

Episode 99:
Detective Boyfriends

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[0:00]

F : Hello and welcome to Be the Serpent, a podcast of extremely deep literary merit with your classy and sophisticated hosts Alexandra Rowland, Freya Marske, and Jennifer Mace. On today's episode we're discussing [Of Dragons. Feasts. and Murders](#) by Aliette de Bodard, [A Marvellous Light](#) by Freya Marske, and the fanfic [If Life Was A Movie We'd Have A Better Soundtrack Than This](#) by galaxysoup.

[Intro music plays]

A: Hello and welcome to Episode 99: Detective Boyfriends. I'm Alex and I'm Robin Blyth.

F: I'm Freya and I am Harriet Vane.

M: I'm Macey and I am the incomparable Joan Watson.

A: I like that for you.

M: Yeah! Me, too! I aspire, I aspire.

A: Yeah.

F: We are three red-headed fantasy authors...

A: And today we are doing our last episode that requires homework, dear listeners!

[excited noises from Freya and Macey in the background]

M: Freedom!!

A: Oh my god, we don't have to read assigned things any more! How weird is that!!

M: I haven't made you read a 300k word fic since, like, the twenties, but now I can never do so again.

A: I know!

F: Yup!

[Serpents all laugh]

A: Even by, like, sliding into our DMs and being like “Okay, I know the wordcount is scary, hear me out, you don’t have to read the whole thing. If you just read the first seven chapters I’ll let you get away with that.” Um, which has happened a couple times.

M: Listen. Listen.

A: Anyway! Today is a very joyful day of celebration...

M: A Very special episode!

A: A special episode, ‘cause today is the Freya episode! We are going to be talking about Freya’s debut book which we are so excited about and so proud of her for.

M: EEEEEEE!

A: *A Marvellous Light* which, as of today, how many days is it until it comes out, Freya?

M: In what country?

F: When is the release date [for the episode]?

A: When we’re recording. Right now when we’re recording it’s in our future.

F: OH when we’re recording. Right now we are two days away from the Australian release—
[M&A ooooooh]

F: Yeah, I know. Which is a little bit terrifying.

A: Yeah.

F: And about, let me think, about nine days away from the US release.

A: Wonderful.

F: And then a month and a bit from the UK one, because—

M: Amazing! I love publishing.

F: —that’s well in December.

M: I love publishing, so much.

A: Sure publishing, sure. So by the time you listen to this, dear listeners, this will probably be in your past, once again the joyful time—

M: Unless you’re English.

A: Unless you’re English. What is linear time when you have a podcast? Who knows. Your past, our future, unless you’re English, unless you’re Macey. In which it is actually...

M: I get American books!

A: That's what I'm saying!

F: And you've also got this particular book for years.

M: For a WHILE. For a while. We've read this book a time or two.

A: Our future, your past, unless you're British, unless you're Macey!

F: Done!

A: It's very simple!

M: [makes interrupt-y mew mew noises]

A: What?

M: I'm trying not to steal somebody's line!

A: Whose line?

M: But what have we been reading—

A: Oh! You're trying to get us back to having an actual episode, I see how it is.

M: This is my LAST fucking chance to take somebody else's job on this podcast!

A: Well, second to last chance because we have a What We've Been Reading on episode 100.

M: That's true.

A: What HAVE we been reading, fellow serpents, before we start any—

M: THANK YOU.

A: —Any further gremlin behaviours?

M: Thank you, Alex.

F: Speaking of books we have had for a while but have not gotten to just yet, I read C. S. Pacat's new book.

[M&A ooooooooooh]

M: Your secret spouse of mysteriousness!

F: Slash doppelganger.

A: Freya's crush, Freya's author crush.

M: Yes.

F: So, C. S. Pacat has now turned to YA and [Dark Rise](#) is the first book in a trilogy. It was very interesting, reading it you can see in some ways how the writing is quite different than what it is in [Captive Prince](#)—

M: Mhm.

F: It's a fairly, in some ways a fairly straightforward "here is the young man called Will in England who discovers that he is a part of people who have been reborn to fight against the dark, and there's the light and the dark and there's these chosen warriors" and things like that, and then because it's C. S. Pacat there are about six different twists that make you put the book down and go: "WHAAAT?" One of the twists I called very, very early and because I called it very early I could see all the clever hints that she was putting in all the way through which I think would make it a rewarding reread, and then there's a scene about two thirds of the way through where I was like: "OH, here's all the id stuff from *Captive Prince*" and here's how that's gonna play out, and I'm really looking forward to book two now.

M: [laughs]

F: So if you enjoy fantasy with fated enemies-to-lovers boyfriends—which, surely you do—check out this new trilogy.

M: [interrupt-y sounds part two: qui-qui-quick version]

Macey? Do you have a comment?

M: Qui-quick question: Is [The Dark is Rising](#) out of copyright or something?

F: It's an homage. Like, it's a very deliberate reference.

M: [laughs]

F: And there's some—

M: Well it would have to be, with a title like *Dark Rise*.

F: Yeah so, in the book, and I think C. S. Pacat's done some interviews where she talks about how this is very much referencing quite a lot of the fantasy books of her childhood that have this basic structure, but digging into the idea of fate and destiny and why the queer people are villains, and if you are a villain who does that make you... Yeah, there's a lot of interesting meta stuff going on in the book, especially if you've read *The Dark is Rising*.

A: Cool.

F: Yeah. And then after that I mainlined very fast the three T. Kingfisher paladin romances.

M: Ah.

F: I think they're called, like, ["The Saint of Steel" series](#). So, T. Kingfisher is Ursula Vernon writing for grown-ups, and these three books are definitely romances. They are fantasy

romances, each of the three books follows a different main character and their love interest based around these paladins whose god died—

M: Awww.

F: So they are now left around and wandering the world, mostly serving as bodyguards for one of the other temples which is like lawyers who go out and solve problems in the community. And each of the books has its own very distinct plot adventure which are by turns zany and very creepy and I absolutely love the way T. Kingfisher writes romances. All of them have this great pining, they're really hot, and they are all starring people in their 30s who have careers and are tired.

M: [laughs] That's a mood.

F: Occasionally a 20-something will skip across the page and the point of view character will go: ugh, God.

M: A CHILD.

A: AN INFANT.

F: "I remember having this much energy." You know and they have to sleep on the ground because they are on a quest and they wake up and they're like "everything hurts." [chuckles]

M: Aww, that is true, though.

F: Yeah, I've been saving this series because I knew I would love it but the third one, [Paladin's Hope](#), came out recently and I thought this was a perfect excuse to read them all very fast and I can tell that they will become comfort rereads for me.

A: Wonderful.

M: Very good. Meanwhile, let's see. I had one fanfic I wanted to mention reading in the past couple of weeks which was a novel-length [Nirvana in Fire](#) polyamory negotiation fic.

[A & F oooh]

M: With a fairly tight focus on Jingyan's wife, and how she negotiates a situation where Jingyan is absolutely fucking Mei Changsu who is married or about to marry Mu Nihuang and so it's just lots of negotiation and communication and very guarded, damaged people, learning to open up to each other and kind of, heal? Bullying Mei Changsu into ACTUALLY healing and not just yeeting himself onto the nearest fucking sword like a dumbass—

F: Well, you know I love polyamory with married people, so, how many thousands words is this, Macey?

M: Oh it's only... It's a reasonable length, it's 160k, so it's, like, a normal novel.

A: Okay.

F: A normal novel, okay. Definitely.

M: I feel like that's a normal novel.

A: Cause when Macey said it's a reasonable length I was like, mmmm, that could mean anything.

M: No, it's a normal novel length. I did say novel-length, not epic. It is called [that ruthless love](#) by alherath and it's great.

F: That sounds great.

M: I have also been practising my harp for fifteen minutes every day and—

A: How is that going, Macey?

M: —my neighbors are very tired of *Greensleeves*—

[Serpents laugh]

A: Macey..

M: —and I am turning into claws, it's a very different—

F: I was going to say, do you have harp calluses?

