No you just don't think he would be like it's never mentioned in his thoughts at all he doesn't feel guilt about it and you think okay well they were you know people who okay they raised him Michael was his main carer but he was tortured all his life I don't think carer means the same thing there as it does to you and me but it just doesn't bother him in the slightest like the slavers that he kills a lechlaid I always said that lechlaid and I looked it up the other day it's lechlaid and I'm annoying about it.

I can't possibly tell you anyway. No it is lechlaid it sounds awful I don't know why they call it lechlaid they should change the name lechlaid it's much prettier anyway. Sounds like lechlaid. The slavers that he kills that lechlaid I'm gonna be the change I want to see in the world the slavers that he kills that lechlaid he doesn't think about it he like casually rips three people pieces and goes oh well they were bad people anyway and just moves on and that detachment is kind of terrifying to me.

Speaker 2: Yeah I don't know it's as you say he doesn't seem to feel guilt because there's like I don't know there's a quality of innocence about him but I mean I don't want to say it's a lack of understanding but his helplessness like certainly in book one he's not really in control of like his powers very much so there there is a sense that he's kind of helpless as regards those forces.

Speaker 1: But see he does have more control than he's letting on this is where the not doing a reread has let you down he has more control than he's letting on because when he blows up the port at lechlaid he deliberately aims for the barrels and he gets them he picks up the flowers and he says sometimes he can't move anything at all in the experiments but normally he can pick something up and you know he knows how to use it he's got some control.

Speaker 2: But in those moments of extreme fear like the like yeah he definitely blew up the petrol drum on purpose but like the the slavers there's there's a lot less control. He didn't seem to be in control there but yeah I agree it is there is a dissonance a definite dissonance between how kind of like hug the trees he is and like how gentle he is with scarlet and like the sheer level of violence and destruction he can and will unleash and like he is he's pretty ruthless when he needs to be and it's by book three it is like a definite trait that he you know like we said that there's that scene where he finds a slaver who he knows his information about thomas and he's

completely ruthless in his torture of him like he strings him up with a chain and throttles him I think. So it's yeah I don't I don't know there is like I haven't fully fleshed out my thoughts about it I don't know if I would call him I don't think he's manipulative of scarlet but I mean maybe towards the start

Speaker 1: yeah generally no but in small in small petty ways he is which is fine because I think we all kind of are people like who doesn't like look at their partner and say hey do you love me would you do the dishes you know who doesn't do stuff like that everybody kind of is slightly manipulative when it suits us I

Speaker 2: think it's all a matter of context like whether I wouldn't call that manipulation because you know it's I know it's a bad example but like

Speaker 1: it's a bad example it's a bad example but kind of like the manipulation that albert does what kind of strikes me is that he's so casual about it it's like he knows that he can do it and he knows he can get away with it and he just kind of makes the decision he's but he's got those limits

Speaker 2: yeah he has he does have lines that he won't cross which is the curious thing like he doesn't I think he doesn't want to to kill unnecessarily but like he is pretty liberal with his definition of what's necessary

Speaker 1: like necessary and what's not yeah like the escape from stonemore does strike me because when he's loses control he calls it maxing out in the first book when he maxes out he doesn't have any control it kind of happens after that he's completely spent he can't use his powers he needs kind of to recover his physical energy but his escape from stonemore like she said there's a series of courtyards he crossed the courtyard killed four men crossed another courtyard killed another two crossed another courtyard killed the last one and that's when he maxes out no he still doesn't max out because he robs him and then he walks across the forest

Speaker 2: yeah I suppose I kind of took the why I suppose no he doesn't max out but he definitely the the description and the quote there makes it does make it sound like he lost control a bit given how

Speaker 1: with Michael I think with his main carer maybe yes the emotional aspect I think he lost control but with the six men that he kills before then

Speaker 2: no that is pretty calculated

Speaker 1: right and again he just doesn't think about it at all and this is it's a direct contrast to scarlet who he spends a lot of time saying you don't have to kill him just knock him out just tie him up did you kill him oh good you didn't kill him you know okay in direct contrast to scarlet you know scarlet's constantly wrestling with her conscience constantly every single death that she causes she's working through in her meditations um and and it's it's very funny to me that like

she's presented as this hard call gunslinging foul mouth cowgirl you know cowgirl that is cowgirl she's just gunslinging foul mouth cowgirl she's from the wild west region which I suppose was formerly known as hamshire but she meditates

