



Waves of YA, Episode 43, In Conversation with YA Author A. R. Vishny

Transcript:

00;00;09;05 - 00;01;21;00

Voiceover 1

[VOICEOVER 1] Do you have new or slightly used prom dresses in good condition? Or do you know someone who wants to give away a prom dress? The Ocean County Library invites you to donate your dresses during the 17th annual Prom Dress Collection. Donated dresses will be collected at all of the Ocean County Library branches until February 28th, and will be available for free for students in 8th through 12th grade starting in March and our Prom Dress Giveaways. Before you donate, please ensure that your dresses meet the following criteria: long or short styles from the last five years, gently used and clean dresses ready for attending prom. Please don't donate dresses with rips, tears or stains and please don't donate accessories like shoes or purses. For details, check out our website at theoceancountylibrary.org, visit your local branch or call us at 732-349-6200. We thank you in advance for your donation.

00;01;21;03 - 00;01;33;02

Voiceover 2

[VOICEOVER 2] Hello and welcome to Waves of YA, a podcast focused on young adult literacy, brought to you by the Ocean County Library's Teen Literacy Workgroup.

00;01;33;04 - 00;01;51;01

Summer

[SUMMER] Hello, everybody. Welcome to our newest episode of Waves of YA. We are here with a very special guest today, Arielle Vishny, also known as A. R. Vishny, who will be talking to us about her debut novel. My name is Summer and I'm the librarian at the Long Beach Island library.

00;01;51;04 - 00;01;54;28

Rachel

[RACHEL] My name is Rachel, and I'm the young adult librarian at the Barnegat branch library.

00;01;55;04 - 00;01;58;15

A. R.

[A. R.] And I'm A. R. Vishny. Thank you so much for having me do this.

00;01;58;17 - 00;02;04;03

Summer

[SUMMER] Well, we're so excited to talk to you about your new book. It came out in September, I believe, correct?

00;02;04;06 - 00;02;06;05

A. R.

[A. R.] Yes, it came out in September.

00;02;06;07 - 00;02;15;13

Summer

[SUMMER] Night Owls, which Rachel and I have both read and we're very excited to talk about it. Would you give our listeners a brief overview of what the book is about, if they have not read it?

00;02;15;16 - 00;03;04;04

A. R.

[A. R.] So Night Owls, it's a YA contemporary fantasy - so it's set in our world - about two estries which are bread eating, owl shifting women, vampires from Jewish tradition and these two sisters live in a movie theater in the East Village that used to be a stage. The older sister, Clara, has a rule against dating and falling in love that her younger sister Molly, just totally ignores. Her girlfriend is a very poorly kept secret, and when this girlfriend disappears under sort of mysterious and magical circumstances, they have to team up with their charmingly useless box office attendant who can see dead people to go and find her, facing down ghosts and demons and a monstrous Manhattan underworld in the process.

00;03;04;06 - 00;03;06;26

Summer

[SUMMER] What inspired the idea for this book?

00;03;06;29 - 00;04;08;00

A. R.

[A. R.] I was originally inspired by the neighborhood I used to live in. So way back when I was in law school, I lived in the East Village, actually a block away from the movie theater that later inspired the Grand Dame. And I love it down there. I love that stretch of Second Avenue, and even though I now live over in Queens and no longer Manhattan, I still go there all the time and it's really my happy place. So then flash forward to the pandemic and 2021, which is when I started this, I was in a rut creatively and also so sick of my apartment that for me, what I wanted to write, I wanted to write something that was joyful and also would take me to where I wanted to be at that moment, which was out of my apartment and down by the movie theaters and good pierogi places down in that neighborhood. And that was the initial seed. It was trying to write something that could be set down there, and then also in the process, loading it up with all the folklore and Y.A. tropes that I love so much.

00;04;08;02 - 00;04;13;21

Summer

[SUMMER] I really enjoyed the book and their useless box office attendant. Can you say his name? Because I only have heard it in my head.

00;04;13;23 - 00;04;15;22

A. R.

[A. R.] Of course. His name is Boaz.

00;04;15;24 - 00;04;25;05

Rachel

[RACHEL] I listened to the audiobook version of the book, and I'm very glad that I did, because it did all the accents for me, because I think Anat is supposed to have an accent, right?

00;04;25;07 - 00;04;25;18

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah.

00;04;25;18 - 00;04;44;17

Rachel

[RACHEL] So the narrator did the accent in the book and I was like, "Oh, that's really great." And it really portrayed the characters' personalities more. And yeah, I said Boaz. And I was like, "Oh, I wouldn't have read that as Boaz." But... so where did you get the names of those characters? You have very unusually named characters. Can you tell us where you came up with those names?

