

ADAMY 10 Rough Clean

Brandon

Hi. Welcome to My Dog Ate My Book Report, a podcast where two weirdo thirtysomethings take turns introducing each other to a formative, uh...book-adjacent media thing from childhood the other has never consumed. I'm Brandon, he/him.

Wren

I'm Wren. They/he. Whatever works. Just don't call me she.

Brandon

Yeah. And this is our 10th episode, and in the long-standing tradition of our fifth episode, this is another one where we're going to take a slight break from the exact formula for what we're talking about on this show, and do something that is related, but not a book. Last time, we talked about some adaptations of books we had been reading. This time, we're not even talking about an adaptation but rather a show that is, while not an adaptation of something itself, meant to encourage reading and writing and things like that. And that is the classic early '90s children's mystery show Ghostwriter.

Wren

Which I had vaguely heard of, but never seen.

Brandon

And Ghostwriter was my jam. I was very into Ghostwriter.

Wren

We had contemplated each of us bringing a sort of educational children's TV show to the table, but we decided that we probably had enough to talk about just consuming this show.

Brandon

Yeah, because Ghostwriter...one of the things that drew me to it in the first place, and that still kind of sets it apart is that it was a serialized thing, and so each arc was four to five episodes. So and we watched the first arc, the first five episodes, so we were dealing with like a feature length amount of stuff, even though it was a TV show. So if you are unfamiliar with Ghostwriter: it was a PBS show. That's public broadcasting, if you're outside the US, done by the Children's Television Workshop, in cooperation with the BBC, where a group of kids in Brooklyn make friends with a ghost who can only communicate to them through the written word. And then they solve mysteries. With help from the ghost. Who they call Ghostwriter. That's the name of the show. Got there!

Wren

I had been curious what channel this had been on. Yeah, well, you answered my question. I'm just adding things that we're going to need to edit out because they're useless.

Brandon

As with a number of shows of this kind that were drama-ish, I mean, fiction, I guess, but with an educational bent. You know, it was also very much about like having a multicultural cast. This one in particular is very focused on being in New York, they actually shoot on location in Brooklyn. And then, really taking some time to show a lot of different ways you can interact with the with the written word. And then it is a mystery show also. And the mysteries don't necessarily have much to do with like, books or literature or writing. But of course, they they find many of those things very useful over the course of solving these mysteries, not least because it's the only way they can communicate with ghostwriter who can like take pick words that are written and then like re scramble them. And if he's in like a computer or something, he can just outright type. But only the only these kids can see him or anything he does. So that's, you know, he's just running around Brooklyn and doing all kinds of crazy stuff on billboards. That'd be cool, though.

Wren

I thought it was interesting that only the children, and select children, could see Ghostwriter's writing. And I really had assumed they were going to have some well meaning adult character that could also see it. But this was actually a pretty contained the children are the ones solving this whole thing and no adults are required situation.

Brandon

I guess we kind of saw this in the Hardy Boys, for example, when we read it, because that was like, you know, a somewhat adult mystery, and so the Hardys had to get help from their dad. Or they go the route of these mysteries are all like really low stakes. Maybe big for kids, but not like the kind of thing that you would see a primetime drama handle. Ghostwriter kind of would go back and forth. There were some that were definitely pretty small in the grand scheme of things, but then there were some that were like legitimate crimes. I don't think they ever solved a murder, but like the second arc, which I remember pretty clearly, is about an arson. And like, like legit arson, not like a tiny arson, like a store burns down and it was on purpose. That being said, we watched the first arc, which was "Ghost Story," and it was a little bit of a low stakes mystery, but you know, that's fine, too. They had to do a lot of worldbuilding because everybody had to meet Ghostwriter and get used to the rules of the universe. So the show focuses on the Ghostwriter team, as they call themselves.

Wren

They do call themselves that.

