

S.T. Gibson on Evocation Interview Transcript

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 to the stars

Sorren

And a dangerously high to-be-read pile.

Morgan

I'm Mogan, I use they/them pronouns and I'm a bedraggled wet cat of a man.

Sorren

I'm Sorren, I use he.him pronouns and I'm doing something unethical in the ancient Egyptian section of the library.

Saint

And I'm Saint, I use she/they pronouns and I am a six pack of sparkling water.

Morgan

Sorren and I have been friends for over a decade and the two of us are always swapping books.

Sorren

Usually the two of us take it in turns to recommend one another a favourite read. Today we've got something a little different: an author interview with S. T. Gibson to celebrate their new release Evocation.

Morgan

So let's get into it!

Sound Effect

[THEME MUSIC FADES OUT.]

Morgan

So today, we're doing something a little different. Very exciting. We have the lovely Saint with us to discuss their new book *Evocation*. Saint, do you want to tell everyone a little bit about you? For those who, for some reason haven't picked up any of your books yet?

Saint

(Laughs) Absolutely. My name is Saint, I write under S. T. Gibson and I mostly write gothic romance and romantic fantasy with a little bit of horror. You might know me as the author of *A Dowry of Blood*, which is a queer *Dracula's* brides retelling that came out about three years ago now, I'm pretty sure. I'm also the author of *An Education in Malice*. And I'm super excited to talk to you guys today about the *Summoner's Circle* series, which starts with *Evocation*.

Sorren

And for those people who might not know, can you tell us a little bit about what *Evocation* is about?

Saint

Absolutely, *Evocation* is a series starter. It's an urban fantasy romance, and it follows a arrogant Boston lawyer named David who moonlights as a medium for a secret society. But as he approaches his 30th birthday, he realises that an ancestral deal with the devil is coming to claim his soul, and the only two people he can trust to help him break this curse are his sorcerer ex boyfriend, and also the ex's new witch wife. And everybody gets a little bit too close for comfort and uncovers some big feelings while trying not to have their souls snatched out of their body. It's a great time.

Morgan

I didn't know it was a series when I started reading it. So when I got to the end, it was like, "Hang on, there's going to be more. I thought it was a standalone the whole time and then was like, "Wait, this is great. Oh my God!" It's perfect.

Sorren

Same. That was a surprise for me too. And I'm so happy 'cause I love them.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

We won't get into details yet, though. So I suppose this is a bit of a new format for our listeners as well, so what we're going to do is start with spoiler free questions so if you haven't read Evocation yet, it will be out by the time you're listening to this. So you can go do that. But if maybe you want to get a little taster before you start or maybe you've just- maybe you're halfway through, we're going to start with some spoiler free questions for Saint. And then once we've gone through those, we're going to warn you and then you can go away and finish it. And you can't blame us...

Saint
(Laughs)

Sorren

...If we tell you all about the ending. So, I was doing a lot of digging into your old interviews. I hope that's not too stalkerish.

Saint
(Laughs)

Sorren

But for A Dowry of Blood, I know you mentioned a lot of influence from film: from the 2004 Van Helsing.

Saint
Mm-hm!

Sorren

And also from Dracula Untold, like a specific frame.

Saint
Mm-hm.

Sorren

And I'm always really curious about what sparks the idea for a novel in the first place. So were there any similar influences for Evocation? Or do you remember what seeded the idea?

Saint

Yeah, Evocation has been on the backburner cooking for quite some time, but I think some of the strongest influences are definitely... I would have to say Maggie Stiefvater's The Raven Cycle series, which is, I think, my favourite series of all time. It's YA, which I- I don't read a tonne of YA, but I've read some really phenomenal YA, and that really sticks out. The character work is phenomenal. It just... It hits me in the gut every time, the prose is beautiful. And the magic in The Raven Cycle is very grounded in our world. Like the magic comes from tarot and ley lines and a sense of fatedness. It's just gorgeous. And I really am into that. And I love a lot of contemporary fantasy, urban fantasy. I grew up reading a lot of the early oughts urban fantasy, like the border town series, a little bit of Anita Blake, a little bit of the Dresden Files, a little bit Simon R. Green, and I really, really love that. And even when I was really little, like, my elementary school series, I was not like a Hunger Games or a Twilight kid I was a Artemis Fowl kid which is very contemporary fantasy in our world. So some of the stuff I've done before like A Dowry of Blood and An Education In Malice are more historical, you're playing with a more fantastical idea of like, a monster, but the Summoner's Circle series is is really grounded in our world, and in magic systems, and religious traditions that come from real, living, diverse occult traditions and that was really really fun to write, so... There's- there's a rich foundation here that's been brewing for a long time. Oh, and also- I- I would be nowhere if not for the Constantine movie and by extension, the Hellblazer Comics, The John Constantine comics, those- those really came- came in clutch... (Laughing) To inspire this.

Sorren

We're huge Raven Cycle fans as well.

Saint
Yay!

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
I was wondering, also, because I saw you mentioned The Raven's Prophecy in a different interview, the Tarot deck that Stiefvater did...