Speaker 2: yeah it's another one I like these kind of funny contradictions that we have in all the characters like albert's innocence versus his you know willingness to commit murder well again debatable if it's murder but his willingness to kill um

Speaker 1: debatable if it's murder yeah just some casual bad slaughter

Speaker 2: well I mean to murder is to kill someone unlawfully so self-defense is lawful it's argued like albert was falsely imprisoned being tortured under threat of death I personally don't count that as um as unlawful killing but anyway

Speaker 1: no yeah I will agree I will agree yeah

Speaker 2: that's that's a that's a very context specific nuance um anyway yeah anyway um scarlet what were you saying

Speaker 1: scarlet well scarlet even when she kills herself defense she still has to kind of work through it you know and she is just so prickly at the beginning in book three she is so soft again this is something like we can't talk about their growth without talking about them together as a couple because it's albert that makes her soft you know he's smoothed out all those rough edges in a lot of ways for her she's so soft and open for her and rereading book one and two it just kind of makes your heart ache because when we meet her she is not soft in the slightest it she's I know

Speaker 2: she's got this great introduction um hang on I have the quote um so this is is this the opening lines of the book I think

Speaker 1: these are the very first lines of the series yeah

Speaker 2: yeah so that morning with the dawn hanging wet and pale over the marshes scarlet mccain woke up beside four dead men four she hadn't realized it had been so many no wonder she felt stiff she tipped her prayer mat from its tube and unrolled it on the ground sitting cross-legged upon it she tried to meditate no luck not with four corpses staring at her and a knife wound throbbing in her arm a girl couldn't concentrate in those conditions what she needed was food and coffee her had same scarlet I

Speaker 1: just realized that if you didn't know what kind of book this was you could be forgiven for thinking that um scarlet's actually a succubus or something like that oh yes anyway moving on also if you've never meditated before you might be forgiven for thinking scarlet's some kind of worry and um well

Speaker 2: yeah I suppose it depends on the kind of meditation I mean I do I think it is like it's a great again study in contrast this this opening scene you know going from the um the the dead men to the prayer mat to the um the the knife wound and the food and the coffee like it's just here like it's a brilliant character introduction and the whole like run-up to her meeting Albert like establishes so much of her character in like such a cool way

Speaker 1: the coolest bit of the introduction to her character that we get from that early introduction and I am sort of hesitant to say it's an introduction to her character as a whole because her rescuing Albert seems very out of character from what we see beforehand but really it's not but the bit that struck me the hardest the first time that I read it was not the four dead men it was not you know robbing the bank it was the scene where this wolf comes out of the forest because he smelled the blood in the air he's got the four corpses the men who tried to rob scarlet she kills them and then she just like takes a nap next to them or something um it's night time she goes to sleep yeah she goes to sleep next to them I think it's more past there yeah she must pass out because that's just the stupidest thing you do obviously the blood is going to attract you know predators and carrion eaters so you don't want to be anywhere near that but whatever

Speaker 2: actually no I think doesn't she like light sulfur torches or something overnight

Speaker 1: those are to keep the mud I think she lit those already before the minotaptor

Speaker 2: oh before the anyway so yeah so

Speaker 1: anyway she wakes up she wakes up makes some coffee gets up the side she's gonna leave and as she's leaving a wolf comes out of the forest and this is post apocalyptic Britain wolves are gigantic

Speaker 2: you know I mean wolves are pretty huge and

Speaker 1: yeah they're massive aren't they they're already as tall as a person so these must be taller than that this wolf comes loping out of the forest and there's this moment where basically they're going to pass each other and she stands and looks at it and the wolf stands and looks at her and they just kind of I don't know their size each other up they look at each other it's almost like they're paying respects to each other because yeah they look at each other they recognize the predator and they both go not today yeah and not worth it it is such a cool scene because it's like

Speaker 2: it really establishes who she is like in this moment

Speaker 1: like she herself is a lone wolf she herself is a predator and then

Speaker 2: she goes and saves a helpless little guy

Speaker 1: I mean there's all those stories about wolves taking in tiny babies and things that abandon the

