

## My Dog Ate My Book Report

### Episode Seven Transcript

Wren

Here lies My Dog Ate My Book Report. They were not obedient. A podcast where two weirdo thirty-somethings take turns introducing each other to a formative book from childhood the other has never read. I'm Wren (they/them) and I am the one subjecting everyone to this book this time.

Brandon

And I'm Brandon (he/him) and I'm mourning. This is apparently our final episode. Since this podcast is dead, dead and buried.

Wren

It was thematic, Brandon.

Brandon

Death is the is the end as we know. There is nothing after that.

Wren

That is not accurate. According to Stephen King, yeah. So yes, today we will be discussing "Pet Sematery" by Stephen King, which is quite obviously a me pick. And also this is I think one of the first "this is definitely not for children" books. Don't let your kid read this. Even though I read it when I was nine. I feel like everything else so far has been you could give this to a kid. This one, don't.

Brandon

Yeah, I mean, even the stuff that we have read that wasn't technically written for children wasn't necessarily, didn't necessarily have a ton of stuff going on that would have been inappropriate or challenging.

Wren

Oh, Good golly.

Brandon

At least not until robots are a consistent part of our culture and have like personhood and stuff. And then then the robot trilogy might have some stuff in it that is frowned upon. But we're not there yet.

Wren

I'm gonna just like jump out of the gate before the book synopsis with the content warnings for this book.

Brandon

Yeah, that's probably for the best.

Wren

Because there's a lot. There's a number of sex scenes that get fairly graphic. There's a lot of talk of death. It's, you know, inherent in the entire theme. There's a lot, there's death scenes, there's a fair amount of gore, there's animal death, there's child death, there's infidelity. There's problematic white guy depictions of Native American mysticism. This is probably not an exhaustive list. But you know, there's a start.

Brandon

Passing mention of other racial stereotypes.

Wren

(Transition sparkle noises) So Lewis Creed, the protagonist... sorta, he's a doctor. He has just moved his family to Maine because he got a job at the University of Maine as their resident doctor there. They're from Chicago. I don't know if it's like really super relevant. I don't know much about Chicago, so. But everything gets pretty grim pretty quickly. Their cat gets run over by trucks on the road. Just one truck.

Brandon

Just one truck.

Wren

And it actually never even said it was a truck necessarily could have been a car.

Brandon

It was definitely a truck. The implications of truck? Yeah, One truck ran over the cat.

Wren

Yeah it's just hard to synopsise this book, his friendly, good ol boy across the street neighbor, Judd brings him to the pet cemetery, up the hill. And then beyond the pet cemetery, up the hill, where there is a Native American burial ground which got tainted somehow. It's a little nebulous. They bury the cat, the cat comes back to life, but the cat comes back weird. And then other people die. Like humans. And there's some debate about whether or not it's a good idea to bury them. Suffice to say our protagonist goes, quite frankly, insane. And does that and then there's more death. And everything's terrible. That's my synopsis of this book.

Brandon

Yeah. Like, there's actually... not a lot of things happen in it. But it is still long.

Wren

It is quite long.

Brandon

Because yeah, it's really just, they move to a new place. The cat dies. Louis's daughter's sad, because it's her cat. The new neighbor is like, "Hey, you're in luck. You happened to move adjacent to a magical pet cemetery, where things come back if you bury them there." And (it) worked for the cat. And then other tragedy is fixed by the via the cemetery as well. But it goes wrong. Because dead is better?

Wren

Right?

Brandon

Yep. Yes, zombies are never a good idea.

Wren

There is mention of the force that is behind why all of the stuff goes wrong. It is something that I know that we as white people are not allowed to say. It is a W word.

Brandon

Oh, wait, really?

Wren

Yeah. Like, if you like, it's... (awkward trailing) I've read that you aren't really even allowed to say the word because saying it is like, incredibly bad. You know, can summon it, or is bad luck, like multiple interpretations of it. But the general consensus I've seen online is that you're not even supposed to say it. It is said a lot in the book.

Brandon

Yeah, I've never I've never heard that it was problematic to say because it's in... there's... it's used in a lot of fiction, which granted. That itself is appropriation and it's usually not very accurate.

Wren

Yeah, so this thing, which is often used as like a cryptid type thing is something that is very prevalent in certain Native spiritual practices and such. It is given as probably the the reason why the soil is tainted in this, this pet cemetery and why things come back wrong.

Brandon

Yeah, which, I know I looked this up at the time, because the depiction of this of this entity in this novel is different than what I'm used to from other things that have been based upon it. And so I wasn't really sure, I was like, are any of these even close to the actual folklore and stuff? And the answer is no.

Wren

Yeah, my most recent interaction with this thing is in Fallout 76. It's a very prevalent monster that you fight all over the place in that game. So...