Saint
Yes! It's literally right here. I still have it.

Sorren
I've got it up on my wall. I don't know if that's blasphemous somehow? But I...

Saint
No! (Laughs)

Sorren
(Laughing) I like to look at the art.

Saint
I've seen- Especially when I was a little bit younger, I've seen Maggie Stiefvater at live events like, multiple times, and at one of them I got the High Priestess uh- of that deck signed, and it's very... It's treasured to me, so I love that deck. It's great, I still use it. I have like seven or eight of them. And it's a really good standby.

Morgan
Second question: outside of your novels, you also write a lot of poetry. And on this podcast, we're very big fans of prose writers who also write poetry, because we feel like it really adds to their like, practice...

Saint
Mm-hm.

Morgan

And to their- to their voice. Would you say your poetry has an influence on your prose or vice versa? And if so, in what way?

Saint

Absolutely, I think... I think you can tell that I originally trained as a poet when you look at my fiction, because I would say that my- my novels kind of run the gamut from being very- almost prose poetry, very dense, lyrical, like say *A Dowry of Blood*, to something a little bit more conversational and fast paced and modern feeling like *The Summoner's Circle* series. But I think in all of that I am just so into the music of language and the power of metaphor. There's very few things that satisfy me more than like, figuring out a way to say something really emotionally evocative with words that you wouldn't necessarily think go together. And I think that comes from uh- poetry. When I was in um, college, I was originally reading a lot of poetry, writing a lot of poetry... Some of my earliest memories of doing anything publishing related were doing uh- Tumblr poetry, mostly about like, fairy tale and biblical figures. I kind of got my start doing first person, almost confessional or diary sounding poetry. So I don't think it's a surprise that I went on to write *A Dowry of Blood* in a confessional kind of diary voice. But I just- I love poetry. I am really one of those people who think it is... It can be life saving, like if the right poem finds you at the right moment in time, there are very few things that are more powerful. I have some favourites that I always go back to, two of my favourites for anyone who wants recs are, uh... *Monet Refuses the Operation* by Lisel Mueller. That one is maybe my favourite poem of all time. And I also really love *Tim Riggins Speaks of Waterfalls*. And I'm forgetting the author at this- at this moment in time, but both phenomenal. So yeah, I love poetry. I'm a big poetry nerd. It's something I can never quite walk away from totally, you know? I'll be really in my little long form fiction flow, and writing my novels and everything, and when... Sometimes when I encounter a particularly strong

emotion, or a particularly strong desire, or a strong image, the only way I can get it down in a way that I feel satisfied with is in a poem.

Morgan

I definitely feel that one. It really does just elevate prose, because you've like, really studied the language and you really think about how it like, reads and how it flows.

Saint

I think another thing to point out here is that I was really inspired in my formative years, in like, early college and late high school, by authors who also have a poetry background, or who are still writing poetry. One of my formative influences is Catherynne Valente, who has written in a lot of genres, still creating great work. Deathless was very important to me, and- and so was Folktales and Fragile Dialects. And I was also really into- still am into Vladimir Nabokov, his language is already so lyrical. And then he does occasionally go into full kind of prose-poetry, experimental territory, and just really breaks down the boundaries of how you think language should act, and work, and what it does. I'm always really excited when I see authors that are kind of blending the disciplines in that way. Because I just think it- it's a really kind of no rules space that can create really cool, powerful, evocative moments.

Sorren

Speaking of, sort of, I guess, non-traditional approaches to prose and to plotting, you wrote an essay for The Stellar Beacon about using Tarot for worldbuilding and for storytelling...

Saint

Mm-hm?

Sorren

Did you use Tarot for Evocation?

Saint

(Laughing) Well, the cover for Evocation is The Hanged Man so we can start there.

Sorren
(Laughing) Exactly.

Saint

No, absolutely. I um... I love that essay that I wrote for The Stellar Beacon. I love that you have read it. It kind of flew under the radar because it got published before a lot of people knew who I was, but I love it, um... And I revisit it sometimes. Basically, I do. I use Tarot a lot in the early brainstorming phases. Also to get me out of... I'm notorious for doing a little- what's it called?- Cask of Amontillado thing, where I brick myself into a wall.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint

And it's not until I am bricked into a corner that I realise that I have done this and only I can save me and I don't know how, in terms of plotting... And Tarot can be really helpful for that. I also love... I don't do this for every project. But sometimes what can be really helpful is finding a card that speaks to you archetypically, and kind of assigning that archetype to a character. So you know, I didn't do it for all the characters in let's say, A Dowry of Blood. But I worked with the King of Pentacles a lot when I was building out the character of Dracula, and then all of the characters in- all the main characters in Evocation anyway, and some of the side characters, do have really strong Tarot associations. Some of them are private to me that I just use when I work and some of them are like, interwoven into the story, which is so much fun because these are all occultists. They're all magicians, all three of the main trio at least read tarot to some degree and Moira does it professionally. So they have that working knowledge of this symbolic language. And so I get to bring that to the forefront a little bit more as the author and it doesn't- I hope it doesn't feel like, shoehorned in because it's part of their world already. So the cover for Evocation- which is just absolutely phenomenal, I'm in love with it- is David in the traditional Rider-Waite Smith Hanged Man position. For anyone listening who is