Speaker 2: forest it's true like many a tumblr girl before her she simply cannot resist a helpless little man

Speaker 1: Albert smokey really isn't he

Speaker 2: yeah that's true she's um sheer can no she's the bear

Speaker 1: she's the wolf he was raised by wolves all right probably anyway

Speaker 2: anyways I remember the songs we haven't done any singing yet and necessities of mother nature's recipes the simple necessities of life

Speaker 1: problem is that Albert is also the most similar to belu so joe is very much big era joe's big era somebody right near you anyway

Speaker 2: Lizzie yeah I call not it we're assigning you in your

Speaker 1: absence anyway she leaves this confrontation with the wolf walks into a bank in the nearby town and robs it

Speaker 2: she's just such a complete contrast in that moment like this kind of smog and complacent bank manner she walks in and she completely disrupts all his ideas of how the world should be and it's a great like moment of establishing her as like scarlet mccain outlaw versus the world like all of this builds her up and it builds her up into like this impossibly skilled impossibly tough yeah criminal um impossibly confident confident so confident in her skills like she's like the guy is in the bank is trying to intimidate her and she's just having none of it she's just yeah um threat casually threatens him casually takes his money heads off on her bike the bike thing is so cute it's kind of like does she have a bike at that point she does have a bike I think she then ditches it um and then she's getting chased um but yeah she does like because I really remember that image of her like flying off on her bike after robbing a place it's such a kind of I don't know to me it has such a school girl association but isn't there isn't there's something in um what is it butch Cassidy and the Sundance kid about them riding a bike never seen it okay well I mean it's again like the whole kind of heists and wild west and robbing banks and daring do and all that it is very similar in in vibe so I wouldn't be surprised if the bike was a little homage to that um

Speaker 1: see I was just thinking that normally you'd be riding a horse but this is England and only rich people ride horses so she gets a bike

Speaker 2: yeah the bikes the bikes are just so funny maybe maybe Stroud didn't want her to have to shoot the horse or something

Speaker 1: or maybe the horses have to be many horses and that would just make everything a bit too complicated also she'll need to find a second one yeah

Speaker 2: anyway um anyway so the the way she's presented is like we said confident markswoman she's not super powered but she has like incredible um she does she does seem to heal up pretty quickly I mean maybe maybe it's just that they have good healing technology in the future I don't know this

Speaker 1: destroyed maybe it's just plot needs yeah the plot requires that your hand be okay right now yeah but yeah she's almost fay like I think when she robs the bank at the beginning

Speaker 2: yeah there's a kind of a there's a definite trickster vibe to her

Speaker 1: yeah it's just she seems kind of otherworldly in a way you know like

Speaker 2: I think Albert often thinks of her like that um as like his his internal narrative kind of presents her as like yeah someone above it all yeah she's almost like an avenging angel I think I think that his narration uses a lot of like bird and angelic imagery around her much like Lucy's does about Lockwood um it's a thing the amount of time she compares him to a bird it's hilarious like his his coat like fapping behind him like wings I'm pretty sure Scarlett Scarlett gets some similar imagery um

Speaker 1: oh yeah she's got the big coat as well doesn't she

Speaker 2: yeah she she also she has the big coat she has the big coat the boots and the hat

Speaker 1: the guns the revolver yeah we love a girl we love that for her 10 out of 10 and yeah as soon as she kind of picks up Albert it's like yeah I'm keeping this one I just found a straight cake on the corner and I'm keeping them

Speaker 2: you know you know that thing from Brooklyn 99 that's like you know when um oh what's her name Rosa Rosa when she adopts the dog and she's like I've had him for one day and if anything happened to him I would kill everyone in this room and then myself that is Scarlett with Albert but actually it's not like she considers selling Albert into slavery like the first

Speaker 1: she does like the first couple of days that we see her with Albert it's almost like Albert kind of serves to highlight all of that cool stuff about her like all of her hard edges because he's so soft and guileless at the beginning and Scarlett is like he says she's hyper competent hyper competent she knows everything about the world they're traveling through she knows where they're going she knows how to get to where she wants to go she knows what to be scared of how to survive how to you know she knows it all she's just she's a front of wisdom she's this source of survival she's confident I keep saying confident I'm sorry it is getting very late at night it's because

