

Rogue Librarians, Bonus Episode

Author F.T. Lukens

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Welcome to a special episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books.

We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, and Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians.

We would love for you to participate in our discussion.

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Today, we are excited to share our interview with F.T. Lukens.

F.T., who uses they-them pronouns, is a New York Times bestselling author of YA speculative fiction, including the novels *Spell Bound*, *So This Is Ever After*, and *In Deeper Waters*, which was on the 2022 ALA Rainbow Book List and a Junior Library Guild selection, as well as other science fiction and fantasy works.

Their contemporary fantasy novel, *The Rules and Regulations for Mediating Myths and Magic*, was a 2017 Cybils Award finalist in YA speculative fiction, and the Forward Indies Book of the Year gold winner for YA fiction, and it won the Bisexual Book Award for speculative fiction.

F.T. resides in North Carolina with their spouse, three kids, three dogs, and three cats.

They also mentioned that for their new book, *Otherworldly*, which we'll be talking about, they have a virtual and in-person event during the release of the book on April 2nd, at 6 p.m. Eastern time in a bookstore in Asheville, North Carolina.

If you can't be there in person, you can join the virtual event at 6 p.m. Eastern.

We absolutely loved reading the book and it was so much fun to talk with F.T.

They were so thoughtful about how they put the book together and incorporated different lore and traditions from many different cultures and backgrounds, but they also made it entirely new.

It was really interesting for me personally to hear how they decided to choose the points of view they did and how they plotted everything down to the dialogue.

I can't imagine doing that myself and I'm so envious that they have that ability before they even start writing.

So what did the two of you think?

Oh, I loved just reading of bromance for once.

You know, it's just nice and light and fun and just a great read, a fun read.

I completely agree.

And I just loved all the Easter eggs that ran throughout the reading of this wonderful book.

It was just exactly what you said, Dorothy, just a light and fun read, but that had so much more to it that made you think and made you contemplate and talking to FT about all of the different parts that came together to make this book happen, where the story began and in their imagination and how they just pulled it all together.

It just amazes me that authors do the craft that they do and that the outcome is just so enjoyable and just reaches such a wide audience in a positive way.

So it was just a great interview.

Yeah, I loved learning about their decision to make the world in such a way that there are no hints of prejudice or misgendering or misunderstanding of who people's gender identities or what their sexual orientations are.

Everyone is accepting in this world, and it made it such a pleasant place to spend time in, even though there's lots of conflict and things are happening that are not ideal for the characters, but the general feel of the book is very warm and positive, and I just wanted to find out what was going to happen with these characters.

Absolutely.

I fell in love with the characters, all of them.

Even the evil ones.

Yeah, no, those shades were fun to read.

Yeah, they were great job on that.

Yep.

So yeah, rush out and buy this book and read it.

You'll love it.

All right.

So without further ado, here is our interview with F.T. Lukens about their new book *Otherworldly*.

F.T., thanks so much for joining us on *Rogue Librarians*.

Oh, thank you for having me.

I'm excited to be here and to talk about my upcoming novel.

We are so excited.

We loved reading *Otherworldly*, and congratulations on the April 2nd release of the book.

Thank you.

Yeah, *Otherworldly* is coming out April 2nd, and it is my ninth published novel.

That's really exciting.

It is.

We wanted to ask you a couple of questions about your background before we dive into discussing the book in more detail.

What was one of the most influential books that you read when you were growing up and why?

I've told the story a couple of times, and folks may have already heard this, but when I was about, I think it was either turning 12 or 13, I'm not quite sure.

My older brother always sent me books for my birthday, and my older brother is 13 years older than I am, so he was out of the house by that point for a while.

But when I was smaller, he had D&D books shoved under his bed, and he introduced me to Star Wars and Star Trek and all the big nerd culture.

So he would send me books for my birthdays, and for my 13th birthday, he sent me *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Yes.