Brandon

Aside from Ghostwriter, who is just a, you know, animated graphic, you have Jamal, who is the first one to make contact with Ghostwriter. Ghostwriter sometimes hangs out in his computer so they can type back and forth. Lenni, who is a girl who likes to write songs and very awkwardly bumped into Jamal at one point, and like, they could have they could have had those actors do another take or two of that collision, I think.

Wren

They could have had the actors do a couple takes or two of almost every line read.

Brandon

And then Alex and Gabby, who are a brother and sister. Their family owns the store that Lenni lives above. And then the fifth kid, Tina, only shows up briefly. She's one of Gabby's friends. And she does indeed join the Ghostwriter team, I think in the next arc. I forget exactly. She's only briefly in this arc, but she does see Ghostwriter pretty soon and get added to the team. Because yeah, only certain kids can see Ghostwriter or his manipulations, so it's kind of one of those things that they don't go around talking about, like the fact that they solve mysteries with a ghost, until they realize somebody has seen Ghostwriter. And it's not clear if it's, like, Ghostwriter who chooses who can see him, or if there's some other mechanism. Seeing Ghostwriter is just basically seeing a floating ball of color. He doesn't have like a human form or anything like that. He says he thinks he used to be a person, but like, he's not sure either. There's a lot of mystery about Ghostwriter's actual, like, identity and origin, but they assume he's a ghost because he says that he used to be a person. And he writes to them, so they call him Ghostwriter. Yeah.

Wren

I think my biggest point of confusion about Ghostwriter is the first thing that he says is like, "Help! Help! Where are my children?" And I assumed it was going to be a mystery about what happened to this alien or this ghost's missing children or something. I think the implication now after watching it is that he meant like where are all of the other children meant to be on the Ghostwriter team or something? Like there's like this destiny thing? I don't know. I was very confused about it.

Brandon

It is a question that is like not really followed up on in the bulk of this episode. They treat the mystery of Ghostwriter himself as a thing that kind of continues to be unclear, but that you get little bits and pieces of maybe additional info over the course of the show, but it's not the point of an arc. You know, because like they're, they're serializing each arc in...most of them are four episodes, but the first and last arc are five episodes. So they're already doing a lot of episode-to-episode storytelling. And these are, you know, like half hour episodes, and so there is also a measure of storytelling that bridges the arcs as well, where there's ongoing character plots and stuff. Not in a huge way, but in a way that is still certainly for 1992 I think kind of uncommon for kids' TV. And that's part of what drew like, always made me think it was a really neat show is because it had that element of like an ongoing story.

Wren

I did find that that style of of episode structure way more compelling than the usual 20 minute child mystery. You never really get that in depth into anything. So it's not as engaging.

Brandon

Yeah. And they do really try to give viewers ways to solve the mystery along with the team. The bumpers, the previouslies often talk about like having your own casebook that you are writing down notes as well, like the Ghostwriter team is. And whenever they're solving a code or something thing written or whatever, they always have pretty lengthy shots of the piece of paper so you can see what it says And you can note them down for yourself if if you want to. That was definitely like part of the structure it seemed of the show and then part of the intent. And I do think they had some like

merchandise that were like Ghostwriter casebooks that were just a notebook with a Ghostwriter logo on it. And then I think there's some like various puzzle activity books, which just kind of makes sense, because they do a lot of essentially puzzles and activities to solve mysteries. This first arc had a bit of codebreaking, and they definitely try to make sure that if you are a child who has never heard of the concept of a code, you will understand what a code is by the end.

Wren

Yeah, I didn't have a piece of paper on hand, but I did, sort of in the back of my mind, try to solve the codes as they were sort of floating by. I only got like part of one, but I do see that the way that they really emphasize enunciation and repeating things, is definitely very useful for children, but it is something that I as an adult find incredibly annoying.

Brandon

Yeah, it is a show that moves kind of slowly because of that, and it's certainly a thing that I didn't really pick up on as much when I was a kid. Also, I was just like, way more patient with media when I was a kid, because...you know, what was I going to do except for watch whatever was on TV?