M: Nnnno? I don't think so, we'll have to find out. But mostly this past two weeks, rather than reading, I have been frantically plotting the necromancy book and then throwing my entire plot overboard and plotting it again, and this is very painful for me as the dear listeners might have gathered from lo, these four years of listening to me whining pathetically about how plot doesn't exist and is a conspiracy. Specifically to oppress me, personally.

[A & M mhm]

M: Which I still believe to be true.

A: Yes.

F: Yep. Can confirm.

M: But I now have a plot. Listen yeah.

F: Well done, Macey!

M: OT3 plot for the heist necromancy book, now with bonus Henry VIII as Cthulhu.

A: We love to hear it. We truly love to hear it. I have been the most boring person in the world, my life has been just grown-up things including getting quotes for new insulation on my house—

M: Oh, booo

F: The most grown-up thing.

A: —that's the level of boring we're at.

M: No, yeah, sympathy adulting noises from this side of the world.

A: A lot of my reading lately has been, like, the websites of insulation companies.

[M & F laugh]

A: Which I feel I should report, because it counts. I am saying it counts—

M: Yeah, no that's fair, are you going to come back with like, a 400K romance novella about the bureaucracy of contractors in [Chant Universe](#)?

A: Or something. I don't know, man, I don't know.

[M laughs]

A: I did read a novella which is... Because I have been very carefully—

M: Victoria Goddard, right?

A: —rationing out Victoria Goddard's books, I read [The Warrior of the Third Veil](#) which is the second of [the "Sisters Avramapul" trilogy](#) and it is just as badass and cool as the first... If you want to know more about them, dear listeners, I had an article come out on Tor.com, which is about Victoria Goddard's works and, um, like, my top 5 choices about the best entry points into her universe so, we will have the scribes link to that in the shownotes: go read it, I am very, very proud of that article and I am glad that everyone seems to be enjoying it.

M: It had a title, it had a name.

A: [You Should Be Reading Victoria Goddard's Novels](#), or something like that.

M: [laughs] Okay.

A: Just, like, very straightforward. It was not a creative, I think my original title was like "A Primer for the Nine Worlds Series". Very dry. But you should be reading Victoria Goddard's works, so please go read my Tor.com article about it.

F: It's a good article.

A: Thank you!

F: Very persuasive.

A: Uh, should we then, take some time to celebrate Freya's thing?

M: [singing in the background] Detective Boooyfriends

A: [joins in the singing]

M: It's time for the Detective Boyyyyyfriends! [singing ends] We are all having a dance party because we make great radio. You can dance with us to the Detective Boyyyyyfriends.

A: You know we make great radio because we've done 99 episodes, and surely we know how to make good radio by now.

F: And still we dance. Yes.

A: For example, nowadays, we tell you when we're dancing. With our voices!

M: [laughs] Yeah. Listen.

A: Freya. Tell us about your great book.

F: Alright! So it's quite good to have a chance to do this, because I feel like even if you've been listening from the very beginning, your knowledge of this book is probably comprehensive but scattered. Cause I have been talking about it for a very long time, but I probably never sat down to do a full run through of what the pitch is, and etc etc. So, now that I have been pitching it on various podcasts and panels, and things for a while, I actually—

M: [Dramatique Gasp] Cheating on us!

F: —have a vaguely organised way of talking about it. Amazing!

M: Amazing!

F: So. *A Marvellous Light* is the first book in [the Last Binding trilogy](#).

A: Yay!

F: It is a queer historical fantasy novel about murder, magicians, and manorhouse parties. This is the very short and elevated pitch. But. It stars: Robin Blyth, who is accidentally named as the bureaucratic liaison in the English Public Service to a magical society that he did not actually know existed, then discovers that his predecessor has disappeared, then gets a terrible curse put on him, then starts having visions, he's having a very bad day.

M: He's having a bad week, honestly.

F: Very bad week. And, in order to solve all of that mess he has to team up with his counterpart in the magical bureaucracy, Edwin Courcey, who does not like him and wants to be left alone with books. Very relatable.

M: Yup.

F: And, of course, they fall in love. And that is the pitch.

M: And get beaten up by a hedge maze.

F: They do.

M: Which is the most important part of the book.

F: It is, they do get beaten up by a hedge maze. Robin also gets beaten up by swans? There's a lot of beating up of Robin in this book.

M: Yes.

A: Yes.

M: Yes. And, like, lots of mysterious illusion-faced people punch him a bunch, he's just very punchable and I don't feel like that's very—

A: He's kind of a jock like that?

F: He's very punchy. He's a sunshine himbo who believes in solving problems by punching them.

A: Yeah.

M: We respect Robin.

F: And this book is about what happens when that stops working.

M: I feel like the thing with Robin though also is that he maybe thinks he's the type of jock to get through by punching things and other people look at him and think that, but actually he's a lot more likely to ask you if you're feeling alright?

F: Yes, he does actually have quite a lot of emotional intelligence, he's just not—

M: He's a good boy!

F: He's mostly just used that to get through social situations. He's good at—

M: We respect him.

F: —parties, he's very good at parties.

M: And one of the things that I really love with... the way that you got away with starting this fantasy novel with a Prologue.

F: [smug] Yes I did.

A: Oh, by labelling it Chapter One?

F: Yes, by calling it Chapter One!

[Serpents all laugh]

M: Cause, specifically it's a murder mystery—

A: I noticed that as well, cause I was like, I remember reading this in draft form, I remember when this actually was a Prologue.

M: But the thing that I wanted to point out was that you start with the Murder Mystery prologue which is the victim of a murder who doesn't have enough information, or puts the information across just badly enough so the reader is like, "oh fuck I have no idea what's happening," and we then spend the rest of the book learning what happens and it's just a really smart hook that you are... Freya steals from other genres like a magpie.

A: She does.

F: Yes I do.

M: And it's great.

[Macey laughs]

[15:14]

F: Very much so.

A: She's very good at it, yeah.

F: But then I have to put them into the fantasy bucket, which is why I sat down with my editor and my editor said, "You can't have a prologue." And I said, "But the Prologue is the pre-credits murder mystery scene." And she said, "That's fair; you can't call it a prologue." I said, "Can we call it Chapter 1?" She said, "Sure."

[M laughs]

A: God!

F: So that is now the structure of the entire— Each of the books now has a Chapter 1 which is actually a prologue. Shhh.

M: It's three pages long.

A: But why? I don't understand why we're so—

M: Because people pick it off the shelf in the bookshop, the readers who know nothing about the book, and see that word, and have an allergic reaction, and have to be taken to hospital.

A: OK.

F: Yeah.

A: I don't understand...

F: Darling listeners, you, and me, and everyone else listening will know it's a prologue.

M: It's a prologue.

F: We're just calling it Chapter 1. Yes.

A: OK.

F: But true, exactly as you said, Macey, that was the purpose of it, to set up a mystery, to give the readers some information that the main characters don't have. But also to set up a mystery that the main characters haven't encountered yet. Because as far as the main characters are concerned, they're just having a bad week. As far as the reader is concerned, a murder has occurred and there's a conspiracy going on. And so that gets you going through the book while the main characters are catching up.

M: I feel this might have been me who wrote this dot point here but, "the inherent capital-R-Romance of uncovering a deep, dark conspiracy together".

A: Truly, is there anything more romantic than uncovering a deep, dark conspiracy together? I think not.

F: Absolutely not, and that is what this episode is about.

M: Yes!

F: Yeah, and part of it is because if there is a conspiracy, you can't trust anyone.

A: Hmm. Hmm.

F: And so you get in a situation where ideally the only person you can trust is the other person that you are detective-ing with.

M: Right!

F: Detective... Detecting.

M: Detecting?

A: Detecting.

F: Detecting! And depending on where you start your book or your story, you may then be not sure if you can also trust that person, which creates tension.

A: Yes.

M: And not just that, it's exactly that, it's the forced vulnerability, it's the forced reliance and opening up, and it kind of makes you break down barriers that you otherwise might not be willing to, so quickly.