Speaker 2: she's super confident it is yes she's five five to twelve for those who are

Speaker 1: wondering but you know this is all contrasted to Albert's softness you know and she does she considers selling Albert into slavery they come across a guy who has a boat and Albert wants to ask him if they can borrow the boat and she just punches him you know

Speaker 2: yeah well I think it is implied that he was about to attack her I

Speaker 1: mean I think I think he was very kind of suspicious she doesn't really give him a second to suss out though she just punches him straight out which I think good for her look if it was Scarlett at Winquins would lock her in the show instead of Lucy she would have lit them up no problem she would have done it

Speaker 2: Natasha just really wants to set someone on fire is what I'm what I'm hearing

Speaker 1: I just think you know dead men don't come after you and Scarlett has obviously learned this lesson dead men don't come back for a wrench

Speaker 2: she very much has and I mean the I think it's even though she changes her mind pretty quickly about selling Albert into slavery it's partly because he's potentially useful like when they rob that first bank together she's like oh you know this could be something big like and she's kind of like she is most definitely thinking about how she could manipulate him how she could use him to her own ends but I mean that's I think that's the surface level of her her her thoughts like as they're presented to the narrative but like her actions don't always line up with that like you know there's she doesn't even though she's like this kind of lone wolf super ruthless tough badass girl she doesn't hesitate to save Albert from the bear and she goes back for Etty at the fort when it's being attacked by tainted um

Speaker 1: she doesn't just go back for Etty she puts herself at considerable risk a massive amounts of risk

Speaker 2: yeah which given given her backstory is

Speaker 1: terrifying yeah and she doesn't like kids she's not close to Etty Albert's really close to Etty Scarlett is not she's been avoiding her up to this point

Speaker 2: um so yeah and she also she tries to get Joe and Etty off the hook when the faith cows is finally catch up with them so so yeah she's again there's a contrast in there there's the surface is not what's underneath

Speaker 1: yeah she's she's wrapped up in barbed wire but inside she's this girl who's just screaming out for connection

Speaker 2: now she's she is also a little meow meow they really are a little meow meow

Speaker 1: Scarlett is not a little meow meow no Scarlett Scarlett is no a meow meow who's someone who is soft and innocent but actually murder cat um she's she's like the cool guy at school who's actually really soft when you get to know her know him i can't remember what school i want to say it's like tsundere something like that but she's not she's not that shallow no no anyway anyway

Speaker 2: the question is how did she how did she end up that way right so

Speaker 1: marae just kind of alluded to it scarlett's backstory is messed up absolutely messed up it's so when she was 13 years old and she had a six-year-old brother i think or was he younger yeah he may have been five um he's teeny tiny he might have been younger than that actually he might have been about four i think six

Speaker 2: when when when when she was like early like kind of pre-teens early adolescence and her brother her younger brother was proper

Speaker 1: yeah well she was she was 13 she was 13 anyway they live in like a homestead small farm in a valley community of other homesteads in that area not too far out from the market town and she's out picking berries with her brother one day she goes home and home isn't there anymore her valley her valley her homesteads been attacked by the tainted who have eaten all her family set everything on fire and now they're hunting down survivors so she has to take her brother into the woods and she pins him underneath her body she convinces this tiny child to be as quiet as possible while the tainted walk around them and they pass so close that she can smell them so chilling it is terrifying in the dark she's just lying on the floor and she's not moving because they're walking past them and somehow they don't get found and the next week or two she's just slowly kind of collecting information supplies because they have nothing they just had some berries that they've been picking and she's stealing back into the homesteads while at the same time the tainted are hunting down survivors because they've gone after all the homesteads in the valley which i feel the need to explain that homesteads are normally a couple of acres out from each other so they are neighbors but you can't see them from your house and the tainted have basically taken out all of these homesteads one by one and then there so any survivors were driven into the hills and they were hunting them down at leisure basically and they knew that scarlet and her brother were there they knew they were up there but they just couldn't find them and they were trying to find them so for weeks as a 13 year old responsible for a tiny child and tiny children are not the most sensible things to try and keep alive in the best of times you know they're hiding out from these cannibals and eventually they come you know eventually the weather turns the tainted seem to leave the area and so they start tracking into town and they make the walk to town they don't see anybody on the walk because everybody's heard about the massacre in the valley so they've locked down any houses that they go past which there's not many houses outside of the towns because if you're not living in a town you're not able to get eaten um you know they're all locked down tight but she is she's a good big sister she's carrying her little brother she's looking after him at one point