00;04;44;19 - 00;06;30;19

A. R.

[A. R.] Oh, sure. So for Molly and Clara, originally, I was just trying to pick names because they are on the surface 18, but actually more like 150 years old. I wanted to find - give them names that historically would make sense. So part of it was going back and looking at famous Jews from the turn of the century and then sort of picking favorite names that way. Clara was in part originally named after Clara Lemlich, who was a famous labor activist. Molly was originally - there's Molly Steiner, who was a famous anarchist in the time period, and also, Molly Picone, who was a famous Yiddish actress, and then specifically for Clara - jumping ahead - so, Boaz originally, because I wanted to give him a name that made sense for someone with his background, someone with an Israeli dad, an American mom, you know, contemporary Hebrew names are very common, so that would fall under the category. And also, I liked that Boaz, it's a biblical name originally, and in the book of Ruth, Boaz is the second chance boyfriend. So I was like, "He's Clara's second chance boyfriend," which was part of that. And then something I only learned after the fact, I think a few months into writing the book, I was listening to a lecture done by Fordham about women in the Yiddish theater, and one detail that had come out that I hadn't never come across before was that actually in New York, the first woman to own a Yiddish theater company was this actress, Clara Young, who co-owned the... theater with her husband, Boaz. And after that, I was like, "Oh, I can never change these characters names. Like, that's it."

00;06;30;21 - 00;06;33;15

Summer

[SUMMER] So you already had the character names when you found that out?

00;06;33;18 - 00;06;39;00

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah. It was that spooky sort of moment where I'm like, on the right track. Those are the right names.

00;06;39;02 - 00;06;46;11

Summer

[SUMMER] That is so coincidental, like, that's amazing. And you knew it was going to be in the theater already?

00;06;46;13 - 00;06;53;13

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, I already knew the theater part. I already had, like, those names were already set in. Some of the other names changed over time, but those always stayed.

00;06;53;16 - 00;06;56;15

Summer

[SUMMER] It's like it was meant to be. So cool.

00;06;56;17 - 00;07;13;00

Rachel

[RACHEL] Can you tell us about what research you conducted when you started writing this book? Because of course, you wanted to make sure that the estries were represented as accurate to Jewish folklore as possible. And while you were doing that research, did you uncover anything that was surprising or fascinating to you?

00;07;13;02 - 00;08;53;20

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah. So it was a little bit interesting with as far as estries were concerned, because there hasn't been a ton written about them. A lot of what we know about our stories comes from a single text. It's the Sefer Hasidim, which is like a medieval text about Jews in the Rhine, in like the 13th century. So there isn't a ton to go off of. So I drew from, like the little bits that you have in there. And then I also pulled in some of the stuff you see written about Lilith, who often sometimes is also associated with vampires, who's also often associated with owls, which was a fun little thing to... kind of bring it all together. And then broadly speaking, a lot of it came down to just reading whatever I could about Jewish folklore. So getting the different texts that - every text I could find. A few of my favorites - there's one, blanking on the author's name, but it's called Sacred Monsters. If you go looking for it, it comes up readily. There's also this classic in the canon Lilith's Cave, which is specifically like paranormal and spooky Jewish folklore. So those were all really useful just for just kind of building up that background in the context, both for estries, but also the shedim and the ghosts and the other kind of creatures that appear in the book. And then on top of that, for estries, because there wasn't so much out there in terms of that folkloric element, a lot of building up who they were and how they worked. I started tying

it a lot to history and trying to ground it that way. So then that's where a lot of, let's say, the research about the Yiddish theater and New York history at the turn of the century became very important.

00;08;53;22 - 00;09;25;25

Summer

[SUMMER] It's really cool. I really liked the owls. I saw the book on a list of books coming out this year, and the name drew me in, because owls are just interesting, and I love vampire books, and I never see this kind of vampire portrayed before. So I was very excited to read it. And I also loved how their transformation works, how they have to take their hair down. The visualization was very - I was thinking about it, when I would take like my hair out of the ponytail, I was like, it really brought it all together really nicely, I thought. Is that something you made up or is that something from the lore?

00;09;25;27 - 00;10;01;04

A. R.

[A. R.] That's something from the lore. And that was actually the detail that drew me in, because I have very thick, curly hair, and that's always been sort of a sore point for me or something I have a lot of big feelings about. So the idea is when I first heard of estries, which it came up in a lecture I had attended on sort of Jewish folklore and Jewish monsters, and the speaker had mentioned that. That was the detail immediately I honed in on. But at the time, that was way back in like 2019. I didn't know what to do with it. So I just kind of stuck it in my pocket and I'm like, one point I'm going to have to write the Cool Hair Vampires.

00;10;01;06 - 00;10;23;14

Summer

[SUMMER] That is so cool. Regarding the films and plays discussed, you said that you had an interest in the theater world in that neighborhood that you lived in. They mentioned a lot of plays and films from the Jewish theater tradition in the book. Are these all real plays and films that can be accessed by readers?