Brandon

Yeah, and it's become... there's a lot of like, horror stuff, both film and TV that has, has a version of this and then like there's a Marvel Comics character named after this.

Wren

Oh, wow.

Brandon

But apparently, Stephen King's interpretation is most likely derived from some earlier fiction, you know, again by I think white people. Possibly, August Derlith's "the thing that walked on the wind." Anyway, all that to say, usually, the book is just talking about sort of the force of the cemetery, like the cemetery itself is an entity, that may or may not be one with this creature.

Wren

Yeah, it was, you know, the big parts that involved it, we're definitely at the point where Lewis was completely, has completely just lost it and so he thinks it's chasing him at some point and etc, etc. So he's a highly unreliable narrator by that point, I mean, he becomes a pretty unreliable narrator fairly early, but still, it's okay. Before I get into the reasoning of like, why did I read this when I was nine, I did want to touch on the, (awkward laugh) this is not the first time that Stephen King has used Native American mysticism to create some horror aspect to one of his books or, or to have like, you know, the "good guy" force be some mostly butchered Native American mythology sort of situation. It... I'm not going to excuse him, because he's definitely like, talked about how maybe he shouldn't have done some of those things. (Transition noise) I read this book because my parents were at my grandparents house. And they watched the movie. So this was probably around 1989-1990 I don't have a good like wiggly room... I don't have a good like, grasp on exactly when this was.

Brandon

The movie was what '89?

Wren

Yeah, so this is probably nineteen nintey- Oh no. If this was, you know, when it came out on VHS, so 1990 -91, maybe I was younger than nine. Wow, me, I have a problem anyway, they kicked me out of the room. And I always thought it was really rude to watch movies that the kids weren't allowed to watch in the only living room. So they would send me and my little brothers to this finished room in the basement, which is where, you know, the kids play space was and I was just so mad. There were a lot of movies they wouldn't let me watch. But the really great thing about Stephen King was, if they wouldn't let me watch the movies, I could go to the library. Because they didn't monitor what I read. They didn't care what I read. They just saw me in a corner reading a book. And they were like, "Yeah, reading is fundamental." So I'm like maybe 7-8-9, who knows? Reading Pet Sematery. I of course was you know, very engaged. Partially

probably because it was something I wasn't supposed to be taking in. And also just because horror is like, I don't know, even more magical and mysterious when you're a child. I very quickly just started ingesting a lot of the Stephen King that was available. So that was the start of my Stephen King obsession from the age of I don't know, eight to sixteen maybe. Yeah.

Brandon

I on the other hand, had never read a Stephen King novel prior to this book.

Wren

Didn't you read "On Writing?"

Brandon

Yeah, but that's not a novel. It's a nonfiction.

Wren

Oh, right.

Brandon

And I just, let's see. So this is probably where I confess to a little bit of a shame, a secret shame. Not really all that secret shame. I was, I was just like, really, really cowardly as a child. Horror and the idea of horror movies and horror books, freaked me out without me having to see any of them or read any of them. I was even when I was young, despite being at like, the exact correct age for the Goosebumps series when it started. And when it was like, as huge as it ever was going to be. And I had a lot of friends reading Goosebumps. I was too afraid to try any of them. Which is ridiculous, because they aren't scary. So you know, needless to say, I also was in no rush to read Stephen King. At any point in my life, really, because by the time I was like, oh, no, I actually like horror, it's kind of good. I would look at them and be like, those are too long.

Wren

One of the things that I found very true to Maine life was the roads. The town of Ludlow where the book takes place doesn't actually exist. It's a stand in for any of the little small towns that are around Orono and Bangor, which is the area where the college is, that does actually exist, that the main character was the doctor for. But I grew up in one of those small towns around Bangor, which mostly just consists of, you know, a street that doesn't have a street name, it's just route whatever. Route 5 in this book, I think mine growing up was 202 and 9, anyway. And the trucks were real. They would just barrel down these roads without a care for the fact that you know, there's kid's biking, there's kids playing, they're all over the place. We lost countless cats to these trucks, and, unfortunately, horribly, my childhood dog. I actually saw it get hit. I would just happen to glance out the window at the right time. And I kind of still to this day get really angry at my parents for not keeping a better eye on my pets. But I didn't really know any better when I was tiny child that you know, pets should not be outside. So that definitely resonated with me. We did not have a magical cemetery to bury them in. I thought about that a lot while we were rereading it.

Brandon

Yeah, I would imagine so. I have never really experienced like tragic pet death. All of my pets have just like lived to a relatively old age and died of natural causes.

Wren

Well, your parents are responsible pet owners.

Brandon

Yeah, generally speaking.

