

Episode 71:
Back to School

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Nic

[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 joined by a special guest as we discuss *A Deadly Education* by Naomi Novik and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K. Rowling.

[Intro music plays]

F: Before we begin, a content warning. The edition of *A Deadly Education* that we read contains racist microaggressions, especially around a stereotype that relates to Black hair. We did not discuss this in the episode, nor did we, the Serpents, recognise it when we read the book. We will link in the transcript to further writings on this by Black critics, so that listeners can make an informed decision as to whether reading the book may be harmful to them.

[[NOT IN PODCAST AUDIO: We suggest [this Twitter thread](#) and [Goodreads review](#) by @newamsterdam, and [this article](#) by Larissa Irankunda for further information. We apologise for not including this earlier.]]

[intro music continues]

[0:31]

A: Hello, and welcome to Episode 71: Back to School. I'm Alex, and I'm the one who took too many arts and crafts classes and now I have too many projects and even more regrets.

F: I'm Freya, and I'm the jock who's secretly topping the year in Biology but trying to hide it.

M: I'm Macey, and I am the Mathlete who makes jocks cry for fun.

N: And I'm Naomi, the nerd who got locked in the library after hours and didn't notice.

[M and A laugh]

F: We are three redheaded fantasy authors joined today by a special guest!

N: A special guest!

A: A special guest. Hello, Naomi, thank you so much for joining us, it's so wonderful to have you.

N: It's my pleasure to be here.

A: Freya, Freya, who is this Naomi person that we have with us? I pretended like I know who she is, but I actually have no idea.

F: And I'm sure no long-time listeners of this podcast will have any idea who this person is, but we are absolutely delighted today to be joined by Naomi Novik who is a fantasy writer of the [Temeraire series](#), [Uprooted](#), [Spinning Silver](#), and the book we're gonna be discussing today—

M: Yas.

F: —and also a founder of the [Organization of Transformative Works](#), which is very near and dear to our hearts.

M: Indeed.

A: Yes, I don't think you really gave me a chance to say, "On today we're talking about," but today we're talking about some cool stuff. We are focusing today on magic schools and Naomi's wonderful book which is just about to come out, right?

M: So soon.

N: Yes, September 29, I think, so I'm, yeah.

M: Probably in the past, because we forget how time works.

A: It's— We do forget how time works, we generally have problems with time on this podcast.

N: Yes.

F: It will have just come out.

A: It will have just come out.

M: Aha!

N: Yes, excellent! It has just come out! We are leaping into the future, we are throwing our voices forward.

A: But before we get into all that, fellow Serpents and Naomi, what are we reading lately?

F: I read the second book in K.J. Charles' *Will Darling* series, [The Sugared Game](#), which is just, it's so delightful, even more stabby grumpy bookseller and aristocratic nervy trash gremlin. I love this series, it was a wonderful escape, I had to then go back and reread some earlier K.J. Charles favorites while I was in the mood. I then took a complete 180 and read—

M: Yeah!

F: —some Octavia Butler for the very first time. So I finally picked up [Kindred](#), which was, which is her book about a young black woman in the 1970s who finds herself being drawn back in time again and again to save the life of a plantation owner's son who turns out to be one of her ancestors. It's obviously quite confronting reading, it's absolutely amazing, I'm definitely going to be picking up all of the other Butlers that have been sitting on my shelf, unread. And, surprising nobody, my yearly romp through Dorothy Dunnnett has to this time continued into a book I've never read before, so I'm actually now making my way through the [Niccolò series](#) and I just finished the [second one](#).

M: How many hundreds of thousands of words of Dunnnett are you going to come out of 2020 having read, Freya?

F: All of them.

N: Many.

[M and A laugh]

F: That is a guarantee. I did my [Lymond](#) reread earlier this year, I am now going to make my way through all eight books of *Niccolò*.

M: God why?

[M and N laugh]

M: Freya!

F: They're just so good, Macey.

N: There's no why!

F: Not to question why, Dunnett is just so— Look, it is having a little bit of a detrimental effect on the word count of my current novel.

[M laughs]

F: I will have to admit that. I will have to go through and do an un-Dunnetting edit.

M: But why? It'll only be, Freya's current book is delightful and will only be more delightful with a little Dunnetting.

F: Ha ha, you say that.

A: Macey, what are you reading?

M: Macey has been reading space books! So I have been continuing my reread of [Freeport](#) and I found a [space!Wei Wuxian, like, resurrection fic](#) that I've been reading but I forgot to write it down so heaven knows what it's called. I will leave that to the scribes. And I also read [Provenance](#) by Ann Leckie, which is set in the same universe as the [Ancillary Justice trilogy](#) but is a totally different set of character with way more heisting and sibling rivalry and they have a space walk that is super tense and there's like a weird spidery underwater alien thing, it's great. And also, yes, read way too much [Scum Villain](#) fanfic, which will be a theme, as you will find out, darling listeners.

A: Yes.

M: And I'm extremely mad about the fact that I have been gotten by a TV show called [Motherland: Fort Salem](#), which is a military academy, like, ra-ra US supremacy show about a gender-flipped patriarchy and witches?

N: Hm.

A: Hm.

M: And it's gay, and I'm, I'm mad that it got me, because it's very propaganda, I am not immune to propaganda, but it's gay and I'm weak.

A: Yeah.

M: So that's me.

A: Very good. Naomi?

N: So my daughter just got, hit the perfect age, and we mainlined [Avatar: The Last Airbender](#)—

[several Serpents say “Nice!” at once]

N: —and have now moved into [Korra](#), which is a little bit, you know, obviously it was perfect if you were watching *Avatar* over a three-year period—

M: Right.

N: —and then grew up, and then *Korra* comes out. It’s a little bit ahead of her for now, so it’s a little bit scary and creepy, but she actually is super into it and I’m really enjoying it. So that’s really, that’s really been quite delightful. I am, I always get really slow on reading when I’m not, when I’m writing, and I’ve been writing a lot lately, just professional writing, so I’ve actually just been creeping very slowly through a book that I act—normally would read in like a giant gulp because I’m really enjoying it, [Beasts Made of Night](#) by Tochi Onyebuchi—

M: Oh, nice.

N: —which is just, it’s really, it’s hard to describe, but it’s wonderful, so I highly recommend that.

A: Yeah. Tochi’s work is fantastic, highly recommend. I think I read *Beasts Made of Night* several years ago when it first came out but for some reason I only remember the beginning of it, but yeah, it was fantastic, highly recommend.

N: Yeah. Just the sin-eating—

A: Yeah!

N: —it’s so amazing.

A: So good, so good. I watch— I have not been reading or watching very much this week. So I watched the first episode of the [brand-new animated show adaption of Scum Villain](#), and it is surprisingly incredible. Macey, what?

M: It’s just very eerie. It looks like a video game.

