

My Dog Ate My Book Report

Episode Four Transcript

Brandon

Welcome to My Dog Ate My Book Report, a podcast where two weirdo 30 Somethings take turns introducing each other to a formative book from childhood, the other has never read. I'm Brandon (he/him).

Wren

I'm Wren (they/he).

Brandon

And today we are talking about my second pick, The Tower Treasure by Franklin W. Dixon, the first book in the Hardy Boys series. So this one is not one that I picked for sort of the reasons we've picked our previous books so far.

Wren

You picked it because of the motorcycles.

Brandon

That's correct. We thematically needed to keep the motorcycles thing going. I didn't remember them using motorcycles, but, you know, whatever. Because the previous books we've talked about, I think it's safe to say there were books that like were not just formative for us, but like ones that we look back on very fondly. And this is more of a book that was certainly formative - really the Hardy Boys series was formative for me - but also my impression of them is very vague in my memory. So we're starting from a slightly different point on this episode than previous ones.

Wren

I was really looking forward to reading this because of the fact that every time a friend asked, "Oh, what are you reading next for that?" I would tell them, "Oh, the first Hardy Boys book." And inevitably they would groan or say good luck. And I don't know why that reaction happened, actually, upon reading it.

Brandon

So, The Tower Treasure is the first book of the Hardy Boys series by Franklin W. Dixon, or is it? It's a mystery novel, a 1927 mystery novel, or is it? And

Brandon

Why is there so much "or is it?"

Wren

There's layers here, Wren.

Wren

Oh, no.

Brandon

In the book, Frank and Joe Hardy, brothers and sons of the famed private detective Fenton Hardy, are swept up in a mystery when a mysterious man steals their friend Chet's car, but they soon find that isn't all that was stolen. Hoping to clear the name of an innocent man and claim a reward they absolutely do not need, the Hardy Boys get to sleuthing, but can they find the valuables stolen from Tower Mansion, question mark?

Wren

I have so many thoughts about that reward money. Hoo. Yep. They absolutely do not need it. I, I have this running document of notes for my reactions as I was reading this, and so many of them just bounce back to: these boys are so entitled.

Brandon

They're very rich,

Wren

Not entitled, privileged. These boys are so privileged.

Brandon

Yeah, they don't act entitled, per se, but they're just ignorant of the fact that they're like, relatively speaking, extremely wealthy.

Wren

Yeah, they're very wealthy, and they have all of this access to things that...like, honestly, their father is a brilliant detective who can afford to like bring them to New York City to help interrogate witnesses. So it makes me feel like they aren't, you know, like, wonder kid detectives on their own merit. Their wonder kid detectives because they inherited a detective legacy and they have all this access. And it makes me feel like they're just like, not very interesting because of that. And then it made me wonder, is the same thing of Nancy Drew, or is she just like, actually, like a wonder kid detective?

Brandon

Well, Nancy Drew will also be on my list. So I'm sure we will talk about her at a future time in more detail.

Wren

Okay, fine, okay. I have so many questions, Brandon.

Brandon

Well, let's...let's begin at the beginning.

Wren

Well, hold on. We have a couple of content warnings for this.

Brandon

My content warning is that the rich are not being eaten in it.

Wren

That's a very good content warning. My content warning is fat shaming.

Brandon

Yes. Frequently. It's in there a lot.

Wren

Boy, do I have thoughts.

Brandon

So, yeah. So these books were some of the first chapter books that I ever read. Because basically, around the time that I was like, at the point that I was reading longer books, my mom, who also liked these books as a child, got me like the first dozen or so I think. So even though I had no real recollection of what happened in this book, I do know that I read this one in particular for sure, 'cause when I was a kid, I was not going to read out of order; that would, that would be wild. So they're some of the first chapter books I read, but they didn't necessarily leave a super strong impression on me individually; they more just were kind of like part of a larger tapestry of me being into mystery stuff. And I think maybe that's part of why my mom liked them and why my mom got them for me, because by the time I was working up to, you know, reading fiction at this level, I'd already, like, taken to things like watching *Murder, She Wrote*, and stuff like that. So I like watching mystery TV. So it made sense. I eventually...what is in my memory upgraded to *Nancy Drew* on my own at a later time. And I have more, I have more distinct positive regard in my memory for *Nancy Drew*, but I didn't come to *Nancy Drew* until sometime after the *Hardy Boys*, which is why we're starting here.

Wren

I'm just going to put a note here: I uh - and this is something we'll cut out, but - I have moved apartment since the last time we recorded and while I'm no longer anywhere near train - which is really cool, no train noises - I am sadly so much closer to the airport, and I think you're gonna have to just clear out the past, I don't know, 45 seconds of a low-plying plane. Low-plying plane...?

Brandon

Well I'm leaving that in.

Wren

Damn it! Low-flying plane that just went over that was very loud on my end. Oh, lovely. There's always something.