not super familiar with Tarot, The Hanged Man, like any other tarot card can mean a lot of things a lot different people. But it is associated with the stillness that is required for spiritual transformation. It's almost a card that feels like being in a chrysalis and going through a metamorphosis. And it also has some associations with Christ on the cross and Odin descending into the Underworld to learn the magical runes. So there's a lot of different mythological overlaps. For me, The Hanged Man feels like reaching a crisis moment that is very uncomfortable for you, in which you actually don't have as much power as you thought. And the only way through it is to receive, and be receptive, and to learn and grow those painful growing edges. And that is really what David goes through in this book. So I love them. I can talk about Tarot all day, I collect decks so badly... (Laughs) I think I have... I think I have 9 or 10 now, and I only buy ones that I actually really love and really use, but I- I adore it. It's really powerful to me.

Morgan

I love that on the... I've got the proof copy. And we also get the tarot cards for Rhys and Moira as well...

Saint
Mm-hm!

Morgan

Which is really fun to, sort of, see. Can you talk about those two, a little bit, as well?

Saint

I would love to. So the card that has always really embodied Moira, at least where she is when we meet her right now to me, because a lot of these cards can be applied to a lot of the different characters as they change and grow... Very similarly to the way in the Tarot, the Major Arcana, which are the really big, beautiful symbolic cards that you've probably seen in movies like Death, The Lovers, The Tower... Those are really big archetypal forces. But you know, no one lives in them forever. However, I think the one for Moira that I have always really been drawn to is The High Priestess, which is a

card that is associated with power, and authority, and magic, very much like, say, The Magician or The Hierophant, or The Empress.

However, The High Priestess specifically rules over the unseen world, the hidden things, the unconscious dreams, the id. She is occultism in a very traditional sense, in the sense of occult meaning hidden knowledge. And in the Rider-Waite, she is kind of presiding over the veil that you know archetypeally, and symbolically, separates the supernatural from the mundane world in the, uh... you know, temple. And she's just really cool, and powerful, and also kind of mysterious. And the more that you think you know about The High Priestess, the more you realise you don't know everything.

And I love that for Moira, because I do think she is this very traditionally feminine in some ways, powerful figure. But there is a lot of depth to her. And she also grows and changes and goes deeper, kind of into some dark parts of herself. In the book and more as the series goes on, that expands her power and her agency, and her sense of self even more. So I love that for her. And then my boy Rhys is definitely The Chariot, right now at least. The Chariot, I always call it like the CEO card, like, it is someone who is like, very controlling about their life, but it's usually to their benefit. You know, they like, have a vision, they're going to execute it. They are the architect of their own empire in whatever way they want to be in control of their world, um... And you kind of have to hang on for dear life when you're with a chariot person, because they're going to get what they want hell or high water. And that is- That's very much Rhys McGowan, for sure.

Morgan

I felt like those definitely come through. So you were a self published author first, before you move to traditional publishing. Has anything changed about your writing process? Is there anything you miss about self publishing or enjoy more about the publishing experience now?

Saint

That's a great question. So yeah, I started in indie. I self published a couple of novellas and then I worked with like, like a- a micro press out of the UK to do A Dowry of Blood, which then got picked

up by Orbit, and I now work with Orbit and Angry Robot, which are two traditional publishers. I have this conversation with myself a lot. Very much like Rhys, I am a person with big ambitions, who is very motivated by things she wants and desires. But that means that sometimes it's very easy for me to want whatever it is I don't have.

So when I was in indie, I was like, "I just want to be in trad," and now that I'm in trad I'm like, "Oh, I miss indie!" But I do think that I have come to the conclusion that for me personally, I think I really thrive best in traditional publishing. I do well with guide rails, I do well with external deadlines, and I am at my best when I'm working with a team. Doesn't mean that's true for everyone. There are some phenomenal indies out there who really can do it all, and they assemble their own little teams, and their suite of people they work with, but I actually work pretty well in a little bit more of an establishment vibe just because I can be a little bit of an unbroken horse... (Laughs) Creatively. And having those guide rails, even though I chafe against them sometimes, really, ultimately are good for me. And I've been super fortunate in that both of the editors I work with are phenomenal. They really make me better. They're super encouraging. They love what I do. But they... They see those growing edges, and they know where my weaknesses are. And they're there to really help me try to be a little bit better with every single book, which is my ultimate goal. I never want to stop challenging myself, and I never want to get bored. So I would say that. I'll tell you what I don't miss about indie, which is the stress of absolutely everything being my decision.

Sorren

Mm.