And I still have that copy that he sent.

And it was the first time I really read a book that used humor and the absurd and was just right up my alley.

So it was great.

And it really was the book that when I was reading, I was like, odd that you could find books in the world that were sci-fi, fantasy and funny and used language in different ways.

And then actually our mother passed away in January 2023.

And when we were cleaning out the house, we found a picture of me with the wrapping paper in my lap and holding up the book.

Oh, that's wonderful.

And such a great choice.

Yes.

Yeah.

He sent me all kinds of stuff.

He sent me like Robert Jordan and Robert Asprin and Mercedes Lackey.

And so he made sure I was well read.

So FT how did you become a writer?

It's like a long journey.

I started writing when I was small.

My first short story I ever wrote was in third grade.

And the computer lab teacher liked it so much, she printed it out and hung it up in the computer lab.

And but I never really thought that being an author or being a professional writer was something that I could achieve.

So I did not go to college for writing at all and got some different degrees.

And then, you know, just kind of always wrote some short stories.

I was, I wrote, you know, journals.

I did some fan community work, RPGs, role playing games, you know, that kind of stuff.

I was in the science fiction and fantasy club, and there were several writers in there.

And, you know, it wasn't until I was much later that I felt like I could do and write a novel and take that on.

And so it wasn't, it was a conscious decision to try, but it wasn't what I set out to do, if that makes sense.

And I happened to lose my job in, God, was it 2012, I think?

And I went back to school and got an English Literature degree, for, you know, because that would be useful after losing your job.

I don't know what I was thinking, but...

I just have this Avenue Q song in my head.

What do you do with the BA in English?

Well, I went back and did that, and it was really helpful.

And it was one of the other driving forces to be like, okay, because my professors were really great and they were like, you know, they encouraged me.

And at that point, I was older than their students that were going through for the first time.

And yeah, so after that, I was like, well, I'm going to try and write a novel.

And I had been hired for a job, so I knew my start date, and I finished the novel before the start date of my new job.

Nothing like a deadline.

So yeah, that was a really long story, just to say it was luck and timing.

Isn't that how everything works in life?

Exactly.

Well, we're so glad you became a writer, and we're so glad that you wrote *Otherworldly*.

And would you mind giving our listeners a brief introduction to your new book, *Otherworldly*?

Yeah, so *Otherworldly* is a paranormal romance with a lot of elements from other myths kind of pulled in.

It's about a character, Ellery, who is stuck in a five-year winter and is a skeptic of and is convinced that the winter has to be something scientific and does not believe in the supernatural at all.

And then suddenly, Ellery runs into this character named Knox, who claims to be a paranormal, a supernatural being.

And then from there, they continue to keep running into each other and colliding, and then they have to figure out how to solve the winter.

Yeah, that's great.

So what inspired you to write this book?

Because you just mentioned that you took elements of a few myths and so on and so forth, but where did this one come from in your brain?

This one, so each book is a little different, and they start with either a premise or a thought about something.

My earlier book *Spell Bound, The Magic System*, is what came first, so *This Is Ever After*, the premise of starting a book at the end with a D&D campaign, a Dungeons and Dragons campaign, ending in what the characters were supposed to do after that, in *Deeper Waters*, a retelling of a story.

So *Otherworldly* is different because it really started with the characters.

It really started with this idea of having a character who is a skeptic, has lost their faith in what they had been taught growing up and just was trying to do the best they could, had to grow up quickly, had just moved from the countryside to the city, trying to navigate and grow up, navigate life, navigate a winter, grow up at the same time.

And then they come across this other character who is a supernatural being, who just has learned everything about life through teen dramas, wants to experience what it means to be a human, an adolescent human.

So the real idea stemmed from wanting to pit these two characters, not against each other, but kind of throw them in an adventure together.

And see, you know, what happens.

Nice.

Well, it worked.

It worked.

So you mentioned different myths.