00;10;23;16 - 00;11;35;03

A. R.

[A. R.] Almost everything. Part of Molly's lore is that she was supposed to be the Yiddish version of Caliban, of this Yiddish version of The Tempest. That does not exist. That was something made up by me. So it was done in the tradition of a lot of Yiddish Shakespeare retellings, where they take the loose structure of a Shakespeare play and cast it onto shtetl life or something like that. That, and also Kaddish, the immersive experience, which appears later is not real. That is also an invention of mine. Everything else, when I reference like a movie or a play, those are real. The other Yiddish plays that are referenced, God of Vengeance, that's real. There's like a Yiddish Queen Lear that's real. And you can go find those online. There's also references to like some other like, well, one, there's a reference I know to Troll 2 that was done in passing. That is a fantastic, unhinged movie that anyone looking for the most unhinged horror movie they can find should go look for. And also a big piece of Boaz's character is that he loves the Mummy and different versions of The Mummy because he has great taste and all of those are real, and versions can be found online.

00;11;35;05 - 00;11;45;03

Summer

[SUMMER] Yes, I love the Mummy franchise, the Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz movies. Those are my childhood. I love those so much that I got excited when he was so into them too. I was really excited.

00;11;45;06 - 00;12;02;19

A. R.

[A. R.] Oh yeah, no. Boaz, he likes those movies in part because I like them and I'm like, okay and then I also figured really early on, like, okay, he has to be a film nerd. And I was like, what is an 18 year-old teenage boy's idea of peak cinema? And I was like naturally it's the Mummy because it's incredible.

00;12;02;22 - 00;12;04;09

Summer

[SUMMER] It is peak cinema.

00;12;04;11 - 00;12;20;27

A. R.

[A. R.] It is just peak cinema. And then on top of it, I loved that the point of The Mummy is you don't mess with dead people and you don't mess with ghosts... and the beyond, which I thought was something that Boaz would have big feelings about.

00;12;20;29 - 00;12;29;09

Summer

[SUMMER] Yeah, I feel like, yeah, a teenage boy, like, that or like Princess Bride I feel like is another big one. Yeah. That's really cool. Rachel, would you like to continue?

00;12;29;11 - 00;12;39;01

Rachel

[RACHEL] Yes. So how do you approach world building in order to mesh together the folklore, the streets of New York, and then New York's monstrous underworld in the book?

00;12;39;03 - 00;14;28;24

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah. I mean so for me a lot of that came down to history and having a really strong sense of like the history of the neighborhood. And then from there kind of thinking of ways to, like, extend it. At a certain point, moving from the realm of reality into the magical. So for me, part of that, let's say for Clara and Molly, their histories are very much part of the story of Jewish immigration patterns around the late 19th and early 20th century. And the estrie element became a way to sort of talk about their internal lives and their desires juxtaposed against the real history, the things like the Yiddish theater and poverty, and then also like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire - side spoilers. There is also ways, like, I liked delving into the history when it came to the ghosts. So for the most part, if it's a named ghost, it's a real person. So at one point, for instance, Boaz, he's walking home in Gravesend early on, he encounters this guy who was like the son of a pirate. He is a real person. He is a fascinating historical character, and someone who is not me should read a whole book about him. And that was actually like a fun piece

when I was just researching and building up the world. When I knew Boaz lived out in Gravesend, I went and it was like, who are famous historical figures from Gravesend that I can have him encounter? And I had to cut a lot. And at one point, of all the other people that I wanted him to meet, because there were crazy things. I think the area was originally found by this very fascinating Dutch noblewoman, this Lady Moody, who is fascinating. There is an alderman who like, choked on a chicken bone. It goes on and on. The stuff writes itself. So that was part of it. Oftentimes history gave me a starting point for then doing something magical.

00;14;28;26 - 00;14;38;28

Summer

[SUMMER] That is so fun. I had no idea that the ghosts were real people. What's the guy whose name, I think his name is Anthony? And he claims to "own Wall Street" in air quotes.

00;14;39;00 - 00;15;10;14

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, that is 100% real. He was a real person. He might actually have been one of the earliest Muslims in the US. At one point he had the deeds to Wall Street and to what is now Coney Island. And the Dutch West India Company did some shady things to take back his deeds. So that is all real. The fact that he actually one point paid a guy in a goat that died, it's 100% real. Again, it is - he's a really fascinating figure and that was a lot of fun to write.

00;15;10;16 - 00;15;25;10

Summer

[SUMMER] That is so cool. So yeah, I think that makes sense. That sounds like something the Dutch West India Trading Company would do. But when he's the ghost, he's acting all like, "Oh, we have to figure this out. We have to get my land back." And Boaz is like, "No, that's not going to happen. I'm so sorry."