Saint

Again, not everyone, some people thrive in that situation. But I would get so stressed out being like, "Oh, if the cover isn't good, it's all my fault. If the editing, if something is not proofed well, it is on me." (Laughing) Like... Just because I'm the person hiring those people, and I'm the person doing the final QC, and I'm the person making the ultimate executive decision about the branding, the marketing, the vision. And it would stress me out so much that I

almost couldn't do anything, like, it just wasn't super good for me. I really love the collaboration that comes with trad, I love knowing that there is a team of people who know about graphic design, and know about marketing better than I do, that are cooking up beautiful covers, and blurb copy. And I do feel very welcomed into that process, that process of collaboration. I always feel like my voice is heard. And sometimes when I've been like, "Hey, can I just please have XYZ, I really want it," I have gotten it, which is great. And I've also been able to be like, "This is not the end of the world, you go, I trust you, whatever you come up with is great." That is good for me, that's a happy medium. So I would say I really... I really do love being a traditionally published author. But you cannot beat the flexibility and the agility of indie from a business perspective. And I'm someone who really likes to... Not necessarily because I enjoy controversy or anything like that- I- I genuinely don't I'm like, a Libra moon, I'm actually a very non-confrontational person. But I do like pushing the envelope a little bit. I do like doing out of the box stuff, mixing genres, doing, you know, a little bit more sex appeal, or a little bit more religion, or a little bit more light, and dark, and taboo than maybe you would expect to see in your average traditional novel. And if I didn't have the freedom to do that, where I am now. And I didn't have editors that supported me, I might miss indie a little bit more, because it really is no rules in indie, like, you can... If you have a vision and you can execute it, you will find people who want to read it. But because my editors are like "That's nice sweetie, we love you sounds great!" (Laughing) I'm very happy where I am.

Sorren

Well, kind of jumping off of that, one thing that you actually don't see a lot in traditional publishing is polyamorous representation and poly characters. It's really refreshing to see that on the page. Why is that something that you're drawn to writing and representing in your fiction?

Saint

I think I'm drawn to writing polyamory... And this is gonna sound so corny, but I mean it from the bottom of my heart. I am- I am one of

those people who really believes that love is bottomless, and limitless, and transformative, and magical, and sacred, and powerful, and sometimes very disruptive, and very painful. You know, love can be the most positively transformative force you ever encounter, and the most destructive force you ever encounter. And for me, the best way that I can explore those beliefs and those interests in fiction is just to widen the scope and widen the boundaries of what love means and what a relationship is. And it's just kind of always been that way for me. Oftentimes, I will start a story with a smaller cast that are interconnected, whether it's a main couple or a main triad, like I'll start small, and then I'll realise that their connections to other people, whether they are romantic, sexual, familial, platonic, whatever... are very complicated and are, you know, it's a spiderweb that interlaps, and I kind of build the spiderweb out and out and out until I reach the full breadth and depth of the story. And we just always end up here. (Laughs)

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint

It is a little bit challenging from a writing perspective, just balancing, oftentimes with me, more POVs, or at the very least more romantic interests, and more character arcs that you want to make sure feel tied up and satisfying. But I don't know, I love it. I think it is... I'm a person who is very drawn to- and I've spoken on this before in other interviews- as an artist and as a private person, I'm very drawn to intense sensation. I'm drawn to big feelings, I'm drawn to melodrama. Fiction, for me is a safe place, and a non judgmental place to explore those desires, those hungers, kind of that love for intensity and drama, without necessarily, uh... you know, launching a rocket into my life by causing drama in my own life, so... I also think that just larger webs of characters, uh... whether they are romantically linked or not lend themselves to a bit of soapiness and that's my sweet spot. I love that as a writer, that's what keeps me entertained and what keeps me trying new things and what just is really fun and delightful for me to read. So I do think it's a combination of like, a very earnest belief that we should

be open to love in our lives in whatever form it takes, and we should be brave, and we should have hard conversations, and we should love big and hard and lay it all on the line. And then also a little bit more of a lizard brain love of, you know, sex and drama and rock and roll. (Laughs)

Sorren

That's very well put, I think and it's- it's so fun to see it honestly, I think despite the fact that we're a queer book podcast I don't think we've done any poly books yet, which is really quite sad.

Morgan

I mean...

Sorren

Have we?

Morgan

We haven't done any canon poly books, I think, but every time we read a book, I go, "But they have two hands, they should all make out."

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

"Why can't they all make out?"

Sorren

Yeah.

Saint

Well, I'm here to provide a community service. (Laughs)

Sorren

I think we're moving onto spoilery questions, so...

Saint

Oooh!

Sorren

For the people who are listening, who was still maybe partway through Evocation and don't want to be spoiled, now might be your time to turn back and go read it. Please.

Saint
(Laughs)

Sorren
You will enjoy yourself.

Morgan

Starting off the spoiler questions strong with an old and classic question. Who was your favourite character to write and why? Which character voice was most difficult to find?