Wren

So I mean, I definitely had a lot of thoughts while I reread this. This is possibly one of the only Stephen King books that I read at a very young age that I've never reread. I have a couple in my rotation that I reread periodically, every couple of years, like I'll go back and reread *It*, and *The Stand*, and a number of other ones fairly regularly. But this one I just never reread, and I was trying to sort of think about why. And I think when I was a kid, I didn't see it as, as scary and interesting as some of the other ones. Maybe because, you know, the main character was not relatable to me as a tiny child, and, you know, the characters in *It* they're all children. So they're much easier to sort of identify with when you're a child reading it. But I also think that maybe I didn't find death as upsetting when I was a tiny child, because it was way more abstract concept. Then now as an adult, where, you know, death is looming. Maybe that's why I don't know, it just never occurred to me to go back and reread it. I also never went and spite watched the movie until last week, and the movie was not good.

Brandon

I, I caught the movie on TV at some point in high school, probably on the Sci Fi Channel. And I watched it. And so I remembered a handful of like core elements to the story, but not not much, in particular. And not enough that I can really articulate like, how well I think the movie did or did not adapt the book. Yeah. So as a whole, I actually mostly enjoyed the book. And I didn't feel like it felt like it was as long as it was. So my, my general distaste for longer books, is because oftentimes, I just kind of am ready to be done with a story after a certain point, on average. And I was expecting that to be kind of a chore with this one. But it wasn't, I found it pretty readable. Even though the content sometimes I had like plot notes. But something that I wanted, and this is like a fine line to walk with horror. But I kept waiting for there to be a little more of an explanation for things. And there just wasn't. And I know that you don't necessarily want to like, get to the end of your horror story by telling everybody the exact mechanics of everything supernatural happening, or whatever. But I felt like this book didn't maybe didn't get quite far enough, because it feels like the book starts leaning on the notion that the cemetery, you know, kind of manipulates people supernaturally somehow. And like, that's why, for example, Judd even tells Lewis about the cemetery in the first place is theoretically this notion that just kind of had to. But at a certain point, it just started to be like, "oh, I feel like maybe This situation isn't being set up organically." The characters are just all acting very stupid in this situation, and there's not a good reason for it. So the cemetery did it. You know.

Wren

That's a good point. I feel like the town itself being sort of this entity that is manipulative, in a way is a theme that he explores to much greater effect in It. And I actually didn't stop to see whether or not, which one he wrote first. Okay, yes, he wrote It after Pet Sematary. So, I'm not going to like sit here and posit what Stephen King may have been thinking, but I feel like maybe he took that theme of this mysterious entity, manipulating the entire town around it. And just pulled on that way better for It.

Brandon

Yeah. and like, I don't feel like that was really a thing. I don't think he was trying to use that as the core theme of the book here, certainly. So I understand that it didn't, it wasn't something he was digging into as much as things like how we deal with death. But yeah, just from a plot standpoint, I felt like I needed a little more of something to get me across the hurdle, especially in the climax of why everybody was, you know, there's that cliché about how characters in horror movies are just very stupid sometimes, like just habitually, because that's the only way that they would end up in situations that they're vulnerable to the whatever. And I kind of felt that way with this book, because it's sort of treats it like you know, the cemetery is linked to some like, primal force of the universe, right? Like, it's treated as a thing like okay, the Micmacs knew that it did that and had some beliefs about it. But that, like, the force is even older than that, right. And so it just can do things and the things that it can do, are make everybody not tell each other what they're going to do, or what is happening in their brains, or basic facts that might help them not die, or meet other some other kind of tragic end. And like...

Wren

I find that sort of pacing, very interesting when I think about what I retained when I read it, because my impression going into this was that the book was going to start, we were going to set up a little bit, the cat was going to die pretty much immediately. And the book was going to make you think that the cat was the bad guy. But then very quickly, the kid was going to die, and they were going to go with all that. But in reality, the, the pacing of the book was huge amount of setup -that guy dying in his office - the cat dies eventually - Judd storytime - cemetery cat action - cat's weird for like a hundred pages -way too much detail about Rachel and Louis's sex life. And then what, like the last 75 pages are the actual like, meat of the problem?

Brandon

Yeah, I mean, it takes him like the penultimate hundred pages or so to decide that he's going to dig Gage up and then also to dig Gage up the, the hem in the, in the graveyard, and like getting over the fence and stuff, it felt to me, like that was literally 20% of the book, getting over that fence.

Wren

It, it was a hard part to get through.

Brandon

So the interesting thing, because because I like I said, I had seen the movie ages and ages ago. And I remember the core plot points of cat dies, cat gets buried in the cemetery and resurrected, child dies, same thing, and then kills everybody. I remembered like those, the core beats. And so for one thing, because of the length of the book, I assumed that the movie was just one of those things that like cuts things out entirely in like large swathes as far as plots concerned. And I think the only stuff, the only like substantive stuff the movie, as I recall, cuts out is like I don't feel like it really dealt much with people who had used the cemetery prior. Because the book does give us a decent amount of background.