Brandon

Yeah, so unbeknownst to me, the *Hardy Boys* were really one of the very earliest examples of long-running children's mystery series. Like it feels like it's a thing that there's so many of them. And that

there were so many of them when I was a kid, right? Not just the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew, but lots, lots of other things that also kind of had the same general feel of just series of infinite books where kids go on adventures.

Wren

I feel like I can't name any. I think I just didn't travel in those book circles, I guess. I can't. I'm trying to think of any just like long-running series. There was like The Babysitters Club, but that wasn't mysteries.

Brandon

Sometimes Babysitters Club did mysteries. It wasn't the only thing, certainly.

Wren

Oh, wait, there was, um...what's the boxcar

Brandon

The Boxcar Children is one.

Wren

Yeah, was that mysteries?

Brandon

Yeah, for the most part.

Brandon

Mystery might be doing a little bit of work here in some of these cases, but certainly, I don't know, maybe thriller or something is more appropriate. But in 1927, there weren't many of those. In fact, you know, books for this audience just kind of didn't exist necessarily. With a few exceptions that we'll talk about later. And so it just kind of...yeah, I don't remember where I was going with this. I guess it's like they seem a little trite in a way that I think is because we live in a world shaped by the fact they've existed for a century, if that makes sense. Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew and everything as well. And you know, for that reason, I found this book, the progression of it to be a little bit like not quite what I was expecting. Because it feels like Frank and Joe don't do a lot of stuff on their own. I'm so used to this genre being one, in general, where like, the kids do all of the major things. Sometimes, you know, under their parents noses, right? In this book, Frank and Joe do some stuff, but periodically, they go back to their dad, and they're like, "Hey, Dad, can you help us out?" And then he leaves. And then he comes back, and he's like, solved the mystery, which I guess is more realistic on some level.

Wren

Yeah, I have a couple of notes on that. I, I was very surprised by the pacing. And I liked the pacing, I thought, actually. I felt like it didn't leave me enough time to be like, super stressed out and worried about the false arrest because like, immediately, like the next day, the police had already done a bunch of stuff and let the guy go, and then they didn't have to do anything. And I liked that it didn't really kind of like...for the most part (there was exceptions), it didn't like bog us down with all of his information that

a kid would not reasonably have access to. I feel like a lot of modern stuff like this definitely, as you say, has the kids just do everything, and they like, you know, find all the files and they inexplicably have access to record and things.

Brandon

Like one of them plays a lot of World of Warcraft, and so that's just like enough rationale that they're also like, a super good hacker, or whatever.

Wren

Yeah. And then, you know, people will just explain legal things to them for a really long time. They didn't bother with any of that here. And that was...that I felt like kind of cut out some of the boring and nonsense stuff.

Brandon

And like...it's a book that isn't all that long, ultimately. And it's certainly not like a challenging read by any stretch. But it does kind of feel like a lot of things happen. Like the whole mystery starts: Frank and Joe are riding on motorcycles, which is why we made a joke about motorcycle theme earlier, and this guy almost runs them off the road. And and at first, they're just like, wow, that person is driving dangerously. Glad something bad didn't happen! But before long, they find that they the person ran off the road and is missing, and then their friend Chet's car gets stolen, and it's the same guy. Probably. And as they're trying to help find Chet's car, they uncover the fact that at the same time, the old Tower Mansion was robbed, jewels insecurities taken from it's safe, and, of course, all of these things are connected. They run down a wig for a while. They vandalize a bunch of cars that don't belong to them.

Wren

Going back to the motorcycles, that being, you know, the first sentence basically, I think, I just...I set down the book and I was like, the first note I wrote was: "they must be really rich to both have motorcycles in," and then there's a dot dot dot where I went and checked what time what date this was printed. It was like *checks notes* 1927. And sure enough, they were rich.

Brandon

Yeah, which we discover, eventually, when after several chapters are running about in the fictional town of Bayport, we get to visit the Hardys' house and it's it's like a former...I want to say it was like a former farmhouse or ranch house or something like that, but the barn has been converted to a gymnasium, I think.

Wren

Yup. Sure had been.

Brandon

Like it's just just wild. And this is just all sort of explained away by saying that their father is one of the most famous private detectives in the country like they they explain, or the book at least explains, that basically, he's a private detective because he used to be a police detective, but he was too good. Which, you know, I'm okay with that.

Wren

And that's, that's in contrast to to Oscar Smuff, who is a private detective but bad at it, who desperately wants to become a cop.

Brandon

Yeah. And he's very bad at his job. Well, he occasionally is dangerously competent. He's like, just kind competent enough to be dangerous.

Wren

Yeah, there were a number of situations where he just like came up and had information. We're just like, how did you get that information? You're just here to be a foil.

Brandon

And we must assume that he got it somehow, right? And then you have situations like when a little ways into the story, Mr. Hardy manages to run down the guy that probably was the one who had stolen the car and stolen the jewels...

Wren

And fatally injures him!

Brandon

...and fatally injured or something. Yes.

Wren

That was wild. I was like, wait a minute, are they really gonna have someone die in this book that they wrote in 1927? Holy shit, they sure are!