Saint

Hmm... Everyone asked me this question. And I always say David and I do mean that. But it's funny you ask this because- David being my- my most enjoyable one to write and the one that was easiest to find the voice for in this book specifically. But it was funny because I was on my little walk this morning going to the Italian bakery because I wanted an iced coffee. And I was like, "I think I just... I'm really into all of them." The main characters in Evocation, and even some of the side characters and I feel like the Summoner's Circle series- not to, you know, to expose myself too much- but there's a little bit of me in all of my books, but the Summoner's Circle series is really me like, pretty transparently working through big questions and things that interest me and things about myself in fiction. And I realised on this walk that all of the main characters that you meet in Evocation, the main triad is David, Moira and Rhys, and then also Leda is kind of a Oscar for Best Supporting, in this case, all of them are people I love very much and I think have a lot of good qualities. But they also have... (Laughs) I think each of them has like, one of my negative qualities that I'm working through. And it's been interesting to realise that

and I think, sometimes I workshop that out of myself and do a little bit of exorcism and catharsis by having the characters go through this journey and grow and learn as I am growing and learning and workshopping myself. It's a very meandering, long way to say: right now it's David, I love David, his POV was, his voice was very easy for me to access once I got to know him at all. On the one hand, and I'm happy to say this, he is a ridiculous over the top power fantasy. He's a lawyer, he's a psychic, he's in a secret society, he's hot. He's a billionaire- Or he's a millionaire. Like, okay, like...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint

It's power fantasy, right? It's a very over the top, almost like a romance novel hero... And he does act a little bit in the way you would expect where he's very into himself. He's a little bit of a [censored], he's pretty arrogant. He's very good at what he does, though. He's highly competent, which makes it hard for him to learn and grow, because like, yeah, he's not behaving the best, but he is the best in the game. However, on the other side of this character, you do have someone who does have this really big heart of gold, that if you barely scratch the surface, you do see, and who is deeply troubled and dealing with a lot of demons and repressing a lot of things he shouldn't have repressed for 30 years. Um...

Sorren & Morgan
(Laugh)

Saint

(Laughs) And I love that for me Evocation is really me taking this character, who kind of starts on top, and just shoving them off the pedestal all the way to rock bottom, and then having the power of love be what gets them out of rock bottom. And that's a very Saint thing to do. (Laughs) And I love it a lot. Um, and that... That's just something I- I keep coming back to. But he's a lot of fun. And there's a lot of me in David for sure some of my best quality and some of my worst qualities. True for all the characters, and I will

probably end up talking more about them as we get into their books later on, but was probably David and then I think the ones that were most challenging were not necessarily Rhys and Moira individually, but um... Just kind of learning about their relationship and their marriage as time went on. And as my feelings about relationships, and marriage, and fidelity, and love, grew and evolved. 'Cause when I first created these characters I... It was seven years ago. So I have like seven more years of being in love and working on things and working through things under my belt. And so I realised partway through writing this book that I was just going to kind of have to hold Rhys and Moira a little bit more loosely and not force them to act necessarily in the way that I thought made the most sense but really do more deep character work and be like: "What are you actually feeling, what do you actually need? What do you actually not getting in your own relationship?" You know, they always say like "the sacredness of the privacy of a marriage," like, from the outside, it's very hard to pass judgement on or even understand what goes on between people who have chosen to couple for the rest of their lives. And I think even when you're writing characters that you have made up, and that you totally control, there is a complexity and a nuance to that. So that was a fun challenge. I enjoyed that a lot. I ended up adding a lot more scenes between them just kind of in these quiet domestic moments, or in these kind of charged moments as I was wrapping up revisions. And that was- was really, really fun. But I love all the side characters too. But that, right now, is- is how things- how things feel.

Sorren

Continuing the theme of David, that theme of burnout was really powerfully explored. How did you go about trying to, I guess, put that on the page and weave it in with the magical aspects?

Saint

Kind of going back to a question you asked me earlier, I do really well... And I've-I've learned this about myself, as I've grown and I was resistant to it at first... I actually do really well with structure and guide rails, even if the structure is self imposed. Sometimes

even better if the structure is self imposed. I have my little routines and habits and structures and check-ins and deadlines. And that really keeps me grounded, keeps my mood stable keeps me working at a level I can be proud of and keeps me happy. So it's just the structure of the formula of the story, or of the series. So the basic formula for a Summoner's Circle book, and this will not spoil the whole series for you, but it will tell you exactly what you're gonna get into...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint

Is this large cast of characters about their lives and loves of these magicians in Boston, and they all know each other quite well. And each book, even though it's multi POV, focuses in on one character's big personal struggle that is reflected through a magical problem that is solved with a romance.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint

That's all the books, that's the formula, I just spilled the secret. That's what you get with every single one. And that's the guide rail I use to keep myself on track. Because I love this world. I love these characters. And they're my little blorbos and I'm really into them, as with every book, but sometimes that can actually be detrimental as the author, because then you can just... At least if you're me, you end up writing, like, 5000 words of people being beautiful and horny in a big house and just talking at each other, and no plot happens. (Laughs) So that is my external structure I use. In David's case in Evocation the problem he is facing is this intense burnout and this refusal to accept help, love, community from anybody else. The magical issue that it's reflected in is the curse that they're trying to break. And there's also you know, a- a romance that resolves everything through the power of love. So on the one hand, it was the formula I made, and I stuck to it, because otherwise we would

be off the rails big time and in uncharted waters, but I also feel like it was really complementary to one another. And this was the book that built the formula, and set the tone, and made me realise how much I love writing... There's this, you know, triangle where the personal, the magical, and the romantic intersect. And there's something really powerful about that. I love, you know, like...