F: Right.

A: It's the "there's only one bed" trope of

[F giggles]

M: But intellectual, yeah! Right, exactly.

F: Yeah, it's the forced proximity, which is what you need for any romance to get going.

A: Right.

F: You have to have a reason why these two people who don't know or maybe don't like each other have to spend a lot of time together and be challenged together. And of course—

A: Yeah. And also it's... It gives them something to work on together. Because I feel like one of the best first dates I've ever been on was when I texted this boy and I was like, "Hey, wanna come over to my house and help me plant some cherry trees?"

[M laughs]

A: And we actually had a great time! Because we had something to be working on together and cooperating with, and that's kind of like what working on a murder mystery does for you as well.

F: Yeah, Edwin and Robin are forever gonna think of this entire debacle as their first date.

A: First date, right.

[M laughs]

F: Yeah. Well anyway, the more deep, and dark, and dangerous the conspiracy is, it means you can put them in these extreme situations. Where you expose their strengths, expose their weaknesses, show how they react when they are under pressure, and of course danger makeouts and danger bangs, which are very important parts of a romance that involves some kind of mystery or suspense plot. Put them in danger—

M: You got eaten by a bush. Let's kiss about it!

F: Exactly! Put them in danger, get them out of danger, oh my gosh, adrenaline rush, we're alive!

M: This is a frequent problem in Australia.

F: [laughs] Yeah, yeah. People just make out all the time in the street. "Oh, we saw a snake, ahhh, let's make out!"

[M laughs]

A: It's about the life affirmation.

M: [laughing] "Oh no, a drop bear! Quick, let's make out!"

A: Oh my God. Anyway.

F: Yes, life affirmation, exactly. So that was what was really fun about putting this book together was that I could use all of those delicious danger and mystery tropes, and use it to make the romance really intense.

M: Yees!

F: Because they don't spend that much time with each other, it takes place over like two weeks.

A: Yeah. Freya, let me ask you just a fun sidebar interview sort of question, since this is the Freya book episode.

F: Yes, Alex?

A: What is your favorite scene of this book?

F: My favorite scene.

A: Macey is doing really good radio by mouthing the word "the sex scene".

F: The sex scene!

M: I just mouthed "I can guess" but I was thinking about the magic sex scene.

A: Oh, it was guess, "I can guess".

F: I like the magic sex scene. There is a sex scene in which magic is used in bed, which is very important to me.

[M snorts]

F: I don't think it's my favorite. Writing the hedge maze scene was my favorite to write because it allowed me to do a little bit of horror writing, and I don't do much horror writing, but being allowed to play a little bit in that genre in that scene was really fun. Umm... I liked writing the argument scenes.

A: Mm-hmm?

F: Especially the big arguments where the big secrets come to the fore and people have some very strong emotions about them, because I love breakup scenes in romance.

[M laughs]

F: I know that some people don't like that the traditional romance beats have this dark moment—

M: Breakup.

F: Breakup, whatever. Fucking love it.

[M laughs]

F: When I'm reading a romance, I don't always need it there, but when I'm writing a romance, I'm always hanging out to be able to write a horrible, horrible fight.

A: And then heartbreak!

M: Well, you have to break the characters open to let them heal.

A: Right, right.

M: Right? That's the thing.

F: And also I think you can show, because of where it usually falls in the narrative, you can show that they now know each other well enough to hurt each other very well.

A: Right.

M: Yes.

F: Which is always a really powerful scene.

A: Yep, yep, yep.

M: I definitely, now that I'm thinking about it, I really love the one I put in the second time through with writing *Catalyst*. No, you're right, those are great fun.

F: They are really fun.

M: Because I forgot to put one the first time and...

F: So I think my favorite scene to reread is probably the last sex scene. But my favorite ones to write were the arguments and the hedge maze.

A: Wonderful.

M: Nice. Nice.

A: Very good.

M: But speaking of murders and detect-ing-ing-ing...

A: Ing-ing-ing-ing.

M: As ing-ing-ing-ing.

F: Ing-ing-ing-ing.

[M descends into ["Mahna Mahna"](#)]

A: We could just do ing-ing-ing for the rest of the, what, the other 40 minutes that we have? Ing-ing-ing-ing.

F: Every time you say the word, it has to gain another -ing.

A: Yeah.

M: Darling listeners! Macey was attempting a smooth transition!

A: Sorry.

M: Macey should not leave her day job!

A: I just feel like it's episode 99, we should get the gremlin party started early...

M: I'm OK with that! We have earned the pizza party at the end of term.

A: We have earned it. It's gonna be all of this episode and then all of episode 100.

M: Dear listeners, let's talk about the fucking fanfic tentpole, huh!

A: Sure, let's do that.

F: Let's do it!

M: Which I don't— Does it even have any fucking in it?

F: Nope.

A: No. Rated Teen.

M: But detective boyfriends get together fanfic! It is the [Guardian](#) fanfic *If Life Was A Movie We'd Have A Better Soundtrack Than This*, which begins with a brilliant example of the most classical meet-cute trope, which is “detective chasing a suspect bowls over the cute professor and ruins his paperwork.”

A: Yes.

M: Which I respect so much!

A: Yep, classic. Classic!

M: Very well executed, actual bruises happen, just, you know... Very good, very high quality. So this is a AU... A-AU? Help. This is an AU—

A: There you go.

M: In which rather than *Guardian*'s quote-unquote “sci-fi” setting—full of magic and aliens—this is just the real world. In which Detective Yunlan is trying with the help of his crew to track down some mysterious mobsters who are killing people violently in his neighborhood. And Shen Wei

is just a mild-mannered professor, who's trying to teach biology and getting hit on by his students all of the time, and breaking his computer all of the time.

A: But he also has a dark past!

M: A dark past!

[M laughs, F sings a little doo-doo-doo-doo of drama]

M: Because when he was a kid, his psychopath twin brother had been involved in kidnapping the then-police commissioner's son, amongst a lot of other stuff. Baby Zhao Yunlan. And so Shen Wei rescues this baby, and they hide together in a closet, and Shen Wei experiences somebody being nice to him for the first time and it's super effective.

A: For the first time!

[A & M giggle]

A: And he imprints on this boy.

M: Like a duck.

A: Like a duckling.

M: Like a tiny baby duck. And so ten years later, after being bowled over by the cute police officer and then eventually figuring out who that is, Shen Wei decides that he is going to Help.

A: Yes.

F: Just unilaterally is like, I can definitely insert myself into this police investigation—

M: And not get myself arrested or murdered.

F: For the sole purpose of helping and preserving the main detective.

A: I have to protect him!

M: I have to protect him, and oh no, he likes his subordinates, I guess I have to protect all his subordinates too! I will nobly take this upon myself!

A: All of them. All of them, yes. No one asked me to do this, I'm not a professional, but I will do it because I imprinted on this man at age 10 or whatever, yes.

[M laughs]

F: Yep. It was a nice way of doing the past lives thing without using any magic.

A: Yes! Yes, yes.

F: Showing that you have a history with someone and there's this sense of recognition in your gut, I know this person, I'm meant to be with this person. And it was a really effective casefic, I thought.

A: Yeah.

F: Some casefics, they're very much that the case is happening in the background and the romance is the main thing, but I was really invested in how the detective story played out in this one.

M: Me, too.

A: Yes.

M: And there's a part in the middle where the first time that they kiss is because Shen Wei has maneuvered them to be standing outside of a suspect's classroom and is trying to make himself look suspicious by kissing the police chief's son? And I'm just like, baby! It's the inverted kiss to avert suspicion. And I'm just like, I love this so much!

F: Yes, kissing to attract suspicion.

A: Yes.

M: You're all fucking idiots, you're just really stupid!

A: It executed the tropes very well, I thought. And with a good amount of pacing.

M: And there's just Shen Wei standing there going, what is this tingling feeling? [laughs]

A: Sexual attraction for the first time in my life.

F: And this is a version of the detective boyfriends trope where one of them is an actual detective and the other one just gets drawn in as a—

A: Consultant.