I know they take some dried fish from a random like cows because they had it hanging outside to dry to dry and obviously she couldn't go knocking on the door or anything nobody's gonna answer they're just gonna shoot her so she leaves a note or she leaves some money or something in return because she doesn't want to steal this is who she starts out as she doesn't want to steal yeah and she takes her brother to this town now both scarlet and her brother have got bright red hair and bright blue eyes she takes them to the town and she says my mother used to come here to trade our family's been eaten by the tainted can we work can we earn our keep and the town has had a new mentor the mentor sent from the faith houses they're kind of like priests except they're not priests they're just they're hoaxes more than anything really they feel like snake oil salesmen

Speaker 2: yeah they cut do you know what they remind me of is like the kind of the traveling witch hunters like if you've ever read stories about them like that's very much the vibe

Speaker 1: no I haven't read stories but it yeah that

Speaker 2: sounds the merry the merry by god or something there was a book I read like a kind of a YA book about um witch hunting in I don't know post reformation England um which is which was very creepy and which really stayed with me but like yeah that character of like the traveling witch hunter who is very much just kind of stirring up fear in people to support his own power is it is kind of an archetype I think in in like English mythology or well not mythology because it really happened but is an archetype anyway

Speaker 1: okay yeah that works that works because this mentor is just awful you know they walk into town and the towns people are like oh better not be here better go to this town or that town or this town it's funny because they also say go to taunton because they'll take anyone at taunton nimble free they do go to taunton taunton is a total slave market so yeah go to taunton you'll be a slave um yeah

Speaker 2: never made that connection again need that reread but

Speaker 1: they do say like go to other towns which are actual towns because they've got this new mentor and the new mentor comes out to the to the square and he sees people talking to the children he's like who are these children and she obviously she's only 13 and the mentors are from the faith houses they're supposed to help you they're supposed to support you she froze herself and her brother on his mercy and says you know we will work for our keep please we've done a lot of business with this town we're part of your safe lands with you we are subjects and he says no he says look at their hair their hair is so red and deviant they've deserved you know they deserve the wickedness that was bestowed upon their family they will bring nothing but wickedness to the town we throw them out and the townspeople picked the children up and merrily threw them out the gates and scarlet who's you know just been chopped out on her ass with her free for whatever however old he is her little brother and she realizes that their bags are in the town so she's gonna go back in and get the bags run so she says to her brother wait there for me don't leave wait here i'll be out soon and he says no no no don't go

don't go we'll just get more food from somewhere else don't go we don't need it and she's like no we need the supplies in the bags i'm gonna go get them so she tries to sneak in and get the bag and she gets caught and when they catch her they look her in this cage that's just like suspended from in the air above the square or something it's one of those public humiliation things you know they look her in a punishment cage overnight and when she gets out in the morning she goes she gets her bag i think she does actually get her bag but when she gets out in the morning she goes to get her brother he's not there and what did they tell her they tell her that her brother was taken and chained out to the post for the wild beast to eat and that's what they did with a four or five year old boy and this just absolutely destroys her the guilt that she went in when he begged her to stay that she told him she'd be right back and then she wasn't and this led to his death and it completely destroys her and she just you know slides into happy violence she is a complete mess as you would be as you would be and understandableness and she seemed understandable but it is i mean as far as back stories go lock was just looking kind of

Speaker 2: cheery now isn't it i mean that's it's hard to talk cannibal cannibalism and which which trials basically um yeah it's it is one of the saddest back stories i've i've ever read um and like the thing is even after she i mean she kind of cleans up well not exactly cleans up her act but she she pulls herself together a bit you know she um i think the that criminal gang again i can't