Brandon

And there's this juncture where like, this guy's at the hospital, but the doctors aren't sure, like, if he's strong enough to speak or whatever. So when he is they let Mr. Hardy know and he was like, I've got to fly upstate to talk to this guy. But Oscar Smuff has discovered about the guy also and so Frank and Joe and their friends have to basically stop Smuff from getting on a plane so that he doesn't get to the guy first and like, spook him out of telling anyone important information to find the jewels and stuff.

Wren

Yeah, he's the father the father was like, he'll just bungle it up or whatever he said.

Brandon

And then they accomplish this by setting a fire. And I guess to to Oscar Smuff's credit, he did seem to recognize that maybe he should help put out a fire.

Wren

Yeah, but it seemed very clear that he just wanted to put out the fire so he could be a big damn hero. My first note on Oscar Smuff was: "Oscar Smuff! Best character so far?" Because he had a cool name, and the first thing that he said was just like silly detective story saying, "A clue!" And then immediately it turned into, "Oh, no, wait, this guy's a jerk. He wants to be a cop. He just...no. Nevermind."

Brandon

When they're still looking for Chet's car - because they spend quite a while looking for Chet's car; that's like really the primary mystery for the first quarter of the book - Oscar Smuff tells Chet that he has a lead on Chet's car, but he wants Chet to pay him for it: \$25, which, I noted, you can live in the Met for a week with. That's living in the Met for a week money. Yeah, so Oscar Smuff: just the worst. Really, the actual antagonist of this book even though he's like the perpetrator of the crime, right?

Wren

Yeah, cuz pretty constantly they're like, about to find something, or, you know, whatever, and then Oscar Smuff is suddenly there, and they're like, "Crap, how do we get rid of Oscar Smuff?"

Brandon

So the Hardys are dedicated to solving the mystery of the stolen jewels and securities because the owner of Tower Mansion, Hurd Applegate, who's also a jerk, is convinced that it's his groundskeeper, Mr. Robinson, whose son goes to school with the Hardys. And even though there's not really any evidence to suggest that he did it other than that, like he has a means, I suppose, which is not nothing, I guess, but like, it's dumb. The Hardys want to clear his name, so that they won't have to live in the poor part of town, which they like really grind into the story at a few points where they like go to visit the Robinsons where they're staying now that they don't get to stay in, like, part of the mansion. And how it's the bad part of town, but it's really just the part where people aren't rich enough to have a gymnasium of their own...

Wren

Yeah.

Brandon

So that...that's fun.

Wren

Their critiques were like, "this house was not freshly painted!"

Brandon

Kind of hilarious in in the worst way.

Wren

Describing how rundown the poor part of town was actually the section of the book that I felt got the extra like the most physical description written about it. Everything else was all pretty vague.

Brandon

Yeah. So the other reason they wanted to solve the mystery is because there was a reward, which they were very excited about possibly getting and splitting between them.

Wren

See, here, I thought, you know, because the friend, Slim, who then had to quit school and kill his chance of going to college because his dad lost his job, I thought the end was going to be that they get the reward and they give it to Slim for his college fund.

Brandon

Yeah. Because they even bring up that they want the money for their college fund.

Wren

They don't do this, and I was very disappointed.

Brandon

I crunched some numbers - and by crunched some numbers, I mean Googled things. So the reward was \$1,000. I did do the inflation calculations on that. But I'll get...I'll come back to that. The tuition at the University of Pennsylvania in 1927 was \$400. I presume a semester? So...

Wren

That's almost a year.

Brandon

Yeah. So...so a \$1,000 award is a year of college.

Wren

Okay, so you said University of Pennsylvania? Is that where this is supposed to be?

Brandon

No, it's just one of the places I could find, like, numbers on 1927 tuition.

Wren

Oh, okay. Because I wrote generic east coast. Where is this supposed to be?

Brandon

I think it's supposed to be in New Jersey, maybe? But I'm not sure. Bayport's a fictional place. It feels to me like it's close to New York, but not like in New York. Right? It's far enough they can they have to fly but like close enough that those flights aren't long, or presumably expensive. Yeah, I just...University of Pennsylvania was one that I could find tuition amounts for 1927. And also, if you're curious, and this is, of course, not necessarily indicative of anything, but today, tuition would be \$53,000 at University of Pennsylvania. So, you know, just just, it's not a community college, I guess is my point. So yeah, that was just that was just one that I could find. \$1,000 in 1927, adjusted for inflation is around \$16,000, as far as I can tell. It's a lot. It's a lot of money. The Applegates were obviously also rich even though they kind of had the vibe of like the people who live in the mansion now were not the ones who like made

the fortune. They inherited it and they're kind of not characterized very kindly, which is fine, I suppose. Hurd Applegate is also sort of a semi-antagonist even though he's the victim of the crime, just because he's like, so dead set on it being Robinson.