Wren

Well, it's perhaps a slightly unkind note that I wrote about the acting, that I didn't really internalize why they did it like this until you were like, just now that they wanted you to sort of try to solve things along. Clearly their acting direction was make sure you enunciate every word extremely precisely and slowly. Like people don't talk like that. Are these bad actors? Or is it bad direction? But I think it's purposeful, make sure that children can understand what you're saying acting.

Brandon

Yeah, because it is a thing done as educational entertainment. It's not as obviously that as something like Bill Nye, Bill Nye the Science Guy, or like Reading Rainbow, or Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? Like all of those things are various levels of like mixing in entertainment and education, and Ghostwriter is kind of, at least in my memory of shows that were on PBS when I was a kid, Ghostwriter felt like the one that was like the furthest to the trying to look like entertainment more than education end, even though there is a lot of educational content.

Wren

All right, you used the phrase at one point the other day. The combination of those things,

Brandon

Edutainment?

Wren

Edutainment! Yes, yes.

Brandon

As a kid, I certainly could see some of the education stuff and other things were like, kind of disguised well enough to me that I didn't notice. As an adult, there's a lot of moments where I'm like, "I don't think

I understood that This was trying to teach me something at this point." I might have still learned it, but I don't think I would have realized I learned it, because I would have thought I was watching a cool mystery show about some kids who have a ghost friend.

Wren

It did have less reading in it than I sort of expected. I sort of expected, coming into this, this, this show that, because it was like a child entertainment literacy show, that there would be like pitching of specific books. But there wasn't any of that. I mean, there was sort of like pitching of fictional books that they made up for the show, which I thought was very funny. So they didn't do all that much reading. Although, the reading they did, I thought it was very interesting, because one kid was reading video game adaptation books, and one kid was reading a comic book, and I liked that those were basically portrayed as totally valid ways to intake reading.

Brandon

Yeah. Something I don't think I consciously noticed this as a kid, but definitely something that I find going back to Ghostwriter, is that...it is very much a show that is trying to give you like all of these different ways to potentially learn to interface with language, both with writing and with reading, because it does deal with a lot of different kinds of media you might consume and doesn't really speak down to any of those. Because it's all it's all literacy, right? It's very positive about that kind of thing. And it's not as obvious yet, but as the show goes on, pretty quickly, you start to realize that each of the Ghostwriter team is like specifically interested in a particular kind of writing broadly.

Wren

Speaking of language, I did find it really cool - this is sort of like a two part comment - in the beginning, when they're sort of introducing the characters they they just sort of show, but not tell, that two of the characters are bilingual, and they have a scene where Alex and Gabby speaking Spanish with their parents, but they just go back and forth switching Spanish and English, and they don't provide subtitles for the Spanish. It was just like, context clues, you'll figure it out. Don't worry about it. But I thought that I thought that was very real, in terms of how families that are bilingual interact. It's just like sporadically switching languages all the time. Which I also thought was just super New York. I immediately knew where they all were.

Brandon

You see a lot of different takes on New York in fiction, just because so much stuff happens there, or whatever. And Ghostwriter I think stood out to me, making it feel like a place that regular kids live, which I feel like was often a thing that I didn't feel whenever I saw New York in other stuff. And they filmed on location in Brooklyn.

Brandon

Which is wild to me, because that totally looked like a set. Way too clean.

Brandon

I didn't actually find a ton of like stuff about the making of this show, sadly, so that some of what I did find might be inaccurate because I didn't find a lot of like corroboration or contradictions. So you know, that might be asterisk there, but it's at least what the internet claims.

Wren

I did have one more language note. I think the other thing they did that was really good was that when they were talking about codes, they were very specific when they were talking about trying to crack the code that they were looking for patterns in the English language. When I think a lot of media definitely sort of treats English as the default, and so they would never like specify we're trying to look for this in English, but I think that it's pretty important to teach people not to be so America-centric. And that was just like a very subtle,

Brandon

So the plot of this arc is, aside from meeting Ghostwriter, there are these people who wear these like Halloween masks, and they're stealing people's backpacks. And so they're trying to figure out who they are and stuff. And after they steal Jamal's backpack, he finds a note later, that is like in code when he's trying to, or...