A: It’s extremely eerie. It’s extremely eerie, it does look like a video game, it is completely CGI animated, and so you look at the faces sometimes, and it hits me in a real Uncanny Valley place for a lot of it—

M: Mhm.

A: —but there’s these moments where they get the expressions absolutely flawless, and also it benefits because the voice acting is *incredible*. They got some really really talented actors for it. And the pacing is *exquisite*, there was not a moment to breathe in the first episode. Highly recommend.

[7:52]

M: You're gonna make me watch this thing, aren't you?

A: You're gonna have to, it's actually really good.

M: Yep. Okay, fine.

A: And of course I'm still reading loads of *Scum Villain* fanfic and [The Untamed](#), as usual. So let's just jump right into the episode. Dear listeners, before we go any further, we do just want to let you know, one of the tent— As you know from the intro section that we already gave you at the beginning of the episode, we are going to be talking a little bit about the first *Harry Potter* book. J.K. Rowling is a TERF, and if you are not in a place where you are comfortable listening to this episode, totally fine, come back to it another time or just skip it. Please take care of yourself and whatever you need to feel good about things. I guess, I don't know where I'm going with this.

O

M: Where are you going, Alex?

A: I'm not sure.

M: Heads up, darling listeners, this is what the tentpole is.

A: Yeah, pretty much just that.

F: Sure.

A: Thank you, Macey, you're very concise.

M: There we go.

[A laughs]

M: And also, we will be talking a lot about a very exciting book that has only just come out!

A: Oh yes.

M: So if you wanna go read that before listening to this episode, spoiler warning, dear listeners, for *everything*.

F: Oh yes.

[M laughs]

A: Yeah. Yeah. I think—

M: But you should already have it on preorder, right?

A: Absolutely you should have it having preordered it. Yes! One thousand percent. I think that we should try to not spoil it too much.

M: We will find out what Naomi chooses us to talk about.

N: Yeah.

A: That's true.

[M and A laugh]

N: You know, I honestly— the thing is, actually, I have friends who are complete spoilerphobes. I myself am not a spoilerphobe. Partly that's because I forget things after I read them.

M: That's a mood.

N: To the point where I've read stories and been like, "Ah, this is quite a good story, I wonder—it's exactly to my tastes," and then I go look up who wrote it and, oh it's me.

[A and M laugh]

N: I've literally had that happen to me.

[the Serpents and N say "Yup" a few times over each other]

M: Okay, who is in charge of Harry Potter, because we forgot to pick a person!

F: Sure, I will be in charge of Harry Potter.

M: Go, Freya, you just volunteered, well done.

A: Go, Freya.

F: So, as we said, our first tentpole this week is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, inexplicably marketed under another title in other countries. Oh, thank you, Macey is now holding—

N: Because philosophers, philosophers are boring, dude.

M: I just read the scene in which Hermione was hiding in the quote-unquote “girls bathroom” and I had to put the book down for a moment and calm down because that’s not the, ah...

F: Anyway.

M: Fine, Americans, fine.

F: Once Macey has finished with her trans-Atlantic tantrum.

[A laughs]

M: Never! Never, Freya, you’ve learned this. Freya, what is this book?

F: This book, if you have been living under a small cultural rock, is the first book in the *Harry Potter* series. It is the introduction, I guess, for most of our generation, I would say, it’s the very foundational magic school book, and it introduces us to Harry Potter and his friends and enemies and various people who will be important in his magical education and his life. Obviously it is stuffed full of boarding school tropes and all the worldbuilding in the world, but it also tells a very self-contained story that introduces us to the idea of Voldemort as an evil that has left the world and is now coming back into it and has a personal tie to Harry Potter himself.

A: Very good.

F: I don’t think we need to go into further detail, I’m almost certain you’ve either read it or watched the movie.

A: Yeah.

M: Yes, apart from, I have a mild American freakout from Alex scheduled.

A: Yes, which is, someone wrote in the document here about how it comes from boarding school tropes. I remember being like, I was probably eighteen or nineteen years old and finding out that houses are actually a thing in British boarding schools and being shocked to my core because I genuinely thought that was just a Hogwarts thing.

M: Well, Freya was in a house, right?

F: I was in two houses, they were a thing in primary schools in Australia. Like public primary schools.

A: Yeah.

F: And then they’re a big thing at my high school which was a private Anglican girls’ school, so, house spirit!

N: But did you get, did you get sorted into your houses by a hat?

F: Well, kind of, I was sorted by a primogenitor because my mother was in my house when she was at my school, which is possibly even more English.

[M and A say “Yes” a couple of times over each other]

M: I nearly got sent to a boarding school in York for a while there—

A: Did you?

M: —but my mother had a class tantrum and refused to let me go.

F: God, think of the funny stories you would have if you’d gone to boarding school in York.

M: I *know*.

F: Anyway.

M: But anyway!

A: Anyway.

M: We have more books, and more interesting new books to talk about.

F: Yes.

A: Naomi, please, please regale us with everything about your book.

N: Alright, so it’s called *A Deadly Education* but actually in my head, all three of these books, it’s a trilogy, all three of them are really just *The Scholomance*.

M: Yup.

N: And so the Scholomance is this legend that appears, it’s mentioned in [Dracula](#), Bram Stoker got it out of a book about Eastern European folklore, and it’s essentially this legend of a school where the Devil takes the hindmost, and the idea is that it was this school of dark magic and wizards would choose, would voluntarily go into this school knowing that at the end of ten years or something like that, they would come out with just heaps of wonderful magical power but the Devil would take the last one out the door and claim their soul.

A: Mmmmm!

M: Nice!

N: And, so I actually learned this legend completely from, and I'm sorry I don't, this visual aid will not be available to those just reading it, but I have it here to show...

M: So, darling listeners, this book is like three times the size of your head, this is—

F: Oh, it's big and gorgeous.

M: —a huge book.

N: Yes, yes, it's gigantic. This is from the [Time-Life](#) series of books advertised on TV.

[M and A laugh]

N: You can get them for the low-low subscription price of, I think, \$12.99 a month? And a new volume of this I think, like, thirty-eight-book series would appear at your door every day.

A: Wow.

M: Amazing.

N: If you only subscribed by calling the 1-800 number—

[M laughs]

A: Incredible.

N: —when your parents were already asleep.

A: So which one is this?

N: Which I did not do. So this one is [Wizards and Witches](#), and there is literally a one-two page spread in here, which I will now attempt to find...

M: It's *illustrated*.

N: Oh yes, no, this is basically a thinly, it's a thinly, it's a thin excuse for putting in public-domain art and collecting in and filling up lots of pages and then selling your book to people who order it on—on, late at night.

A: On television.

N: On television. But anyway, so this was the spread, and you see this room, it's pitch-black—

A: Ah, yeah.

N: —and just this handful of hooded figures visible in it, and the thing about it was this school had no teachers, though wizards would ask questions and the answers to their questions would appear in letters of flame.