Everything is sex, except sex, which is about power and magic is sex, but sex is just magic, but it's actually just God. And what if God is actually eroticism, like... Anyway those lines get really, really blurry, that's my happy place. And so I do feel like this series really allows me to play in that little... juicy little grey zone. And it's really, really fun. Hopefully that answered your question. I feel like that one rambled.

Sorren

I think that was a good answer. I- I- I was enjoying myself.

Morgan

We're very big fans of all vibes, no plot here. So...

Saint

Thank God! (Laughs)

Sorren

As- as you were saying, hot people in a big house, I was like, "I want to make a list of just books that are like..." Because that's like, some of my favourite books.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Saint

Some of my favourite books too! I will say for anybody listening out there who is sad, because maybe they're a really plot driven writer, and they wish they were more character driven. Or you're like me, and you're a very character driven writer, and you're sad because you wish you were more plot driven... What I have realised is that, yes, there will always be people who are down to clown with you

and want to hear your stories in the way you want to tell them. And yes, we can all make our weaknesses stronger. I think that it's always a good goal to stay growing. But every time I see like, a movie, or a book that I just like, eats, and I'm so into it, and it just like, gets embedded in my brain... It is always all vibes, no plot. So I'm like I came by this naturally, I'm just going to work with what I have been given. And we're going to build little guide rails, so I don't go off the- the rails too much. And that is... That's what we're going to do. (Laughs)

Morgan

That's like, the thing people say about The Raven Cycle, how you can read the whole thing and be like: "I enjoyed that. Didn't know what the plot was, though!" (Laughs)

Saint

But also so much happens in The Raven Cycle!

Sorren

True. (Laughs)

Saint

For me... I'm sorry, I'm gonna go on a tangent right here now, but for me...

Morgan

(Laughs)

Saint

I actually was having this conversation with my fiance a while ago, back when we were in revisions for Evocation, and also when we were getting some very early feedback and early, early reviews in. And I was like, "I really feel like If I put a lot of plot in this, so much happens, they're doing things all the time! And people keep telling me it's really character driven and vibey. And I guess that's fine. But I didn't think I was doing that!" And he was like, "Yeah, well, you know, we both love The Raven Cycle. And that's also vibey. And that's okay!" And I was like, "No, so much happens!" And he's like,

"A lot of conversations happen. A lot of driving around in cars being sad, standing in a forest speaking to the trees... I want you to think through what you're saying..." (Laughs) And I was like, "That's fair.

That's fair." Uh... Very similar my relationship with the movie Saltburn. I love that movie. No notes, 10 out of 10. I'm aware that all the criticism that I've seen of it is fair and valid, but head empty, no thoughts, perfect film.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Saint

Because it is so deeply entrenched in emotions, desire, aesthetics, and kind of, big set piece monologues, which is just the way that I really like to consume my art. And so it makes sense that my art would also probably feel a little bit more like that as well. So as we enter my 30th year on this earth, we are embracing our natural skills and desires... (Laughs) And that's where I'm at right now.

Sorren
You know, your niche, and you are killing it.

Saint
Thanks. (Laughs)

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint
Thank God!

Morgan
Next question... Especially as an aroace reader, it really struck me how the platonic side of the poly triangle was arguably the strongest between like, David and Moira. Could you talk about how you balance sort of the romance and the platonic and like, how you figured out what the vibes were in each?

Saint

It is a tightrope walk. It's actually I think that building out the sides of this triangle- technically it's a- it's a V, because they're both dating Rhys, but Moira and David don't end up dating each other... sexually, but I'll leave that open to your interpretation.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Saint

That was the most challenging and the most rewarding part of it. I never got tired of workshopping that. And I workshopped it a lot. And if the editor had not pried this book out of my hands, I probably would have workshopped it for another year. I'm just so into the complexities, and the nuance, and the entanglement of loving multiple people in different ways at the same time, especially when they also love each other. I will never get tired of that. And that... Maybe that comes back to the earlier question I answered about polyamory. It is just the most fascinating vibe to me. But yeah, it was challenging to balance, I cut a lot of scenes, I rewrote a lot of scenes, I put a lot of scenes in, but I cherish the relationship between David and Moira, and it was the one that took the longest to take shape. And the feeling of that relationship changed a lot over time. But I really like where it landed. And I know this is kind of the spoilery part of it, so I can- I can say this... Moira and David have a very... It is a very romantic friendship, like they- and- and I'm not going to spoil too much about the rest of the books, but that only gets stronger as it goes on, even though they- they aren't having sex with each other. And they just have this wonderful, intense friendship that is bolstered by the fact that they're both in love with Rhys, but also bolstered by the fact that they have that psychic connection. And that was the handhold I gave myself in writing this, is they do have a really particular spiritual and physical connection with each other in that they can feel each other's emotions when they touch each other, and they can borderline read each other's thoughts, not quite, but they can definitely feel emotion. And that was so much fun to play with. And I think one of the reasons it works, or at least I hope it works, is it is something