Wren

No, they didn't steal Jamal's backpack.

Brandon

Oh, right.

Wren

He finds them doing like their weird meeting in the playground.

Brandon

He sees them at night being weirdos on the playground; they steal Gabby's backpack shortly after. Jamal starts looking into this, and then he gets a note that is threatening, but he also finds this coded note at the playground. And so they're trying to figure out what the code is about, and they first look at it as like, are these scrambled words, and they really take some time to work through it because Jamal is kind of not super familiar with codes and stuff, but Alex, who likes to read mystery novels and stuff, he swoops in and is like, "Well, they could be scrambled. This set of letters could be this other word..." And they mentioned like, well, now that we look at it for a little while and have explained to kids about the notion of scrambling letters around, like this word down here as a Q in it, but no U, and an English, there's nothing that we can make out of these letters, so it can't be this. Let's move on to another kind of enciphering. So that is definitely like a thing that they they show the thought process for the decoding stuff, and they do seem to be careful about stating some of the assumptions they're making about the fact that they're assuming the code is an English code.

Brandon

Something else they do, which I didn't entirely understand was important as a kid, but which now, many years later, after I have done, you know, a fair amount of writing professionally. There's a part where

Jamal and Lenni are trying to write a note to tell one of the gang of thieves like not to come to their secret meetings, so they can send Alex in disguised instead. And they write the note, and then they like, look at it and edit it for a while. Like they take time to talk about, in their first draft, like extraneous words, or like, you know, kind of trying to cut the length of the note down or make the note clearer. And, like, that's a very important part of writing anything, you know, is that editorial process. And it's pretty rare to see that. There's this process to writing. It's not just that if you're a good writer, you just do it right the first time and if you don't do it right the first time you're not a good writer. And that's that's super cool. To me

Wren

They do a lot of things really right in this show, I think, that I see nowadays, people sort of getting cranky about shows doing and calling it woke. Like, for example, all of the main characters are, there is there's one white girl the sort of like main protagonist, Jamal, is black and the siblings are Latinx of some...they don't specify in the first arc. And then the other character who is going to be present more later is Vietnamese. And I thought that was pretty great. It wasn't like a, we have three white guys and one token of a couple of different categories. It was very more representative of Brooklyn than a lot of things I've seen that were supposed to be in New York.

Brandon

I think Lenni is Jewish if I recall correctly. This arc doesn't make that clear, but I think she's Jewish.

Wren

Oh, okay. She does lose points with me for being white rapper girl.

Brandon

I figured she would be in the hole already because she was Ellie in the 1989 Pet Sematary movie.

Wren

That was very hard for me to ignore. That's all I could see.

Brandon

And we see a fair amount of their various family members as well. Jamal's grandma's pretty much always around. She's a postal worker, as I recall. Alex and Gabby's parents are pretty much always around in some capacity. Lenni's dad, who is a musician, is around a lot. Not as much, as I recall, because I think my recollection of later things is that they start to use Lenni's loft where she and her dad live as like kind of their clubhouse because it's, I guess, the biggest one and has a lot of large tables in it that they can sit around, which is not true of like Jamal's bedroom or the bedroom that Alex and Gabby share. So I think Lenni's dad is just often not there right now.

Wren

Well, again, as you just said, Alex and Gabby's bedroom, they did a lot of more, you know, showing and not telling about the different family styles and economic situations that these kids are in. Like Jamal is clearly probably the most affluent one of all of them, because he has his own bedroom, and

they live in...all of the outdoor shots of it are just like a, a large, freestanding Brooklyn house, and everyone else lives in apartments.