00;15;25;12 - 00;15;38;05

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, I don't know. It was - I loved writing that. And like I said, the ghostly encounters, if I could have kept everything that I wanted, it would have been 600 pages of book. So, I don't know, maybe in the future.

00;15;38;08 - 00;15;43;15

Summer

[SUMMER] Maybe a short story bonus on your website or something in the future.

00;15;43;18 - 00;16;12;08

Rachel

[RACHEL] Yeah, that's so interesting. Like, I didn't know all the ghosts and stuff were real, and now I want to look all them up and everything. So at the part of the book, I want to say it was in a church, but I don't think that's the correct term for Jewish practicing people. But when he's there and the ghosts kind of pull him into another room and say, "Can you give us the ring for safekeeping?" because they didn't

think he was worthy of having the ring and he was talking to, like, past rabbi ghosts, is that correct? Are they all real?

00;16;12;08 - 00;16;55;15

A. R.

[A. R.] Okay, so yeah, no, at the synagogue, those aren't real. I should qualify. I was like, I totally forgot about them. So Anthony is real, the dead synagogue board is not real. Though they were a lot of fun to write. That was a interesting research process because I'm Jewish and have things in common with Boaz, but I am not Syrian. So for doing that, a big piece of the research process was figuring out specifically what are Syrian synagogues in Brooklyn like, which meant spending a lot of time on the websites for Brooklyn synagogues where you are learning more about how, like, the synagogue boards work, going on the Facebook groups and just digging in was very useful in figuring out how I was going to make decisions about how to write that.

00;16;55;18 - 00;17;25;09

Summer

[SUMMER] I feel like I learned so much in this book, too. I was constantly looking stuff up. I felt like I just learned so much culturally. I knew some stuff just from life and absorbing knowledge, but I just felt like I learned so much from this book as well. I also really like how much food came into the book, but it made me hungry. There's a part at the beginning where Molly and her girlfriend are eating bagels dipped in salt, and I love salt. And so I was like, "Wow, that sounds so good." And then the next day I went and got a bagel sandwich because I was like, I need bagels right now.

00;17;25;12 - 00;17;28;23

A. R.

[A. R.] That's what I'm here for. You know, just pushing carbs on people.

00;17;28;23 - 00;17;32;01

Summer

[SUMMER] Is dipping bagels in salt a thing?

00;17;32;03 - 00;17;55;25

A. R.

[A. R.] Not bagels, but challah in salt, that's often something you do. It's interesting, so bread and salt in general, there's some different sort of Jewish customs that are associated with that, specifically to when you like, I'd like create a new house or you invite people, but also from Shabbat sometimes some people do like bread and honey, but it's often come to do like bread, like the challah dipped in salt.

00;17;55;28 - 00;18;04;15

Summer

[SUMMER] That would be awesome. I've been kind of getting into bread making lately. I made cinnamon raisin bread last week, so now I kind of want to make challah. It sounded really good when they talked about it.

00;18;04;18 - 00;18;20;16

A. R.

[A. R.] It's so good and it's not hard to make. You can definitely do that. It's not like the breads that take multiple days and crazy starters and all that stuff. I have yet to like make a perfect challah, but you can do a decent one within a few hours.

00;18;20;18 - 00;18;25;08

Summer

[SUMMER] If it's something that's very religiously significant, I won't make it because I don't want to be disrespectful.

00;18;25;11 - 00;18;27;28

A. R.

[A. R.] Oh no. You can make challah.

00;18;27;29 - 00;18;31;11

Summer

[SUMMER] I didn't know if it was like something that was just out on holidays or something.

00;18;31;13 - 00;18;37;24

A. R.

[A. R.] It's like a Shabbat bread, but people eat it all the time and you get it in bakeries and things.

00;18;37;27 - 00;19;02;19

Summer

[SUMMER] The bread aspect was really interesting because it's the one food - that and salt are the two things they can eat from human cuisine, which I thought was so interesting. I don't know much about Jewish folklore, but reading the book, it just sounded so fascinating. And are there any other stories or creatures from Jewish folklore that didn't make it into this book that you'd like to share with us?

00;19;02;21 - 00;19;41;17

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah. I find in general the lore about Shedim, which are the demons, endlessly fascinating. And there's some stuff I put in there, but there's a lot I left out, so I'm sure for future projects that some of that will go in. I really like this creature, but it has no purpose in the book. There's a Ziz which I think I mentioned in passing at one point, which is just a giant bird. There isn't a ton of deep folklore about it. It's just a giant mythological bird. But I love a Ziz and I know and golems are like a classic. Those aren't in the book, but I love a golem and there's a lot of great books that deal with them.

00;19;41;19 - 00;19;49;05

Summer

[SUMMER] Yeah, there actually is a picture book that came out recently called Too Many Golems. That looked really cute.