that is exclusive and special to them that Rhys can't access or even arguably understand. So that element of their connection truly is just about them. And it's lovely. And it's wonderful. And they play off each other well. They're also very kind of opposite people but like... the more they get to know each other, the more strangely, they realise they overlap. And that was just a blast to write. And I'm really looking forward to, you know, I spent a lot of Evocation getting them into a good place with each other because they start out basically disliking each other very, very heavily, borderline enemies, um... And it's so much fun now to be revising book two, which starts with them in a good place. And they just get to like, their relationship just gets to like vibe, the whole time. Goes through ups and downs, of course, but they're just locked in. And it's really, really fun. So I had a blast, and I'm glad it meant a lot to you because I do think we need to see more platonic partnerships, more celebrations of found family and friendships and romantic friendships, um... and queerplatonic relationships in all different shapes and sizes. It's really powerful. It's really important. And I know a lot of people in my life who have relationships like that. Some of my best friends that I've known for years and years, I'm like, "I'm madly in love with you. I don't necessarily want to date you. But I'm in love with you and I'd bury a body for you and it's you... Like, let's run away to New Orleans together." (Laughs) And that doesn't take away from or negate the fact that I'm also madly in love with my partner in a different way. And I've chosen to partner with him long term so yeah, it's... it's just I liked... I liked playing with it. That makes me really happy. So I'm glad it made you happy too.

Sorren

I absolutely loved it as well, not from an aroace point of view, but also just from like, a queer point of view, I think I also saw a lot of my friendships that and that like, being in love with your friends thing

Saint

I will say on this topic one fun fact... Sometimes the scene that I love the most that I write is one of the very last scenes I put into

books, during revision, because for me it oftentimes feels like the cherry on top. I realised I'm not quite saying something as clearly as I want to. And I put in one more scene that I'm just like, "Just in case you missed it, this is what I'm saying." And I usually really like what that scene does, and for- for Evocation the last scene I wrote in the book... There's the scene where it's just David and Moira is one of their solo chapters. And they go and they sit on the steps of the Boston Public Library, and they like, play like, a ghost spotting game together, it's in Moira's POV. And it's a great chapter because it's her on a personal note, realising she wants to explore her psychic gifts. Realising that she is a little bit more ambitious and a little more curious than maybe the box she's put herself in because she cares for other people so much, um... And David really encourages her to- to live a little. (Laughs) Which is really fun. But it's also lovely just to kind of be in her POV and have her spending time with him and be like, "This is so weird, but I'm really into you. Like, I've learned to trust you, I appreciate you. There's some special quality you bring into my life that I'm not getting anywhere else." And they have that special bond. And it was just so much fun to write. And I'm really proud of that scene. So I always think of that scene whenever anyone asked me about David and Moira,

Sorren

We've got one more final question, which I suppose we've kind of hinted at already. But Evocation is book one of a series, can you drop us any more hints about where it's going, themes, any worldbuilding bits you're exploring, or would like to explore in the future?

Saint

Yeah, let me see what I can say without being too spoilery... So Evocation is first book in a four book series. Summoner's Circle is going to be four books. But as a bonus, for the listeners, there is in addition to those four books, a prequel novella that will come out this October called Odd Spirits. It is the first thing I ever wrote and published. And it was indie published and my publisher is amazing, and is letting me revise it and edit it to tighten up characters and fix continuity errors. We're getting a beautiful sensitivity read, we're

getting a beautiful dev edit. Like, it's great. The team has done a great job on this. So there is that if you want that as well. But yeah, I'm not going to spoil who all the books are for. But each of these books does tend to focus in on one of the characters, all of them will focus in on characters you have already met by the end of Evocation thus far, I can say that the web gets bigger, and the relationship boundaries continue to be permeable. And I can say that book two is Rhys' book. I've heard from some people who... like, my friends and betas and other authors who read the book, they're like, "I love Rhys, he's just like, really intense, though. Like, maybe he should take a break. Like... I feel like his ambition is going to get the better of him and I'm concerned about how he's treating the people he loves." And I'm like, "Yeah, well, let's strap in for book two."

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint
So book two is- is- is Rhys' dark night of the soul. (Laughs)

Sorren
He needs a turn on the hot seat. (Laughing) It's been David's.

Saint
That's what I'm saying! Everybody gets a turn on the hot seat.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Saint
Everybody has to go through the occult transformation. No one's getting out of this alive. Well, we're all getting out of it alive but... It's a happy ending it's a romance. But no one's getting out of this unchanged, how's that?

Morgan
We love to see characters dragged down to their like, darkest depths...

Saint
That's it.

Morgan
And then... Hurt/Comfort.