Wren

Yeah. One little detail that I thought was very weird to me...I don't know. Coming at this as an adult, I feel like I just like nitpicked inconsistencies unfairly. But they make a big point about how they've never been in the Tower Mansion and it's so mysterious, but then suddenly, it switches to, "Oh, yeah, our friend Slim lives here." Like so wouldn't they have ever been there? That seems strange to me.

Brandon

I don't know, I don't think Hurd Applegate would let Slim have friends over, right?

Wren

That is a good point. That's a good point.

Brandon

Like the Applegates...I mean, I think they're intentionally characterized as suspicious, because eventually the Hardys do contemplate if the theft was a hoax, or like an insurance scam. That's not what it ends up being, but like, I had been considering that option for a long time by the time one of them thought of it. And I say one of them because here's the thing about Frank and Joe:

Wren

I don't know who's who.

Brandon

Frank is the older one and Joe is the younger one and I do not remember anything else about them, and...and I could not tell you what differentiates...I know they have different hair colors, but I don't remember whose is who.

Wren

I'm pretty sure that Frank is the one with black hair, and Joe is the one with like, well, on the cover, it looks like he's kind of like a gingery blonde. But I think that's how it is. But you're right. Like they just...they're just one person to me.

Brandon

Yeah, it's difficult to like really tell them apart in general. But that's fine. They just kind of move things along and operate as a unit. And the only the only one of like their little gang that really has any sort of character at all is Chet, and his character is mostly liking to eat.

Wren

Yep. Sure is. I did write when when they list off all of their friends, of whom I don't remember any of their names at this point. None of the other friends get physical descriptors or adjectives of any sort except for Chet. Every time Chet is discussed, Chet is described as stout or some other, you know, sort

of fat-shamey adjective, and none of the other ones even get a hair color. But you get constantly reminded that Chet is always eating or that Chet is a little chubby all the time.

Brandon

Or there's like the time where they're at Chet's house and he's really concerned about his Welsh rabbit. So I mean, at least in Chet's defense it seems like he can also cook...like, cool, marketable skill. His other his other character trait is that he owns a car. The aforementioned yellow jalopy.

Wren

Which he refers to as a jalopy!

Brandon

All will be revealed.

Wren

Cars are new! Cars are a new thing! How are you describing it as an old, beat-up car? Cars are new...

Brandon

It's yellow. It's bright yellow. And he calls it the Queen. And I did when I was like Googling around and like reading articles and stuff about Hardy Boys, I did see - I forget where it was, might have been like the Atlantic or something - where the writer of this essay about the Hardy Boys sort of offhandedly was like, made some oblique reference of like, you know, Chet being adopted by, like queer kids in more modern times on the basis that his car is called the Queen. I don't know if that's true, or if it's a joke in the article that I read. I couldn't really tell, but like, sure. You know, all of his friends are mystery-solving dudes. One of the things I do recall about the Hardy Boys as a series is that, while they do have a number of incidental friends that are mentioned, Chet is like the best friend, Chet and, uh...uh...Biff, who I think may have been mentioned in this book, but wasn't really important.

Wren

Yes! Biff was mentioned. I was, I was thrilled to see the name Biff because it's just so silly.

Brandon

They're kind of like on the recurring person with actual significance sometimes tier.

Wren

They also both had girlfriends, sort of. They phrased it so oddly. When they introduce I think the first one I think Frank's girlfriend's name is Callie? And, and he doesn't say it's my girlfriend, he says, "Oh, this is a girl. She's really nice. We've often dated," and it's like, how does dating work in 1927? And the same thing was described...Chet's little sister is dating Joe, and he says the same thing, like they sometimes date. And I was like, huh, but I guess they're like, not going steady yet or something. I don't know. All of my my reference to like how people date in the past is like from Grease, I think. Like maybe none of them have given each other a ring like a class ring yet or something, or a Letterman's jacket.

Brandon

And this is America, not Greece, so...who knows.

Wren

Oh, shush.

Brandon

Yeah, I always just kind of assumed that this was their very, like, safe for kids way of being like these are girls they hang out with but definitely don't do anything untoward with, right?

Wren

Yeah. There was no no mention of anything.

Brandon

They're not old enough to do anything untoward, right?

Wren

They're 17 and 18!

Brandon

They're not old enough, Wren! Not in 1927 they're not. Not in a book for the mass market they aren't.

Wren

Some of the 1927 phrases really tickled me. I wrote my favorite one down: "You look as if your last friend had gone off on a moon rocket!" I loved that so much. I want to use it.

Brandon

In 1959, the first chunk of the Hardy Boys series was heavily revised for a variety of reasons, and in fact, you've kind of stumbled across quite a few of them in this conversation. The slang was updated. So in the original 1927 text, Chet's car is not a jalopy, it's a roadster. Jalopy was added in 1959. Things like "moon rocket" are also from that revision, things that were a little more contemporary for 1959.

Wren

I thought that was a little a little modern. I was like wow, they're already thinking about moon rockets in 1927? That's cool.

