

The Hidden Bookcase Transcript
Rabbit Test by Samantha Mills

Morgan

Welcome to The Hidden Bookcase: come through and get cosy. 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
and stars

Sorren

And a dangerously high to be read pile.

Morgan

I'm Morgan, I use they/them pronouns, and I am a miniature lop.

Sorren

I'm Sorren, I use he/him pronouns, and I'm a volcano rabbit.

Morgan

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

Sorren

Each fortnight we take it in turns to recommend one another a
favourite read. The first time reader tells us what they know about
the book, makes some predictions about what they don', and then
we discuss our thoughts with all of you bookworms.

Morgan

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

Sorren

Rabbit test by Samantha Mills.

Morgan

I feel like I should start off this episode by saying that Sorren and
I've been talking about rabbits for the last hour..

Sorren
We have...

Morgan
On and off. It's been great. And now I'm convinced I need a rabbit.

Sorren
I think you do need a rabbit I agree.

Morgan
Except it will chew my books!

Sorren
Except you will get glass fronted bookcases as we have discussed!

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Everything is in place.

Morgan
There's a whole plan.

Sorren
Thank you for being on the Patreon and helping us to afford
Morgan's... (Laughing) Glass-fronted bookcases.

Morgan
With your help of a two pound donation a month, one day in 15
years time...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
Morgan will get glass fronted bookcases and all will be right with the
world.

Sorren

I think our lowest tier is three pounds actually. But that's- that's fine.

Morgan

Ignore me.

Sorren

Even closer.

Morgan

So Sorren. Tell me about the rabbits.

Sorren

The rabbits took me by surprise. They... (Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughing) They mugged you in an alley at 3am at knifepoint!

Sorren

They did. They did. I wasn't ready. I don't remember exactly how I came across the story. I feel like it was probably on Twitter or... (Scoffs) X. I'm not going to stop calling it X. I'm just going to say that now by the way, if you guys are listening to my outros every time and wondering, 'When is Sorren gonna start saying X instead of Twitter?' The answer is never. You'll never take me alive.

Morgan

We don't deadname people.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

We do deadname websites.

Sorren

We do deadname websites. So I think it was on Twitter. And I feel like it was just on Uncanny's Twitter page. Like maybe they retweeted it being like, "Here's a random story!" Or maybe I was just browsing because I do just sort of leaf through the Uncanny website when I'm bored.. Definitely not at work. And this one grabbed me and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it since late 2022. I think it was very shortly after Roe v Wade that I read this so it was...

Morgan
Ooof.

Sorren
...On the brain. But to summarise, Rabbit Test is a speculative fiction story about a theoretical world- Well, less theoretical than I would like... But a theoretical world where abortion has been criminalised again, at least in the States, people with uteruses have to have a 'Rabbit Test,' installed everyone is sort of cyborgs and you can sort of Google things with your eyes- that's- that's just sort of taken for granted, not really explained. But one of those things is that you have a internal pregnancy test, if you like that, will just trigger if you miss your period for a few days, and the sort-of protagonist of this story- it follows a lot of people over disparate time periods- is a young girl of 17, whose Rabbit Test is about to be triggered. And she's concerned because she's had sex recently. And she's missed her period. And she's trying to find a way to obscure the fact that she's pregnant from her religious fundamentalist parents and get out of the situation, basically. Shall we listen to your blind?

Morgan
Yes.

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS ON.]

Morgan
Short and sweet one today- I know absolutely nothing about Rabbit Test, except for the name and that it's a short story. I don't know the genre. I'm gonna guess that there's no real rabbits in it.

Because metaphors, that is my wild prediction. But I have nothing else! So let's see what happens.

[TAPE RECORDER CLICKS OFF.]

Sorren

I think you're correct. There's technically no rabbits. That's a reference to real rabbits, I guess.

Morgan

Yeah. Rabbits are discussed. I feel like I have to start by saying it's not like I was actively imagining that this was set on the moon.
(Laughing) However...

Sorren

(Laughing) What?! Not what I was expecting you to say.

Morgan

(Laughing) Let me finish! So I wasn't like, actively imagining it. But I was kind of just assuming that it was set on the moon, especially in Grace's point of view.

Sorren

Because rabbits?

Morgan

Because I read *Spirits Abroad* by Zen Cho, a couple months ago, which is a short story collection. And one of the short stories, one of the final short stories, is called *The Four Generations of Chang'e*. And is about these four generations of women in this family, and how the first one is like, born on earth. And then the second one like, is born on the moon.

Sorren

Mm-hm.