Brandon

And at the very beginning of the show, his older sister is going off to college, which of course doesn't mean that they necessarily are paying for tuition. Maybe she got scholarship or something but like yeah. And she gives him her computer.

Wren

Yeah. Alex and Gabby share a bedroom, and sometimes if Gabby is mad she closes the partition between it. It doesn't show whether or not Lenni has her own bedroom, but she is an only child so I assume she does, but also that I believe...my assumption is that he's a single dad because of dinner. That's all to say that I think they did a lot of things right, in terms of how you should portray a lot of this information to children. And I appreciated that, and I am a little sad that I didn't see it when it was on.

Wren

The other thing that I really like is that they do take time to give each of the characters kind of their own hobbies that intersect with the literacy angle. Jamal, I think...what does Jamal get into? I don't remember what Jamal gets into, aside from just...

Wren

It wasn't super clear in this arc. He was the one that was going through and reading the the video game books to try to find clues about the antagonists.

Brandon

Yes, but it didn't seem like they were for him. But Lenny writes music, and there's only a little bit of time in this first arc spent seeing her working on a song, but she definitely does songs in other arcs. Alex reads a bunch of mystery novels and things like that, Gabby, I think, they hint at it, but I think she kind of gets into journalism. Tina, again, they kind of slightly established this is like doing the sort of film thing. She's got the camera from the school and everything.

Brandon

Lenni was also the one reading the comic book at the end.

Brandon

And then Rob, the other guy that's added in an arc or so, gets into poetry. There's actually a subplot that I remember really vividly from, I want to say the fourth arc where Rob goes to like, this sort of poetry club thing, just like something at a community center or whatever, where it's sort of, like in a classroom. And he makes friends with this homeless guy who writes and sells his poems on the street, and his poetry is like, some of it is talking about the experience of being homeless, or you know, just getting by in this place. But I remember it being, I think, very humanizing in a way that a lot of media didn't do, because like he was never characterized as like, less of a person because he was homeless. And it just kind of stuck with me because so often, even now, but certainly when I was a kid, like, if there was a homeless character in fiction, they were usually like a drunk, or depicted as stupid, or dirty,

or whatever, like, it was never flattering, you know. And they were usually just kind of essentially set pieces for something to happen to or happen around or as a punchline for something. And that wasn't the way that this one went.

Wren

Yeah, well, I don't want this all to just be sunshine and flowers, or whatever, about how good this was, because I definitely do have some grapes. But before we get into my grapes, before we get into, you know, talking about the rest of the story, which will, I think come naturally with some of the grapes. I want to know what tiny Brandon thought about this and how you came about it.

Wren

That one was really good.

Brandon

Staple parts of my TV rotation. And then as I got older, Carmen Sandiego, and the math variety show square one, which is what most people seem to remember the math net segment from that show. Which is the drag parody about Beth.

Wren

Which I had.

Brandon

So I don't remember how exactly I discovered Ghostwriter, but I think it was probably just it was on TV at some point and I watched some of it and I thought it was neat. And then the mystique of this serialized nature was what got me really interested, because I think this might have been the first time that I encountered a show doing, like, the end of the episode is not the end of the story. And also, I wished I could figure out when it was on more reliably so I could see, like entire stories, and that was easier said than done; that's why I haven't seen like a ton of full arcs.

Brandon

That's what you needed a TV Guide.

Brandon

So by the mid-90s, when I was like seven or eight, I got ahold of several VHS tapes of Ghostwriter. There were three arcs that they released on VHS edited back together as essentially just feature length things. And I had all three of them. I did not know until yesterday that there were only three of them; I always kind of imagined that they had others for the other arcs and I just never got those ones, but apparently they only released three. And one of them was this first arc, "Ghost Story." One of them was the second arc, "Who Burned Mr. Brinker's Store?" And then they skipped the third arc and then did the fourth arc, "Into the Comics." And we watched those a lot. My brother and I watched those three things a lot. They had tie-in novels and things as well, like young reader novels, some of which were novelizations, some of which were new stories. I read some of those. The only one I remember well enough to have described any of the plot to you was one where Ghostwriter like brings these cries for help to Jamal and the others from these other kids who are afraid that there's an alien invasion going

on. And as they sort of unravel things, they realize Ghostwriter is somehow traveling through time, and he's connected with a couple kids in 1938, who are listening to the broadcast of The War of the Worlds that was, you know, famously

Brandon

Oh my gosh.