Brandon

They updated some of the slang, replaced some like slang that wouldn't have made as much sense to a kid in the late 50s/early 60s. They also heavily shortened them. They were originally 25 chapters, and their text was more invested with suspense and tension, and the pace wasn't nonstop. And they decided that was not what they wanted anymore, and they simplified the text. They replaced a lot of words that were deemed like too challenging, shortened them down to the 20 chapters that they exist in. Another big part of that revision is removing a lot of racism.

Wren

Oh.

Brandon

As near as I could find, it did not sound like The Tower Treasure was necessarily one of the chief offenders here, but that some...

Wren

The Tower Treasure seemed to have zero mention of anybody's race at all whatsoever. And I assumed it was probably because these guys were rich white kids, they probably don't ever interact with any people of color.

Brandon

Yeah, so that's, that's how it is a lot in the Hardy Boys series is that it's kind of a setting where there just aren't people of any sort of ethnicity other than white Caucasian. But when they did pop up, they would usually just kind of be stereotypes. So you'd have like, like some black characters, in the first couple dozen books, when they popped up, they would have, they would just be written in like, with a very heavy like stereotypical accent and diction. And there are some books from relatively early on whose plots are like about, like, a group of Indians or whatever, and just like treats them very...not well. And so some some of the books had to like, undergo significant revision to like, get rid of that, and others just sort of had to have like, some massaging of, or in some cases removal of, non-white characters, because those characters were not portrayed in a way that even people in 1959 were okay with.

Wren

So when you were a kid, do you know what version you read?

Brandon

It was almost certainly the revised version.

Wren

This time, did you read the revised version?

Brandon

Yes. The revised version is all that's really sold, as far as I can tell. It did look like, periodically, people had started printing the originals again as well, but I couldn't...it did not seem like that was like the main version printed by the publisher, currently. I read the Kindle version, which of course is like the most up to date. You know, I didn't have like a lot of editions to choose from. But if you went and found, for instance, a physical copy of this book from prior to 1959, the text would be different. Even, it sounds like, the voice of the text would be fairly different. The pacing is is slower, like apparently it takes them a lot longer to get around to the figuring out the significance of the wig. They don't go to New York with their dad. Apparently, instead of lighting a fire to delay Oscar Smuff, they make a bomb, which I feel...

Wren

WHAT?

Brandon

...I feel robbed, frankly, that they took that part out. Part of the revision, though, was also downplaying disrespect for authority. Cause this still kind of exists a little bit in the book, but in the original version, the element where like the Hardys are stepping in, and/or their father is stepping in, because the police are incompetent was apparently a much stronger line through the books.

Wren

Was interesting. I just sort of read it as like the police were irrelevant.

Brandon

Well, and that might be because of the revision, right?

Wren

Gosh.

Brandon

Also, the revision added in several female characters. Neither Mrs. Hardy nor Lola Morton were even in the book in the first place.

Wren

Which one's Lola?

Brandon

Chet's sister.

Wren

Oh, so Joe's girlfriend.

Brandon

Callie was in the book, but apparently only very briefly, and Delia Applegate was also in the book, but she had a much more limited role, which was basically just exclusively when she was being really shrewish.

Wren

But she was the person that like she was a critical piece of solving a certain part of the mystery for heck's sake.

Brandon

Yeah. It's interesting. I hadn't I didn't know that before bothering to Google it. But yeah, I had to have read the revision because that's that's just that's what you're going to get if you go to a bookstore and buy these.

Wren

So all of my notes about, like, language are more about 1959 than 1927. That's so fascinating.

Brandon

You were correct to feel if something was a little bit inconsistent.

Wren

I just thought it was so strange that they referred to something as a jalopy. It just stuck out to me. I was like, that's so weird. Yeah, one of the the other sorts of pieces of phrasing that they use, which I had never heard before, and was confused by the first time they said it, and this by the second time, they said it, I was like, oh, that's an exclamation, was "good night." They seem to use it as like a...like a surprise sort of exclamation, like probably to say it more like "Good night!" Like, whoa!

Brandon

It's interesting. I literally knew kids that I went to school with who used good night in that fashion.

Wren

That's so strange!

Brandon

So it did not give me any sort of pause. I was like, yeah, that...that's a thing people say. I don't know why.

Wren

I'd never heard it before. In chapter one, they say it, and I was like, why does he say good night there? That's weird. And then later on, they both say it together as an exclamation because something surprised them. And I was like, what is this phrase?

Brandon

I have no idea whether or not that one was 1927 or 1959. Because I'm sure some things were kept, right? Like the thing that I remember noting as a kid was I never ever had encountered the word "chum" in like actual usage. It just always struck me as like, huh, that's a strange word.

Wren

So, ultimately, what was your sort of general experience reading it again?

