

My Dog Ate My Book Report Episode 17: Goosebumps #11 The Haunted Mask

Wren

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 am Wren. I go by neutral, they pronouns. And my favorite Halloween costume I've ever worn was probably when I went to a theoretically haunted battleship as a generic Vulcan command officer. I didn't bother, like giving myself a name or anything, but I had on elf ears, and very severe hair and a uniform. And everyone wanted to know why I was an elf, and it was very disappointing, but I felt very cool.

Brandon

Oh, no. I did have a Star Trek costume one year, but it probably wasn't my favorite.

Wren

I've seen that picture.

Brandon

Yeah, yeah, my mom made it. I was just like generic tng command officer. I guess mine is probably... I went as Link one year.

Wren

Oh my gosh, are there photos?

Brandon

I mean, probably my mom made that costume also,

Wren

I'm gonna message her like immediate.

Brandon

I, I was trying to think about like, what, what the last Halloween was that I dressed up as anything and it probably was like my fourth grade year or something at latest. I don't think I've ever really, I don't think I've ever really dressed up for Halloween as as anything but like a preteen.

Wren

Yeah, the costume I'm talking about was like five years ago.

Brandon

Yeah, you know...

Wren

I never stopped doing Halloween.

Brandon

There have been lots of years like in primary school, at a certain point like middle school/high school I was like too cool for Halloween, right? And or I was at least too cool for trick or treating. And the only other time at that point that you would put on a costume for Halloween is if you're going to a party, and I don't like parties. So it just didn't happen. And then by college and then like throughout my adult life, especially when I've been at like a nerdier workplace like at a game company, I flirted with the idea of doing costumes because like coworkers and stuff do and it's accepted, and everything.. And then I just tend to always think about it, and then not act on it. And then like a week before Halloween, I'm like, oh, no, I had that idea. But it is like, there's no way I can execute it in time, maybe next year. And that's just what I do every year.

Wren

That's why you go to things like haunted battleships or something instead of parties. Haunted Houses...

Brandon

Sadly...

Wren

Haunted forests.

Brandon

I've only ever been in landlocked places on Halloween, I think. I think one year while I was at Fantasy Flight, I believe I asserted that I was there as myself from like, a timeline where Betamax beat VHS or something like that. I just hadn't done anything. And so I just came up with a reason that my normal clothes... I might have imagined... I might have only thought about doing it. And my memory has turned that into believing I actually did it.

Wren

Well, if you've read the episode title, you probably have a vague understanding of why we're talking about Halloween. But I brought the subject up because Halloween is the setting for today's book, which is a me pick. And we have read "The Haunted Mask" by RL Stine, which is the 11th book in Goosebumps series. The Haunted Mask was first published in September of 1993. It is a brief 120-pager with a rather big font, about Carly Beth an 11 year old girl in somewhere (Mispronounces) suburbia. Su-why did I? Suberberra? An 11 year old girl somewhere in suburbia who is tired of being teased for being easily scared. She longs to take revenge on her "friends," and I wrote that in scare quotes because it really doesn't seem like they're particularly friendly, but calls them or friends or whatever, by finally scaring them on Halloween with a very spooky costume. After engaging in some strong arming of a poor Halloween store shopkeep slash mad scientist, we'll get to that later, into staying open later than he really wanted to... My former retail worker self was perhaps most scared by this prospect... She manages to secure a creepy green mask with fangs off of him by sneaking off into

the clearly marked staff only section of the shop and it's a whole big awkward thing. And what follows is a rather quick descent into the mask taking over her mind and being impossible to remove. Also, she steals her mother's art, tries to strangle her friend and otherwise becomes a bully and candy thief to some smaller children the moment she gets any amount of power. Somehow she's the protagonist. Spoiler alert, everything is fine for a hot second. And then, in Goosebumps fashion is terrible at the very end, with a nebulous ending of horror bum bum bum. There are clearly some content warnings for this book since it's a horror book...

Brandon

Oh, I got this. I got this: content warning, listener beware, you're in for a scare.

Wren

I see you also went in and listened to the theme song.

Brandon

No, I just remember it.

Wren

ContentWarning: Horror, body horror, creepy masks, I suppose are probably a content thing for some folks. And like possession mind control, sort of.

Brandon

Yeah. And bullying. I think I think there's bullying in there. Everybody's awful.