M: Amazing.

N: And so this idea of this school sort of lodged itself in my ten-year-old brain and stayed there, and there was a point, I've gone through more than one cycle of writing *Harry Potter* fanfic, I go through fandoms fairly quickly, at a quick pace, but occasionally I come back to one after a gap, and *Harry Potter* was one of the ones I came back to after quite a long gap, but in my first round through, around which, I think it was around 2000, I wrote a set of Scholomance, a story where Draco ends up inside the Scholomance, and I sort of refined my ideas of the school and played with that idea, and then that was, you know, twenty years ago, and that was it, you know, that was it.

[M and A make assenting noises]

[15:59]

N: But one of the key pieces of that story that stuck with me was, why do you choose to go into a school like this? What kind of a person chooses, what are the things that could make you go into a school like this, and the necessary sort of, despair, that has to be behind it.

M: Right.

N: And so that was sort of living in my head for a long time, and then later on I came back to *Harry Potter*, I think in 2016? 2015? Time. Time.

M: Time.

A: What is time? What is time.

N: Yeah, and I basically got engaged with the idea, which didn't actually show up in any of my *Harry Potter* stories at the time, but one of the questions that lodged in my head as I returned to *Harry Potter* was, sort of, magic is free.

[Serpents agreeing.]

N: Or rather, the ways in which the economy of *Harry Potter* does not actually make sense—

M: RIGHT.

N: —*because* magic is free.

M: Right.

A: Yeah.

N: Right? So the Weasleys who have a total of eight highly skilled wizards in their family should not be poorer than the Malfoys who only have three. Right? That completely makes no sense. So what's going on? You know there's a lot of ways in which the signifiers in Harry Potter are kind confused, in that—

My personal take actually is that Harry Potter is a story about a mother who wants to buy things for her child.

A: Mm.

N: A mother who wants to provide for her child. And obviously that feeling is informed by knowing what Rowling was going through as she came up with the story.

M: Right.

N: But it very vividly throughout feels to me, like that the things that are so rich, so vibrant, are the shopping. Right? The shopping...

A: YES. That's my favorite part, too.

N: And if you've been to the Wizarding World in Orlando, that's what makes it so wonderful. It's not the rides, the rides are kind of *okay*..... But it's literally getting to be in these magical stores.

[Noises of agreement]

You can physically feel yourself in this world which is magical, and yet “consumerism, yay.”

M: Well, it's the fantasy moment, the big moment for Harry Potter in the first book—cause we were rereading it for this—is that moment on the train where he buys one of everything off the cart.

[Everyone else agrees]

M: Because for the first time, he can afford to eat.

[Everyone agrees harder.]

A: Even moreso... 'Cause the moment that he goes into Diagon Alley, right? That is a moment of wonder, of "oh wow, there's this whole world that I didn't know about," but I would completely agree Macey, you're right, because the moment where he has access to it is the moment on the train.

M: But I think that what you're getting at, because that's the thing that really came across to me in *A Deadly Education*, was the strength of what the mother was trying to do for El.

N: Yeah, but in a way, it's the piece that falls to the wayside in Harry Potter for me, is that because that's the story that she wants to tell, she doesn't really care about the economy. She cares about that visceral kind of experience, that joy. And so, the economy does not make sense, she's just giving us the pleasure of being able to buy things, of imagining your child being able to get everything, right? And so that was one of the seeds of leading me into *A Deadly Education* eventually.

[Agreeing.]

N: And then it sort of bumped into the state of the world?

[Dark laughter and agreement.]

N: Climate change... And as the mother of a child myself, in a way, thinking about the things that I want to give, and how it's not the material... And so those are sort of the stew that was in there, and what came out when I sat down to write. Because I don't ever actually have a plan.

M: Hah! Yeah.

A: Yeah.

N: I just sort of sit down and the sentences start to come, and in this case, the first sentence was this girl who wanted to kill the hell out of Ri Lake.

[A laughs]

N: And I didn't know who she was. I didn't know who he was, I just... literally I knew he had to die, that's what she told me.

[Serpents laugh]

F: But we've touched on a whole lot of things that I think are already dot points that we want to talk about, but I have to say I love that you started with the legend of the last person in a cohort dies and went to "how about 75% of every cohort dies?"

M: Yeah.

A: Yup.

N: Yes. Yess.

M: Well, let's talk about that! Let's talk about the purpose and nature of a magical education, right? What is education for?

N: And so obviously in *A Deadly Education*, in *The Scholomance*, the question that I had to answer was "why do you go to this school?" This school that is so horrible, that exacts such a horrible price. And the answer clearly is, it's better than staying outside.

M: Sure.

A: Yeah.

N: Right? Because it's not just "why do *you* chose to go?" Like, one individual.

M: Why does the system?

N: Why do *people* send their children here?

M: Yep.

N: And obviously that has to be because systematically it has to be waaaay better. And that's where I go the idea of, you know, your odds of making it out of puberty alive on the outside are one-in-twenty. The odds of making out alive on the inside are one-in-four.

M: This is great odds!

N: Yeah! And so you take the one-in-four odds, but that doesn't mean you are happy.

A: Right.

N: And in a way, obviously, that becomes over time more complicated, that story complicates that the odds aren't actually one-in-four for everyone there, just like the odds are not actually one-in-twenty for everybody on the outside. And the ways in which it's a machine of exploitation, essentially.

A: Yup.

N: While it is also a place of shelter.

M: Well let's talk about that a little bit. Cause I think that if we're looking at magical educations at magical schools overall, the pattern across various works, Harry Potter is also a story about class. In a very, very British way, it's all about class.

A: Extremely yes, yes.

M: Anybody who, in the fanfic world tries to make some sense of the economy and the numbers and the population numbers, tends to imagine, you know, is Hogwarts really the only school? Because Hogwarts is a British public school, right? It is the fancy, upper-class, upper-crust, uniforms-for-everyone and prefects with sticks, you know, it's Smeltings.

[Noises of agreement]

M: So who goes to the high school down the road?

[22:51]

M: And then you look at something like... I will claim that [Tamora Pierce's Tortall books](#) have a magic school in them. So Kelladry of Mindelan goes to magical night school even though it isn't actually that magical and again it's like secondary education is a thing for the privileged. Is magical education *only* a thing for the privileged? Discuss!

F: It's about what is this magical education actually meant to be preparing you for? Because in Harry Potter it just seems to be everybody goes to school in order to learn how to control the magic that they have to fit in the magical society they'll be a part of when they leave. One of my favourite things about reading Scholomance was that there's the balance between reading something that might be useful to you on the outside IF you get out and learning something that will let you get through the final graduation exam which is try not to be killed by deadly monsters and horrible spirits and so when El is trying to learn things there's this tension between will this help me survive? Will this help me in the economy by getting something from somebody else that might then help me to survive, or will this be something that I can actually use on the other side and only certain people with a certain level of privilege can afford to tip that balance with what will help me in the other side because they have the assumption of getting out.