F: Witness, turns into consultant, question mark?

M: A non-consensual consultant.

F: Non-consensual consultant. You can see this being the pilot episode of a procedural.

M: Oh yeah! Of [Bones](#)! Of *Bones*!

F: This is how the odd couple of detectives forms, this is how this person becomes involved as part of this detective found family, and now they're gonna go off and have detective adventures.

A: And then you have the series big bad introduced, which is Shen Wei's brother, who would naturally last for at least the rest of the season, possibly several seasons.

F: Dear galaxysoup, please write us the rest of this season.

M: Yes! Right? Please, galaxysoup, come back. We would read more.

A: Yes. Yes.

M: But this is not a million miles away from how the actual TV show does it with consulting biology professor and part time alien, question mark, because they're aliens. Not demons.

F: Yeah, the trope of a detective romantic partnership relies very heavily on loose interpretations of the term "consultant" I think.

[M laughs]

A: Yes. Yes. The fact that they're allowed so often to just wander in and take part in things even though they're not paid employees... How do most of them have that much time, by the way?

M: Well, no, it actually makes complete sense, Alex, it makes complete sense, just assume that Shen Wei has tenure.

A: [unconvinced] OK.

F: Hmm.

A: Alright. Alright. Sure.

F: I'm assuming he does.

M: It's like Tolkien, who would try to make people stop going to his lectures so he didn't have to do any work at all!

A: The one time where I've seen this where it was faintly plausible was, did either of you watch the TV show, [Castle](#)?

M: *Castle*?

A: Where he's there for a reason, he's not just there to be a consultant, he's also—

M: It's a stupid reason.

A: I mean, initially yes, he's kind of a suspect in the beginning, but he's there to research his novels, right?

M: Right.

A: And they do make an effort to protect him, and keep him out of harm's way, and they put a bulletproof vest on him...

M: [laughs] He's a mystery novelist, Freya.

A: He's a mystery novelist.

M: He basically inserts himself into a bunch of investigations because he is in a murder, he's involved in one in the first episode...

A: Yeah, in the pilot episode he's implicated in a murder because someone is doing a copycat of one of the murders from his book.

M: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And he's like, oh, this is interesting!

F: Well, that's how the Peter Wimsey/Harriet Vane partnership gets set up. Because Harriet Vane is a mystery writer and they meet when she gets framed for poisoning her lover.

M: Amazing! I really do need to read [those books](#).

F: And she's on trial and probably going to be executed, and he has to prove her innocence, but it gets really complicated when he falls instantly in love with her.

[M laughs]

F: She's like, "Stop declaring your feelings, go and solve the case! I'm gonna get hanged!" He's like, "But I'm in love! Ohh, maybe I should drop the case." She's like, "No, don't drop the case!"

[A & M laugh]

F: "Get me out of prison!" And then the subsequent books with Harriet, she stumbles across murders while she's off on a writer's retreat trying to finish her book. Harriet Vane is one of my favorite fictional characters, she's amazing.

M: Amazing. But we should cover the next tentpole, which doesn't have boyfriends.

A: Yes, because it has husbands, in fact.

M: Husbands!

A: Very thin distinction there. The next tentpole is *Of Dragons, Feasts, and Murders* by Aliette de Bodard, and this was a later book in a series, right? Yes.

F: Yes. It's a novella that—

A: I have not read the previous ones but I enjoyed this one, and I felt a little bit like I was dropped in the middle but I still didn't have a problem picking up the worldbuilding. She did a really good job of including everything.

F: Well, the previous trilogy has so many characters and these two are just one of the major threads that sort of goes through the trilogy.

A: Ohh!

M: I see.

F: This is a novella that's just like, let's play with everyone's favorite characters!

A: Yes.

F: For a novella.

A: So the detective husbands are the fallen angel Asmodeus and the dragon prince, and I apologize, I am not sure how to pronounce his name, it's either Tuan or Thuan. It is a Vietnamese name. And they are visiting Thuan's family for Vietnamese New Year and while they're there, obviously there's the tension of visiting family and family holidays, you know how visiting family for family holidays.

M: But also when your great aunt is the emperor.

A: Also when your great aunt is the emperor.

F: More importantly than going home for the holidays is going to the court of the dragon empress, because Thuan is a dragon and also a member of the royal family. And when he and Asmodeus got married, it was a diplomatic marriage of convenience. Which was amazing!

[30:41]

A: So obviously stress levels are high, as you might expect.

F [laughing]: Mmhm.

A: And stress levels only get more high when they discover a murder.

M: Murr derr.

F: Yayy.

A: And they go through all the beats of the solving a murder—they investigate the clues, and they interview witnesses, and one of them gets kidnapped and has to be rescued.

M: Yas! A lot happens in a novella.

A: A lot happens in it for a novella.

F: Oh yeah.

A: Absolutely, absolutely. So yes, just a beat for beat kind of perfect example of the detective murder mystery in a very short amount of space. I was very impressed with it.

M: And I found it very interesting that in some ways, because this is an established relationship, the mystery is less to draw them together, and it almost more forces them apart. Right?

A: Mm!

M: They come into conflict with each other within the relationship because of how they choose to approach this investigation. One of them's saying, "Well, this is not our problem. We should get out of here before all hell breaks loose."

A: Right. And the other's saying, "Actually, no."

M: "Actually, it's my family! I don't want them all dead, actually."

A: Right. And yeah.

M: And Asmo is just like, "Why not? They're kind of shit, babe."

[general laughter among the Serpents]

F: Yup. One of the things that I love about the way that Aliette de Bodard does mysteries—and a lot of her novellas are mysteries—is that the people solving the mysteries often are even just as complicated, in terms of their personalities and their motives, as the people who are eventually found to be guilty of the murders. Asmodeus is a very stabby person.

[simultaneously]

M: YEAH.

A: He is.

F: There are— When a secret society is trying to distract the detective husbands, they're like, "Here is a criminal. Would you like to torture them to death? We hear you enjoy that." And Asmodeus is like, "Mm! Tempting."

[M cackling]

F: But I think, you know, he's someone who does not actually have a lot of patience for the detecting side of things.

M: Not really.

F: He doesn't— He is the ruthless one. And Thuan is the bookish one, as they say. And I think that is a really good set of foils, like a good team to have? Is to have somebody whose main approach is "Can I stab it?"

M: Mmm.

F: And somebody whose main approach is "Can I find the answer in a book somewhere?"

[laughter]

F: Which is very much what I relied on writing *A Marvellous Light*.

A: Yes.

M: I feel like that's an interesting thing you got also in the fanfic, because they have an actual detecting Team(!) with like, a Rookie, and a Muscle, and a Smart Computer Dude, and a Science Apprentice. And so that was really fun.

[F & A agreeing]

M: Like, it's sometimes fun to have not stranded your main couple having to rely on only each other. Sometimes it's nice to give them help.

A & F: Yeah.

A: Yeah, well, let's talk about why that is so romantic to have that. Is it just about the balance? Is there something else? Like, why is it? Why does it work so well to have these two foils set up?

F: Well, I think any good romance, you have to be able to describe them as foils in some way.

[M & A make noises of agreement]

F: Like, if they are exactly the same type of person, then it is less interesting—

M: Right.

F: —because the whole idea of a romance is that they are fulfilling some kind of need, that the other one has.

A: Mm. Mmm.

F: Not that they are complete only with the other person, but that there is something about the person that they are falling in love with that either brings them out of themselves, or helps them to be more themselves in a really good way.

M: Mm-hm.

F: And so if you think about the kind of foils that make up a good detective duo—and this is why it's such a good romance basis—

M: Right.

F: Is that yes, you often have the careful, studious one and the reckless one. So sometimes you do need to take a step back and do some research to solve a clue. And sometimes, for plot, you need someone to just run in and start creating mess.

A: Yeah

M: Yes.

F: Because mess makes for really good plot.

M: Yep. Yep. We love us a Gryffindor.