Wren

No, they they, they do actually go into that for for a bit. They tell it all wrong and weird in the movie.

Brandon

Yeah, so I'm just not remembering...

Wren

The major things that they cut out in the movie is just inner monologue.

Brandon

Yeah, that's obviously...

Wren

But that's so important. I don't think it translates well to a movie at all because you don't get to really understand why Lewis is doing the things he's doing at all. He just goes from like, "I'm stoic doctor man" to "I'm talking to myself and digging up my dead son" just with no, nothing to give you any amount of why. But speaking of why, why does the cat come back, and the cats just kind of clumsy and little weird. But when people come back, they just want to murder people. I'm okay with horror things, giving us very little explanation for stuff. But it did just want a little bit of explanation for that, because they can talk! They can explain! The animal can't explain, but the humans could have explained.

Brandon

Yeah, and like, it's another thing, it's another thing that like, characters, intimate stuff, like Judd tells Louis early on that, like, you can kinda, if you if you do it with a pet, with an animal, the animal is going to come back, a little off. But if you're, if you're willing to accept that, and the smell, it's fine. But if you do it with a person, it's going to be bad. And I assumed that I sort of filled in the blanks of that situation with the assumption that something something people have a more complex soul or some greater connection to the whatever that is behind everything. Or like when people are brought back by the cemetery, they have that whole demon possession-y thing where they know secrets there would there would be no way for them to know about people and stuff. So I think I kind of just, when those ideas were presented, and then not really filled in more by the book, I just sort of inserted demons. The book never goes into the whys of that. Much, much like it doesn't go into, you know how the cemetery compels people to do things like share

knowledge of it. Like this is something that I also noted the dead guy whose name I can't remember, the guy who dies early on.

Wren

Oh, Vincent Pascow.

Brandon

Yeah, like you said he dies fairly early, and is like for a decent chunk of the beginning of the book, kind of the major plot point that happens because, you know, it affects Louis because Louis was trying to save him, but he was beyond saving and everything. Like yeah, that's, that's gonna stick with you. Even if you're a doctor and probably have seen people die before.

Wren

Well, he seemed like he was a pretty fresh doctor. And This kid, Vincent Pascow on Louis's very first day of work when he's touring the new offices, this kid comes in having been jogging with friends, and had been hit by a car. And just dies. In Lewis's arms.

Brandon

Yeah, but he visits Louis in a dream, right? And, and I think as the book progresses further, it seemed like, it seemed to me like the implication was meant to be that it was genuinely like his ghost or something. It wasn't just a random dream, because he visits Ellie in her dreams later on. But he he's he does this thing where he like, in in a dream shows Louis the cemetery is back there and stuff. And I was like, wait a second. And he showed it to Louis, but he says like, don't don't do anything with it. Just don't. Bad idea. And I'm kind of like, if you hadn't visited Lewis and his dream, would any of this have happened? I guess Judd would probably have told him about the cemetery. But I don't know. It felt to me at the time Pascow's attempt to warn Lewis not to do the thing is the thing that made Louis think doing the thing was worth worthwhile to do.

Wren

Well, he says, Stephen King being, says, right before the scene where was Victor Pascow dies. "This is where Louis when he thought back on it, realized the nightmare truly started."

Brandon

Yeah. Yeah. And I just kind of was like, Why? Why did this occur? Like, why? Why this visitation? Because it, and I think later on is still intimated that maybe the cemetery made this happen also. But yeah, it just sort of feels like, it felt to me, like the order of operations was: Pascow dies, Pascow is so concerned to tell Lewis not to use the cemetery, that he tells Lewis not to use the cemetery, because if he did something might happen that he'll think is good, but he shouldn't. It sort of felt like telling a teenager not to do a thing that the teenager didn't realize wasn't allowed until you told them.

Wren

Yeah, don't look in that box in my closet, honey. Oh, but now I'm spoiled on my Christmas presents.

Brandon

And so I was I was kind of like, I don't know if this is either the cemetery manipulating either Pascow's like soul or just Louis's dreams, right, but using reverse psychology. But if it's the cemetery, why would Pascow visit Ellie? I kind of felt like, yeah, like, like Pascow seemed to be operating somewhat benevolently later on because he starts visiting Ellie in her dreams.

Wren

Yeah, but he makes her go completely batshit which is why I think one of the reasons why Rachel was so susceptible to rushing back thinking there was something very, very wrong, which led which led to Rachel's death, so I feel like, I feel like book Pascow is bad. However, movie Pascow, they turn Pascow into Pascow the Friendly Ghost. He has a way bigger role he's all throughout the book. And he physically guides Rachel back to town, like finds her a flight, helps her hitchhike. Like, it's ridiculous. He's just there the whole time.