Brandon

Eh, it was fine. So like I said, at the top, I didn't pick this on the basis that it was necessarily a favorite, or a book that I had very fond or even very distinct memories of either way. And that's kind of where I ended up with it now. I read it and I'm like, I understand why this series was one I moved on from, you know, not too long after I had gotten through the ones that I had. Because, you know, yeah, there's, the pacing is pretty fast, but oftentimes, it doesn't feel like a lot is happening. There's not that sense of tension or suspense. I gather, from what I've been able to find about the 1927 edition, I gather I would probably have enjoyed that more. But who knows? It was longer, and had more challenging language, so maybe it would have been too hard to get through. I'm not sure. But yeah, like it kind of just reinforced my general feeling about them that they were a thing that I did encounter, and I read, and

they were an early part of me reading novels. But they did not continue to be an important part of my reading habits for a long time. I found things I liked better, whether it was Nancy Drew, or, you know, things that were in a totally different genre like Animorphs or, you know, when I started reading Star Wars novels or whatever. So yeah, it was fine. There were parts that I enjoyed more than I was expecting to. I was kind of expecting this book to be a bit of a slog, and I did not find that to be true.

Wren

That was where I was. I was expecting it to feel like real hard to get through because of 1927 language, but little did I know I was actually reading 1959 language. Because actually, a point that I made to myself was it felt like I was kind of reading something very Scooby Doo ish, which makes a lot of sense, because that's also similar time period.

Brandon

Well, and I think I think you could make the argument that the Hardy Boys are, you know, the Hardy Boys tracked down their friend's stolen jalopy so that Scooby Doo could unmask rich people trying to pull real estate scams.

Brandon

Yes, so like, obviously, it being, you know, the prototype for a lot of teen mystery stuff. Sure. But I think maybe the language and just kind of the looseness of the setting, I think maybe also is what felt like that to me, in terms of, I guess, time period.

Brandon

And I don't want to, you know...the 1959 edition is not just an entirely new book, it's a revision. I was able to find chunks of the 1927 text online, and when I did, you know, I didn't find anything super, super, like interesting to share. But there were definitely large portions of pages that were verbatim still the same.

Wren

I think I may have found it a little boring as a child. When I was a kid, I really gravitated towards things with animals, or things that were survival stories or things with fantastical elements of some sort. I really just wasn't very interested in normal humans that didn't have magic powers because normal humans are just not super interesting to me. I never really got into mystery as a thing until much later.

Brandon

And Mr. Hardy being a literally World Famous Detective wasn't fantastical enough?

Wren

Okay, so there was a moment where he just like, looks at the safe for a couple of seconds, looks at Mr. Applegate, and is like, "Oh, yeah, all of these fingerprints are yours." And I was like, what kind of magical forensic wizard are you?

Brandon

Yeah, I think the thing that is interesting about it, I guess is that like, when we sort of touched on this earlier, I didn't really remember how big a part of the books he sometimes was. I knew that he was around, but like, I think if the Hardy Boys were written today, what would happen is Mr. Hardy would go missing or die, right?

Wren

Yeah, and they'd spent a lot of time like, sneaking around and stealing his files as opposed to him helping them.

Brandon

Yeah. But no, he's around and he helps them out a bunch.

Wren

The moral of my story, though, I think is that I actually...I actually kind of enjoyed it. I had a good time figuring out whodunnit.

Brandon

Did you find the resolution of the mystery satisfactory?

Wren

I had actually taken a guess. When they couldn't find anything in the old tower the first time I was like, you know what's gonna happen? They're gonna like go do something and look around and see some other old tower in town and be like, "Oh, that's the old tower they meant," and then solve it. And I was mostly right, kind of. It was a different sort of tower but I was I was on the right path. So you know, I pat myself on the back a little bit there.

Brandon

I definitely was, once they didn't find anything in the old tower or the new tower, once they didn't find anything in the mansion, I was kind of like, well it's probably the Applegates then. This theft was not real. This is an insurance scam or something. And they rule that out at a certain point and then I was like, yeah, it's probably not it's probably a different tower. But I was definitely on the Applegates are trying to scam people train. I just wanted them to be guilty of it because they're terrible.

Wren

Yeah. So when are you going to stop stringing me along about the it was written by Franklin Dixon or was it?

Brandon

So here's the thing: Franklin W Dixon does not exist and never has.

Wren

Wait a minute, what? I knew that there were ghostwriters involved in like later parts of the series, but this person just didn't exist from the beginning?

Brandon

Correct.

Wren

What the hell?

Brandon

So I'm gonna hit you with some history.

Wren

Oh, good golly. Someone just took off on a moon rocket.

Brandon

Are you familiar with book packaging?

Wren

I guess not.

Brandon

Cool. I'm gonna explain it anyway, because I imagine some listeners aren't either. I wasn't until I googled it more. So...

Wren

I assume it's not the obvious like book packaging is the way a book is packaged.

Brandon

Correct. It's not...it's not that. So book packaging is a practice where a publisher commissions a different company, a book packaging company, to make a book. And then that company handles the outsourcing of the writing, the layout, editing, the cover artists, all the things that go with making a book, and then sell the finished book back to the publisher. So the Hardy Boys were one of the series done by a book packager named Edward - I'm gonna go with "Strat-eh-meyer" because there's an E between the Strat and the Meyer, so I don't think it's just Stratmeyer and I don't think it's Straightmeyer. I'm gonna go with Stratemeyer and I'm just going to hope for the best.