I was going to ask about that because some elements of the other world were familiar and that I really did not intend for that pun to happen.

But if you read the book, you'll know one of the characters is a familiar.

But so recognize some things, certain myths here and there, but then not other things.

So I was just curious, how did you decide what to pull from the different myths and legends and lore that you researched?

So I did a lot of research on different myths.

And some of my background from college and classes and things like that is that I have a minor in Classical Civilizations.

So I have a lot of that knowledge of stories from antiquity and myths and those kinds of things.

But I also knew that I wanted to play around with the idea of crossroads bargains and Faustian narratives.

And it was a challenge to myself to try to figure out how to merge the two.

So I wanted to make the world my own and not rely on either the myths.

But I also wanted it, like you said, to be familiar.

And maybe folks could pick up Easter eggs while they're reading.

And so I didn't want to do a beat by beat retelling of another myth.

And I wanted to pull the elements from different myths that fit.

When you're dealing with a crossroads bargain, usually it's a demon or a devil that pops up to do that bargain.

But I wanted to stay away from that kind of mythology.

And so that's when I came up with, oh, well, the shades.

And they're an amalgamation of the witches from Macbeth, the Nazgul from Lord of the Rings.

The three fates, maybe a little bit.

Yeah, the three fates.

And they're just kind of a mixture that I took and made my own.

And then the character of Knox is a familiar, a witch is familiar, because in the particular story or the bargain that Arabelle makes, she wants magic.

And so he's who crosses the liminal being that crosses the barrier, the border and inhabits the world.

So it was a lot of figuring out, you know, if I do the earth goddess, the chthonic goddess, do I want to use elements of Persephone or Hecate or Demeter or do I want to get a pull from different things?

Like you mentioned the the river crossing the river, like the River Styx.

Well, when I had gotten to that, I knew that there was going to be a river.

But when I got to that point, I was like, I want something else to be here, too.

It's not just going to be crossing the river because I wanted to keep the tension going.

And so I made something up completely not in any myth.

That happens right there.

And I drew from a lot of folklore, too.

My friend DL Wainwright has a folklore background and is a horror author.

And a lot of the liminal spaces that I use, like the cornfield or the abandoned mall, the darkened alleyway, a lot of those are horror elements that are popular in horror fiction.

And when we were talking about where to set the story, they were like, cornfields are creepy.

Like, cornfields are creepy.

What lurks in there?

Exactly.

I mean, cornfields are weird.

So yeah, so basically, it was just pulling from different pieces of knowledge that I had already and research that I did, and then kind of making it all my own to fit the world of Otherworldly to make the book have internal consistency.

Mm-hmm.

Well, you did a good job.

I have a question that just popped it to my mind about the Crossroads myth.

In my head, that's very American.

Is that more of a folklore thing?

You know, I'm hearing, you know, Devil Went Down to Georgia in my head when I think about the Crossroads bargains.

Yeah, so Crossroads myths are in a lot of different cultures around the world.

I was drawing specifically from Christopher Marlowe's Dr.

Faustus in that play.

However, I did a lot of research in Crossroads myths that pop up everywhere else.

And yes, Devil Went Down to Georgia, there's a video game called Cuphead, where the main character makes a deal with the devil.

Myths about, oh, I can't remember.

Oh, there's like a Looney Tunes with Yosemite Sam.

So like that mythology, that idea of making a bargain at a Crossroads or making a deal with the devil, pops up in a lot of different places.

And it's so, you might not even realize that that's what you're watching or what you're seeing, or it just pops up like, one of my favorite movies is The Western Tombstone.

And there's a Faustian narrative that runs through that movie too.

And it's, yeah, so I mean, it's everywhere.

Very cool.

It's fascinating to hear you describe all of the elements you pulled into your book, FT.

And one of the things we especially enjoyed is how you re-imagined the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice near the end of the book.

So could you tell us why you chose this myth in particular to re-imagine?