Wren

Oh, yeah, definitely bullying. Totally forgot about that. Even though I said it already. I pfft. Anyway, yeah. I don't have a very good like concrete story for my personal experience with this book, or anything. I don't remember what age I was when I started reading these, although I definitely have this kind of, like, mental image of where they were on the bookshelf in like, the sixth grade library. So I feel like it was probably around then. So I know I didn't own them. And I think the fact that I was taking them out of the library is why I didn't read them in order. Because I know that this and "Don't go in the basement!" which I believe is like book four maybe... are the ones that I read first and the most. I did at that point very quickly move on to "Fear Street" because I you know, I was already you know, 10 or so and ready to move on to Stephen King but I did have a brief segue into Fear Street, which is RL Stine's series for slightly older children than the Goosebumps series is intended for. I... in terms of you know, additional like, personal connection to this I do very vividly remember seeing advertisements for the show after I was already you know, deeply invested in these kids horror books. And being super excited about this shows premiere and it's it's one of my first memories of like anticipating media in terms of like paying attention to previews and being like jazzed that something was coming up that I had an awareness that something was coming up, my, I think the first piece of media actually that I remember like seeing the beginning couple seconds of the production company of the preview would have me like gripping my seats and and waiting for this preview that I had already seen like 15 times before. And that preview was of course for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles movie. Cinematic classic, cinematic masterpiece, amazing soundtrack T U R T L E power. Anyway, goosebumps would you think?

Brandon

It was cute.

Wren

Yeah, that's, that's about where I was.

Brandon

Yeah, I mean, it's, you know, it's not, it doesn't really frighten me as an adult or anything, or have deep themes that I find revelatory or tell me something about the human condition. But yeah, it was cute.

Wren

I mean, it could. So I mean, I feel like it could tell you a little about the human condition, nothing that we don't already know, as jaded 30-somethings as we've already mentioned in our intro... that you know, this girl was being bullied and all she wants in the world is to be able to bully back her bullies.

Brandon

Yeah, that's fair. That is that is definitely a potential read that you know, valid. Also, there was a moment near-ish the end, I guess when Carly Beth is running back to the store. Because she's realized that the mask has like fused with her. And some rando character says "what are you supposed to be?" And I was like, what are any of us supposed to be? Like is this book about like, the expectations placed upon us by society? The masks we all have to wear on all the nights that aren't Halloween. Or is it just a book about a girl whose mask is haunted? It's actually not even that, technically. It seems. But you know.

Wren

Yeah, the actual like haunting of this mask is some very flimsy quickly exposted pseudo science. It's not haunted, per se.

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

You know, the Spirit Halloween proprietor slash casual geneticist or something made creatures creations, something, it wasn't clear. That started off wonderful, but then they were *unloved* and then they became horrible looking. And that's why they want to take over people by being creepy masks. Also they can fly.

Brandon

Yeah,

Wren

The resolution... it was... I would say the book was honestly, you know, five/sixths of the way interestingly creepy. And then suddenly, Carly Beth was being chased by floating rubber masks. And it was just suddenly goofy as hell. I set the book down and I was kind like...? No, like, what?

Brandon

Yeah, yeah.

Wren

How did we get to this point?

Brandon

I had a lot of questions. I will say this: the climax of the book didn't go the way I expected. That's a thing that is true. So right most of the book is a pretty standard you know, girl gets picked on for being easy to scare, girl wants to not be easy to scare slash to be scary enough to scare the people who bully her and are theoretically also her friends... Everybody's awful, basically, at Carly Beth's school. And, and you know, then then this mask kind of like has this effect on her where it makes her more aggressive, and eventually sort of fuses with her body. And she can't take it off. And everything. And all of that feels pretty, pretty reasonable as far as like where this story would go. And I expected the title would be a little more true than it is. And that we would discover this because the mask is haunted, like by a ghost, or possessed by a demon or something like that. I would have been like, yep, that checks out. You don't really need to give me more. What the what the book gives us instead is that when she gets back to the like party store, where she got the mask, the guy who runs the store is like "I am a scientist. And I created these." and they... it... it sounded to me like they used to be heads instead of masks? But he had to make the masks because they were mean? And then yeah, as you said then the masks, the other the other masks that were in the same room as the titular haunted one, fly off of their mountings and chase Carly Beth through the neighborhood. And I don't... I have questions. I want to know why did this scientist do this? I want to know, why did RL Stine make it a scientist instead of a mask that was haunted? I want to know how... like why... so he calls them the unloved capital U, which, not a bad name for a set of cursed artifacts slash entities. And he assures Carly Beth that the mask can only be removed once and only by an object that's like the power of love or something like that. Which okay, but again what science did he do to learn this? I am so baffled by the science part. Everything else would make total sense to me if it had just been like, like, was that guy Sardo? Sardo? No, emphasis on the -do. Yeah. From "Are you afraid of the dark?" He was the slightly recurring guy who owned like a magic shop. And he showed up in various episodes that were otherwise not directly connected. But pretty much always it was because some significant part of the story was some item from his shop that was cursed or whatever, right? And he just kind of, as I recall, was like, a bit careless with those things. And it was just always fine. Because it was like, yeah, this guy is a weirdo magician type who has this shop full of weird curios that he's probably found places. And maybe he doesn't fully understand the power that they might hold or whatever. That kind of I would have just been like, yeah, that checks out. This is fine. That's not the way RL Stine went. But maybe that's why he, you know, was the king of juvenile horror. Because he has the vision to uh...