A: You mentioned graduation and I wanted to say that this was the thing that was making me laugh the whole way through the book because, like, there's this vibe... Dear Listeners if you've ever listened to [Welcome to Night Vale](#)—

M: Yes!!

A: Specifically the episode where Cecil is like "[It's Street Cleaning Day](#)...Run....RUN!!" That's exactly what it's like!

[All laugh]

F: But I also wanted to say a part of the models of education that are in Harry Potter, in Hogwarts, versus the Scholomance is very much “here are your professors they are very much the repository of wisdom, they will tell you things” is things are being passed down and there’s a few jokes made about the stasis of knowledge like Professor Binns has never changed his lectures in hundreds of years whereas the Scholomance you’re trying to learn things that might be available on the outside but there’s very much this sense that knowledge is there to be discovered and rediscovered like you can access texts that might have been lost and you can access knowledge that no one on the outside world currently has and that you might be able to take into the world provided that you get through graduation... And look, I am not a computer person in the way that I know Naomi and Macey are but even I picked up on the theme of “how do I form this query to get information out of a formless void of possible data?”

[N & M laugh]

M: SQL is hard OK?? It’s fucking like—

N: Yes! Yes, many hours of debugging!

M: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah...

F: I feel like there must be some formative experiences that led to the idea of no matter what you ask the void you get mass destruction...

N: But I did think, I did think we all, right, can agree, we’ve all had the experience of trying to google to try to find the fanfic story or the reference piece material to write the story and you’re like well how do I ask to find the right kind of gun to be used by, like, the Stargate crew...

A: Without getting put on a government list of some sort.

M: When we started this podcast Naomi we had a few early scribes who would hear me say something stupid like “the one Naruto fanfic with the levels of hell” and then—

A: Yes!

M: —they would just pop up with the link and I was like HOW?

A: How are they doing this?

M: And like, they hadn’t read it! They hadn’t recognised the story!

N: Google wizards!

M: Yes!

A: Yeah!

F: Yup... Well, Alex I want to draw on this dot point here because you said "Is the Archive of Our Own a magical school for writers? Discuss—

M: I said that!

F: I'm sorry Macey said that and then Alex added some things about speaking into the void.

N: I approve! Yes.

F: In that case what is the AO3 equivalent of a predilection for mass destruction spells when trying to search for things within the tags?

N: Hm...

M: Ummmm...

N: I mean I was actually going to say that I feel like the Archive of Our Own is like a House, actually. I'd be like Wattpad, Fanfiction.net, Archive of Our Own... These are houses of magical education in the school of fandom...

A: The old school geocities fandom...

M: I think that was true like five years ago but nowadays? Particularly with the import stuff?

N: Yeah..

M: I remember going looking for Freeport back in the day when it was only on the Gundam Wing raygun_works archive and you had to manually copy paste every single page into a document and then save it as a word doc... It was a thing! But then I went searching a couple of years back and someone had imported it into the archive! And I'm like YES, I CAN DOWNLOAD A .MOBI! It's 200 thousand words long and I can READ IT.

A: Truly we are living in such luxury these days.

M: But okay, I think... Darling Listeners in the book one of the really fun things about EI is... The school kind of has opinions about what it's going to give you based on your predilections and talents and EI's talent is for mass destruction and EI would really it rather wasn't! So whenever EI runs a search query she gets obscure egyptian curses and stuff... I feel like on the AO3 this is getting tentacle porn every time.

F: Yes! Untagged! Untagged Tentacle Porn keeps turning up!

A: Yes, I agree!

M: Untagged Main Character Death, Untagged Main Character Vore...

F: Yup.

[28:17]

M: So, a school is an object for turning smaller humans than you into what you want them to be.

A: Yes.

F: Right.

A: Yes.

M: And the *you* in this sentence is whoever is "paying" for the school. So, in our modern society that's generally governments and you see this based on the history curriculum of various countries. For example, I did not learn anything about the starvation in India in my British public schools.

A: Hmm I wonder why?

M: And I bet you Alex, you learned very little about Emmett Till in your public American high school.

A: Well, I was home schooled...

N: And the only thing we learn about the Native Americans, you know, is Thanksgiving! Everybody has a—

A: —Hooray!

M: Yeah! You would almost think JK had gone to an American school for the accuracy with which she portrayed them. So, Scholomance, the goal is to keep people alive.

A: Yes.

M: In Hogwarts, the goal is to make you "a productive member of upper class society". What are some other magic schools? And how—

: —A poduc—Do you—I don't know if I—productive feels like a stretch for Hogwarts, right? It's more like...

M: I'm giving the Minister Fudge voice on that.

[rasping giggles]

N: Yes. Yes.

A: So, for many of the students who are going to Hogwarts, going back to how British it is, right, it's an opportunity to do seven years of social networking.

F: Yeah.

A: Because part—

N: —It feels like it's your only chance to meet your life partner.

A: Right. Because part of being a productive member of upper class society is like marrying someone who is also a wizard and then producing more wizards.

M: Yes. Spreading your genes, very important. I will then, if none of you will take up my foot-dot-point that I put right here—let's talk about—so, Naomi, have you come across *The Untamed* in recent memory?

N: [stuttering] I have not, I mean, I have seen it through fannish osmosis enough to be like, "When I have time..."

M: Yep.

N: In some halcyon magical future...

M: It's a lot...Well, then please forgive a three minute aside, because...

N: That's okay!

[giggles]

N: Please do, please do. It clearly looks like it's absolute—I'm sort of like, I want it...

M: Yes! It's so much fun. But, the middle section is hilariously structured! The structure is nonsense! It's great. The middle section has two separate magical schools in it, I will argue.

A: Yes.

M: Lan Qiren's Gusu Lan Indoctrination Ceremony has a particular bent. That is a magical school in which Lan Qiren wants to create a bunch of obedient small children who will follow the precepts of the Gusu Lan.

A: Yep. So we are going to solemnly recite the precepts for you, all 3,000 of them. And you will take them in and you will obey them, and be good little students. Very quiet, very well behaved. Versus the Wen Indoctrination a little bit later on, yeah.

M: Mhm! So, come on! We need to have more magical schools than this, people. Give me some input.

A: So, there's, in Tamora Pierce's [Circle of Magic](#), there is a very established magical school and then there is the sort of little cottage run by the lesbians just outside of the magical school, which is where the troublemakers get sent.

M: Because lesbians help with that! They're very competent!

N: Well, there's also, of course, the Isle of Roke in [Earthsea](#), which is quite an early school of magic. And by contrast, I would say, one of my own quite vivid contrasts, is [The Forgotten Beasts of Eld](#).

A: Yes!

N: Which is about a wizard who is self taught, in a way. Like, her father is a wizard and he teaches her and she learns. But it's so personal. Her magic is so specific to the creatures...