Speaker 1: the bros of the hand take her in see i don't know how she ends up in that town because it's quite far away from where she started um but she ends up in the town of stowe which is more or less run by the mafia like they let the fave house pretend that they're running it but it's more or less run by the mafia which is called the brothers and hand and she causes a problem because she wrecks some ceremonial hats but because she's caused such a ruckus and the towns people haven't managed to catch her and string her up and she's basically fought off about eight people which again scarlet's not supposed to be an actual deviant she's not supposed to have powers but this is her untrained she manages to hold her own she hasn't been murdered she's survived thus far i i think she's got some kind of

Speaker 2: theory she i i think so as well like the the thing on my like reread of um book one like the thing with her hand healings so quickly did like kind of make me pause it is funny um

Speaker 1: and she's got this thing like she will just hold an image in her mind of where the people are when albert's using his powers he also holds that image in his mind of where the things are to move them whereas scarlet holds an image in her mind of where they are and where they're gonna be and then she hits them without felt every time

Speaker 2: this this it is supposed to be inevitable that this will remind me of firefly because you know they're both westerns um but like it is a little bit um yeah river oh what's her name river tam i want to say it is good river

Speaker 1: whatever her name is

Speaker 2: river yeah her name is you know the kind of um the uncanny shooting reminds me yeah but yeah no she definitely she's she's quite impressive like whether it's an actual like a superpower or just just her like she is there is definitely something special about her but um i mean

Speaker 1: and she's impressive enough she gets noticed by the brothers of the hand doesn't she and they take her in they train her properly and that's kind of how she turns her life around sort of but is she

Speaker 2: really how how turned around can your life be when you're in the mafia um i

Speaker 1: mean by time we meet her she says she's a freelancer which i find hilarious as a fellow freelancer you know yeah as a really freelancer like how can you be a freelancer if you're not selling a service

Speaker 2: you're just robbing back um but yeah i mean yeah in in book two like even even after she links up with albert and she has you know she has some relationships now which is like you know kind of a stabilizing effect she's still like she's still a bit wild and inclined to make self-destructive choices like you know at this um at some time i think it's towards the start of book two isn't it when she's like they've pulled off a heist and she's like great time to go party it up you know

Speaker 1: yeah and she goes and gambles it all away and she borrows money to keep gambling from people in the bar and she says oh yeah i've got the cash in my room she doesn't have

Speaker 2: the cash in the room um like i mean you think lockwood is reckless like she is actively courting danger the whole time like she's trying to draw it on herself and i think um i think like she's she's someone like as you said she really is characterized by guilt like the whereas albert is like the sweet little murder puppy who has never never felt remorse in his life i don't know about that but anyway like she is just so wracked by by it and the need to atone for the failure failure like this way she let her brother down like um when when i was in this reread i'm doing a book one you know she says something along the lines of like the weight of the because she has this funny habit where you know if she swears she puts a penny into like this little um box that she wears around her neck and then she gives she'll give that money to the poor we see her just kind of give it to someone who needs it randomly at one point um and like she she kind of needs that physical weight around her neck is like as an expression of her guilt like um it's a little biblical you know the anyone um well know that there is there's a line about anyone who um misleads or betrays one of these little ones they'll be thrown into the sea with a millstone around their necks um i don't think it's yeah i mean there's some things about like those books that have me scratching my head like what's that deliberate like she got stabbed through the palm is that is that meant to be a little bit a little bit messianic i don't know i don't

know i'm probably reading too much into it because i interpret everything through that filter but um like i

Speaker 1: mean coupled with all of the angel references but then again you know west exactly through all kinds of Christianity it's been so heavily into trying for so long so what's deliberately religious and what's actually just an expression of our culture yeah you can't tell the difference