00;19;49;08 - 00;19;50;27

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, that's a Jane Yolen book, right?

00;19;51;00 - 00;19;51;19

Summer

[SUMMER] I think so.

00;19;51;25 - 00;19;54;07

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, no, that one looks really sweet.

00;19;54;10 - 00;19;58;05

Summer

[SUMMER] And there's also something called - they called it the Snake.

00;19;58;07 - 00;20;30;29

A. R.

[A. R.] Oh yeah. The whole idea with that portion was so it's meant to be like the snake from the Garden of Eden. But the part of I think the story in the Bible is that the snake originally had arms and legs, but that as punishment after what he did, he loses the arms and legs. So I was just amused by the idea, one of like, oh, what snake? The snake. But also the idea of just having like the snake with arms and legs that's just walking around, chilling in the night club, that's also the underworld.

00;20;31;01 - 00;20;42;02

Summer

[SUMMER] That was funny. Seeing Boaz interact with like, paranormal stuff and him just being like, "Okay, this is fun. I'm very scared. But this is fine."

00;20;42;05 - 00;20;58;08

A. R.

[A. R.] That was some of my favorite stuff to write. You could throw in some of the folklore, and I think it also was a chance to kind of be like a little bit silly at Boaz's expense.

00;20;58;10 - 00;21;30;00

Voiceover 3

[VOICEOVER 3] Are you looking for a blast from the past? Don't forget to tune into Wheeler Talk: The History of Ocean County, a podcast brought to you by me, the local history librarian. Episodes of Wheeler Talk are released monthly right here on OCL Sound Waves. Learn about the rich history of Ocean County with topics such as shipwrecks, historic storms, Ocean County's role in the Revolutionary War, tales of local hauntings, and much, much more.

00;21;30;02 - 00;21;34;16

Rachel

[RACHEL] What was your biggest challenge you encountered while writing a book?

00;21;34;18 - 00;22;58;05

A. R.

[A. R.] A big issue for me was just the ending, honestly. Once I knew this was going to be a standalone book, I knew that I wanted it to end well. And to have sort of a happily ever after for now. But beyond that, and I sort of knew roughly some of the things that needed to happen by the end. But how to get there proved endlessly complicated. I am also a pantsier, not a plotter, which made the whole drafting process extremely painful. I think there were at least ten drafts of this book between what I did with my agent and what I also then did with my editor, and every single draft had a different ending, like a radically different climax. At one point early on, there was a totally different villain, and completely different happenings at one point. So a few times throughout the book, the characters make jokes about a Leviathan in the plumbing, Leviathan being this mythical sea monster, and that's because at one point that was the climax. A Leviathan emerged from the plumbing, and I had to cut that. But that's another thing that maybe one day will make it into a future book. I love a Leviathan, so that was honestly the hardest thing is getting the ending right and getting the choreography of the ending right because once even I figured out roughly what needed to happen, there was just a lot of steps and movement and characters coming together that needed to happen in a way that was satisfying.

00;22;58;08 - 00;23;01;29

Summer

[SUMMER] That makes sense. You said, a pantsier versus a plotter. What is that?

00;23;02;01 - 00;23;33;25

A. R.

[A. R.] So sometimes you'll hear writers mention pantsiers versus plotters. Plotters are people who plot. So when they write, they have wonderful, beautiful outlines that say everything. What's going to happen when, in what chapters, and it's nice and organized and pantsiers are writing by the seat of their pants. That is most often me. I like, go in with a rough idea of what I need to do, and often there are notes, but a lot of the sort of the how you get there happens - I am learning things as the characters are.

00;23;33;27 - 00;23;36;09

Summer

[SUMMER] That's really interesting. It sounds scary.

00;23;36;12 - 00;23;39;16

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, I wish I was a plotter. That would make my life a lot easier.

00;23;39;19 - 00;23;45;02

Summer

[SUMMER] What do you hope that readers will take away from your book?

00;23;45;04 - 00;24;44;11

A. R.

[A. R.] I mean, so definitely in general, I think that really inspired the book initially was a curiosity about a neighborhood that I lived in and a lot of sort of the lesser known history. I hope people look at their own neighborhoods and where they live, with that sense of curiosity and a desire to uncover some maybe lesser known or forgotten history there. Because there, no matter where you live, there definitely is stuff. You have your Anthony, you have your fascinating historical guy. I found for me a lot of how like some of the details about estries, specifically this idea that they're easily forgotten and that's how they've been able to live on the same city block for 100 years, came from this bigger idea I had about how women in history, and specifically unconventional women or queer women, are very easily forgotten. So a big takeaway I hope people have is to not forget those things and to maybe go digging because you'll never know what you find, but you'll probably find some interesting people if you do.