[31:55]

M: Well, you saying that makes me want to ask, is *Uprooted* a magic school story?

N: Uh, in a way! There is a magic school in it. There's a school for wizards.

M: But I mean, even just the Dragon and her in the tower.

N: Yeah, the Dragon takes her to the tower and she learns magic and it's just a sort of one-on-one, private independent study. One-on-one tutoring, with your very cranky and uh...yeah. Tutor.

F: Well, what you said about the idea of personalised magic reveals another difference, I think, between the Scholomance and Hogwarts is that Hogwarts has a structured curriculum that everyone does. Everybody does first year potions and first year transfigurations, and there are standardized tests at the end of it that everybody has to do. And there's a sense that some people are more or less gifted in different areas, and you can start to choose your electives once you get into higher areas, which is more or less how my high school worked as well. But

the Scholomance is very much about self-directed learning and taking advantage of your particular strengths and areas of interests. Or attempting to suppress them if you are EI and attempting not to wreck mass destruction on a daily basis. But it's much more about—it's a different model of education. It's saying we're not trying to produce a lot of witches and wizards who know the same spells and do the same things even if they have different roles in society. This ones going to be a healer, and this ones going to be an Auror. It's saying magic is a lot weirder and idiosyncratic than we think it is, and so the Scholomance is designed to say you can achieve almost anything if you put in the work and make the right sacrifices, and what you do will be completely different from what the person in the room next to you does. Which I really liked.

N: Yeah, right. And part of that is, of course, is that everybody is desperately trying to find their niche. The niche that will get them out the door. And the other piece is that, you know, part of it is my sense that there's a lot of, in the US at least, that there's a strong feeling that education has become kind of like a holding pen that keeps growing, right? So first you have to have a high school degree, then you have to have a bachelor's degree. And it's a way to keep the labor force from growing too fast, and then producing people who are going—and it rewards people who can fit, who can make themselves cogs—

M: I was going to—yep.

N: —in the machine.

M: It behooves a government to have uniformity.

N: Industrialized.

M: It behooves a government to have a uniform output of the school system.

N: And the other piece, that I would add, is that in the US, there's a much stronger feeling that the purpose of the schools is to provide useful, not just useful citizens, which is in some ways a little more innocent, it's useful labor.

A: Useful factory parts.

N: Useful workers to—right.

M: Obedient. Let me clarify, rather than useful, obedient.

A: Obedient, yes. But it's producing interchangeable parts. Where you can be plopped into a setting and you can be exploited all day until you fall down dead on the job and then you can be replaced with someone else.

M: But it's hilarious because what you actually see when you get out into the world, among the scrabbling, 20-something millenials is everybody trying to stand out. Everybody trying to find, like you're saying Naomi, their niche. Their 'what can I sell on etsy'. What can I hustle? What can I do that will set me somewhere unique so that I can't be replaced.

F: So let's talk about that. Because I want to talk about the idea of interpersonal relationships in these texts. So, one of the first things that Harry hears when he's being exposed to other wizards is, "You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort."

M: "With the wrong sort."

F: Said to him by a small, pointy-nosed blond boy who is being fitted for his robes. And for all that Hogwarts is a very, very class system, it's sort of giving you your niche on day one. It says, "Here! You're a smart person. Here's smart person table. Here's dubiously evil table. Off you go!"

[laughter]

F: And the idea is that—

N: —Yeah! You're eleven! You're eleven, but we can tell!

F: The most generous interpretation of the house system is that it is trying to give you a friendship group from day one. The actual reason is it is trying to give you, as you said Alex, your professional network. Here are your people. You will come out of school knowing the right people and not the wrong people. And obviously, Harry Potter as a person forms friendships. Like, real friendships, within his house and to a certain extent, outside his house. But really he just goes along making friends with the other brave kids in brave house. Where as, the Scholomance, you have niches and cliques and friendship groups like any school would, but there's always a sense, and I think in these sense, EI the narrator is a little bit of a biased narrator, because she thinks purely in terms of allyship, not friendship. Who are my possible allies? Who can I work with? Whose cog fits into mine in an interesting way for us to get through this alive. And there is an economics of favor and barter and EI just views everything in terms of that. Human feelings? Sounds fake. It's not real.

M: There's also a sense of, and I think this does span more than just EI, but perhaps not everyone in the Scholomance, that exerting yourself in any way has a cost and must extrude a value. And so, why would I got out of my way to make friends if I was not getting something out of this? That's something only the rich kids can afford.

F: And the psychology of someone doing you a favor I think is a lot more realistic in the Scholomance. EI HATES that Orion keeps saving her life.

M: Because she owes him.

F: She does not want to owe this person anything. Whereas there's a sentence in *Philosopher's Stone*, which is oh, after Harry and Ron saved Hermione from the troll in the bathrooms, they had to be friends!

M: They were inevitable friends!

F: Wai, wait, wait. Are you sure? That doesn't sound inevitable to me.

A: And I was having some really big thoughts about the area of effect protagonist aura. Which Harry definitely has and it's not really questioned.

M: But we're in Harry a little bit more than we're in...

A: Right. Because the entire thing is from Harry's perspective, he is the protagonist and also he is exuding this protagonist aura, and so things just sort of happen to him. This happens in many, many fantasy books where the protagonist has a slightly easier—

M: [something]

A: Yeah! Where the protagonist just has a slightly easier time of it than everybody else around them. And then you get books like *A Deadly Education*—

N: —I don't understand! No, no, no. The protagonist should always have the worst time!

A: Yes! Where you have everyone else at Hogwarts is just trying to—have you ever seen that webcomic..

F: Ah! The background... *My Life as a Background Hufflepuff?* Or [Background Slytherin!](#)

A: *Life as a Background Slytherin!* That's what it is. Where there's this protagonist sort of like on the other side of the room doing protagonist things and you're like I just want to get my homework done, goddammit.

M: I just want to not get eaten by a monster. Can you stop attacking monsters when you're walking next to me, please?

A: Right! Right.

M: *Orion*.

N: Will you stop fighting the chimera in the alchemy lab!? I'm trying to get my project done!

A: Goddammit!

M: Darling listeners, we've forgotten to tell you that Alex is talking mostly about the second main character in *A Deadly Education*, who is.

A: Orion Lake! Yes. Who is very much positioned, I think, against Harry Potter in the conversation *A Deadly Education* is explicitly having with Harry Potter about what it means to be a protagonist. Because you go into this school and a chair could be trying to kill you. But Orion Lake just like—and so everyone in the school is just like I gotta check the chair before I sit down, better check this box before I open it. Something could jump out and kill me. And Orion Lake is just happily going around, sitting on chairs and opening boxes without thinking about it because he has such a strong protagonist aura that it affects the entire area around him and things just don't happen to him, right?

F: I mean, they do but then he kills them.

A: But then he kills them.

N: Right.