It was, it just worked well with the premise.

And it was something that was a myth that I knew well.

It just worked with this idea of the other world and the idea of having to cross barriers and the ideas of the themes of liminality.

And so it really was something that worked into that third part.

Yeah, so it really, really just fit the novel.

Yeah, that's always the way.

Well, as a big fan of Hadestown, we had to ask.

Yes, we did.

So I have not seen or read Hadestown.

Really?

You must.

You must.

It's another reimagining of the myth and it's well done, but done in completely different ways.

So I think you would enjoy it too.

Yes.

I know it's out.

I've heard of it and seen it and, you know, talked about and everything.

And it's on my very long list of things to look into.

Well, highly, highly recommend.

Definitely.

So on the while we're on the subject of the lore, I don't know that much about familiars, so I was curious.

Is a human familiar something that you have found in your research or did you just kind of decide to do that?

Because I'm usually, you know, usually it's a cat or, you know, a bird or something.

Cool.

Although I was looking at Wikipedia, which I know is not the best source, but it did mention there are some texts with human familiars out there.

In Western Europe.

I'm sure there are.

And Knox is kind of a play on Mephistopheles.

But not in...

It doesn't have the weight of that mythology behind it.

So, yeah, so I just needed him to be a character that was supernatural, would be a foil to Ellery, but also needed to be on the same level as Ellery.

So I didn't want him to have a lot of life experience and have a lot of immortal knowledge and those kinds of things where there would be a power imbalance in the romantic relationship.

And that's why his memory gets erased when he crosses over.

I like that.

Yeah, I really like that.

Very much so.

FT.

I really enjoyed how you wrote the story, alternating between Ellery's perspective and Knox's perspective.

And so it's technically in third person limited or close third person point of view.

How did you decide to write the story in that fashion?

Because I think it works really well.

So I had written in third person limited for *In Deeper Waters*, and then I switched to first person for *Since This Is Ever After* and *Spell Bound*.

And I wanted to change back to third person limited.

Spell Bound was actually my first book where I did multiple POVs.

I had had trouble with kind of structuring like different POVs in the novel.

And then I read Beth Revis's *Give the Dark My Love*.

And the way that she used multiple POVs, point of views, I keep, sorry, I keep using like acronyms and abbreviations, point of views.

The way she used it was so clever.

And I was like, this is, it was a little, you know, it wasn't 50% one character and 50% the other.

It was like 80-20.

And then in the scenes that needed to be from a different point of view were through that one character.

And I was like, this is a really interesting way to do this and solves all my problems.

So I kind of emulated Beth's, the ways that she had done that, *Forgive the Dark*, *My Love to Spell Bound* and doing the multiple POVs and having a character carry a lot of the book within having the, another character do specific scenes and also specific scenes for their character arc.

And I took that and did the same for *Otherworldly*.

I mean, not, it's not alternating chapters.

Doing alternating chapter POVs is very difficult.

And Camilla Cole just wrote, *So Let Them Burn*.

And it has alternating POV chapters between the two sisters.

And I, it's just amazing.

I told her when I met her, I was like, I can't, the way you structured this is fantastic.

And it is just so difficult to do that.

Which is why it's not done in other books.

Yeah.

And it's interesting because most other books that I've read that use that alternating, but not every other chapter, you know, it isn't every other chapter.

Very few books I've read have every other chapter where it's even.

It's, I like, you know, *Spell Bound* and *Otherworldly* are where I have experimented with different POVs.

And actually, towards the end of the book, there wasn't a Knox POV in a certain spot.

And my editor came back and was like, hey, I think it would be really good to have a Knox POV here.

So I wrote an additional chapter and had that put in.

And it really worked.

It made the ending much better.

But another book that really plays with POV that I love is Maggie Takuda Hall's *The Mermaid, The Witch, and The Sea*, because the sea has a POV and it's so cool.