00;24;44;14 - 00;24;55;08

Summer

[SUMMER] Yeah, that's really interesting. The Shirtwaist fire was interesting when you mentioned it. I feel like I had heard of it, but I didn't really know that much about it and now I want to research it further.

00;24;55;10 - 00;25;28;19

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, no, it's a big moment. That is probably one of the, if not the, like, key moments in American labor history, because it's so horrifying. And it's a strange thing because it's something I read about in school and it took living in the neighborhood one day when I realized like, oh, I live a few blocks over and I point out, like the location and now there's a memorial. But actually there wasn't when I was writing the book. The factory is now an NYU building, so it's very like it's there and it's definitely something worth reading more about.

00;25;28;22 - 00;25;36;04

Summer

[SUMMER] And that ties into your aim with this being, in a lot of ways, an immigrant story and a lot of the workers in that factory were immigrant women, correct?

00;25;36;07 - 00;25;50;16

Summer

[A. R.] Yeah. So that was the whole thing, most of the women were under 21, and they were mostly Jewish and Italian immigrants. And again, it's I think - if not the - it's one of the biggest factory workplace disasters in the US history.

00;25;50;18 - 00;25;55;21

Rachel

[RACHEL] I guess we can move on to the next question, what types of books do you enjoy reading in your spare time?

00;25;55;24 - 00;27;16;27

A. R.

[A. R.] So I read pretty widely. So a couple of years ago I'm not on it anymore, but I was on the Sidney Taylor Book Award Committee, which is for Jewish children's books. Which meant that for a few years I was reading every single Jewish kid lit book that came out. And I still love kid lit, and I read a lot of YA, obviously, but also middle grade as well as other stuff too, especially sometimes for me, I'll read a lot of fiction and fantasy, and then when I reach a point where I'm in a bit of a rut, I'll go and get some nonfiction that is totally outside of what I'm normally reading, just to kind of, you know, shake something loose and get excited again. I think some recent stuff I've been loving, and if anyone who reads this enjoys the Mummy of it all, or like the kind of fun fantasy elements, there's this book that came out earlier this year, also in September I think, *Us in Ruins* by Rachel Moore, which because I know Rachel, she had pitched this book originally as "a Lizzie McGuire movie meets the Mummy." And that is exactly what this book is. It is your next comfort movie as a book. It's like a fun paranormal romcom set in contemporary Italy, where a girl teams up with this archeologist who was frozen in stone, is now in the 1920s and is now awoken. It is really fun.

00;27;16;29 - 00;27;20;13

Summer

[SUMMER] Immediately requesting that. I want to read it now.

00;27;20;16 - 00;28;18;06

A. R.

[A. R.] Highly recommend, you'll love it. I also love, it came out recently, *The Forbidden Book* by Sacha Lamb. Sacha is an author who writes YA historical Jewish fantasies, often set in 19th century Eastern Europe. And this new one is about a girl who, on her wedding night, decides she's going to escape and assume the name Isser Jacobs, a guy's name. Only it turns out that this name she thought was random is the name of a real person, and that lots of people want Isser Jacobs dead. And what ensues is this mystery adventure with some dybbuks, which are ghostly possessions in Jewish folklore, and it's a lot of fun. And also, really, it's very cool, a lot of Sacha's books read at once, like a classic and also like really fresh and contemporary and this one's no exception. Highly recommend.

00;28;18;09 - 00;28;21;24

Summer

[SUMMEMR] Really cool. Have you ever read Naomi Novik's fantasy?

00;28;21;27 - 00;28;22;21

A. R.

[A. R.] Yes.

00;28;22;24 - 00;28;39;03

Summer

[SUMMER] I read *Spinning Silver* this past year and I really, like, oh my God, I can remember like the whole plot of books, but I forget characters names. The main girl at the beginning, her storyline with her father being the moneylender. He's not very good at being a moneylender and she takes over the business and it blossoms.

00;28;39;03 - 00;28;49;14

Summer

[SUMMER] And I really loved her characterization so much. So that was like my favorite part of the story is her character growth and everything, and I think she's a Jewish fantasy author as well. Correct?

00;28;49;16 - 00;29;23;16

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah. And that book for me was a huge inspiration in terms of things that got me excited about writing Jewish fantasy and sort of what was possible. I had been writing this stuff even before Night Owls and Night Owls was not the first book I wrote, but it was the first one I published. And just seeing what Naomi managed to do with Spinning Silver, and how in the way it uses the history. And it's also really original and is also just so smart and compelling, was really like, makes it one of my all time favorite books.

00;29;23;18 - 00;29;32;05

Summer

[SUMMER] That was a really good read for me. It was dense. It took me a while, but it was really good read. Do you ever read your book reviews?

00;29;32;08 - 00;29;42;26

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, I shouldn't, and every time I look at Goodreads and like, I should be doing this, but I do, they've also mostly been very nice, so it's okay.