A: And so he's like wandering around, being this slightly antisocial weirdo—

M: —Well, I wasn't sure! I wasn't sure so I'll ask Naomi this. I wasn't sure if that was an Orion Lake thing, or a fancy kid with a lot of magical energy that none of the monsters were going to target thing?

A: Could be both?

N: You have to wait til book three.

A: Oh! OH!

[chaos. everyone is talking, laughing]

N: I know, but no, I'm not telling.

F: But the glory of having El as a narrator is that you have what everyone on the outside is probably thinking about this really annoying protagonist. And what people are probably thinking about Harry Potter, who breaks a lot of rules and still gets a bazillion house points for it.

M: He got given a broom for risking his life and disobeying a teacher! What!

F: And this invisibility cloak just turns up out of the blue—

M: —Everything that happens to Harry is so unfair!

F: Yeah! Exactly. And you can tell that there probably are some people in Hogwarts, on the edges in his year, who are having a very EI time of it. And would like to just get through their homework.

A: Draco!

M: Draco, for example!

A: For example!

[cackles]

N: And the thing, of course, is, right, if you sort of talk to Harry, and well, what would you rather have? A nice, normal life with your actual parents? Or would you like all this stuff? You'd be like, can I have my parents.

A: Please?

[laughter]

A: Please?

N: As any rational person—and, obviously to me, that's the key for Orion. That was the key that I needed to make Orion matter to me, which is that he's choosing to save people. He doesn't have to. He could literally be sailing right through, no problems, and yet he is choosing to aggressively save people. Even though he doesn't necessarily, at the beginning at least, have any reason to believe that he's going to be able to do this just fine. But he still is doing it. And that's obviously I think, part of what makes Galadriel so mad. That he's actually—

M: Well, I think the thing that really got to me was how upset he was when he didn't save Jack, right? And how Jack's victim died. It's clear that Orion isn't just trying to save people but he's feeling it deeply when he fails to.

N: Mhm.

F: Yep. And I do like that you get more and more of a sense of him as EI gets more and more of a sense of him. Because at the beginning she sees, yeah, he can afford to save people because philanthropy is a privilege when you are fighting for your life. And how dare he save everybody at me. He's doing this to annoy me, because he knows I haven't got all the advantages he has. And very slowly we see her sense of who Orion is and what's actually motivating him, and he's a slightly more complicated person than that, changes throughout the book, which is absolutely lovely.

[42:51]

M: But I want—‘cause we’ve only got 15 minutes left—to talk about building.

[F hums]

A: Tell us about buildings, Macey.

M: Tell us— who wrote this?

[A + F laugh]

M: Who wrote—

F: That was me.

M: —‘the controlled farming of delicious children’? Freya Marske!

N: Yes!

M: Justify yourself.

F: Well, I was thinking about why— why in hell Hogwarts and the Scholomance were built.

[M hums]

F: And so... yes, Hogwarts was built by the Founders as a school of learning slash social division and networking thing, where we put a hat on, and we produce a horde of children in our own image.

M: Yep.

F: Whereas the Scholomance, as Naomi said, was built *specifically* as a way of saying, ‘Well, we’re going to lose a certain percentage of all of our young magic-users anyway, this way we’ll just feed a very small amount of them to the monsters. And therefore, it won’t be like overfishing’. You know.

[M + A + N laugh]

F: We’re not just letting everybody out there to, to—

N: Correct.

M: So it’s a salmon run.

F: —thin the population.

A: It's sustainable.

M: It's a salmon run.

F: It's sustainable farming of delicious magic-ful children.

A: Yeah.

[M continues to cackle]

N: Right.

A: That's very good, Freya.

M: Naomi?

N: And, you know, obviously... the thing is, right, so one of the things that— and this comes— this gets played with a little more obviously in book two and then in book three. Which is, you know, sometimes the motives that you claim, right, there's the motives you claim publicly, and then there's the motives that you have privately.

[A hums]

N: And sometimes the two of them are not, you know, the public motive may not necessarily be a complete lie, even if you have the ulterior motive?

M: Sure.

N: And sometimes, of course, the forward motive becomes the real motive to the people who are after you. Or the background motive becomes the motive— you know, it's sort of that play of cynicism and idealism. Which motive do you choose to foreground as a person living in this system, right. And that tension is something that I feel very strongly, in a lot of just sort of, in general reign in public life.

M: Yeah.

N: That we have that. And in schools. And that's a thing that feels very true to me. That, you know— and so the motives for the building of the Scholomance I think are a little murky.

M: Yeah.

N: In a way that... it can be experienced as I do think, right, so many of us— which of us, right, doesn't know somebody who literally went to the same school that we did, had possibly almost exactly the same classes we did, and yet had a *completely* different experience, right. Whether vastly more positive, vastly more negative, and looks back on it in a completely different way.

M: Right.

N: And that's— and that's something that I think is important, right. It's a magic school, it should not be like a single, monolithic experience.

M: Hah! Yes. Sure.

[F hums]

A: Yep.

F: And the whole point of the plot of the first Harry Potter book is that a school that was built to be a very safe and well-guarded place is now being used to guard something completely different.

M: Right. And put the kids in danger, right!

F: Without telling the children about it.

M: Yeah!

F: We've just put this magical item there. We've guarded it with a whole lot of very dangerous spells.

M: Which is also book two.

F: And we're just saying, 'Just don't wander into that... just don't wander over there'. As if that's ever worked on a child. In... ever.

M: It's also book two with the fucking basilisk—

F: Yeah!

M: —book three with the 'let me hire a werewolf'.

F: Yeah, and it's a school that says—

M: Book four with the *fucking* competition!

F: —‘This is a safe place to send your children’. You know, ‘We will protect them’.

N: Yeah! Is it really? Right!

F: Whereas the Scholomance says, ‘This is *not* a safe place to send your children, but it is the best chance they’ve got’.

M: But you’re making me think Freya, a little bit, about the interaction between that—which isn’t really very voiced in canon—like, nobody notices that and calls it out. And a lot of the fanfic which comes back to Hogwarts almost as a holy place, and then is like, ‘This has been despoiled. Let us fix it up’. I’m thinking back, again, of [Transfigurations](#). Right.

[F + A hum]

M: Um...

F: But I mean, across the Harry Potter series, the importance of Hogwarts as shelter becomes more and more and more important.

M: Right.

F: Like it’s this— the idea that you can’t, you know, transport yourself into it, it’s a place that is there essentially as a narrative device to shelter Harry. While he grows up into somebody who can kill Voldemort.

M: Well, specifically, yes—

N: Right.

M: —it’s a shelter for the abused child. From Harry’s point of view, Hogwarts with its basilisks and werewolves is *safer*.

F: Yes.

[A hums]

M: And...

N: I mean, it’s a shelter, right.

M: Yeah.

A: Yep.

N: —if you're trying— if you're escaping domestic violence.