Yeah, I really enjoyed that book and the way she used POV through that novel as well.

One of the things we loved throughout your book was how you portrayed the central romantic and family friend relationships, especially Ellery's found family just loved those characters and their relationships.

So could you tell us a little bit more about how you developed those storylines?

Yeah, so Ellery is, you know, Knox and Ellery both have character arcs where they are, I don't want to say coming of age, but they're growing and they're having what they thought was real or what they thought was happening.

They're having revelations of that.

And so really the romance that builds between Knox and Ellery really comes from them growing closer while they are both experiencing this growth in character and personality and in their kind of worldview, the changes of their worldview.

And so, yeah, the romance I wanted to make sure was running along with the, was running kind of parallel to this coming of age that these two characters are both experiencing.

And I knew that Ellery and Knox both were going to make mistakes.

They're teens.

They're young adults.

They're going to make some not so great decisions.

And we're going to need, you know, some stable background characters to go to and to help them with this development.

And so that's why there's the, Charlie, the cousin and Zeta, the cousin's girlfriend.

And they are the pillar, really, of the found family, because they are the ones that invite Knox to their home when Ellery would never do that.

And they're the ones that invite him in and kind of teach Ellery about being kind and not taking things at face value kind of thing.

And then they're also, you know, giving Knox this idea of relationships that were not transactional.

So he gets to see how Charlie and Zeta and Ellery work as a family and gets to be included in that.

So they're really integral to, Charlie and Zeta are really integral to the character development and the changes that Ellery and Knox go through.

Yeah, that makes so much sense.

I loved that Charlie and Zeta as characters too.

They were so much fun to see how they interact with each other and with the others.

And like you said, I think their kindness was so important for both of the other characters.

Dorothy, did you want to add to that?

I did.

I feel like Knox did not just fall in love with Ellery, but he fell in love with being a part of that found family.

And, you know, just the other two, Charlie and Zeta were as important almost in his thinking about wanting to stay.

So that was that was a lot of fun and a new perspective.

Well, and because I think it's important that even in in romance novels to have a representation of different types of love, like romantic love, familiar love.

And Zeta says to Ellery that you may love Knox, you know, in one way, but I love Knox too, just in a different way.

And I think it's important to show those different connections that people can make and that not all love is romantic.

And that doesn't diminish the power of the love either.

All right.

All right.

So the pronouns I wanted to bring up, it's just a beautiful thing that you've done with Ellery's pronouns, where Ellery uses they them pronouns.

And they seem to live in a world where everyone simply knows their pronouns without having to ask, you know, people that Ellery's never been introduced to, know to use they them and they seem to know everyone's pronouns for that matter.

So there just was no nothing else to mark Ellery's, however Ellery identifies.

I loved reading that.

I have non-binary child and one trans child.

So, you know, it's something that's always on my radar.

And of course, we read all the band books.

So I was just curious how you made that choice to make that clear, but like literally never mention it.

Well, because I enjoy writing queer normative worlds.

And, you know, one of the things that I was growing up when I was reading fantasy novels and, you know, like I said, steeped in nerd culture and watching all these, you know, sci-fi and fantasy TV shows was always looking for the characters that were like me and not finding them.

Or if they were there, they were the alien or the robot or, you know, they were the other.

And so I've made a choice in my author career that I'm going to, you know, write queer normative worlds where my readers can pick up one of my books and read through and not have to worry about being misgendered, characters being misgendered or, you know, their struggles in life being connected to queerness.

And there's room on the shelves for all queer experiences.

And there are books, you know, about coming out and about, you know, the struggles of queer teens.

But for me, I've made a choice as an author and a fantasy author to, you know, write my worlds where my readers, queer young adults don't have to worry about that piece of it.

Just make it a fun place to be.

And it very much reminds me.

And you two are going to have to help me remember the name.

When we checked Jerry Craft.

Yeah.

When we talked to Jerry Craft.