Speaker 2: i mean yeah yeah some it's culture scarlet's whole relationship to to religion is is quite confused like um it's interesting that it does play such a big part in this story but i feel like it never really um goes anywhere like it's just it's just kind of there it's not like saying one thing or another yeah it's not any kind of true religion in the way that like it's it's totally irrational like you know she they all all the characters use the names of gods to swear but the only person we actually see praying is scarlet and she kind of prays to herself like to her own conscience which i would not go that prayer personally um but you know the the thing about the the cursing being the thing that she just pennants for like after she like kills and steals and deals with criminals and slavers like that's that's completely irrational but the thing is like it's an albert does call that out actually he kind of goes oh i'm glad you draw the line at swearing and like i've seen you kill people and stuff but swearing is where we're drawing the line in the sand okay great great you know i'm glad there's something you want to but it's um i think it's what it is for her is that it gives her a sense of control like there is there is some sense of like order in her life um and it like i said it is it is pretty irrational but it's it's also quite similar to the way a lot of people practice religion these days like they they'll go through the rituals even though they don't understand the meaning behind them and that ritual can give a certain measure of comfort and a sense of control but it is ultimately kind of hollow and senseless um and i think like this is why in my more pretentious moments i refer to scarlet and brown as stroud's post-modern series there's like this this huge sense of hollowness at the center of of the books and it's at the center of scarlet too um i think she's kind of again okay now we're wrapping up so now i get to be really pretentious she to me she's kind of like an emblem of like the this broken world that they're in that doesn't doesn't seem to have a future like she doesn't think she deserves a future um and it doesn't seem to have like a past like there's nothing about its past that's salvageable um but and that's kind of it's the world they're in but it's also scarlet herself but the books do end with her finding a kind of peace like reconciling herself to her past and also opening herself up to a future and it it actually i love that it comes from her making this kind of desperate public act of confession like she she kind of she abandoned thomas like the the mercies of the crowd and then like in front of the crowd she like shouts out this apology you know it's me it's scarlet it's your sister i left you behind i'm so sorry like oh my gosh that moment is just so heart-shredding it's incredible um but she's trying to apologize to him and like that's that kind of absolves her like it's it's this final getting the the secret out she tells it to the world um and the book does end with this kind of like hopeful look towards the siblings relationship being mended i like that it doesn't finish with you know them being like perfectly reunited and so happy because again i think stroud another thing that like and this is i think a reason maybe that he doesn't show kisses as well is that the moment of consummation is never as satisfying as the anticipation of it like it's really hard to build up an entire book to like a moment of consummation and then pull it off where is that because real life isn't like that no matter what happy ending you write it's ultimately going to be

unsatisfying because we don't really have endings like that in life so the book ends with kind of like a just another another beginning like so the siblings are they're not perfectly together yet they still they're getting used to each other they're getting to know each other again but there's a definite sense of like a tentative hope for scarlet for the future now and like a kind of a tentative hope that the world can be um in some way restored although like yeah its relationship to the past is a bit more dubious um that's a whole another episode though and it's 17 minutes past 12 and i have to be up in six hours so

Speaker 1: let's wrap it up there because i think you've put it very beautifully i did want to say something about how we've kind of ignored albert with the conclusion to this series yeah albert is also extremely important to the series but no i think the ending the final ending is scarlet's the ending of each book is scarlet's the ending of the first book she acknowledges the fact that she needs other people that she wants other people after spending the whole book telling herself that she doesn't that she's that lone wolf that we met in the beginning the ending of the second book she opens up she lets albert in she tells him about tom its we've never named him this whole episode her little brother's name is thomas yeah and the ending of the third book she opens up to everybody and she finds him no and i mean she wouldn't be able to do that if it wasn't for albert if albert wasn't there it wouldn't have happened yes but that is again a completely different episode so thank you very

Speaker 2: much for listening i wanted to know did that natasha promised we would be finished by half 11 that was nearly an hour ago

Speaker 1: it's about 45 minutes ago so i hope this episode hasn't turned into another hour long extravaganza we are trying to keep them short and snappy but they just keep getting longer and longer i don't know how i think that we think we're so good at this that we just ramble and that makes us less good at this so we need to stop it and i'm rambling anyway so let's get back to it thank you everybody for listening i hope that you've enjoyed this episode as much as we have actually enjoyed doing it despite the repeats complaints about the time i love scarlet and brown i'm sure you can hear from the way mirade is just saying i'm too tired to be articulate and then just waxing lyrical about scarlet i love her that she loves she loves output these are fantastic books if you haven't read them

Speaker 2: please if you haven't read them and you've listened all the way through this you're so super confused right now and i'm i mean

Speaker 1: i respect your dedication and i love you for it if that's the case

Speaker 2: but yes do read them and yeah until next time that's it from us at haunting the narrative thanks for listening

Speaker 3: bye