Saint
That's it!

Morgan
Perfect.

Sorren
And y'know, to be loved is to be changed.

Saint
Yeah, yeah!

Morgan
Well. That is all of the questions we have written. Um...

Saint
This was lovely, thank you so much for having me.

Sorren
Thank you for coming on. We had so much fun talking to you. And...

Morgan
Yeah, thank you for coming on...

Sorren
You know, we got to read Evocation early so that was also very fun.

Saint
So glad you had a good time. I love these books. And I just... My-
my great hope for anything that I write and put out there is that

people have a really good time. And maybe think some... about some things they haven't thought about before. That's all I ask.

Morgan
Definitely achieved that goal.

Sorren
Absolutely.

Morgan
I am now ride or die for these characters...

Saint
(Laughs)

Morgan
And will be reading every book in this series,

Saint
Thank you so much. That's so kind.

Morgan
Can you tell our listeners where they can find you if they are looking for your socials, etc. Any projects you want to plug?

Saint
My best place to find me is my newsletter, which is saint.substack.com and I put a newsletter maybe every month and there's always info about sales, cover reveals, what I'm working on. And also everything I'm reading or watching or loving lately, so it's a little bit of a peek behind the scenes. And if you really liked that there is a paid version where I send out monthly essays on behind the scenes writing craft and publishing tips. I just did one on how to write a good sex scene. I just did one on my hacks for querying, um... so that's really really fun that's the best place to find me. However, if you like social media, I am on Instagram quite a bit @stgibsonauthor and Instagram account. I say I'm leaving Twitter every three weeks...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Saint

And then I skulk back in for like, three days, and then I leave for three weeks. (Laughs) But uh... If you really want to follow me there you can but I am not consistent with updates and you probably will miss things there. So I suggest the newsletter or Instagram or both.

Sorren

Amazing. And have you got anything coming up that people keep their eyes on?

Saint

If you would like to figure out why exactly Rhys is so mad at David at the beginning of Evocation and also how he and Moira met you can preorder Evo- I'm sorry preorder, uh... Education in- Whoof! Let's try this again. You can preorder Odd Spirits, which comes out in October of 2024. And as far as what I'm working on next, I'm deep into Summoner's Circle series right now, I'm revising a lot and doing a lot of research for Rhys' book because he is smarter than I am. And pro tip, if you're gonna write a character like that, you're gonna need to do a lot of research. But I also am cooking up a erotic gothic romance trilogy for Orbit that will start coming out in the fall of 2025. First book is called Savage Blooms. And you can add it on Goodreads or Storygraph if you'd like, and that one is set in a dilapidated manor in the Scottish Highlands, and it's all about ancient fairy magic, and kink, and polyamorous soap opera drama.

Sorren

I'll be adding that to my GoodReads right after this. That sounds amazing.

Morgan

Another one of characters in a crumbling house. Vibing.

Saint

Listen, I only do one thing. (Laughs) I hope I do it well, but I only do one thing. I guarantee you there's going to be beautiful, sad people wearing good costumes against the backdrop of probably a gorgeous old house. (Laughing) And that's where we're gonna- We're gonna start we're gonna see where it goes.

Sorren

Can't wait. You've reached your target audience.

Saint

Thank you.

Morgan

So our next episode will be This Is How You Lose the Time War coming out on July 1st and we're changing it up again. Because we have both read this book. We just thought it fitted the theme for this summer perfectly. And so we're gonna do it anyway.

Sorren

Sapphics in space... An excuse for me to read this for the fourth time. I couldn't... I couldn't say no.

Morgan

I haven't read it in a few years so I'll have new thoughts about it. But until then, you're always welcome through the bookcase.

Sorren

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

Sound Effect

[THEME MUSIC FADES IN.]

Sorren

Thank you for listening to The Hidden Bookcase, a production of Planar Prod on this episode you heard S.T. Gibson, Morgan Greensmith and Sorren Briarwood discussing Evocation by S.T. Gibson. You can follow S.T. Gibson on substack at

substrack.com/@saint, or you can follow S.T. Gibson on Instagram @stgibsonauthor or on Twitter @s_t_gibson. You can find The Hidden Bookcase on Twitter @HiddenBookcase and on Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and TikTok @hiddenbookcasepodcast. Find out more about Planar Prod at planarprod.com. Know what we should read next, or want to talk to us about what you thought of this episode's read. You can reach us at the hiddenbookcase@gmail.com. Send us a DM on social media, or come chat with your fellow bookworms in our growing Discord server. The link is in the shownotes. Want to support The Hidden Bookcase? Support us on Patreon for bonus episodes, audio outtakes, playlists, and other extras, buy a book through our Bookshop.org page or consider leaving us a rating or review or telling a friend how to find us. Your whispers are the best way for bookworms to discover our show. For our next episode. we'll be reading This Is How You Lose the Time War by Amal El-Motar and Max Gladstone. You can join us for that in just two weeks time on July 1st. We hope to see them, and in the meantime, you're always welcome through the bookcase.