Wren

Well, I couldn't remember where it was going either. Other than that, I have a vague recollection of this girl gets stuck in the mask forever. Which, incidentally, is also not what happens. Somebody else gets stuck in the mask forever. It's actually got a very, like, "Thinner" esque ending, where inadvertently, she

saves herself. But then somebody else gets trapped in the mask. I don't know if you've ever read Thinner, but this is another Stephen King thing.

Brandon

No, I was gonna say that I don't think I've ever heard anybody admit to having read Thinner.

Wren

I thought Thinner was fine. Obviously another trademark Stephen King uses some you know, ethnic group and their spirituality as a place to plumb for horror elements. Because it's a Romani curse. That is the catalyst for the whole thing. He's gotta stop doing that. Anyway, RL Stein didn't do that. At the moment where Carly Wynn gets her revenge on the two guys, Steve and Chuck or something like that, or Chuck and Greg or... generic... two generic boy names. She gets a revenge on them and they get scared. And there's a moment where she sees the the plaster of paris... and take a note on the material this mask is currently, theoretically made out of, there's a plaster of paris bust of her own head that her artsy mother had made that she stole from her mom to use as part of her costume. As if she was a monster that decapitated Carly. She thinks that she sees that head start to move on its own and ask for help. So as soon as that happened, I was like, oh, cool. It's gonna end up where she's stuck as this mask monster for the rest of her life. And actual Carly is trapped in this plaster of paris head for the rest of forever. And I feel like that would have been like a cool spooky thing to have happen. But after plaster of paris head moved, it never moved again. That went away.

Brandon

I did think that was like probably the most legitimately chilling part of the book.

Wren

Yeah, I agree.

Brandon

Or the closest to the legitimately chilling, right? Like, you know that could have gone, because it's because it's not just her that sees it right. The boys are implied to see it as well.

Wren

And I said to take note of the material of this mask, because the way that she's able to finally get the, the spooky haunted mask off. Is she pulls the *plaster of paris* mask on over her actual head. Which doesn't...

Brandon

Yeah, I had...

Wren

...seem possible. So I mean, none of this is... I guess it's a little silly to pick apart. Like physics and material elasticity. In a magical horror book. But that part just really weirded me out.

Brandon

Well Wren in this is not magical horror. This is science horror. A scientist did it.

Wren

There is magic, because there is the magic of love.

Brandon

Yeah, I guess so. I guess you're right. You know, you know who else I would have been okay with. Instead of a scientist is the Happy Mask Salesman from from Zelda games. Granted, he didn't appear in a Zelda game until probably... what year was this from?

Wren

1993.

Brandon

That guy didn't appear in a Zelda game until five years after this book was published, but I would have preemptively accepted it. But this masked salesman, incidentally, was not happy.

Wren

No, he was kind of like a sad old guy. I want to know the, the career trajectory here. Of "I'm a scientist, I create spooky masks on accident because I'm trying to create creatures." And instead of like locking the spooky masks up forever, he opens up a Halloween mask store.

Brandon

Yeah, and keeps them in the back room. Which granted is marked employees only but as otherwise not secured, apparently. And he implies that Carly Beth is not the first person who has wandered into that room.

Wren

And I assume she's probably not the last because there are two sequels to this.