Brandon

taken as possibly true by some people. That was my first encounter, actually, with that story. I had never heard about that, about that broadcast.

Wren

Well, what was your experience watching it again, after so long?

Brandon

I mean, the pacing and the acting are both worse than I remember, but that's mainly because I didn't care as much when I was a kid. I still found it pretty okay. You know, I am kind of interested to watch some of the other arcs, because I do wonder if they move a little more quickly. When they don't have to do all of the introducing ghostwriter to everybody stuff. They still, I'm quite sure, take a lot of time to do the like educational part of the show. I'm sure that the pacing is always a little bit rough, because there's always going to be those times where they take long, long loving shots of someone writing in very neat handwriting on a piece of paper.

Wren

You know, I bet they didn't bring on Tina yet so that next episode, they can explain the whole Ghostwriter thing to a new character, and it's also a recap for viewers.

Brandon

The things I remember liking are still there. The things that I suspected would not hit as well as an adult didn't hit as well as an adult. But I still look at it fondly, nostalgically, and I don't feel like it has smashed my nostalgia to bits.

Wren

Yeah, it didn't have anything in it that I feel like would be horribly offensive, or you'd go back and you'd be like, "Ooh, I can't believe I liked that. That was problematic." It was good. I was very interested in the mystery. My gripes were fairly small, ultimately. I find Lenni to be the most annoying character. I had a very weird reaction at the end when Jamal jumped up and apparent, er, seemingly in that moment, trapped Ghostwriter in a binder and then opened it back up again, and it just had some more words and it was like, you just smashed him in between the pages of a book like a bad bug. What are you doing?

Brandon

Like, like Ghostwriter's a printer or something? If you catch Ghostwriter, he prints for you?

Wren

Yeah, it was very strange. It's like you're gonna hurt him. Okay, he's fine. But it was weird. Well, yeah, so like it. Like I said, I think I would have enjoyed it as a kid. And I enjoyed it this time, despite the acting and such making me kind of like, ugh. but um, the thing that I have a gripe about, is a thing that is not new. But was a I think, a fairly straightforward thread throughout my entire childhood of media portraying video games as a bad thing that that bad delinquent kids do. And so ultimately, if you didn't follow along and watch this show with us, the moral of the story was that the people stealing kids backpacks, and subsequently their lunch money was so that they could train on this video game and beat this video game tournament that was coming up. So it was for kids who were just like obsessed with a video game, a fictional one, which they made up for the show called Double Defenders to the point where they called themselves, you know, characters out of the video game and that sort of thing. So they committed crimes so they could play their video games and, and that was bad, because video games are not as valid as reading, which is not a message I enjoy.

Brandon

Why'd they need people's lunch money to play video games? Well, they had to do it on this old piece of technology called an arcade machine, and you had to feed arcade machines with solid made-of-metal currency called "quarters." I was thinking about that a bit as we were watching. Jamal and Alex hang out at the arcade at one point, and that's not really portrayed as a thing they shouldn't be doing or that they're doing to solve the mystery. Jamal allegedly just kind of feels like going there one day, and Alex clearly knows a bit about the arcade machines, and he's not portrayed as being like, I don't know, a bad kid who's played too much arcade games. That all being said, I do think it's fair to come away from this arc with the reading that video games are not on the level of the other things that they're necessarily talking about. I like to think if they made This kind of ghostwriter, today, one of the kids could be into making their own video games, or something, just the same as you know, a kid get being in to film the kid being into journalism, etc. Because that would be a thing that you absolutely could do today, you know, back then it was not that that wasn't a thing you could easily do on your own or even do like in a miniature version on your own. And there weren't a ton of video games that at the time that were story heavy, or writing heavy. Certainly in the US, it would have been still before. Like JRPGs really got a good foothold here and stuff. So, you know, I understand. Even if I do wish they had maybe done a little more to be like these individuals are committing a crime to play a video game, but it's not because the video game makes them bad. It's because they've decided to commit a crime