00;29;42;29 - 00;29;47;04

Rachel

[RACHEL] So do you have any future writing projects that you'd like to share with us?

00;29;47;07 - 00;30;16;04

A. R.

[A. R.] Sure. So I do not have a book yet under contract, but the thing I'm working on now and probably whatever I will write next, is going to probably be another YA with sort of a Jewish fantasy element. It'll probably be a contemporary fantasy with a strong historical connection. This one that I've been tentatively working on, I would describe as a Jewish Beetlejuice, and that is what I can share about it. It's different, but if you like Night Owls, hopefully it would be within the spirit of that.

00;30;16;07 - 00;30;20;03

Summer

[SUMMER] Well, I love Beetlejuice, I just saw the sequel, and it was great.

00;30;20;06 - 00;30;27;04

A. R.

[A. R.] It was so good, I was really pleased. I mean, I had low expectations because it was a sequel and I thought it was delightful.

00;30;27;06 - 00;30;31;03

Summer

[SUMMER] I think it really does capture the fun of Beetlejuice, you know?

00;30;31;06 - 00;30;32;27

A. R.

[A. R.] Oh yeah.

00;30;32;29 - 00;30;41;21

Summer

[SUMMER] Is there anything further you'd like to share promoting your book or about your writing process, about anything that you'd like to share with listeners?

00;30;41;23 - 00;30;54;05

A. R.

[A. R.] I think that's the long and short of it. I mean, I'm happy to answer any questions if you guys have anything. I mean, I'm like I said, I'm really thrilled that you guys read the book and enjoyed and had great questions for me.

00;30;54;08 - 00;31;31;11

Summer

[SUMMER] I had a really good time. I thought the pacing of the book was really nice. I thought the flow of it wasn't too fast or too slow. I loved Boaz and Clara's little romance, how she was so mad at him all the time for being late, and I really like I won't say what it was because that's like a spoiler, but I really liked at the end towards the climax, how you interpreted the place they go. Yeah. I don't know how to say it other than that without spoiling it, but I really like that interpretation of the place where the climax is set.

00;31;31;14 - 00;33;18;25

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, thank you. Well... here that's something interesting, like, yeah, without spoiling, if I'm thinking about what you're, if I have the right thing. So among other things I used to do a lot of background work as like an extra, which is sort of this whole separate world that I really love, but a very strange experience I've had and something that ended up maybe informing some of how things happened in the book, is the very strange experience of being on a set for a long period of time. So I did a few seasons of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel and the big one that I did, it was one of the Catskills scenes, which, by movie magic - so the scene, if people are familiar with The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, is this orientation scene where the guy who runs the camp explains the run of the show, and it looks like it's in this rec room at a 1950s summer camp in the Catskills. It was filmed in Brooklyn on a soundstage, and the beautiful afternoon sunlight that you see streaming in is lighting. It is not real. So that was the scene I did, and it was so much fun and a very cool experience. But it was very strange to be sitting on a set

and there's this beautiful golden light coming in, and, you know, you've been there for a long time, you know, like this is going on for hours and hours of filming, but it's still like, you know, 4 p.m. and then you finally look at your clock after going to take a break, finally, and you realize that, no, it's actually like 11 p.m. It was a very strange experience that you know time is passing and yet it's not. Or you start to realize like, oh, this isn't real, which then wound up informing how some of the things happen in terms of the encounters that characters have here with movies and maybe like stepping into movie sets and soundstages.

00;33;18;27 - 00;33;34;00

Summer

[SUMMER] That was super cool. I just feel like recently I've just been encountering a lot of Jewish fantasy books, and another one is Ava Reid. I just read Juniper & Thorn and the Wolf and the Woodsman. I really enjoyed those a lot.

00;33;34;02 - 00;33;41;15

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, I know people have loved and I haven't gotten around to them yet, but I know those have been ones people really enjoyed.

00;33;41;17 - 00;33;43;10

Summer

[SUMMER] I want to ask you if you read them.

00;33;43;10 - 00;34;01;23

A. R.

[A. R.] No, I haven't gone around it. I'm like very behind. I mean I try to keep up, but you know how it is. The TBR is just never ending. And I'll have so many books on my Kindle that I'm like, oh, I should get to those. And then inevitably, I'm getting something else from the library or buying another book that I absolutely did not need to buy.

00;34;01;25 - 00;34;06;21

Summer

[SUMMER] That's true. Yeah. I just love talking about recommending books, my favorite thing in the world.

00;34;06;24 - 00;34;09;01

A. R.

[A. R.] You guys are librarians, so yeah.

00;34;09;01 - 00;34;11;11

Summer

[SUMMER] That's true. That is true.