F: And sometimes you want to have that tension of somebody with a really strong moral compass, and a really strong reason for “this is why we have to seek justice,” or “I want to help my family.” And then you have somebody who's maybe a little bit more amoral, who's coming at it from a more intellectual perspective. And that creates good interpersonal tension along the way of solving the mystery.

A: Mm.

F: And quite often, I think, especially in these really classic detective duos, you then get the main detective and the one who serves a sort of secondary purpose, so maybe a consultant, but maybe also like a bodyguard, or a chronicler.

M: Mm-hmm. So the Watson.

F: The Watson! Yeah. So the Watson is the chronicler, but he kind of also becomes consultant-y, in that he has specialized areas of knowledge in medicine. And he's also the one with like, the military background.

M: Well, it's almost like—

F: So he's kind of all three at once.

M: So in a romance—and in problem-solving, in general—it is helpful to have people with different ideas who can argue productively.

A: Yeah.

M: Right?

F: Mmm.

M: And I think with the detecting, you want them to have— It's how you strengthen your theories and come up with new ideas, is you spark off each other. In a romance, however, you're trying to grow as people, you're trying to get them to... to reveal wounds, and then resolve their wounds. And so you need them to be slightly at counterpoint to each other, in order to have that argument—

A: Mm.

M: That conflict, those conflicting—

F: So really from a fiction point of view, it's kind of boring, just being in one person's head while they deduce things on their own.

M: That's true.

A: Yeah.

F: If you make it dialogue, if you make it “What if this?” “Oh, there's the hole in that.” “What if this?” “Oh, I hadn't thought of that.”

M: Mm-hmm.

F: That is much more engaging than just one person scurrying around ticking along by themselves.

A: Right. Right, right, right.

F: But you seemed that you were having a realization, Alex.

A: Yes, I was having a realization that [*Gold and Iron*](#) is also a detective boyfriends book.

[M laughing]

F [also laughing]: Yes, it is. Did you not notice that?

A: Well, I mean, I sort of... I don't think I noticed it with the top of my head. Like, consciously.

M: Right-right-right-right-right.

F: I think because you have also given them a lot of more support stuff, it's less obvious.

A: Right. And also, I was coming at it primarily from like, "This is the fealty book about fealty. Oh, I'd better give them something to do." Right? And so I was thinking of it primarily as the other thing, rather than like, "Oh, no, this is structured as a detective boyfriends book."

F: I mean, to a certain extent, the fantasy plot in my trilogy is just so that all three romance couples have something to do.

M: Sure. You need to give them a hobby.

F: Let's be honest.

A: Yeah, absolutely.

M: Yeah, that's a mood. That's a mood.

F: Yeah.

A: Should— So on the subject then, just to keep moving us along, if that is all right. When we are writing detective boyfriends, are we all just living in the shadow of Arthur Conan Doyle?

[big sigh from M]

A: He was kind of the trope inventor, was he not? I mean, I don't I don't think like—

F: There's something so fundamental about the Watson and Sherlock Holmes pairing.

A: Yeah, yeah.

F: I think it's sort of the basis for so many things—even if they're not directly referencing it, or directly derived from it—

A: Its influence.

F: —to have the shadow of that archetypal relationship.

M: Right. And it's truly fascinating trying to dig through *anything* on modern TV with detective partnerships in, and see how the roots come back. It's like— We were laughing beforehand— before the episode, listeners—about [House MD](#). And how that is a Sherlock AU.

F: Oh, it is, absolutely.

M: Right.

A: Like, deliberately. Yeah.

F: Yeah. Very deliberately, down to a lot of the references they make— the names of the characters. Yeah, yeah.

A: Mm-hmm.

M: And like [The Angel of Crows](#), which Freya mentioned the other week.

F: Yep. Sherlock wingfic.

A [resigned]: Yeah.

M: Sherlock wingfic! What's up with that? And, you know, what is it? What is it about the two of them?

F: But I think— But, you know, there's been a lot of a great tradition now of procedurals—especially on television, but also in books—realizing that if you have a good central couple whose dynamic has got good chemistry, and one of at least one of those foil relationships in it, then you can just—

[A & M agreeing]

F: Then really the mysteries are just giving those two people something to do. And you can drag out a relationship for a really long time, which is great.

M: Right. And it's a certain degree of just competence porn, right?

F: Mm.

M: It's watching people be really good at a thing that you think is hard.

A: Yeah.

M: You're meant to think that solving mysteries is hard. And it is, but the trick is that everybody writes them backwards.

A: [Doctor Who](#) also does this.

F: Yeah.

A: *Doctor Who* is also drawing on this, because the Doctor is the Sherlock character. And then the companion—

F: You have a rotating Watson.

A: —is the Watson. Right. And they run around, basically solving mysteries, and the Doctor gets to be super smart and amazing. And the companion gets to say, “Wow, you’re so cool.” And help it make him more human! But also help to make him more human. Yeah.

F: And I think when you’re right about competency, I think one of the joys of a romance and a really good fundamental relationship is that they get to see one another, being competent at stuff.

A: Mm.

F: And go, “Oh, yes, you cracked the case.” “Oh, that was a brilliant breakthrough.” And then they get to rescue each other.

M: Yeah.

F: So you get the competency porn, and you get the hurt comfort and the “Oh, no, the person I care about is in trouble.” Because you’re, by your very nature, dealing with dangerous people.

M: Right. Right. No, that makes sense.

A: Yeah, it makes the feelings more intense and immediate? Because the stakes are higher.

M: Yep.

F: Mm. Yeah, and I think— I like this dot point that— Was this yours, Macey? —the joy of using the casefic engine as a delivery vector for relationship growth.

M [chuckling]: Yeah.

F: Which I really agree with. It is! It’s a vector, it’s a way of, if what you care about is exploring the relationship, then you know, giving them the mystery to solve means you can throw in whatever you want in order to strengthen or test the relationship bond there.

M: Right. And I was thinking about this a ton as I was reading your book, and because I’ve also been reading [Jenn's third book](#) at the moment, as well. And Jenn is just very, very good at what she writes. But I was thinking about how much more space you have to explore interpersonal dynamics when you are untangling a mystery, versus when you’re solving the world— Ah, bleh bleh. Versus when you’re *saving* the world. Right? So when you have to punch a dragon in the face, you’re not really getting much into each other’s philosophy on life, you know?

[A laughing]

F: But also, I think, the stakes matter. Like when the stakes are punch a dragon, save the world, right? Romantic stuff almost feels like any downtime we have, we shouldn’t have this downtime.

M: Mmmm.

F: Like nothing is as important as saving the world. Whereas if your job—your day-to-day career—is solving a mystery, or the mystery is maybe a little bit smaller, or you're not quite sure how big it is yet—

M: Mm-hm.

F: Then the beats of romance can have equal weight—

M [emphatically]: Sure.

F: —in terms of stakes.

A: Yeah.

F: Which I think makes a big difference.

A: Yeah.

M: Yeah. When it's like "I might need to save your life," or possibly a victim's life, "but I don't need to save the planet Earth."

F: Yeah. And to use, again, [Captive Prince](#) as an example. It's not really detective boyfriends, but the reason it works is because yes, the stakes are fates of nations, but the romance between them has the same stakes.

A: Right.

F: Because they are the relative princes and kings of their kingdoms. And, you know, their tragic backstory is related to the relationship between nations.

[noises of agreement from A & M]

F: It works because the stakes of their relationship are so high.

A: Yes.

F: So they were—

A: The stakes are matched.

F: Yeah, they're matched stakes, which I think is important.

M: Right. Because if you're writing a romance-romance with a capital R, you need to have the impediment. And if you're writing a romance that is also something else, you want the impediment to tie in with the something else that the book is, so it does need to be on that same scale, right? No, you're right.

A: Right.

F: Mm. And I think what you're asking here about the difference between a conspiracy and a mystery, and I think the reason conspiracy can work well is because you can have small people like small cogs caught up in a larger picture.

M: Mmm. Mm-hm.