Wren

Yeah, I just thought it was awkward, like the level of obsession that these kids had with the video game. I I just remember so much in the 90s about people blaming video games for a lot of bad stuff that was happening, like in high schools and stuff. I remember there being this whole thing after Columbine, where there was just articles everywhere about how these kids were probably influenced by video games to do this. And yeah, it seems not great to be someone who really liked video games at that time.

Brandon

You're right. The the cultural context would have been that there would be some genuine concern or whatever. So I do think that not saying anything good or whatever is probably not due diligence if they're trying not to portray the medium as a problem. That would have been...it would have been a

number of years early for Columbine, but this would have been around the time of like Mortal Kombat, which, of course, was a thing that set off, or was at least part of, congressional hearings about violence in video games.

Brandon

Yeah. I mean, even that isn't really like a huge gripe about the show. Like they did a lot of other stuff really right, so...overall, I thought that like finding a way to pass our afternoon.

Brandon

I do have one last question. Do you want to know what Ghostwriter's deal is?

Wren

Here's my guess. So the whole thing starts with Samuel L. Jackson. And I'm not kidding. And Jamal in their basement, and they uncover this old trunk, and I'm assuming they had some ghosts associated with the trunk or something.

Brandon

Kermit Frazier, who was the head writer of a fairly decent amount of the show, said later on that Ghostwriter was the ghost of a runaway slave who was literate and taught other runaway slaves to read, and was was killed by slave hunters.

Wren

Fuck.

Brandon

And that was just something that the show itself didn't get around to revealing, but that Frasier revealed in 2010, apparently, so, you know. He was the head writer on the early stuff. So if anybody knows he's a pretty authoritative you know, source but the mystery is never solved in the show. And yes, that he was kept in a or he was inhabiting a book in that trunk that Jamal opens at the beginning and that frees him. So you were right about that element of like, he was haunting stuff in that trunk. And so that's like, how Jamal gets in touch with him.

Wren

That's a real shame that they didn't get to reveal that.

Brandon

So yeah, I don't know. Peaches.

Wren

Peaches, peaches, peaches.

Brandon

This arc is maybe like a three peach arc. I feel like I give the show as a whole more like four peaches. I think there's like a lot of good stuff in my brain, in my memory. And this arc maybe has that issue of

having a lot of mythology to establish, and in stuff that I think kind of they they get a little better at some of that stuff later. And as they as they do more with just the premise and all these different ways to kind of depict reading and literacy. I just, it's a good package, I think. It would be hard to like, if you haven't, if you weren't alive in the '90s, you will wonder why they don't just Google things.

Wren

I mean, I think it's pretty clear with the state of that computer on his desk that can fit like four sentences on it.

Brandon

Yeah. Just a solid blue screen.

Wren

That was wild. Anyway, I was probably gonna give it a 3.5 Because I don't know anything about the other arcs. I was engaged in the mystery. And I want to give it bonus points for the fact that they do try to trick you in the beginning into thinking that the thieves might be some sort of supernatural element, because they they shoot the kids in masks in darkness, and there's a lot of like special effects of them. I still don't know what they were doing, but there were like lights and sounds and they were like play fighting or something out in the park. And it was like, are they aliens? So I'm gonna give 'em credit for trying to throw us off with the maybe the bad guys are aliens thing.

Brandon

When Alex infiltrates their their secret meeting later on, they definitely have like a lot of they've invented a lot of strange rituals for themselves that harken to their fandom, like walking backwards to do things. And stuff. So like, you know, I get it.