Brandon

Yeah. And, and like, also, he just kind of like lets her, she talks him into selling her the mask, right? Like, initially, she like goes back there when he's distracted. And then he comes and finds her and he's like, these aren't for sale. And she's like, please, I want that one. Because it's scarier. And he's like, they aren't for sale. And she's like, please, and he's like, okay, 30 bucks. And she's like, excuse me, I could stay in the met for a week for that. But accepts this deal anyway. And then he just hangs around like after closing because he expected to see her again. I'm like, why did you let her go in the first place? Like, because he didn't seem to be like the sort of trickster character that you sometimes see who allows someone to go off with a, an item of some frightful power, thinking it will solve their problems. But like, the trickster character knows that they will actually discover it's like a monkey's paw situation, and there will be consequences and they're like, waiting for the person to come back having learned the lesson. He doesn't really have that vibe.

Wren

No, he just sorta just like resigned.

Brandon

Yeah. Yeah, he's just like, I guess I'll just let this girl do the thing. And I'll expect to see her again in a few hours, and I'll just wait. Instead of just tell her no.

Wren

I mean, I wouldn't have felt too bad for him. If if he was the sort of like, yeah, take the mask you little brat, because he was trying to close his store. She's strong arms her way in. She's like "No, I, the customer's always right. I'm going to buy a mask." And he's like, no, little girl I'm trying to close my store and she's like, "Nope, I'm the protagonist. Let me buy some stuff." And you know, and then she kind of comes back you know, after he's like in his PJs, banging on the window.

Brandon

Yeah. And like he lets her in and everything to tell her about having made all of the masks and stuff, and to tell her how to remove the mask, maybe but it sounds like he doesn't think there's any chance she'll be able to manage it.

Wren

That's why I say like, there's this element of magic to it because she's like, "explain to me what this act of love is that can remove the mask." And he's like, "I cannot tell you anymore." It's like, has he been magically cursed to not be able to reveal *the secret of the mask.* Like, what is the science? There's no scientific thing that will prevent you from telling somebody something... this is definitely like, science magic.

Brandon

I mean, is it is it a Five Nights at Freddy's situation? Is that what we're dealing with?

Wren

I don't know what five nights of freddy is.

Brandon

Okay, I can't... I can't summarize.

Wren

You just got like real silent there. Is this like a big deal?

Brandon

You have to understand what the internet has been for the last decade.

Wren

I don't internet well.

Brandon

Five Nights at Freddy's. You probably have seen things based on five nights at Freddy's even if you don't realize that's what they are. It is the like, eight or nine games deep at this point series of video games about haunted animatronics.

Wren

I've missed this completely.

Brandon

Anyway, the the one of one of the big things is that it's a series that mostly doesn't tell you its story. It hides the story around in things like HTML code and stuff. And so I think the entirety of YouTube basically is built upon people making five nights at freddies lore videos. And anyway, it it has, at this point become this thing where like, this character learned that you could fuse metal and souls. And so that's why the animatronics are haunted because he starts doing science experiments with soul metal, it's, it's kind of off the rails anyway. Yeah.

Wren

Well, yeah. So reading it again, not having firm memories of how it resolves was interesting, because it just, you know, it didn't go where I thought it was going to and, you know, we're twentyplus, and who knows how much media between me reading this, then and now. And, you know, I have a lot of, I make a lot of assumptions now, based on other things I've seen, like, oh, yes, this is gonna go that route, or this is going to use that trope. And it didn't. It surprised me, which was interesting. I'm pretty interested in going back and reading the other one that I have strong memories of. And I also am kind of just like morbidly curious to see how the episode of this in a TV show is.

Brandon

I'm trying to remember if... I think it might be one of the better regarded episodes? It's a two parter.

Wren

I know, I've done all the research on this.

Brandon

I didn't have to do the research to know that. I simply remember that.

Wren

But I'm not going to segue to that yet. Because I wanted to talk about... I mean, I'm pretty sure I know the answer to this because one of the reasons we did this one is because I knew damn well, you hadn't read this one because you didn't do horror as a kid. So what do you think? You know, eight to nine year old Brandon would have thought of this book?

Brandon

I think I would have been like wait, that's it? Because I was definitely the right age theoretically. When the Goosebumps craze hit to be like steeped in it. And I wasn't.

Wren

We were right there like, this was for us.

Brandon

A lot of kids that I knew read a ton of them. And and for that reason, they were kind of inescapable in that regard. But I just as I've as I've mentioned, I'll say it again in case this is your first episode. I just didn't do horror as a kid. I had this like very specific perception of horror as a thing that was just like really freaky and gave me nightmares to think about. And also, frankly, and I think this is a positive now but at the time I was like, "Why did they do this?" I did find the art style of the covers to be very creepy. In a weird way.