Wren

He probably can't object.

Brandon

Probably not. He died in 1930. So, you know. So Stratemeyer was a prolific writer of short stories and dime novels and stuff. And at one point, he has this idea to form the Stratemeyer Syndicate to do this thing where he would come up with ideas and hire people to write them. And for a while, he was, you know, one of the writers involved here. His initial attempt at a like juvenile fiction series was in 1899; he created the Rover Boys Series for Young Americans - that's the full title - which were very successful. They're about three brothers at a military school. And although he wrote them, they were under a pen

name. So a few years later, in 1905, that's when he starts the Stratemeyer Syndicate, and begins just churning these like juvenile lit series out. Because these this was a genre that just didn't exist. People didn't write books like this for children. But Stratemeyer kind of had the epiphany that like, kids kind of want to feel like they're reading what grown-ups read, right? So he was trying to provide this like constant deluge of books that would feel to kids like they were grown-up, right, or or grown-up-like. Stratemeyer launched the Hardy Boys, the Bobsey Twins, Tom Swift, Nancy Drew, and others you won't have heard of probably. So while Stratemeyer was the creator of the Hardy Boys, and the originator of many of the Hardy Boys ideas, he is not the writer of them. And Franklin W. Dixon is not a person who ever existed. It's just the name that they were always published under. In fact, new Hardy Boys books are written to this day and credited to Franklin W. Dixon. And all of those book series pretty much have similar situations, like Nancy Drew novels are all credited to Carolyn Keene who is equally fictional. So all this to say that Franklin W. Dixon did not exist. All of the books were written by ghostwriters. They were paid - the number I found for 1927 was \$85, a flat rate, for a book. That would be about \$1,400 in today money, so not great money. This book in particular, as well as many of the early books, many of the first several dozen books were written by Leslie McFarlane, who was...who is best known as being the author of The Tower Treasure and many other Hardy Boys books, despite the fact that's not what he would want to be remembered for.

Brandon

McFarlane was a Canadian author. He wrote a number of novels under his own name that were not like these. He also directed some films and stuff. Sadly, none of the work that his name is actually on are anywhere near as well-known as the Hardy Boys. But he's he's well known as being sort of the the original Hardy Boys author and the author of a lot of the first swathe of them. He was not a fan of the 1959 revision. He thought that the removal of the more complex language and the more suspense-based pacing kind of defanged the stories, which I can, I can understand. His daughter has said that like he wasn't really a fan of the Hardy Boys or anything. He kind of recognized, by his own admission, that they were trash but also they paid his bills. So you know. Apparently he kind of had a thing where he would ghostwrite, finish the job - and I think he goes through a series other than Hardy Boys, but he's best known for Hardy Boys - he'd finish the job, he'd be like, "I'm never going to write one of these stupid juvenile books again," and then like the next time that like money was a little bit tight, he would take another gig, right? So, so yeah, that's, that's, that's the history here. While the Hardy Boys were not the first of these long, universally-ghostwritten juvenile fiction series, they were one of the early big examples of juvenile fiction in general, and certainly this approach to publishing in particular, because book packaging is still alive and well, not just the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and so forth. Lots of lots and lots and lots of people have ghostwritten The Hardy Boys. There are today more than 420 Hardy Boys books.

Wren

Holy crap. I had no idea that were that many on the back of the book I have it says 53 additional titles and I was like, wow, that's a lot of Hardy Boys books.

Brandon

So the original series ran for 190 books. But some people only consider the first fifty-something to be canon. I think because after that, like it stopped being the Stratemeyer Syndicate and went to

somebody else, or something to that effect. But there have been many spin-off series and revivals over the years, up to and including today, things like Hardy Boys Casefiles, Undercover Brothers. The current series, I think, is called Hardy Boys Adventures. So there are Hardy Boys books still coming out. Apparently, the Hardy Boys Adventures books are told in a first person perspective alternating between the brothers, which is a little bit different. New Hardy Boys books are written all the time, and they're basically always it seems set in a contemporary time to when they come out. That's just how it is. It's like comic books. Time, time, just kind of isn't. But they are still credited to Franklin W. Dixon.

Wren

What, what age range is theoretically supposed to read this?

Brandon

I don't know. I would guess like eight to twelve-year-olds, maybe, would be my guess.

Wren

I keep going back to the question of whether or not I would have enjoyed it as a kid and I don't think I would have enjoyed it from the eight to twelve range. But when I was, I don't know, maybe fifteen or so, I got really into the old Jonny Quest cartoons. And I feel like after that point, I probably would have gone back and been into this.

Wren

So everything else that we've read so far has had a movie.

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

Is there a movie that we can watch based on this?