Wren

Before we get into the credits, I'm introducing, since this is Episode 10, a new mini-segment at the end of our episodes, it doesn't have a better title at this point other than water we currently reading. Because one of the really great side effects of having started this podcast is that forcing ourselves to go back and revisit these books has, I think, for both of us kind of rekindled this desire that always used to be very prevalent in us to be doing a lot of, you know, hobby reading just for fun. So, so what have you been reading, Brandon?

Brandon

Well, as I threatened to do, I have since reread the rest of the Robot trilogy, the continuing adventures of Elijah Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw, and liked those very much. I had remembered - I'd never reread the second or third book, and I remember them being less engaging than the first book as a kid. I find them more engaging as an adult, but they are mostly people talking about sociology and rooms, so I understand why, as a kid, I would have been like, what's going why, why is this what we're doing? But I quite enjoyed those. And I read EL Konigsburg's other debut novel, Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth, and liked that very much. I'd never read any of her stuff besides Mixed-Up Files, and that was a fun one. Mixed-Up Files is more my jam, but that one is also pretty, pretty cute. It's got some of the same kind of personality. And that's fun. And all of that. Also, the mystery

reading inspired me to finally read an Agatha Christie novel, which I had never done. So I read *And Then There Were None*. And I like that very much, too.

Wren

And now I'm forcing you to read *Watership Down*. Not for This podcast.

Brandon

Yeah, haven't started, but I will be doing so. So

Wren

I can't wait. I also continued on with Asimov. I only got as far as the second one though, because I'm listening...I've started almost exclusively, except for the very short children's books, doing things on Audible. Because that's just the easiest way for me to digest books at this point with my work schedule.

Brandon

Yeah, you spend a lot of time in your car.

Wren

I do spend a lot of time in my car. And as much as I sometimes give myself grief over it, I have to remind myself, taking in books via audiobook is still valid. It's still reading, it's still fine. So yeah, I continued with the Robot trilogy, and you're right, I really liked the second book. It gave me a lot to think about, and you're right, the sociology is super interesting. The more they get into the space folks.

Brandon

Yeah, yeah, the first book is definitely like the most noir ask of those novels. And so I totally understand why as a kid, that's the one I liked the best. But as an adult, I'm I find a lot to really, really like about the later ones.

Wren

Yeah. So I haven't got the third one yet because I'm, I'm waiting for my next Audible credit. But I also have continued on with *Animorphs* because I need to know what happens to Tobias, because he's the best character.

Brandon

You're correct. Well, you're correct as far as you're aware.

Wren

Oh no. And in actual paper form, I'm reading *Monstrous Regiment* by Terry Pratchett because I've never read any Terry Pratchett books. And I'm reading that in actual paper form because I've been reading it while traveling and such so yeah. I also think I'm gonna go back and listen to *Watership Down* again just because I love it. But that's nothing new. I've listened to it many times.

Brandon

So what are we doing next time? It's a Wren pick.

Wren

Right! Yeah, so we're, we're swooping back...we're flipping back to me. And so the next thing we're reading is going to be *The Hero and the Crown* by Robin McKinley. We haven't done a just like straight fantasy book yet on this show. So yeah, time for it.

Brandon

Was not my genre as a kid, so I have no fantasy to offer. Gotta strike while the iron is hot.

Wren

Didn't get to that point until later.

Brandon

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Wren

We have a new piece to our credits. Our editing is done by the incredibly talented Derrick Valen. Check him out on the links that are present in the show notes, and he's got another podcast called *October's Children*, which is about retro horror in New England. Because Derrick is also a Mainer, like me.

Brandon

Have a question or comment for the team? You can find us on Twitter at @DogAteMyBookPod, and on Instagram at MyDogAteMyBookReport, or by emailing dogatemybookreport at gmail. We'd be super excited to know what books you loved growing up, or which member of the Ghostwriter team you find most tolerable.

Wren

Word! Thanks for listening.