I was thinking that too.

He just wanted to write a book that wasn't about the trauma of being black.

You know, it's just a regular, a regular kid.

Although he, you know, he called out some of the racism, which, you know, I love that this is a world.

If you're going to make it a fantasy world, make it one where everyone's accepted.

Why not?

That has been always my big beef with some, with fantasy and sci-fi, because I feel like if you're creating worlds and from just whatever, you know, and you have all of this creative freedom to do these things, why would you pull in the parts of society that suck?

Yes, 100%.

But I understand, though, that, like I said, there's room on the shelf for all books, and there are, you know, books that are needed and books that I would have loved to have growing up that are about coming out, about queer experiences, queer struggles, and that kind of thing.

But like I said, I've made a choice that my books are going to be safe spaces.

Excellent.

On that note, though, I was wondering if you included any sort of maybe non-purpose.

I saw veiled references to the general experience of being non-binary.

And again, you know, this is from having watched my child and a lot of my students through over the years.

You know, I know that some, for instance, some are estranged from their parents at a younger age, or this idea of being let down by the breakdown of their belief system.

You know, nothing is like they thought that it was, or even just the way that Ellery kind of is very quiet and tries not to take up too much space.

I have kind of seen all of that in trans and non-binary children that I've known.

So just curious if that was, if you did that knowingly or just sort of seeped in.

Well, if a non-binary teen or queer teen reads the narrative and they interpret it that way, and they get comfort and connection to the character or they relate to the character in that way because of the things that you mentioned, then that's great.

And that is wonderful.

And I would not say no to that interpretation at all.

But the phone call they have with their, the tense phone calls that they have with their mother, don't revolve around them being non-binary.

It revolves around and in no way, I had readers tell me that they got to that scene and they were like, oh no, is this going to be a misgendering scene?

And then when it wasn't, they had that sigh of relief that no, it's not.

It is about something else.

So again, I try to keep my books in, even in Spell Bound, there is a non-binary character and someone tell me that even the evil corporation knows better than to misgender someone.

Right the world you want to see.

Exactly.

Okay.

My last question on this topic as the mother again of a non-binary child, how many times could I say it?

I know my child is constantly trying to subvert the way that they know they are perceived by others.

Just basically they love to wear a lot of makeup and pretty dresses, but then they will ask me to use he or they pronouns because they know.

And they said this to me.

Mom, I know that when you say they, you're thinking she.

So I'm going to ask you to say he is just kind of really pushing that envelope.

So when I looked at the cover art, I just thought Ellery was to me seemed very feminine.

We didn't all agree on that.

But did you have any say in the in the cover art or did you have any thoughts about that?

Well, I, Sam Schechter, who is the artist, has been my artist on and done the covers for my last four books.

And I love them.

They do great interpretations of my characters.

And I love this cover.

And I love the way that Ellery looks in this cover and the way Knox looks in this cover.

It's beautiful.

It is beautiful.

Yeah, it is.

The only thing that I asked them to change was originally Knox had sunglasses on.

And I was like, that's too Crowley from Good Open, so can we not?

And they took them off.

So but I mean, there's this kind of perception that non-binary means it equates to androgynous.

And that, you know, there's a wide range of gender presentation of non-binary folks.

And it doesn't matter.

You know, there's nothing in the narrative.

And actually, there was a line that I took out that so that when folks read them or that they know that Ellery is a non-binary character.

And it can be, you know, that character can be accessible to folks that may have been born female at birth or born male at birth.

And but it's just a non-binary character.

Does that make sense?

I mean, yeah, no, it absolutely does.

And you're right.

You know, anyone can present to any way they want and still ask people to use whatever pronouns they want.

So yeah, I think the cover is great.

Yeah, it's I'm glad.

Beautiful.

This is the last question on this general topic.

But as we mentioned, since our podcast normally focuses on banned books, we were wondering whether or not the current political atmosphere affected your writing of this book or your books in general.