Brandon

I have no recollection of that. That sounds kind of fun.

Wren

It's bad. I was laughing so hard. So like in the movie, he's like, benevolently trying to help. It's so weird.

Brandon

So I read, I read his interactions with Ellie as having the side effect of making Ellie seem crazy and making Rachel concerned about Ellie. But that wasn't because of Pascow that was because of Louis gaslighting her. Right?

Wren

Oh, that's fair.

Brandon

Like I read it like...

Wren

Oh god, Louis is so terrible.

Brandon

Pascow tries to warn Louis, Louis does not listen. So Pascow tries to, you know, warn Ellie, or I guess more more specifically, like get Elly to warn Louis, possibly hoping that hey, if I communicate through his daughter he won't be able to write me off as just some kind of hallucination of his dreaming mind. And maybe that way, maybe that way he will understand that he's on a very bad path that he should not follow. And, but then, but then like, Louis just kind of, I forget exactly how he responds to Ellie, but it's definitely, he's definitely not like, oh, yeah, I met that ghost. What you dreamt was totally real. He's, He's very just sort of like "it was a dream,

don't worry about it." And when Rachel gets a little suspicious, because as I recall, she remembered the name, Pascow's name enough from like Louis telling her about how he had died and everything that when Ellie is like, slightly mispronouncing his name, it does it does trigger something like like she recognizes that there's something there but Louis won't tell her either, right? Yeah, Louis, is garbage. And I think I think we're supposed to think that right? I don't think Stephen King was like, under the impression he was writing a sympathetic protagonist.

Wren

No, I don't think so.

Brandon

But he's garbage.

Wren

So I have a couple. I have just like a little side segue about asking you about your experience reading this for the first time that is more of a... I want to talk about Stephen King's writing style.

Brandon

Okay.

Wren

Asking you as an English major.

Brandon

Doesn't give me any special authority. But sure.

Wren

There's two things that Stephen King does in this book that are very Stephen King stylistic, like, throughout many of the books that I've read of his. One of them is repeat phrases, cutting in as intrusive thoughts constantly. And in this book, it's "Hey, ho, let's go" "Oz the Gweat and Tewwible." and "Smuckey the cat." That just like cut in all the time. And I always thought, especially in some other books, where it's used to very great effect to really depict the character who's thinking them going, really having some some mental problems going on. And wanted to know what you thought, you thought about that, because I haven't seen that in a lot of other things, just how often he repeats these phrases.

Brandon

Yeah, I mean, repetition is often a very powerful tool for emphasizing things or symbolizing things. You know. So like, in this in this instance, for example, the "hey, ho, let's go" is usually the thing that pops up when Louis is like, going off the deep end, right? When he when he knows he is doing something he shouldn't be doing on some level. And certainly, this repetition, you know, makes makes all that much more sense when the the book is as fixated on the inner life of a particular character as this book is. It's not. It's not literally a first person narrative, but it

is always tuned directly into Louis's brain. So yeah, I thought that stuff was for a recognizable reason that, you know, was identifiable and effective.

Wren

I mean, I like him. I like when Stephen King does that. I was just, I was just curious what you thought about it.

Brandon

Yeah. No. Repetition is is absolutely a thing.

Wren

It kind of makes them like these little like, micro memes. In specific books.

Brandon

Well, they become they become shorthand for bigger ideas like, Oz the Great and Terrible was a, or tewwible. I have a hard time pronouncing terrible without the r's.

Wren

I tried. I tried in the outline to spell that.

Brandon

Yeah, no, I remember that it was W's but I just, my mouth doesn't want to say tewwible.

Wren

My mouth didn't want to do it either.

Brandon

But like that, that becomes a shorthand for the power of the cemetery. Right? So it's also just a way that like, he can talk about the power of the cemetery without constantly being like, "the dark force behind the pet cemetery that manipulates people like a puppeteer" every other sentence, right?

Wren

Yeah.

Brandon

So yeah, that totally, totally fine.

Wren

The other thing that he does a lot which I usually really enjoy is interruptions. So you mentioned already that it felt like the scene where he is in the graveyard trying to go dig up Gage, there are multiple sections, where he just pauses the action, especially in parts where the action is really ramping up. And you just kind of want to see what happens, and then he pauses it for some

long tangent of a memory. And like, you know, in the graveyard, he goes on this tangent about when he remembered working for his, I wanna say his uncle, who ran a funeral home.

Brandon  
Right.