Morgan

Because the mother was always like, looking up at the moon and like, wanting to go to the moon and then the daughter wants to go back to the ground. And then it's like this whole, like generational thing. And the third daughter, I think...? The native people of the moon are rabbit people.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Um, and she like, ends up with this rabbit person and her mother is horrified. And then her kids are like half rabbit folk, and then they end up back on the ground. The point being my brain just linked the two stories, and was like, oh, yeah, it's about rabbits. It's set in the future. It's like episodic back and forth in time. Of course, it's set on the moon.

Sorren
Fair. I can kinda see how you got there. I mean, like rabbits on the moon have been very linked in many cultures. So sure.

Morgan
Yeah. So...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
So you can't tell me this wasn't set on the moon because it's never said that it was set on Earth.

Sorren
I mean, some of it I would say is definitely set on Earth.

Morgan
The past is definitely set on Earth but the- the future bits, it's never even said which country it's set in, so...

Sorren
It could be the moon.

Morgan
It happened on the moon.

Sorren
It's heavily implied to be America. (Laughs)

Morgan
(Laughing) It's the moon! It's- the U.S. of the moon.

Sorren
I feel like if the States conquered the moon, they would just make it one of the states. Do you know what I mean?

Morgan
The 52nd state.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
How many states are there?

Sorren
I don't actually know. I was just assuming that you knew... There are 50.

Morgan
So 51st state is the moon. Except hopefully not because please don't colonise the moon.

Sorren
We don't have a cover to discuss, sadly, because this was printed in a magazine, Uncanny Magazine. Which by the way, if you want queer, sci-fi and fantasy, a lot of their stuff is queer. And it's always pretty good. Alix E. Harrow has written short stories on there,

Charlie, Jane Anders has written short stories on there. And it's all free on their website.

Morgan
You're selling it well.

Sorren
So how do we feel about the writing style?

Morgan
It itched some part of my brain.

Sorren
Ooh, I thought it wpuld. I'm glad.

Morgan
It's very me. It's very fanfic. It's very sort of like, repetition and refrain, which are- ugh. I eat them up. They're like poetry for my soul. The like, repetitive like introduction of like, "It is, it is, it is, it is." Oof. I don't know what it is!

Sorren
Thematically in this story, it serves so well, because it has that effect of reminding you of how long this has been going on. And establishing it as that connecting thread.

Morgan
Yeah, it feels very ritualistic.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
Obviously, we get that bit where Olivia is speaking the end, and she says "It is..." this date. And it feels like this could have been her whole speech.

Sorren

Mm, mm-hm.

Morgan

She could have just been saying this as the whole thing. It feels like a call to arms. Feels very traditional. Bardic.

Sorren

Yeah. I think it's a nice use of technique in a way that's also like, very accessible. Like I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this to somebody that doesn't really read at all. And I think it's easy to follow, despite weaving a lot of storylines together, and jumping around quite a lot. This is the queer podcast, we need to talk about the fact that this is so trans, inclusive, and I really, really loved that.

Morgan

Ambrose MVP.

Sorren

Ambrose MVP. Was I imagining him as Ambrose from The Attic Monologues the entire time? Yes, because it's a very uncommon name. So I was like, "Wow, stuff has gone down in Ambrose's life!" But I feel like he would also be doing this.

Morgan

I feel like I could see that character progression.

Sorren

Apologies to anyone that hasn't listened to The Attic Monologues. But The Attic Monologues is written by Morgan and is an urban fantasy podcast, which happens to involve an Ambrose. And I feel like this is just something that he would do because he's very about community. And about helping people out. Mm- I feel like maybe Ambrose 's wouldn't charge.

Morgan

Athrie would be standing over him being like, "Get them to pay you money!" And Ambrose would be like, "But I can't!"

Sorren

That's exactly what the dynamic would be.

Morgan

"I can't make them pay me."

Sorren

But anyway, that's a sidenote. I was really happy to read that, because the first time I was reading this, I had no idea if it would be queer-inclusive or not. That really surprised me. And then the return of that later, in the segment where it's sort of giving people's reasons just in little fragments.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

I don't think it actually ended up in the episode, but you were talking in... Oh god. What episode was it? I don't know. But I edited it recently. But I've done a lot of editing recently. So it's kind of it's kind of blurred together.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

You were talking about a professor that you had, who I assume we won't name, about how...

Morgan

Oh yes.

Sorren

There wasn't room in a speculative setting for trans characters, even though it was discussing gender. And I feel like this story is a great example of why it's so necessary because we are a part of that equation. I think it's disingenuous to cut people out. And I think this story also does a good job of framing this mainly as a woman's

issue, because as a trans man, I would agree that it isn't mainly a women's issue! It is women that it mainly affects... Women just statistically are more likely to have a womb! But without leaving anybody out it still encompasses everything.