Wren

The covers are fantastic.

Brandon

They are. Yeah, they are at the time, I did not appreciate that they were fantastic at being creepy on purpose. I was just like, looking at this cover and imagining what might be in the book, based upon the cover kind of freaks me out. So I'm just not going to risk it. For that reason, I think that had I read this book anyway. I don't think, I don't think things would have scared me really. In this one. I do think that I would have been a bit underwhelmed also in that one of the main ways that I did eventually get into horror media at all, was certainly partially through like shows like, "are you afraid of the dark?" But also when I kind of discovered other kinds of horror, I think when I was really young, I feel like most of the things that I was aware of that were horror, and I did not consume these things. I just knew they existed, because they were somewhat culturally inescapable and also just I had friends who, whose parents let them watch R rated movies and stuff. But I was mostly familiar with horror, meaning slasher flicks, you know? Like I was, I was growing up when when a lot of horror was, you know, many Halloweens deep or Friday the 13th's deep or whatever else. And so it was all like slasher movies and monster movies that were, you know, more of a slasher style monsters not like the Godzilla style monsters. And so, in my head I have like horror is all of these things Horror is a thing, wander around murdering people, you know? And even though I'd never seen any of them, I was like, well, I know that the murderer keeps coming back. That's the point. So clearly, like, I don't know the murderer is the hero? Or like the good guys always lose? Or whatever. I filled in a lot of blanks in my head, sometimes kind of accurately sometimes, like, totally, totally just like imagining it being way worse. So I started to like horror, when I started to discover things that come at horror in a way that makes it more of a mystery. Which I know will shock anyone.

Wren

I was just about to say I'm shocked.

Brandon

So the first horror stuff that I started to like and got into was the stuff that was like more paranormal sometimes. Or were a part of the plot is like, learning what's going on and perhaps why it's going on that way. Whether that is a horror thing that is mundane, but set up to be sort of a tense, thriller kind of kind of thing, or whether it's like a movie where it's like, here's a ghost. Why is the ghost haunting this place? Like what's the ghosts unfinished business? Right?

Wren

Yeah.

Brandon

Or how does this mysterious creature who is dangerous or doing a thing work? Or whatever the case may be? Right?

Wren

Well, I definitely think that the Goosebumps series would... honestly knowing that if someone had actually taken the time to ask you at that age why you don't like horror? They will probably would have been like, okay, well try these out anyway.

Brandon

Yeah

Wren

I think that you probably might have enjoyed a bunch of them because for the most part is kind of like that like a mystery as to like why this weird crap is happening. And in the Goosebumps book, specifically, RL Stine was pretty adamant about like, the kids don't die in the series. So it's not slashers it's weird stuff.

Brandon

Over the years I've certainly retroactively become interested in Goosebumps as a thing because I'm just kind of... I'm the kind of person who is very interested in kind of deep diving into these pop culture fixtures, and why they stick with people and stuff, even if they aren't things that I personally loved at the time. And so I do know, like, in retrospect, there's probably goosebumps books I would have really enjoyed if I had just kind of gotten over the hump of being like afraid of being scared, I guess. I think this one, I would have been underwhelmed by because of the lack of mystery, sort of, or the fact of the mystery feels so weird, in that what I wanted was an exploration of why the mask is this way. Not necessarily that I would want an answer, right. But like, again, if the if the title had been more literal, the Haunted Mask, it would be like, okay, who's it haunted by? Why is it haunted? Or something like that? Right? Like, let's, ambiguity is fine. But like, let's ask that question, or, or that question being in some way important to solving the problem. And instead, it's just kind of like, the mystery is a scientist did it. And it doesn't really make sense. And it's not a thing that's built to, right. Like, it's not something that Carly Beth unravels over the course of the book. Just once everything has gone bad she goes and gets an exposition dump from from the scientist slash store owner. And so I think this one in particular, I would have been like, kind of disappointed in. But yeah, you are correct, that there are other goosebumps books that I'm sure I would have actually enjoyed reasonably well, had I given them a shot at that age.

Wren

Well, in his defense, these books are not really meant to be consumed by people that actually have a ton of like, critical reading skills yet.

Brandon

Yeah. Totally.

Wren

And also, at current count, in Robert Lawrence Stine's lifetime, he's written over 530 books.

Brandon

Yeah, he's written a lot of things. So many.