Wren  
And these conversations that they had about the times of year that people die. He does this a lot in his books is he just cuts into the action with memories and stories. And I always really enjoy them, because they're usually very interesting, and usually have something to do with the theme and are generally like, if they're, like a topic that is not necessarily Stephen King's purview, are pretty well researched. Like he, he talked with a number of morticians, and doctors and things about funeral practices and stuff to research this book. So these little factoids about times of year that people die, I'm sure are correct. And even though it definitely like cuts into the action, it makes it I think a little bit more tense, and interesting. But these are, those are the the intrusive thought, repeat phrases, and the interruptions with memories is something that Stephen King does a ton to add in more horror or more tension to his his horror stories, and I just found that interesting.

Brandon  
Yeah, I think that the interruptions in scenes that are are maybe more focused on action, sort of, were generally good ways to tune into how the character is feeling about the action going on, which sometimes is, you know, more important than the action itself. Right? It is more interesting to know where Louis's head is as at when he's breaking into the graveyard to dig up Gage, than it is to know precisely how he scaled the fence. Right?

Wren  
Yeah.

Brandon  
So yeah, I generally didn't mind them. I also found that part of the reason I think I didn't mind I don't think it was, I don't think it's a problematic tool. But I found that I just, the times when I was bored of the book, were times when he was writing scenes of I don't want to say action, but scenes where stuff was actually happening in the scenes. When he was actually talking about getting into the graveyard, for example, I mostly was pretty tuned out. I was like, just let him get over the fence. I do not care.

Wren  
\*Transition noise\* Even though I feel like there's so much I could say about Stephen King, we could have multiple Stephen King episodes, and I could fill up the entire time. But before we hop over to just talking about him a little bit, I just wanted to get a general sense of like, do you think you would have enjoyed it if you read it as a kid? What do you, what are your general thoughts on this?

Brandon

If I had somehow gotten over the fact that Slappy the Dummy was possibly the scariest thing in the world.

Wren

(Wren laughs and then apologies)

Brandon

I don't think I would have enjoyed it very much. And I think that's because I don't think I would have enjoyed the amount of time spent on the mundane stuff that I just said I really liked.

Wren

That's fair.

Brandon

Yeah, like I think I kind of alluded to this as well when we talked about Caves of Steel, that when I first read that book and its sequels, I didn't necessarily as a kid, get super into some of the lengthy digressions about like sociology, and stuff that I now find, like interesting stuff to think about. And I kind of feel the same about this book. I think that if I had read it as a kid, I would have been sitting there for long periods being like, when is it gonna bury the cat already? Just like bury the cat. And then I'd be mad at the cat didn't do anything except for kind of wander around and smell.

Wren

The thing, the thing that the extensive trip to the cemetery and how difficult it was to traverse the rocks and the little swampy area and stuff... the thing that it just made me think of every time was how the fuck is the two year old going to get back and know his way home?

Brandon

Yeah

Wren

I would have slept at the graveyard until the boy crawled out of the dirt and then helped carry him home because he's two. But no, he's magical, scary murder doll two year old. So he found his way back, apparently.

Brandon

Yeah, I wasn't too weirded out by Gage getting back on his own. Because at that point, I was just like the cemetery is just magic. And because he's a human, maybe he's possessed by a demon now or something, because that's sort of the conclusion I had come to from the conversation about, I don't remember the name of this character, either, but the one that

Wren

Timothy

Brandon

Yeah, that Judd said, like, had been brought back many, many years prior, and just kind of like wandered around quoting The Exorcist at people.

Wren

And like telling everyone their secrets and stuff. It's like, oh, yeah, you're cheating on you. You're cheating on you.

Brandon

Yeah. And like that stuff is like, exactly, like, for example, the kind of stuff that the demon says, in The Exorcist, that sort of thing is a very commonly used way to sort of symbolize that or just sort of guide, what what does a person possessed by a demon do? You know? So? That's why I had that conclusion. And because by the end, he had not disabused me of this notion because he had offered no alternative.

Wren

So I have a discussion question. It took me a fair bit to figure out what the discussion question for this book could even be because everything I thought of was just incredibly morbid.

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

This is still morbid, but it is the most like PG morbid, I could think of for this book. So if you were a pet, what would be written on your Pet Sematery marker? A la, "Smucky the cat, he was obedient."

Brandon

Hmm

Wren

Brandon the blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Brandon

Yeah, that's it.

Wren

Yes.

Brandon

I'm do I have to decide what kind of pet I would be.

Wren

You don't, but you can for fun.

Brandon

It should probably be a pun but I'm not really sure what kind of pun. An easy pun I imagine because a child has probably made this grave marker. Probably something like "Brandon the corn snake. Oh, comma, rats." Because I died because I was afraid of the rodents that they fed me.

Wren

Oh, no.