Morgan

Also, just love that Ambrose is like "Ah yes, the ol' womb exhume."

Sorren
Honestly.

Morgan
(Laughing) That was so funny!

Sorren
I'm gonna start referring to it as that, especially if I get one.

Morgan
(Laughs) The womb exhume.

Sorren
That was very on brand, I feel like for a trans person of like this age...

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
And I guess Ambrose would be about our age if- No, maybe he would be a bit younger.

Morgan
It's got the same energy as teetus-yeetus.

Sorren
Exactly, yeah, it does.

Morgan

Top notch comedy,

Sorren

Which is needed in this fucking story, honestly...

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

...Because it is very dark. It has made me cry every single time I've read it.

Morgan

I did not. I did not tear up.

Sorren

There you go. This is the one that gets me.

Morgan

Uno reverse.

Sorren

To be fair, I think I was particularly raw the first time I read it, because it was so soon after that I was, you know, thinking about real people. And I'm still thinking about real people, I suppose, when I read it.

Morgan

Mm. I really liked the environmental bent of it.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

It's something that I'm seeing increasingly being explored in fiction, and the righteous anger of people. Like, when Grace gets out of prison, and she's like, "The only thing that's changed is I'm angrier now." And I'm like, "Go off queen. I love this for you." Her character

arc really... Like, I know it's supposed to be the through line of the whole story, but like, I really, really liked following that. I mean, obviously not liked because it's fucking awful but like...

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
I really enjoyed following that storyline.

Sorren
I think it's really successful in that when you're writing something like this, you want to be discussing it with some degree of universality, which I think this achieves really well, but also gives you Grace as that anchor. But I think there's just so many things about this that feel so topical- one thing that was like, driving me insane, on a reread even more so. Grace is scrolling through all the forums, and she's trying to find euphemisms for what she's looking for. Recently, I was just watching a random video on YouTube. And they were like, "Oh, because of the algorithm, I'm just going to refer to it as 'the procedure.'" But it was about abortion. And I was like, "Yep, that's exactly what's happening here is people talking around it." And I've seen people do the same thing on TikTok, using different words in the subtitles than they using out loud because they didn't want things to get flagged.

Morgan
When Roe v. Wade first got overturned, there was a lot of people talking about camping trips.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
And that was like, the euphemism. We started off with, instead of saying, like, "killed," saying "unalived."

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

And like, there's a certain amount of times I can get behind that.

And then we just start sliding in- back into having to codify language in order to survive. And it's um... Not to be like, "This is the end times," but um... Really fucking sucks.

Sorren

It really does.

Morgan

I did not think that things would be sliding back so fast in my own lifetime.

Sorren

Yeah, I was also thinking when I first read this, if I had read this even a year ago, I would have been doubtful about it, quite frankly. And then... I mean I was reading it in the frame of mind where I was like, "No, I feel like this could definitely happen." I feel like this is...

I'm going to slag off Black Mirror, I feel like this is Black Mirror, if Black Mirror thought about women and also intersectionality. (Laughs) Rather than just being like, "computers scary." I feel like this is what it's trying to do and what a lot of speculative fiction... Speculative horror, if you like because I feel like it could arguably be called that...

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

...Misses. It is just so informed by what's already happening, I guess, arguably, in like a similar vein to the way that The Handmaid's Tale is, where Atwood went "I'm only going to use things that have already happened so that it is all technically possible, even if it's happened somewhere else or a different time."

But I feel like that has that sort of weight to it, where it just feels horribly plausible. I do love and this is a bit of a tangent, but... Mills

has clearly put so much research into this and like, so much love into it, and also anger. All of the good emotions that make a wonderful piece of writing. I'm a bit of a nerd, I'm just like, "Oh, cool, I got to learn something." It's not really something that I've thought much about really is how do contraceptives work historically, which I'm kind of a bit like, "I should have," because I love fantasy, so much and almost all of these are historical settings where people would have come up with a different way, whether it's magic, or whether it's herbs, or something else.

Morgan

And especially in fantasy, and especially in sci-fi, the genre has been overwhelmingly dominated by men until fairly recently, and people like to just be like, "Oh, this is escapism, we're not gonna talk about that. We're not gonna think about that one." But actually, it's very intrinsic to the worldbuilding.

Sorren

If you're ignoring it, you're just not thinking about "How does this society function," because if people can't plan their families... They're going to have more kids. Inheritance might work differently. There's just so many ripple effects.