M: Right, yep.

N: Right, it's the place that you go, and of course, but— at the same— and yet it's also meant to be a place of adventure and so, you know, places of adventure—

M: Are not safe.

N: —are not very safe. Not safe, no.

M: But I think we tend to anthropomorphize Hogwarts a lot, and Hogwarts itself helps with that. But I think that a lot of magic schools do take place in kind of, semi-sapient buildings?

[N hums]

M: Like, the Scholomance definitely felt like it had opinions.

A: Yes.

F: [Hums] Even if it doesn't, the Void definitely does.

N: Yes, yes. Well, I do also feel that, you know, magic— right, magic is something that should spill over.

M: Sure.

N: You know, that's where the Maleficaria, really—

[M hums]

N: —a lot of the Maleficaria are the consequences of wizards using magic and not really kind of keeping control of it. And that things that you create and give certain kinds of will to will eventually kind of take on a will of their own. And in a way they're algorithms, right.

M: Yes!

N: They're the social media algorithms—

[F laughs]

M: And then they do stuff!

N: —you let them loose and they'll try to eat you. Yeah!

M: But it made me think a little bit, like, a lot of the Mals made me think of the bit in ["House Proud"](#), right. With the bed and the thing coming out from underneath?

F: Yes.

N: Yes, yes, yes.

F: Yeah, it's about what— you get back what you put in.

N: Right.

F: And after a certain point, if you put in neglect—

M: Enough fear.

F: —and if you put in horror and fear, that's what you get back out.

N: Yeah.

F: And I love the idea of the Maleficaria as the social media algorithm, because we *don't* know how to protect children from what the internet has become—

M: Fucking Youtube.

F: —after years and years and years of thoughtless output.

M: I mean, Youtube is terrifying! The ways in which it's radicalizing people, purely based on an algorithm that's designed to optimize for engagement without really sitting back and thinking—

A: Yeah!

M: —'what does engagement mean' for our monkey brains, right. What is 'engaging'?

N: Right.

M: Well, shocking and horrifying things, and conspiracies that are false, are... surprise! Engaging.

[F hums]

N: Right, right. Things that cannot be real, things that are lies. Lies are much more engaging than the fairly prosaic everyday.

A: Yeah. 'Cause it's exciting.

[M scoff-laugh]

N: Sure. And speaking as a writer of lies, who... who has nevertheless tried to tell the truth!

A: Yeah.

N: But the— but yeah, I do feel like that's— I do feel that the school comes to life. That there is a life, there should be a life in the stones.

F: Yeah.

M: And, well, it made me compare it a little bit to the space school in [Ender's Game](#). Which is kind of the very far sci-fi end of magic schools, right.

N: Yeah.

M: But you definitely feel there's kind of... so many kids living in such fear and tension, that it kind of seeps into the environment. And you do feel like this— the dragon's dorm is different to whatever the other kids teams dorms were.

[F hums]

F: Yeah, at a certain point—

M: It's interesting, 'cause kids are anthropomorphized.

A + N: Yeah!

F: At a certain point, the culture of the school becomes the school itself.

[M hums with interest]

N: Yeah.

F: And it's about what kind of culture is being cultivated.

M: Eyyy. [Laughs]

A: Yeah, yeah. And I mean, especially in Scholomance, because like, explicitly—

F: Sorry, Macey.

A: —the thing that you believe is what becomes true. Right?

N: Right.

A: And like, if you believe like, the school is partially powered by your belief in the school. Yeah.

N: Right, right. And, you know, so it's important because obviously that's why they have the blueprints all over the walls.

A: Yeah.

M: I love them!

N: They have... yes.

A: Very good.

M: But I just— can I just Engineer Nerd Out? Because I really love the stuff about like, patching patches on top of patches, and like—

A: Yeah.

[F hums]

M: —fixing the school, and the way that mutated what it was meant to be? And just like, yes! This is how stuff in engineering works!

F: But it's, yes, it's definitely an engineering thing—

A: Yas, yas.

F: —but it's also an education thing.

[A hums]

M: Sure.

F: It's about saying, 'This is how we've always taught it, oh, we better make some tweaks to the curriculum. Just to reflect what's already happened'.

N: Yes.

F: But at a certain point, you may need to go in and completely revamp from the roots.

M: 'Cause it mutates!

F: But nobody's doing that!

N: Right, right.

F: You haven't got time, so we just keep patching and patching.

M: This is fine.

N: Right.

A: Yeah.

M: So, we have a little bit of time left, and I really wanted to talk about [Omelas](#).

A: Well... when *don't* we want to talk about Omelas? Frankly.

M: I mean...

A: This whole podcast was founded on Omelas, Macey.

F: We did an entire [episode](#) about Omelas.

A: Yeah.

M: The first— the reason we started this podcast, Naomi, was because we wanted to yell about Omelas and ["Victory Condition"](#).

A: Yes.

N: Yay!

M: Because we're nerds. So who wrote this?

F: That was me.

A: Can you stop saying— okay, I feel like I have to advocate for our dear listeners. Can you stop saying, 'Who wrote this?' without, like, *saying* what it is?

[M cackles]

A: 'Cause the— more, it's not just like showing something to the camera and saying, 'Look at this, dear listeners, isn't it great'. It's also like, highlighting something in a document that's private to *us*.

[F + M laugh]

A: And hoping that the listeners will be able to understand the context. Macey!

M: Alex—

F: Alright...

M: Alex, you have to understand there's no possible way for me to work The Husbands And Wives Show into this episode. I need to make in-jokes *somehow*.

A [weakly]: Oh my god... *Macey*.

F [also weakly]: Oh god.

[A makes Very Tired noises]

A: Once again, dear listeners, the hus—

M: It's fine, I'm just trolling Alex.

[The mic does a dramatic sigh of its own]

A: Once again, dear listeners, Macey is referring to [*Person of Interest*](#). A very good show. The Husbands And Wives Show.

[M giggles evilly]

M: The cost of power and the cost of peace to the individual is a topic which Freya would like to elucidate now, thank you please.

A: Thank you.

F: Thank you, yes. So, the dot point, which is being invisibly highlighted for your pleasure—

M [quietly]: Success!

[M proceeds to wheeze like a cartoon grandfather]

[A cackles]

F: As Macey said, this book has the book— *A Deadly Education* has a lot to say about what the cost of magic and power is, both to the individual and to magical society. And that is what I wanted to ask Naomi to talk about a little bit, because there's— this book is doing some really interesting things with how an individual generates power—

N: Right.

F: —and what the cost is to them, but also what is the cost of having magical people and how is the cost paid by the Scholomance?

N: Right. And, you know, it's one of those things where very often ideas that I explore in fanfic... because, of course, the wonderful thing about fanfic is that fanfic does not have to be a commercial length—

M: Right.

[A hums]

N: —it does not have to be— I don't have to necessarily build a whole world from scratch—

A: No plot!