Brandon

Which is a thing that I saw a corn snake kind of go through once.

Wren

Oh, no.

Brandon

Where just like, the snake was just like, huddled into a corner and there was a mouse just kind of like, hanging out. Doing minding his own business and had been in there for a while.

Wren

\*Transition noises\* Yeah, so Stephen King. I, I really liked Stephen King. Did you read the foreword?

Brandon

I might have. But I don't recall. I probably did.

Wren

Well, well. First off, how many books would you estimate? Stephen King has written?

Brandon

63.

Wren

You looked that up!

Brandon

I did no such thing.

Wren

You looked it up.

Brandon

I did not.

Wren

It's 64. Okay, well. So in the foreword for this book, he mentions the inspiration for it, which, as you might guess, is, you know, Maine roads being, or Maine country roads being horribly terrifying with their trucks. And also that when his daughter buried their cat Smucky, she wrote "Smucky, he was obedient." And his little note was "Smucky wasn't in the least obedient of course, he was a cat." But, so he wrote this book. And he ended up putting it away for a long time, because he wrote it and he said, this is the scariest thing I've ever written. No one's gonna want this, and he put it away. And it wasn't in this book's forward but I think it was in the foreword of another one. Like, I think maybe it was in the foreword for Bag of Bones or something, where he mentioned that he always has several books on deck to be published at any given time, he just front loads a bunch of books. So when publishers come asking for a new thing, he can just like, you know, hand them something. And also it helps like if he front loads a bunch of stuff if he has periods of writer's block. So this book ended up being in storage for a while, until he needed to finish a contract with a publisher. And so he just handed them this. And they edited it, and it went out and you know, was very popular.

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

Well, I thought that was pretty interesting. Stephen King is an author who, you know, he's had a very long career, started in the 70s. And he definitely has made many a goof in terms of representation and such. The aforementioned problematic depictions of Native American spirituality that is prevalent through many of his books, as well. And he also definitely leans way too heavily on the trope of the magical Black person, in *The Stand* and *Green Mile*, stuff like that. But the one thing I really like about him is that he is not aged into a say William Shatner, he has aged into a flaming liberal, he's gone toe to toe with JK Rowling on Twitter. He is very politically active. And he's acknowledged a lot of the missteps in writing that he's done, which I really appreciate. I've read interviews and such where he's just like, yeah, I should not have wrote, I should not have written that and I'm sorry. I really like that about him. I, while this book was definitely not my favorite Stephen King book ever. It's definitely in my lower lower echelon of Stephen King books, honestly, but I, I just really liked him as a person. And I wanted to give a little side note, because I knew that you read *On Writing*. He actually he wrote that while he was recovering from being hit by a car while he was out walking.

Brandon

Yeah, I know. Yeah, he talks about that a bit in the book as well.

Wren

Oh, I didn't know. I haven't read that one. Maybe I should.

Brandon

Yeah. I mean, I found it. I found it good. You know, he obviously is a, whatever else you can say about Stephen King and I have always found him when I've seen him in or in, like, interviews or whatever. I've always found him to seem like he's a pretty, pretty decent dude. But whatever you can say about like his writing, love it or hate it. He is prolific. And that can be like, like output, certainly, for me, is arguably the hardest part of writing, I think, certainly is for many people. So yeah, I mean, he has he has some handy insights and anecdotes. If you're curious how he does what he does, it's not like a it's not a dry like instruction manual. There's a lot of personal anecdote and sort of getting at the way he thinks about writing and stuff. And certainly some of how, maybe his outlook changed as a result of his real life. You know, near brush with death, because he was severely injured.

Wren

Yeah, like, definitely near death car accident.

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

And also, it really kind of struck me that it mirrored Pascoe. Because Pascoe was hit by a car when he was out walking around.

Brandon

Yeah, like I knew that this book was well before that accident ever happened. But it did kind of strike, heh, no pun intended I guess, that I guess that this book in particular was like, very anti car in it's way, not like not like he was railing against the automobile industry or anything, but like, cars, in cars in a general sense of any sort of motorized vehicle that drives on road, don't look great in this book, like they're always just attached to tragedy. They're arguably like, more pernicious monsters, then the possibly demon possessed zombie toddler that kills people with a scalpel. So yeah, I thought, I thought that that was sort of, it almost made it seem like if, if they made a movie about Stephen King's life, and then they were like, oh, yeah, Pet Sematary has all of these people who die by getting hit by cars, or all of these important characters who die by being hit by cars and, like, it's really fixated on this road, and how often the trucks just go barreling through there and it's dangerous. I'd be like that foreshadowing for the actual events later in his life couldn't possibly be real. Some Hollywood writer thought of that, because they thought it was cute.