Wren

So sometimes, you know, you get a cool idea. And his idea that he had for this book was his son put on a Frankenstein mask at Halloween, and he had trouble getting it off at the end of the night. Boom, an idea was born.

Brandon

Yeah. Actually, that, that makes sense to me, because that's the part of the book that I did find most potentially, like. I know I mentioned the talking head was chilling this is not chilling so much but I guess anxiety inducing or maybe...

Wren

Yeah

Brandon

Or maybe like connected to a, a real discomfort. Something that I don't really know why I have it but I think it's developed as I've gotten older is...

Wren

Did you also get a plastic pumpkin stuck on your head?

Brandon

Did I? As I've gotten older, I have found that something that I dream about a lot or have nightmares about a lot rather, is like claustrophobic situations. I don't identify as having claustrophobia. I'm not like, when I'm awake and in the world bothered by tight spaces or wearing a helmet for example, even if it's like a full head thing or wearing a mask beyond the discomfort. But I have a lot of nightmares where like the crux of the nightmare is getting trapped in some small space or, or like having my movement otherwise really restricted or whatever. And those are just nightmares that are often very kind of indistinct but very anxiety inducing nightmares for me and I don't know why I have those. They're not as far as I can tell, connected to any like trauma that I have suffered or event in my life. But the descriptions of the masks not coming off and stuff but really put me in mind of those kinds of nightmares. So I could kind of feel that anxiety in those moments. And I thought that was probably the most effective part of the book in terms of like tapping into a sort of real dread.

BookReportPod Admin

****Transition Worble Noise****

Wren

So in terms of background information, probably the most surprising thing that I uncovered was that RL Stine is not a fake name.

Brandon

Yeah, everybody assumes it's a fake name. I also assumed it was a fake name at some point in the past.

Wren

I assumed it was some play on Frankenstein like, but no, his last name is Stine. So, you know, this guy was preordained to be a horror writer. Although, interestingly enough, he actually started out well, let me let me go to the beginning. Okay, did he grew up in Ohio, he majored in English and then he made the move to New York City to be a professional writer. Pretty straight trajectory there. However, he started off writing humor books for kids under the pen name. This one had a pen name, Jovial Bob Stine. And he was also the co-creator and head writer for the Nickelodeon children's series "Eureka's castle."

Brandon

Oh my god, I love Eureka's castle.

Wren

There you go.

Brandon

It was one of my favorite shows.

Wren

There you go. Jovial Bob.

Brandon

The dragon puppet is coming from inside the house.

Wren

So he did comedy stuff for about 20 years. And then he started dabbling in horror in the late 80s. His first horror series for kids was actually "Fear Street," but that was aimed for more like Junior High/High School. And then he aimed for younger kids with Goosebumps. And then it became you know, the wildly popular best selling, award winning child horror empire that it is still to this day. The mainline Goosebumps book series has 62 (at current count) books, but with 10 million spin offs and one shots and things like that. The the main line book series started in 1992. This book in particular, you know, even though they are, it was you know, a serial book that had like different stories in each one. This book does have two sequels, the Haunted Mask 2 that was written in, that was released in 1995. And then in 2008, was "The scream of the Haunted Mask." I haven't read either of these. I don't know if I

will. Maybe I'll give it a go. We'll see. As I mentioned earlier, this was incredibly popular, popular enough that they made a TV show out of it. And the Haunted Mask was actually the premiere episode of the TV show. And its highest rated. So you were right about that. The Goosebumps intro theme music still lives as they say rent free in my head. I will link that because it's it's real good. And I just found out today when I was talking about doing this with a friend, and they said, "Oh yeah, they're rebooting that TV show." And yeah, they're rebooting that TV show. They're filming it right now.

BookReportPod Admin

Transition Worble Noise

Wren

This, this moment right now is where I'm going to suggest that if you are interested in a deeper, I think hour and a half long dive into the history of the Goosebumps empire. The tale of legal disputes, ghost writing, publisher fuckery, and way more go listen to episode 87 of "Secret histories of nerd mysteries" it is a delightful podcast hosted by very fun folks. And I was laughing my face off for large chunks of it because host host Brenda does a sloppy impression that I will never get over. Topical laughing your face off. Oh oh dear.

Brandon

Yep. And Carly should I have gone and listen to this episode. Maybe it would have helped.