Morgan

I liked how this talked about different cultures, the different plants that they've used.

Sorren

Mm-hm.

Morgan

And the different methods that they've had. Comparing the single book that the Victorian lady has versus the hundreds of plants that the native tribe has. How devastating that loss of knowledge is.

Sorren

Exactly. I really loved that bit as well. I think another thing that this book does really well, on that subject, is that intersectionality.

Mentioning the- the black woman who's involved in the abortion League, and talking about how the people that are needing that service aren't necessarily the ones in that service, and she wants to represent a friendly face for them.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
And then similarly, that flash from the woman in the 1800s, has that brief mention of what's happening to enslaved women during that period of time. And how they don't have access. And how if they do have that access, and they get caught...

Morgan
And having the balls to say "The character that we're talking about doesn't care."

Sorren
Yep.

Morgan
Because realistically, unfortunately, most people didn't.

Sorren
It'd be so easy to say, "I want that character to be sympathetic. So I'm going to make her an abolitionist, I'm going to make her a suffragette." You know, whatever it might be. But I think you get the sense very much of these ordinary people who are just trying to navigate the life that they have in the body that they have. And I think that's really valuable, because it is that thing of like, it shouldn't have to be, you're a good person to secure this right, quite frankly.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren

It should be inalienable. It's like the thing of like, "Oh, well, I'm gonna misgender that person because they're an asshole." No, you're not. You just have to treat everybody equally. And everyone has a right to a certain level of bodily autonomy. And even that bit at the end, which says, "She doesn't want to, she doesn't have to be running from a monster. She doesn't have to have a health condition," etc. It just shouldn't be something that's forced on someone which is said, you know, explicitly, you could argue that this is a little bit in your face about its themes and message, but I don't think that that is a point against it, at least in my opinion.

Morgan

Yeah. Especially at the moment, we kind of need that.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

People are really not doing well with the media literacy at the moment.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

This is what we need.

Sorren

I think it's interesting, because in some ways, it almost doesn't feel like fiction, even though it very much is because it is like, sci fi. And obviously, it's following fictional characters. So it's fiction, but because it's so immediate, it almost feels like an essay or a call to arms as you were saying before. I can't believe that people just used to look at pee to try figure out if you're pregnant. I want to say that. Wild.

Morgan

(Laughs) The different versions of the pee as well, it's like "This one where we're like, making corn sprout. That kind of works. The one where we're looking for maggots? No."

Sorren
No.

Morgan
(Laughing) It's so funny.

Sorren
I'm kind of curious because that's the only completely BS one, I guess that gets mentioned- Is it? There must have been so many. That's what people should be putting in the fantasy settings is the ridiculous ways people have to determine whether someone's pregnant 'cause there must be some that are like not even like, vaguely medicine, there must have been some, like, "If you go to sleep with a fish and you wake up and the fish is still in your bed, then you're pregnant," or something like there must have been like folklore ones all the time.

Sorren
(Laughs) This is what fiction is missing is...

Sorren
Yeah!

Morgan
...More like, beliefs that are just absolute bullshit. Everything's like, "Oh, this just works because it's magic." Okay, people will still believe the most insane stuff.

Sorren
Oh God, completely. Yeah.

Morgan
Let them be crazy about it. Even more when there's also magic.

Sorren
Mm-hm.

Morgan
Because the average Joe doesn't know how magic works.

Sorren
And if you've never seen any evidence to the contrary, and if you live in a small village, where just out of pure statistics, whatever weird test has just happened to work a couple of times in a row, you're totally going to believe it.

Morgan
It rained after I had sex one time, therefore I'm pregnant.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Every time it rains.

Sorren
Every time it rains, oh no! Not in England.

Morgan
Pathetic fallacy took a real dark turn.

Sorren
Oh dear. (Laughing) I will say as much as we're making fun of these beliefs, as well, I do love the tone of that, like even when it's mentioning, you know, the maggot situation, all of these methods that we can see with the modern hindsight aren't gonna work. It is so respectful of everyone who's ever had to turn to those methods because they didn't have anything else, what are you supposed to do? And again, you just wanted to know, as the narrative says.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren

I think it's very humanising in a way, it's putting you in contact with that very basic desire.

Morgan

Yeah. This story is just deeply empathetic.