Wren

Well, it's pretty interesting that you know, this man who is known for writing some of the scariest stuff of our time, when he actually got hurt and had to like convalesce and was writing something he doesn't write something scary. He just writes a book about the writing process. Yeah, because he already wrote stuff about car accidents. He didn't need to revisit that. I also definitely want to take a second to like praise one of his non horror books. I think my favorite Stephen King book is Hearts in Atlantis, which isn't horror at all. I may have you read that at some point.

Brandon

I quite like that movie. So I'm on board.

Wren

It's got a little bit of history a little bit of like hints of potentially preternatural stuff, but no outright monsters or anything.

Brandon

Yeah, I will. I will say that, you know, having now read a Stephen King novel, I am at the point where I'm like, well, actually, yes, they're long, but his writing is digestible enough that I didn't find that the length felt as much as as I thought it would, or that I maybe find with the average novel of that sort of length. So I'm not I'm not opposed potentially to looking out at some other Stephen King books even just on my own.

Wren

It's difficult to say which ones I should recommend to you because Hearts in Atlantis is just a wonderful book. Bag of Bones is, in my opinion, the scariest Stephen King book that I've read so far. I had to read it all in one sitting. And I'm looking at it on my bookshelf, and it is as thick as The Stand. It took me like almost an entire 24 hour period to read that book. I didn't do anything other than sometimes get up to grab like a glass of water. But I was so terrified. I couldn't go to bed. And I was in my 20s.

Brandon

Yeah, so you know, I may very well, I'm still intimidated by the length of of like The Stand and stuff. Certainly.

Wren

Yeah, I mean, there's definitely some some merit to, you know, the classics like It and The Stand. So it's hard for me to tell you which ones to read. But we're creeping on an hour and a half. And while I feel like I could talk about this more, I am going to slide us along to the rating. How many out of five giant peaches would you rate this book?

Brandon

Hmm. I mean, I knew This question was coming and I don't have a great, I also just don't remember what I've been rating things so now I'm like sitting here like, am I going to start getting really inconsistent? I don't know. I think I'm at like a three and a half. Maybe. I enjoyed it. By and large. I enjoyed it more often than I didn't.

Wren

You're so generous. I had so many gripes with it that I was sitting here thinking like, is a one too high. I'm gonna go with 1.5 because I know how much better Stephen King can be. I know how much scarier Stephen King can be. And there was so much nonsense that I just didn't feel like

lent itself to the horror. Yeah. And also, I found the sex scenes in this book incredibly cringy he can do better.

Brandon

To be honest, I forgot there were sex scenes until you just said it.

Wren

It was. He can do better.

Brandon

Yeah, I mean, my writing may be somewhat influenced by the fact that I was expecting this book to be a chore. Just, you know, like I said, because of the reasons that I had conjured over the course of my life for just never reading a Stephen King book besides *On Writing*, and so I might I might be forgiving of it because it already had the deck stacked against it to a certain degree. When I began because I was expecting it to just be kind of a slog to get through.

Wren

It has the deck stacked against it like the other way for me in that I've read so much other way better Stephen King, that I'm judging it against that instead of just in a general sense. But uh, you know, fear not, dear listeners, we will lay off the multiple 100 page long books for just a little while. My next pick will be very gentle. What is your next pick Brandon?

Brandon

Well, since since over the course of this episode, we buried the podcast in the pet cemetery at the beginning. You see, and while we were talking, it came back so it's back. This is not a last episode.

Wren

But it came back weird!

Brandon

It came back weird, which which means that we are going to read *Animorphs* number one. "The Invasion" is the name of that one by KA Applegate. One of my major childhood influences is that series. I loved that series a lot. And I devoured them as quickly as I could.

Wren

I'm really excited about this because my very good friend Nik, thank you so much Nik, dropped off a cardboard box with every *Animorphs* book in it for me. I have to give them back eventually. But I'm I'm ready for this.

Brandon

Yeah, and then the nice thing is that having physical copies you can like enjoy the flipbook action.

Wren

Flipbook action! Oh what?

Brandon

Anyhow, the music used in this podcast was licensed by Epidemic Sound transcripts generated by otter.ai

Wren

Do you have a question or a comment for the team? I don't know why I say the team is just two of us Okay teammate. Well, regardless, you can find us on Twitter at dogatemybookpod and on Instagram at mydogatemybookreport or by emailing us at dogatemybookreport@gmail.com We would be super excited to know what books you love growing up, or if you want to yell at me about my thoughts on Stephen King.

Brandon

We're a team! Yeah, definitely tell us what books you love growing up that you should not have been allowed to read?

Wren

Yes. make me feel like I'm not alone in being potentially damaged by reading these books.

Brandon

Or if you also think Slappy the Dummy is the scariest thing in the world. Because that will make me feel not alone.