Do you think about how people will respond to the characters' genders and sexual orientations?

Or, as you said, do you want to create this world in which it's not an issue so you don't worry about how other people will think about it?

I write to an audience, and my audience are queer young adults and queer teens.

If adults read the book, if teens that are allies or have never experienced a non-binary character or whoever, pick the book up and read it, that's great too.

I don't think that any author is going to say that they don't think about if their books are going to get into the hands of their readers, or, you know, because you have to.

But it's not going to change the way I do things.

Yeah, good answer.

Very good answer.

Switching gears a little bit.

We wanted to talk about some of the themes we noticed.

And one of them is we were really interested in how you explored the concepts of faith and skepticism, especially through Ellery's character.

So why did you decide to discuss those topics?

I thought it would be interesting to approach those in a world that is not based off of a known mythology.

So a lot of young adults and teens, when you get to a certain age and you're going out to the wider world, maybe getting a job or going to college or moving out of the house, those kinds of things, start to see the wider world and maybe start to think about the culture they grow up in and the things that they would do differently or things that don't fit them anymore.

It's something that we all do growing up and realizing that your parents and grandparents aren't infallible, that they don't have all the answers, that they make mistakes too.

And it's something that happens when you're 18, it happens when you're 40.

And so I think it's a really relatable part of growing up is just realizing that these people that you've relied on to have all the answers may not have the answers and may have had the wrong answers.

I like the way it kind of comes full circle and Ellery realizes that the parents maybe had some good points.

In terms of their belief system?

Their belief system, exactly.

Yeah.

So and Ellery is bucking against the way they grew up.

And like I said, had moved from this rural town to this city and is experiencing new things.

And it's difficult for them to reconcile that maybe some of the things their parents told them were actually true.

And it's also difficult for them to make the choice to put themselves first and having to make that hard decision of, you know what?

No, I think I'm going to make the decision of staying where I'm at or doing things a certain way or doing things this way.

And again, that's a relatable topic.

People have to do that all the time, you know, in different situations saying, well, you know, I'm not coming to Thanksgiving this year.

Because I don't want to, you know, have to talk about things around a turkey or, you know, you know, not answering a phone call because you don't want to deal with it.

So that happens.

Yeah, it does.

And even beyond that, even when a person does make a difficult choice to not go to Thanksgiving dinner this year, or whatever it is, their feelings they're going to have about that also, like, even if it's the right choice for them and their mental health, there's still going to be underlying feelings of loss of some variety, just because it's a change of, you know, it's a change from what the norm has been, and, and I guess I call that growing pains, but, you know, so there's grief to it, because you you mourn the connection of to where you grew up and, and, and this is all I mean, like, this is all very personal to me.

My dad died in 2019.

My mom died in 2023.

I didn't have good relationships with either of them.

And, you know, after having to end being the only responsible sibling that I can deal with the estate, my brother and I are dealing with the estate and to have to, you know, realize this loss of connection.

And that even though these two people were very, made bad decisions and were fallible, that they were part of who you grew up as and, you know, losing the connection to the home I grew up in, that was my grandmother's home, that was built by my grandfather, that my mother died in.

I mean, like, these things, and I wrote a whole article about mourning the loss of not just the people, not just my mom and dad, but mourning the loss of that connection to my childhood.

Yeah, I actually live in my childhood home where my mother died, so I fully hear what you're saying.

All right.

Well, we've been talking about basically what the theme that I was going to ask about is agency.

And I feel like we've kind of just explored that a little bit, you know, with Ellery making choices at the end of the book to, you know, taking agency to do what is best for them.

I also noticed the agency was part of Knox's storyline as well, you know, wanting to have control over his own choices.

So I don't know if we have anything more to say, but if you want to speak to that, go ahead.

Well, yeah, I think we covered Ellery pretty well.