Wren

Yeah, so there's there's just so much more to the Goosebumps saga, in the background than I can get into in this like, little chunk of here's some background information for this book. And it's very interesting. And, you know, other than that I, I did uncover, before I even read this book. And I had, I put this on a note in my phone this article that I saw, because I knew that I was going to do Goosebumps eventually. And so I went back to it. And there's this this horrible article. "RL Stine was not told about woke edits to his book." And the article paints the whole situation as RL Stine being really angry, with a lot of scare quotes around the word woke, that the publisher has started releasing, in this year, versions of Goosebumps that have censorship and horrible woke edits, I had to do a lot of deep diving. And really like analyzing the wording of these articles and finding other articles to uncover that actually RL Stine never even used the word woke. He, in terms of the whole situation, which is quite tame. Scholastic started releasing, releasing versions of the book where they just like, take out some casual ableism. And that sort of thing. seems fine to me. But you know, the kind of people that get really mad about this on social media, somebody with like I guess, a large following, made this like attack post about how RL Stine has agreed to censor all of his books, and blah, blah, blah. And Stine responded with "The story is false. I've never personally changed a word in a Goosebumps book." And then he explained that the publishers didn't actually show him the changes, it just happened. That's all he said. He didn't make any value statements about whether or not like, it was a woke thing. Because I was initially like, pretty peeved at him. For you know, being a white guy using the whole woke thing in scare quotes, because, you know, that always just means...

Brandon

Yeah, it's kind of a dog whistle.

Wren

Yeah, exactly. But it doesn't look like he actually had any objections to that he just didn't know that the changes were going to be made. Whatever.

Brandon

Yeah. Which is not like a weird thing for this situation. Because, you know, obviously, I don't know the details of whatever contract he has or has had with the publisher in the past, but a publisher gets to do the things. That's how publishing generally works.

Wren

There's, there's so much about the publishing. Go listen to secret histories. Yeah, I even went so far as to go to his Twitter and do a search to see if he'd ever even used the word woke. And of course he had because, you know, people write things like I woke up yesterday and did this. But uh, yeah, he didn't. So a lot of crappy newspapers decided to attribute him to saying like, oh, I don't agree with these woke edits, but he never actually said those words at all. So my scaring myself into thinking that I was probably going to be writing about somebody horribly problematic ended up being okay. I, I've done, I do a couple of cursory Google searches, whenever I'm getting ready to do an episode and I type in, you know, author name, problematic question mark. So I can kind of like figure out what kind of stuff we're gonna have to touch on, because I don't think it's super responsible to like put these books out there as our content if we don't also acknowledge that problematic stuff has happened. But as far as I could see, Stine has you know, made some, you know, kind of silly missteps with these books in the 90s with a lot of casual ableism. I went out of my way to make sure that I got versions of the book with the older, (lower volume as Wren reaches for the notes) da da da da da, Tim Jacobus cover. Tim Jacobus was the artists that did all of the original sort of main main line art. And he just does this very sort of like 90s fluorescent air brushy but scary art and it's just, it's just so good.

Brandon

Yeah

Wren

But I think that the not as good covers are the edited ones. There's also a lot of interesting stuff about the art and the art license and stuff in that episode of Secret Histories which I will stop pitching now. But yeah, it's it's good stuff. All right. Are you ready for a discussion? Question?

Brandon

Yep.

Wren

That does not sound particularly ready. I want some more enthusiasm. Are you ready for a discussion question?

Brandon

I'm ready. (deadpanned)

Wren

Still not particularly enthusiastic. What kinda content creator, are you?

Brandon

Ready? (Still deadpanned)

Wren

If someone wants to scare you very badly when you were eleven would have been the quickest way?

Brandon

That's actually a good question. I'm not really sure. I don't think I was uncomfortable with spiders yet. But maybe, maybe I would have gotten, maybe I was getting there. I think certainly something, something dropping on or near me is a good one. If it's like dark, something drops. Maybe with a noise, not like a dropping noise. And that's fine. But like, I think for me, a lot of horror is auditory. So some like excellent sound design could be a good way to scare me when I'm 11. Frankly, it would potentially scare me now. So get out your you know, mixer and other sound equipment. Do some stuff. I do think I was probably still a bit uncomfortable with heights at that age.

Wren

Yeah, that's fair.

Brandon

Yeah.

Wren

Mine is definitely telling me to go walk into tall grass that has grasshoppers in it. When I was when I was that age, I had just like a massive fear of grasshoppers landing on me.

Brandon

Why?

Wren

I don't know.