00;34;11;13 - 00;34;45;00

Rachel

[RACHEL] I agree with Summer. I really like the pacing of the book. But another thing I also really liked about the book is how you interwove in, I think, other folklore stories. My favorite one was, I think it was about halfway through, where a king was seeking out the Prince of Demons for the help with building, I forget what it was building something, and I just really enjoyed that, because I feel like that was just a moment of the book where I could take a break from paying attention to the main storyline and just enjoy just a folklore story that I've never heard before. And I really enjoyed that.

00;34;45;03 - 00;35;53;16

A. R.

[A. R.] I'm so glad. Yeah. No. So that story is derived from the biblical story of King Solomon, and also like the Midrash, which are like the commentaries on King Solomon and how the temple was built. And that was super fun to write, both because it's something that I find personally interesting and really kind of interesting and kind of strange story, but also because it allowed me to play with the fact that so when you look at a lot of like commentary and Talmud and Torah stories, there's like a lot of different variations and different ways some of these things pan out. And that was a kind of a fun bit of uncertainty to introduce specifically, even this idea that they're not sure how there's differing accounts on how does King Solomon eventually defeat Ashmedai if he does. And also, it gave me a chance to mention the Shamir, which is this - so there's like another Jewish mythological creature that some attribute to having built the temple, which is just this giant worm who can eat rock. It's so random, and I love him. So I was glad I was able to just stick him in there.

00;35;53;18 - 00;35;57;19

Summer

[SUMMER] It's like will that come in to the the Beetlejuice story that you mentioned?

00;35;57;20 - 00;36;02;16

A. R.

[A. R.] Oh, I hadn't thought of that, but now that sounds like of course it should.

00;36;02;18 - 00;36;04;29

Summer

[SUMMER] Yeah, Beetlejuice, sandworm.

00;36;05;02 - 00;36;09;09

A. R.

[A. R.] Yeah, oh my gosh, thank you for that. That will...

00;36;09;10 - 00;36;12;26

Rachel

[RACHEL] You might be credited at the acknowledgments at the end of her next book.

00;36;12;28 - 00;36;14;12

Summer

[SUMMER] Honored.

00;36;14;14 - 00;36;18;03

A. R.

[A. R.] I will note that. And if the Shamir makes it, you will be credited.

00;36;18;06 - 00;36;35;15

Summer

[SUMMER] So blessed. Oh my gosh. But yeah, I really like that too. It gave it like a fairy tale element. The whole, like, once there was a king and once there was a girl, and once there was, an actress. All the little side stories were very magical, I thought. That's a really good point, Rachel.

00;36;35;17 - 00;36;41;09

Rachel

[RACHEL] Yeah, it's very unique. Like, I don't read too many books that have that element aspect of it, so I thought it was very unique.

00;36;41;12 - 00;37;21;29

A. R.

[A. R.] Well, thank you. Originally that started because for myself, and again, because there isn't a ton written about estries, I needed to have a very strong sense of what was the lore for the purpose of the book. So originally, the story that's Clara's interstitial was the first thing. Originally, I didn't intend to stick it in the book. I was writing it for myself. And then once I wrote it, and that was one of the few things where the first draft is basically what is exactly on the page. I was like, oh, this is really great. And it became a way I can also explain it, or maybe introduce some of the context without having to just have the characters explain it in dialog, which can be boring sometimes.

00;37;22;01 - 00;37;30;19

Summer

[SUMMER] I think you get a really good job for your very first novel, which is so exciting. Just the thought of that. My brain is like "Wow, this is the very first book." That's so exciting.

00;37;30;22 - 00;37;31;16

A. R.

[A. R.] Thank you.

00;37;31;19 - 00;38;05;23

Summer

[SUMMER] Thank you so much for joining us on Waves of YA. We're so excited to have you. And thank you for sharing all your stories about your writing process and about the world of Night Owls here at the library. And for anyone who wants to access Night Owls, of course, buy it if that is your wish. But we also have it at the library, so it's free to check out. And yes, that is all we have for today. Thank you so much for listening. This has been Summer, Ariel and Rachel and we'll see you next time. Bye.

00:38;05;26 - 00:38;27;21

Voiceover 2

[VOICEOVER 2] Thanks for joining us today. Be sure to check out the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events. All titles mentioned in today's episode can be found through the Ocean County Library. Free with your library card. Until next time, happy reading!

00:38;27;24 - 00:39;00;25

Voiceover 4

[VOICEOVER 4] Hello, adventurers! If you enjoyed this content, please take a look at the Ocean County Library's new podcast called Forge Your Imagination: a Guide to Immersive World Building. This new podcast is dedicated to helping creative individuals design their own expertly-crafted worlds for books, games, Dungeons & Dragons, and more. Starting January 2025, tune in on the first Wednesday morning of every month to learn more. Thanks for listening and safe travels, adventures.