Knox, you know, his whole character arc is about having and experiencing relationships that aren't transactional.

And like you said, taking agency of his existence and making choices that he's not been allowed to make before and experiencing things that he's not been allowed to experience before.

And that even though there's a situation where he loses some of the things that he learns, he's still able to hold on to that.

I can make a choice and makes one, which is great for him.

Well, we, I think those are the most of the questions anyway, specific to the book.

But we wanted to ask some questions just about your writing style.

Would you consider yourself to be more of a plotter or a pantsier in your writing?

I am a plotter.

I can't pants anything.

Then I get to the middle and then be like, what am I doing?

So I can't just go off the top of my head.

I really am a plotter.

And I have said this in other places and people freak out.

But I plot to the dialogue.

I know what characters are going to say in different scenes to be able to convey the message or the theme that I want in that scene.

And with *Otherworldly*, one of the things I did differently is I plotted to the setting where, like I mentioned before, there's a lot of horror elements in the book.

It's romance, but I pulled from a lot of horror stories and horror media.

And there's different liminal spaces and different scenes happen in places that are just eerie.

And it kind of gives this pervasive creepiness throughout the novel.

And that's something that I used setting to be able to make that mood throughout.

So there was a lot of plotting involved in setting this time around.

Awesome.

We're also curious if you're planning to write a sequel to *Otherworldly* or any of your books, or if not, or even if so, can you give us a hint at what you're working on next?

No to sequels.

Okay.

Nothing else in that world, you know.

It's a good world.

I will say that there's something that I wrote that is otherworldly adjacent, and it has to do with the TV show that they watch.

Which is fun.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So look forward to that.

But we love that TV show, by the way.

All three of us talked about how much we enjoyed that storyline.

That TV show is basically like Buffy and Many Way Diaries.

All of these teen supernatural shows that were really big hits in the 90s and the aughts.

And things that I watched and enjoyed.

So yeah, it's totally based on that.

Well, I picked that up immediately.

As we wrap up, I wanted to ask if you could give some recommendations to our listeners for other books and authors that you've enjoyed reading, who write LGBTQ plus books or authors that, you know, that our listeners might want to connect with.

So there are so many great authors and books that are coming out and are coming have come out recently and have really expanded on the queer content.

And I mentioned Camilla Cole and So Let Them Burn just came out.

And I would say anything by Ryan La Sala, but The Honey's is amazing.

I love that book and he has a new release or a new were release called Beholder and both of those are horror novels and Robbie Couch.

Oh, Jason June just had a book come out called The Spells We Cast.

These are all fantasy novels for contemporary.

I would say Julian Winters writes the most realistic teens and young adults in his books.

And I love Julian so much and he's the nicest person in publishing and CB.

Lee is an amazing author and they wrote Clash of Steel, which is a pirate Asian inspired fantasy with pirates.

No, it's not a fantasy.

Sorry, historical.

And then I also just I have already mentioned Maggie to Kuta Hall.

So, yeah, those are some authors to check out.

Wonderful.

Thank you.

Yeah, sounds like a lot of fantastic books.

I'm excited to check them out.

Finally, FT could you please tell our listeners where they can find you online?

Yeah, I have an Instagram and it's just at FT.

Lukens and I post there.

And then I have a website, f.tlukens.com, and folks can find my books and things there.

If the book is not out yet, by this point, there are signed pre-orders available through Malaprop's bookstore in Asheville.

Up until launch day, you can order a book through there and I can personalize it and sign it, and then Malaprop's will send it to you.

Oh, awesome.

Well, F.T. thank you so much for talking with us.

It has been wonderful getting to know you a little bit and learning more about your book.

Thank you so much for having me.

Otherworldly will be out April 2nd, and it was a pleasure to be here on your podcast.

Thank you.

We really enjoyed talking with F.T. Lukens.

You can find F.T.'s website and social media links in the show notes.

So please go check out Otherworldly.

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Bye.