F: And so for them, the romance can be like a grounding point, like something that is the most important *to them* as they are caught up in a larger picture.

M: I do think it's fun also because there's a big overlap between a mystery and a conspiracy. Right? But if I'm trying to figure out where I personally draw the line... It's, I guess, a mystery, you see on the page, roughly the size of it. You're like, "This person is dead. By the end of the book, I will have solved why this person is dead." If it is a conspiracy though, it's "This person is dead. By the end of the book, I will have found a group of 12 people trying to overthrow the kingdom."

A: Sure.

M: "Because of unpicking the threads of why this person is dead."

F: Yes, for me, a mystery is much more "who." And a conspiracy is much more about the "why," with the implication that the why will expose a larger picture, not just one interpersonal conflict.

M: Right. I think that like that, you get the who as well, kind of, with the mystery— You get the why as well.

F: Oh yeah, the why is important in a mystery, but I would expect, like with a base— a murder mystery, a detective story, the why may just be a small interpersonal thing, but a conspiracy, the why is going to have larger stakes and larger implications, right?

A: Right.

M: And I think, so Freya book is almost as much conspiracy as it is a mystery. And I was thinking of a couple of other sci-fi examples, actually, fairly recently. Books like [Winter's Orbit](#) or [A Memory Called Empire](#). Right?

F: Yes. Mm.

M: Which deal with this kind of "get caught up and then you have to unpick the conspiracy to even save your own life."

A: Right

F: And *A Memory Called Empire* does the same thing that *A Marvellous Light* does, which is a very common way to kick off a conspiracy murder— a conspiracy mystery.

M [witch-cackling]: HAHAA, yes!

F: Which is, “I have been sent here to replace somebody who is now missing. What happened to them?”

M [emphatically]: Yes! I love that.

F: Like, at least one of the [Vorkosigan books](#) does that as well.

M: Yes, the bureaucrat previously known as me.

A: Was that [Komarr](#)?

F: I think... so? There's a couple of them that are sort of like that. It's very much like somebody in this society, this machine, has gone missing.

A: Vanished.

F: Work out why.

A: Yeah, yeah.

F: Mm.

M: But I think—and this might also just be my tastes as well though—with the casefic engine, I really like couples who have an intellectual connection as well. Right? And I think that showing off to solve the mystery and having them be impressed by how the other one thinks?

A: Yeah.

M: It's just really nice. I just like it?

A: It is really nice because none of us are allosexual on this podcast.

[laughter ensues]

A: So...

M: It's nice! It's nice to be able to have conversations that are interesting with the person you're involved with.

A: Yeah, brains are sexy—

M: Don't lick them.

A: —when they do brain things? I don't know where I was going with that.

F: I think— Yep. And that's why I like— This is a good segue to our next thing, which is about the slow burn detective partner romances. So I think for me one of the examples of this genre that I probably imprinted on quite hard, and that I think, does influence and inform the romance in *A Marvellous Light* is *Bones*.

M: Mmm, oh *Bones*.

A: Yes. Yes, yes.

F: Which, I loved the central relationship in *Bones*.

M: Yes.

F: And you can kind of see—

M: I see it. I do see it.

F: —echoes of it in *A Marvellous Light* in that you've got one who's much more about the research and the data, and you know, wanting to read the books or be in the lab.

M: Yep.

F: Like, if this was a modern AU, Edwin would be the one in the lab.

M: Oh yes.

A: Mm-hmm. I can see it.

F: And every time he has to be dragged out into the field, he would complain extremely about it. Whereas Robin would be the one wandering around, flashing his badge, being charming to people—

A: Wearing his sunglasses...

F: Wearing his sunglasses, getting information through, you know, just being a generally good at socializing kind of person.

[46:38]

M: So dear listeners — once you have bought and consumed *Marvellous Light*, please send Alex and I, but not Freya, fanfic AUs of *A Marvellous Light* with these two as forensic detectives.

[F chuckles]

A: Yes!

M: And Freya will not look at it. At all.

A: YES!

F: I will not look at them, but I'll be very glad to know that they exist.

M: But Alex and I will be exceedingly delighted.

A: Yes.

[M laughs]

F: Yeah.

A: Yes we will.

F: Yeah.

A: Actually, I second that.

M: Yup!

A: Please send me all of the *Marvellous Light* fanfic that you write, thank you, yes.

M: Yep, yes. Thank you.

F: But, you know— and I think this is— oh, sorry Macey, you are full of feelings.

M: No, I'm going to derail us— if you let me do this I will derail us. So if you have something relevant of note...

F: Oh, no, I just wanted— I will finish my dot point about slow burn romances. Which is that the nature of procedural television and long arc television—

[M hums]

A: Yes.

F: —means that you can do a real slow burn. You can do those challenges to the relationship...

M: Yes!

F: The... you can have a really gradual buildup of things like, you know, "Oh, it's a season finale, let's put one of them in danger and the other one will inch closer to realizing their feelings."

[A laughs]

F: And the whole way through you can do competency porn—

M: [Leverage](#)!

F: And people like this! Like there's definitely a huge market for a, you know, a central pair of people who are solving mysteries together with good chemistry. Like, [The X-Files](#) is a really classic one.

M: Right. Right right right right right.

F: Macey? [Laughs]

M: So! Here is where I ask if you two will give me—as long slow burn detective boyfriends TV—[Hannibal](#).

F: Yes.

A: Yeah!

F: Obviously.

M: Murder boyfriends! I love them!

F: Murder boyfriends!

A: Why wouldn't we give you that?

M: They're the worst! They don't so much solve mysteries as commit mysteries?

A: They commit mysteries.

F: It's like Aliette's book, in that one of them is just as stabby as most murderers out there.

A: Yeah.

F: But you're still gonna get—

M: I feel like Hannibal would resent being called "stabby", you know? He doesn't stab, he *carves*.

A: He *carves*. He carves! Why was it a question that we might not give you that one, Macey?

M: Because they're not solving mysteries, are they?

F: They are!

M: Well mostly ones that he killed, or he wanders off and kills the person who did it before they can get to them. [Laughs]

F: It's true, like, Hannibal himself— like, the structure is a little different.

M: Sure.

F: But the whole point of Hannibal Lecter is that he's a consulting serial killer.

A: Yeah.

M: A consulting cannibal.

A: Consulting cannibal.

F: He's a consulting cannibal! Yeah.

[M laughs again]

M: I love him.

F: Yeah, absolutely. And the other format that I think lends itself to this sort of slow burn romance is urban fantasy book series.

[A + M hum]

F: Which are very frequently structured around episode of the week. Like, mystery or monster of the week. And also very frequently have a primary on and off, or sort of slowburn, love interest for the main character.

[A + M hum]

M: I was thinking through detective shows that I really love, and one of them was— so, we titled this episode, dear listeners, you will notice, ‘Detective Boyfriends’. All of our examples are detective boyfriends; this is not nearly as common with girlfriends. And so I was thinking of the show [Rosemary & Thyme](#)? Which I don’t know if either of you have come across?

[A makes a noise meaning “no”]

F: No...

M: But the thing is, they’re just best friends. They don’t really have chemistry. And, I don’t know. There’s a funny thing. But I was also thinking about the show [Poirot](#). And then I was thinking, “Has anyone, ever, tried to ship *Poirot*...?”

A: Oh, probably.

M: ‘Cause he strikes me— he just strikes me as very ace.

A: There’s a whole internet out there.

M: He just strikes me as very ace.

A: There’s a whole internet out there! Of course someone has *tried*. I don’t know if they’ve succeeded...

F: The thing with *Poirot* though is that the— he’s one of those few characters where the satisfaction is all in just watching him work by himself.

M: Right!

A: Ah, yeah.

M: Right.

F: If he had a foil, he wouldn’t need to gather everybody into a room and be like, “Now we’re all going to listen to me monologue about how clever I am.”

M: Right.

F: Because we would have seen the cleverness bouncing off things. It’s just a different style of detecting.

M: It is! And it's just super interesting to me how different it is to anything you see today. 'Cause I couldn't imagine a similar creature today, you know?