Sorren

Mm-hm. And maybe for our generation, it's something we've taken for granted a little bit just because we've always lived- or at least in the UK, for the pair of us... People know whe they're pregnant, you can just go to the Tesco. (Laughing) I don't know why it'd have to be a Tesco. That's the first thing I thought of. Go to Tesco and buy a pregnancy test. That's actually kind of a luxury compared to 1000s of years where you wouldn't know until you showed or until- you know, you wouldn't know for sure anyway. You mentioned the final scene earlier, which I really, really love. I also really love the line, "She pulls Rayleigh tight to her side, a child she chose." I think there's just a lot of really simple language in this that's really, really effective.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

There's not a lot of metaphor. There's not a lot of verbose vocabulary. It's just very direct. Morgan, you're the new reader here, will you give us your final thoughts on Rabbit Test?

Morgan

(Laughing) I feel like I can't say I enjoyed it, just because it's very depressing.

Sorren

That's fair.

Morgan

But I really enjoyed it. I guess. It was really interesting. I learned a lot. I thought it was beautifully written. And it said what it wanted to say in exactly the right amount of words. Five stars. Sorren, what about you?

Sorren

I mean, cosigned, I just think this is so moving, and effective, and well researched, and as you said, before, empathetic. And I think you can tell it's written from a very emotional and caring place. And I think it's simple and accessible, something that I can imagine an English teacher pulling out for their class, I feel like it could be looked at as a historical piece of literature that marks this moment in the future. And I hope that that future will not look like the future described in this story. And I would also give this five stars. (Laughing) Do we have any recommendations? That's a weird one for this one, I think.

Morgan

I have two structurally.

Sorren

Mm-hm.

Morgan

The first one is the short story from Spirits Abroad by then show The Four Generations of Chang'e because that also deals with sort of like, generations, and with femininity and with rabbits. And then my second one will be Sea of Tranquillity by Emily St. John Mandel, because that follows three different timelines. One of them is on the moon. And then one of them is like the 1800s. And one of them is modern day, I believe.

Sorren

Mm.

Morgan

And that is sort of, looking at speculative futures and how generations connect. And then also about potential pandemics, which is really fun. Brackets, not.

Sorren

I love the blend of historical and speculative fiction. I'd love to see more of it in fiction in general, I think it's sort of anchors the speculative.

Morgan

I'm not a historical fiction girlie but I will make an exception sometimes. Do you have any recommendations?

Sorren

Um, if you have somehow not read *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, it is not as intersectional as this, I think it kind of tries to be but I feel like- You could argue as well that that's a facet of the protagonist's point of view, and that maybe she's not thinking about other women as much as she possibly could be. But at least to me, it feels like queer people are a little bit of an afterthought, women of colour are a little bit of an afterthought. Also, I kind of wanted to see a little bit more of in this maybe- Like I'm still giving this five stars because it just emotionally affected me so much- I would have liked to see a little bit more acknowledgement of how disabled women, or disabled people with uteruses, are being faced by this both historically and in the future because I think that's like another element that deserves to be heard. But I do think *The Handmaid's Tale* is interesting and is worth reading, maybe check the trigger warnings before you're going in and be in the right headspace.

Morgan

Also a nonlinear narrative.

Sorren

Also nonlinear narrative. And I think that she does that very well to be fair.

Morgan
Really fun when you're trying to find a specific quote...

Sorren
Oh my god.

Morgan
In the middle of an exam. And you don't know...

Morgan
Oh my god!

Morgan
If it's on page 70, 111 or 312.

Sorren
(Laughing) Literally, I remember this so vividly!

Morgan
Anyway!

Sorren
I want to also recommend, even though we've done it on the show, Daughters of Sparta, which was Morgan's pick for our Greek mythology retelling month by Claire Heywood. Also a lot about motherhood, also a lot about bodily autonomy in relation to pregnancy. If you enjoyed the historical bent of this and looking into that theme, that's so often under discussed, I think Claire Heywood does a fantastic job of that.

Morgan
This is a really hot take, actually really quickly. I'm going to recommend some music.

Sorren
Ooh!

Morgan

Yeah, I'm going to recommend basically, anything by Sofia Isella but especially Us and Pigs, because I've been listening to Everybody Supports Women on repeat, but one of the first songs that she did, that was like, viral was Us and Pigs and it is very much on the same theme.

Sorren

We- We don't say what we're doing next 'cause this is the Patreon so I guess you'll find out.

[THEME MUSIC FADES IN.]

Morgan

(Laughing) You'll find out when we find out!

Sorren

This will come out in November, presumably... (Laughing) During necromancy month.

Morgan

If you were really prolife, you'd learn necromancy actually, goddamnit.

Sorren

Oh my god you're so right!

Morgan

(Laughing) Start with the dead before you start making more life. God damnit.

[THEME MUSIC RESOLVES.]