N: —I can go with the characters who live inside my head already—

M: Yup.

N: —and so I often find myself exploring ideas in fanfic that then end up in my next book, which then doesn't get published for one or two years.

M: Uh huh!

[A chuckles]

N: Because that's the schedule!

A: That's how it goes.

N: Right! And, you know, one of the things for me when I was writing "Victory Condition", is just this sort of really palpable sense of... that the way in which much of the evil that we do, both as individuals and as a society, is predicated on hiding it from ourselves.

M: Right.

N: Right. It's— all the systems that we have, the systems—fundamentally capitalism, right—that the systems are all designed and become increasingly more efficient at moving harm, moving costs away from the visibility of the people who are essentially propelling the— doing the, you know, creating the propulsive force. And so you have this kind of propulsive force happening back here, that by the time it gets to the people who are actually being hit, it can't be stopped.

M: And also it can be plausibly denied that it was done on purpose.

[F hums]

N: Yes. Yes, exactly, exactly. That sort of plausible deniability. And in a way, you know, "Victory Condition"— and I didn't— I don't know if I would've said this at the time, but I think about it in retrospect, that it's about essentially the.... that I think that Omelas, the city of Omelas— and I think that one of the problems a lot of times when people read Omelas, they get to the child and they think Omelas is this *horrible* place.

[M hums]

N: And that's— they've missed the huge frontloading of Omelas Is Amazing, right. And the contrast that Omelas is a place where there is one child in one basement, as opposed to our world, in which there are millions of children in millions of basements.

M: Yep.

A: Yeah.

N: And the... that I feel that the distinction of Omelas, right, is that Omelas is the place— it's the 'empire of unsheathed knives'—

M: Right, right.

N: —it's the place where you *look* at your own cruelty, and you don't deny it, and you face, and you look at it. You force yourself to tell the truth. You force yourself to look at the harm you do. And that, you know, obviously— *you know*, this is not necessarily relevant to giant robots—

[Undetermined Serpent gently wheezing in the background]

N: —but if you're a person, right, then all your natural— all our natural instincts of non-broken people, and there are broken people—

[A hums]

N: —and there are, you know, people who are sociopathic or narcissistic or literally cannot experience the feelings of others. But, for the vast majority of people, it is very hard to

deliberately cause harm and knowingly do something truly horrible if it isn't kind of hidden from— if you haven't sort of bought in to hiding it from yourself.

A: Yeah.

F: Mmm.

M: I think there's hiding or justifying, right. Can I convince myself this person is evil?

N: Right, right. Which is of course a system— and even then, you've got to have that person far enough away that you can't—

M: Yep, yep.

N: —that they can *blur*, you know. That Soft Focus Evil. Evil Cloud.

M: Yes.

N: As opposed to if they're right in front of you, talking to you, in pain or crying. If you see somebody who like, gets hit by a car in the street in front of you, you don't stop to say, 'Are you a good person? Let's quiz!' before you put a tourniquet on our whatever. So the question is — so walking away from Omelas, I feel, is predicated on being in Omelas. And to walk away, you have to say, 'I'm going to love also. I'm going to choose to open my... open my horizons to the people that I am willing to care about'.

[57:30]

[Outro music plays]

F: Hello everybody, thanks for joining us for this episode of Be the Serpent, a podcast of extremely, extremely deep literary merit. I'm recording this outro on October the 4th, when the words "everything happens so much" have never been more appropriate. Like El, we're all engaged in survival mode this year and I don't really know what to say except to hope that this episode and Naomi's fantastic book can provide you with some sustenance and some distraction. I've seen a lot of our listeners tweeting about which episodes they're listening to and how they're helping them get through lockdown and we are incredibly glad to be providing that small service of making art and making ourselves laugh in the midst of the darkness.

F: And speaking of darkness, heyyyy... For the next episode, two weeks hence on October 21st, we'll be doing our bit to prepare you for the spooky season because we're talking about vampires! Or, as Alex is gonna try to insist we pronounce it, *vampyyyyrs*. So if you've got any friends who are mysteriously unaging or really into hot people who sizzle in the sunlight, maybe give them a head's up. One of our tentpoles will be Taika Waititi's film [What We Do In the Shadows](#), which I highly recommend you check out.

F: Questions? Comments? Breathless adulations? As ever you can get in touch with us at serpentcast@gmail.com, and we're @serpentcast on Twitter and Tumblr. Or come and join the fan Discord community, which is linked on the About the Show page of the podcast website. If you have been enjoying the podcast and would like to support us more, you can find our Patreon at patreon.com/serpentcast, or please continue leaving us a rating and review on iTunes so we can continue to reach new listeners. And by the way... the Void approves of you, and we do too.

What We're Into Lately

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

[The Sugared Game](#) by K.J. Charles

[Kindred](#) by Octavia Butler

[Niccolò series](#) by Dorothy Dunnett

[The Spring of the Ram](#) by Dorothy Dunnett

[The Lymond Chronicles](#) by Dorothy Dunnett

[Freeport](#) by Maldoror_Chant

[Event Horizon](#) by MonstrousRegiment

[Provenance](#) by Ann Leckie

[Imperial Radch series](#) by Ann Leckie

[Scum Villain](#) fanfic

[Motherland: Fort Salem](#)

[Avatar: The Last Airbender](#)

[The Legend of Korra](#)

[Beasts Made of Night](#) by Tochi Onyebuchi

[Scum Villain animated series](#)

[The Untamed](#) fanfic

Other Stuff We Mentioned

A [Twitter thread](#) and [Goodreads review](#) by @newamsterdam

“Racism vs Rep: Missteps of Naomi Novik’s *A Deadly Education*” by Larissa Irankunda

[Temeraire series](#) by Naomi Novik

[Uprooted](#) by Naomi Novik

[Spinning Silver](#) by Naomi Novik

[Organization for Transformative Works](#)

[Dracula](#) by Bram Stoker

[Time-Life](#) books

[Wizards and Witches](#) by Brendan Leane

[Tortall Series](#) by Tamora Pierce

[Welcome to Night Vale](#) podcast (specifically [Episode 15: Street Cleaning Day](#))

[Circle of Magic](#) by Tamora Pierce

[Earthsea](#) Cycle by Ursula K. Le Guin.

[The Forgotten Beasts of Eld](#) by Patricia A. McKillip

[My Life as a Background Slytherin](#) by Emily McGovern

[Transfigurations](#) by Resonant

["House Proud"](#) by astolat

[Ender's Game](#) by Orson Scott Card

“The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula K. Le Guin

Be the Serpent Episode 1: [False Utopias and... Robot Sex??](#)

“[Victory Condition](#)” by astolat (and the quote: ‘the empire of unsheathed knives’)

The Husbands And Wives Show aka [Person of Interest](#)

For Next Time

[*What We Do In the Shadows*](#) (2014 film)