F: Mmm.

M: We'd get annoyed. They'd be too smug, somehow.

A: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

F: Yeah, I mean, look, there are still quite a lot of TV shows unfortunately that are built around the idea of, "There's this one white guy and he's brilliant."

M: Mmm. That's true. But—

F: But I think—

A: I think a lot of superhero shows are kind of filling that niche now.

F: Mmm. But I think they've also recognized that what people want is a good ensemble around that person.

M: Yeah.

A: Yes, yes.

F: Like a good sort of, you know, snarky found family ensemble thing. So if you're gonna build a show around one person, you have to give them a good grounded ensemble for people to care about, basically.

[A hums]

M: Yeah, you're making me think of [Hinterland](#), which is a Welsh detective show that sort of has that, "Fancy detective from London gets kicked out for disgrace and has to go to small town Wales." And you're right, it's all about the people around him. It's just that he doesn't have a partner, per se.

F: Yeah. Well, I mean, oh, actually, [Hot Fuzz](#)—

M: Oh?

F: —is the *formation* of a detective boyfriends.

A: Mmm!

M: OH?

F: Because it starts with like, one central guy who thinks of himself as the main character and goes out and does detective-ing. And along the course of his murder—or his mystery solving—discovers that he actually does have a foil slash best friend.

M: Aw!

A: Yes, yes. Yes.

F: Uh, and it turns into a buddy cop.

M: That's cute.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

F: God, I love *Hot Fuzz*. I should rewatch that again.

A: That's a fun movie.

M: I have a question for Freya.

F: Yes.

M: In your magpie guise.

F: Mmm. Yes.

M: I was wondering. We've talked a lot about mystery romances. And you do a lot of genre fusion romances. I was wondering if you had any thoughts on other kinds of plot engines or fusions that work really well as romance vectors.

F: Mmm... So I think if you went up to the average—capital “R”—Romance reader, and said sort of “mystery romance” it would be less of a recognizable subgenre.

M: Okay.

F: Than something like romantic suspense.

M: Huh.

F: So romantic suspense is ones like a lot of, you know, people might be like an FBI agent and someone that they're trying to protect. Or two people who get caught up in an action conspiracy. I think like some mafia romances probably are romantic suspense as well. Like there's— there's always a higher stake adventure. Usually some kind of deadly threat going on. Cozy mysteries with— like, cozy mysteries *can* have romance in them?

M: Mhm.

F: Like a lot of them would have a romance, some of them don't. Um, but I think if you're looking, there are people like Sherry Thomas' [Lady Sherlock series](#), which are historical mysteries with a slow burn romance in them. So Sherry Thomas is a romance writer, but the Lady Sherlock books are not romances. Because they don't follow the beats, and they haven't got a happy ever after for the main couple. But the main couple are having a very slow burn getting together across the whole series, which is much more like an urban fantasy series. It just happens to be set in Victorian England.

[M + A hum]

F: But I think it does work really well for romance, because of— as long as you've got that something for them to *do*—

[M laughs]

F: —and... deadly peril. Like, that's a perfect combination. Because it means you can do someone rescuing the other. You can do them realizing how much they care about the other person because they're in danger. You can do, "Oh, you're wounded. Let me nurse you back to health. Let me tie up your arm." You can do the post adrenaline danger bang.

[M giggles]

F: You know, there is so much you can do with *danger* in a romance.

A: Mmm!

M: And then we can have them be injured, as they must be in order to have sex on page in a Freya book.

F: Mmm! Exactly!

A: That's true. In a Freya book people don't get to have sex unless they're injured.

F: They're injured.... Yeah.

M: Bleeding is not required but it is encouraged.

F: The problem is I like causing injuries, and I like sex scenes!

[M wheezes]

F: And they just— unfortunately, due to the beats of a story, often happen at the same time!

M: We will never stop teasing you about this. We will never stop teasing you!

A: I have a further question for Freya. How is it that nobody has gotten injured during a sex scene yet?

F: Well, I mean, you know.... it's possible? But also it kind of throws you out of the sex scene.

A: Yes...

F: Like, it would make for like a fun... a fun thing to happen. But it depends what you're doing with that sex scene. 'Cause if the sex scene is there to heighten tension, then you kind of want a good flow in it—

A: Sure.

F: —that an injury during sex would kind of....

A: It would be— it would work if you had the sex scene towards the beginning, where they hadn't resolved it yet.

M: You want to interrupt.

A: And so it's like, that kind of tease.

F: Yeah, it would be a cockblocking event. Yeah.

A: So they're almost there, they're making out, they're getting hot and heavy, and then someone gets their dick broken. And they have to stop.

F: Yes, that's true.

M: Okay well, let's define injury. 'Cause there are also... like, you can break skin in sex on purpose and have that be fun for everyone too. But—

A: By injury I'm saying something that is going to impede your ability to continue with the sex.

M: Hmm. I mean I think what we're saying already though is that in Freya's books, injury does not impede sex!

F: No.

A [higher-pitched, pensive]: No... but they, well—

[M bursts out in a cackle]

A: —here's the thing...

F: I can see it having a place, but I think it would have to be relatively— either a relatively light-hearted book—

A: Sure.

F: —or it would be quite difficult to pull off.

M: Yep, yep. There we go Freya, there's a dare for you.

F: I mean, people do things, like, um, like paranormals and things like that would do—

M: Oh yes.

F: "Oh no, I accidentally hurt my partner because of my super strength" or whatever, you know. And so that definitely is a way of increasing angst, and creating an impediment.

A: Yeah.

F: Because then that person is like, "Oh, I cannot possibly have sex with you again. What if I accidentally—"

A: I am VAMPYR!

[All three laugh]

F: “—what if I accidentally drain your life? Oh no!”

A: Sure.

M: Might ascend, and become an immortal! I don’t know. Anyway!

F: Yeah, yeah. We’re just talking around [Twilight](#).

A: We are all thinking of *Twilight* in this example.

M: I’m just like, “Never? For how many hundreds of years? Never? Okay.”

A: Okay.

F: Yeah.

M: That’s fine.

A: Shall we get back to talking about detective boyfriends?

F: Yes, let’s do that. Can we talk about K.J. Charles?

M: I will always listen to you tell us about K.J. Charles.

A: Can you please? Please can we talk about K.J. Charles?

F: Well, I was having a think about which of my favourite K.J. Charles’ are best examples of detective boyfriends. And I think the most classic one is [The Will Darling Adventures](#). So those three books are very pulpy. Although neither of them is a detective, they are very much put into the same kind of, “Oh well we’re in danger and there’s a conspiracy and we have to solve it to get ourselves out of danger.”

F: Technically it is kind of Kim’s job in it, because Kim is a spy. So he does actually have to help uncover conspiracies as his career, and then Will gets drawn in as puncher versus, you know, hang on, let me say that again— Will gets drawn in as the person who stabs people, slash, you know, unwittingly caught up in things and has to get himself out again.

A: Mmm.

M: I’m having some thoughts about why [John le Carré](#) or like, [Bond](#) in general is never a good vector for romance? Mostly because it’s not a romance if they die? But continue!

F: It’s not— yeah, and James Bond can’t be a vector for romance because the entire series is so solipsistically about—

M: Yeah, no no, I mean not even Bond specifically but like, the genre of spy novels. You *could* have a really cool rival fighting spies across multiple book tour.

F: Yeah, and there are— romance suspense with spies is a definite genre.

M: Oh fun!

F: But I think realistic spy fiction is just too depressing.

M: That's a mood.

A: Right, right right right.

M: But there was that one that we read as well with the manor house mystery.

A: Yes, [Think of England](#)! So good.

F: Yes.

M: Aha!

A: So good.

F: And that's very much like, two people against the world stuck in a manor house full of terrible people. One of them, again, like, the both of them go in trying to solve a mystery.

[A hums]

F: And then they discover that they're kind of the same mystery, and they have to work together. And *that* has blowjobs to avoid suspicion!