Brandon

Were you also were you also afraid of other insects landing on you? Or was it like exclusively grasshoppers

Wren

Exclusively grasshoppers.

Brandon

Interesting. Interesting.

Wren

Psychoanalyze that! I don't know. Anyway, in "my dog ate my book report," we go back and we analyze the books that we read in terms of how many giant peaches we would give it out of, you know, five giant peaches. So, what do you think Brandon?

Brandon

Um, I'm gonna say I'm gonna say this book is like, my instinct is two and a half. But I'll give it an extra half peach to bring it up to three. Because science man does have a Spock mask. It's not his fault that Carly didn't have taste, granted, Spock is not scary. So I understand it didn't fit the rubric she was working from. But I appreciate the inclusion.

Wren

I was also going to give it a three just because I wanted to kind of smack it right there in the middle and call it a day.

Brandon

Yeah, I definitely like I said, I think there are probably goosebumps books that I could find and really enjoy even now but certainly when I was at a at a closer to target age, this one just felt like it kind of like fumbled the climax enough that it was you know, it was kind of just a fine for me. I don't I don't have strong feelings about it either way. It does make me curious a little bit if some of those sequel books get into the lore of the thing at all. Like I always I do think I was always like, sort of curious about the serialized nature of the Goosebumps books that did start to have numbers on them. Like like not obviously all have numbers but like, you know, A Haunted Mask 2 right? like I do remember knowing a few of those...

Wren

Yeah. Slappy Fourteen the Slappy reckoning!

Brandon

Right, Yeah, yeah night of the living dummy had a lot. Well, like I remember that that the the standard series the ones that would get sequels, they didn't have extra subtitles they just hadn't had, you know, they were just Night of the living Dummy 2, Night of the living dummy 3, et cetera. And there was that part of me that was kind of curious about like, a story unfolding over things that got me thinking, oh, like, how, what's that monster blood up to this time? You know? Yeah. Having no real context for what it was up to the first time. So...

Wren

Well, that that's that's been a me episode. Next episode. Number 18.

Brandon

Yeah,

Wren

We'll be, I'll be handing the reins back over to Brandon. What do we have on the docket?

Brandon

Oh, no. You only wrote Nancy Drew, crap... the...

Wren

I figured you would you would remember what your selection was like a responsible host.

Brandon

I looked through a list of so many Nancy Drew books now that like my, my brain is mostly like, if you took, if you did like one of those one of those memes that was like figure out what your Nancy Drew novel would be titled. Like, if you were born in January, it's "secret." If you're born in February, it's "legend." And if you're in March, and so on. And you know, if you are on the 15th of the month, it's "of the rainbow." I don't think rainbow that's not a good example "of the diamond."

Wren

I feel like there needs to be an adjective in front of the diamond.

Brandon

Yes, true. Let's that's probably your like, favorite color or something? I'm not sure.

Wren

Secret... of the... orange... diamond.

Brandon

Yeah. What's up with the orange line? That's absolutely a Nancy Drew book. I would I would buy that. Back when we read the Hardy Boys book. I mentioned that I eventually graduated to its sister series Nancy Drew, because it's better. And so the time has come. It's time to venture into Nancy Drew and read, Nancy Drew number one, the secret of the old clock.

Wren

Nice save.

Brandon

Yes. Thank you.

Wren

Well, thank you all so much for joining us and listening to our yammering on about our childhoods, etc. Yeah. My Dog Ate My Book Report is hosted and produced by Wren and Brandon, That is us.

Brandon

The music used this podcast was licensed by Epidemic Sound. Transcripts were generated by otter.ai. Our icon image was illustrated by Cindy Lau.

Wren

Have a question or comment for the team. You can...

Brandon

You can find us on our website which links to all of our socials at dogatemybookreport.blueberry.net or by emailing at dogatemybookreport at Gmail.

Wren

We would be super excited to know books you loved growing up and if you read this one and you know if you have a Nancy Drew book title birthday quiz name result.

Brandon

Yeah

Wren

That we just made up.

Brandon

Or and um...

Wren

Mystery... of the... yellow... lagoon.

Brandon

Yeah, that's another one. You got it.

Wren

That's just... that just sounds gross.

Brandon

Yeah, actually, I think I know what the mystery of the yellow lagoon is. It's full of gold, obviously.

Wren

Oh, yeah.

Brandon

Thanks for listening. Maybe, maybe it's lemonade. The secret is that it's lemonade. Lemonade, but why?

Wren

Goodbye.