Brandon

No, there are six television adaptations. The first one was a serial, based upon this book, in particular, done as part of the second season of the Mickey Mouse Club in 1956. The theme song we listened to early on in this episode was the theme song to an animated version from 1969. There have been several live action versions over the decades. There was quite a resurgence in the 1970s; there was a TV show that was like the Hardy Boys Nancy Drew Mysteries where they were just teamed up the whole time. And the second season of Hulu's Hardy Boys series I think just started.

Brandon

No.

Wren

Well...

Wren

Oh. Also isn't like Supernatural just the Hardy Boys?

Brandon

It's the Hardy Boys if like after the first slew of books, Joe goes to college, Frank starts having a drinking problem, and also vampires exist.

Brandon

So no movie, but lots lots of television adaptations and, and how much they have taken direct, like inspiration or directly adapt any given books kind of varies as far as I can tell. Many of them will at least kind of start at a book for like an episode's plot. There's also been comics and video games over time. I've not played any of the video games, they're probably not very good.

Brandon

Yeah, so the Hardy Boys are formative for me insofar as reading mystery books even though I moved on from them, and they're formative for this corner of the medium even though many other things have ultimately kind of supplanted them in terms of cultural popularity.

Wren

So how about them giant peaches?

Brandon

I'm...I think I'm at like a two, maybe. You know, I didn't dislike the book, but as a whole, I wasn't super thrilled about it.

Wren

So as a reminder, we here at My Dog Ate My Book Report, we rate every book that we read, as a measure of how many out of five giant peaches we liked this book. Judging it up against James and the Giant Peach, which we both really like. I'm gonna be generous and give this book a three. I feel like it was it was a solid read. I enjoyed myself. I was definitely annoyed by the fatphobia, but, I mean, we still get that now. Like, I can't even say like it's a product at the time. It's just a product of terrible humans. I was I was compelled. It was a solid little mystery. I don't know that I would read more, but I am very interested in checking out Nancy Drew now.

Brandon

Yeah, this, this does definitely cement my intention to have us read a Nancy Drew novel before too long, because that is the series I moved on to after I'd read some Hardy Boys and that I do remember enjoying more. I just liked the Nancy Drew books that I read better than the Hardy Boys as a whole. So we'll definitely be checking in on Nancy Drew, and we can talk about her in particular, when that time comes.

Wren

I don't like Frank or Joe. I spent most of the book being really worried about Slim, and hoping that when Frank and Joe inevitably solved the crime, that they would give him the money, and they didn't. So that made me like them even less. But yeah, it was fun.

Brandon

I did have a fun piece of trivia that is not really Hardy Boys relevant, but I will never have any other time that is valid to say this. This is something I knew before we went into here, but I didn't realize it was the same person. So I mentioned earlier that one of Edward Stratemeyer's other series that he created was Tom Swift, which is like a science adventure boy kind of thing where he invents stuff. While Tom Swift is not himself like a character that a lot of people remember necessarily, he does affect our lives often in a way that maybe you're not aware of. Because Tom Swift is the reason that a taser is called a taser, because the inventor of the taser decided to facetiously name it after Tom Swift's electric rifle, which was featured in one of the Tom Swift books...

Wren

T-S-E-R oh my gosh.

Brandon

...and yeah, so for a while it was called the TSER and they added the A just because it was a pain to pronounce without a vowel in there. Yeah, that's that's what "taser" stands for. That's amazing. And so and so in a way the same guy who gave us the Hardy Boys gave us the taser.

Wren

That is funny.

Brandon

So what uh...what're we gonna do next time?

Wren

Well, next time is very exciting because it'll be our fifth episode. And if you remember from our intro episode, we said all of the multiples of five episodes we're going to do something special, like bring in a guest or this time we're going to subject ourselves to some of the movie adaptations of the books we've read so far. So I'm definitely going to make Brandon and I watch the boy screams in woods version of Hatchet.

Brandon

I would be way more excited about watching this movie it was it was named Boy Screams in Woods.

Wren

So if you

Brandon

And I'm gonna make Wren watch all six Hardy Boys TV series.

Wren

Oh, please, no. We can do one of them.

Wren

So that's what we're gonna be doing next time is a catch up on the books we've done so far. Movie adaptations. Oh, boy. Adventure. So come along with us for that. I promise it's not all gonna be snark.

Brandon

All six.

Brandon

It'll probably mostly be snark though. Now anytime anybody says "oh boy," my brain is going to be like, "Here come the Hardys! Oh, boy, we're having a party!" Having a party is literally the rhyme. It doesn't make sense. They're detectives. They just...it just didn't have any other rhyme for a hardy.

Wren

What else could rhyme with Hardy? Tardy. Their their their crime solving is never tardy...? No. Okay. Let's move on. Well, hi everyone.

Brandon

Goodbye!

Wren

have a question or comment for the team. You can find us on Twitter at dog ate my book pod and on Instagram at my dog ate my book report or by emailing us at dog ate my book report@gmail.com We'd be super excited to know what books you loved growing up. Yeah,