M: That's— it's just— yeah!

F: Which is a [makes chef kiss noise] just spot on use of the trope, absolutely. And—

A: Perfect, perfect.

M: But you're also making me think of that [scene](#) in [Doctor Who](#) where Donna and the Doctor spot each other across an office that they're spying on.

A: Oh yes.

M: And they're like, "YOU!"

F: Ah, that's such a good scene.

M: And you're making me think of that with these two.

F: Yeah.

M: Like, "You're detecting? But I'M detecting! What are you detecting?" Like...

F: And like, K.J. Charles is just so good at a foil.

M: Yes.

A: She is!

F: Like, *The Will Darling Adventures* and *Think of England* have the like, straightforward steady one, and the slippery spy one.

M: Mmm.

A: Yes. Yes yes yes.

F: Yep.

M: Yes, gotta have a Slytherin and a Gryffindor to be mad at each other about their terrible ethics!

A: True! Exactly!

F: Yeah, and about their— the way that their approaches to problems don't mesh.

M: Yep yep yep.

A: Yep.

M: I want more Hufflepuffs.

A: Okay, can I recommend a series to you, Macey?

M: Oh?

A: [Greenwing & Dart](#) by Victoria Goddard!

M: Detectives? Detective Hufflepuffs? Oh cool!

A: Detectives! Well, detective best friends, not detective boyfriends. But yes.

M: Okay. Hmm!

F: Mhm.

A: But yeah, it is full of Hufflepuffs and good boys.

F: Are they both Hufflepuffs, or is there like a— one that is slightly more something else?

A: That's a good question. That is a good question. Um, I would say that the main character Jemis absolutely is a Hufflepuff. The other one, Mr. Dart, I am going to have to think about that. I feel like he's probably more of a Gryffindor.

M: That's good. We like to have like, some contrast.

A: We do like to have a little bit.

M: I'm more like— a lot of the times you have lots of Gryffindors, and then the foil is either a sneaky Slytherin or a bookish Ravenclaw.

A: Yeah.

M: But you don't get a ton of just plodding along in detectives.

A: Yeah. Well, now, actually now that I'm thinking about it... no no no. Jemis is more of a Gryffindor. What is Mr. Dart, then? I'm going to have to take this to the Discord server and like, have a whole discussion about it.

M: There we go. Alex will inform us later on Twitter. But! I see that we wanted to name drop a few more things in the last few minutes.

A: Oh yes.

F: Yes! Yes, I wanted to name drop the entire sub genre of Harry/Draco fanfiction—

M: [Laughs] Yes!

F: —where one or both of them are Aurors. 'Cause you have in that case, a canonical career where part of the job is being a detective, essentially.

M: Was it [Episode 33](#) or 34 that we did police? That we had a Harry/Draco case [fic](#)?

F: Yes.

A: Yeah!

F: Yeah we did procedurals.

M: There we go. Yes, exactly those.

F: That's quite common because you have it set up that Harry wants to be an Auror.

M: And we know that Draco is his foil.

F: Yeah, exactly! And there's this huge range of fics where Harry has to solve a mystery in some random magical subculture or industry, and then Draco is in one of seventy million different random magical careers. Who then either becomes witness victim or consultant, depending on the story.

M: Mmm. Mhm! And I know you were thinking about having us read [A Dead Djinn In Cairo](#), right Freya?

F: That is detective girlfriends. Well, it is a detective girl who acquires a girlfriend during the story. And then I was asking Alex whether [Good Omens](#) counts, here.

A: I *feel* like it does. I feel like it does.

M: What are they detecting?

A: They're detecting where the anti-Christ went.

M: Okay, a kidnapping! That's true, kidnapping!

F: That's true, that's a very concrete mystery! But they are also—like Edwin and Robin—caught up in a conspiracy that's bigger than both of them.

A: Right right right. It's also like, I think that what they meant to do was write a spy novel.

[M hums]

A: Because it's the two spies from opposite sides who have like formed—

M: Sure. It's Russia and America.

F: There's a lot of le Carré lampshading about the meetings in the park with the ducks.

A: Right, right.

M: Yeah, and the newspaper. Yes.

A: It's doing a lot of things.

M: Anyway, lots of detective boyfriends!

A: Lots of detective boyfriends. Dear listeners, thank you for joining us for the last episode that required tentpole readings!

[M gasps]

M: Yes!

A: We are now free from homework, but we are not free from answering your questions, which we will be doing next time.

[Outro music plays]

[01:02:17]

F: Hello everybody. Thanks for joining us for this penultimate episode of Be the Serpent, a podcast of extremely, extremely deep literary merit. I feel like this podcast is in many ways the half sibling of *A Marvellous Light*, as the past four years have been the years of drafting it, revising it, going on submission with it, waiting the long long months before publication... and now celebrating its release! So I did want to say thank you so much to all the listeners who've attended launch events, supported me by buying the book, reviewed it, tweeted about it, taken

pictures of it — honestly all your enthusiasm means the world to me. So I can only hope this particular pair of detective boyfriends brings you half as much joy.

F: And now, for the next and last episode two weeks hence on December 1st, I hope you have a long car ride or a deep thorough spring cleaning of the house planned, something that will let you pop your earbuds in—or make the neighbors blush, we won't judge—and just get settled in for a nice, double length farewell. That's right, it is our centenary episode: Episode 100 Super-stravaganza. We'll be answering your questions, reminiscing, and maybe playing some silly games. Despite the fact that we record in my mornings, I might also have a drink in hand. No tentpoles, no pre-reading. Just enjoy.

F: Despite everything coming to a close, we do still welcome questions, comments, and breathless adulations. So if you wish you can get in touch with us at serpentcast@gmail.com, or @serpentcast on Twitter and Tumblr. And do still consider leaving us a rating and review on iTunes if you haven't already, so that new listeners can find us and gorge themselves on the backlist.

F: And by the way, excellent detective work today. You deserve a pint. Or possibly a pipe.

[01:03:58]

What We're Into Lately

[Dark Rise](#) by C. S. Pacat

[The Saint of Steel](#) series by T. Kingfisher

[that ruthless love](#) by alherath

[The Warrior of the Third Veil](#) by Victoria Goddard

[The Sisters Avramapul](#) series by Victoria Goddard

Other Stuff We Mentioned

[Captive Prince](#) by C. S. Pacat

[Chant Universe](#) by Alexandra Rowland

["You Should Really Be Reading Victoria Goddard's Nine Worlds Series"](#) by Alexandra Rowland

[Guardian](#)

[Bones](#)

[Castle](#)

[Lord Peter Wimsey series](#) by Dorothy L. Sayers

[A Taste of Gold and Iron](#) by Alexandra Rowland

[House](#)

[The Angel of Crows](#) by Katherine Addison

[Doctor Who](#)

[The Memory of Souls](#) by Jenn Lyons

[Captive Prince](#) series by C. S. Pacat

[Winter's Orbit](#) by Everina Maxwell

[A Memory Called Empire](#) by Arkady Martine

[Vorkosigan Saga](#) by Lois McMaster Bujold

[Komarr](#) by Lois McMaster Bujold

[Leverage](#)

[The X-Files](#)

[Hannibal](#)

[Rosemary & Thyme](#)

[Poirot](#)

[Hinterland](#)

[Hot Fuzz](#)

[Lady Sherlock series](#) by Sherry Thomas

[Twilight](#) by Stephenie Meyer

[The Will Darling Adventures](#) by K.J. Charles

[John le Carré](#)

[James Bond novels](#) by Ian Fleming

[Think of England](#) by K.J. Charles

An iconic Doctor & Donna [scene](#) from *Doctor Who*

[Greenwing & Dart](#) series by Victoria Goddard

[Be the Serpent Episode 33: Turn In Your Badge and Gun!](#)

[A Private Reason for This](#) by femmequixotic (aka mentioned Harry/Draco case fic)

[A Dead Djinn In Cairo](#) by P. Djèlí Clark

[Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch](#) by Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman

For Next Time

N/A

Content Warnings

N/A