

## THE LIBRARY COVEN [fka JK, It's Magic]

### Episode 28 *Labyrinth Lost* by Zoraida Córdova

**transition** [00:00:14] [jaunty string and harpsichord music plays].

**kelly** [00:00:14] Hello! And welcome to JK, It's Magic, a bi-weekly podcast in which two bookish besties discuss mostly YA fantasy through the lens of intersectional feminist criticism. Why? Because critique is our fangirl love language. And because talking about books is pretty magical.

**jessie** [00:00:31] I'm Jessie.

**kelly** [00:00:32] And I'm Kelly.

**jessie** [00:00:33] And today in Episode 28, we're going to talk about *Labyrinth Lost* by Zoraida Córdova. We meet Alex, a bruja who is hiding her powers and attempts to rid herself of them on her death day. Things go terribly wrong. Alex's family is taken and she has to travel to Los Lagos with Bad Boy Nova to try and rescue them.

**kelly** [00:00:57] But before we dove in, we want to tell you about our shiny new Patreon. We have different tiers, membership levels with nerdy names. For five dollars a month, you can join the Court of Shadows and get access to our reader and listener community on Discord, which is like slack, but for fun and not work. We also shout out your name in episode credits and we're going to have mini-sodes in which we talk about— we nerd out about everything from Marvel movies to Great British Bake Off. For ten dollars a month. You can join the dregs and we at that level you can get exclusive full length bonus episodes, which are going to include deep dives into theoretical texts, interviews with readers, academics, writers, podcasters and other people. And also you get all the rewards from the previous tiers. We also have twenty dollars a month and fifty dollars a month options. So please check out our Patreon. And the first 10 people to become patrons are going to get a book from our personal bookshelves. So chickity-check it out.

**transition** [00:02:01] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [00:02:06] Initial reactions.

**jessie** [00:02:08] So this was a reread for me, and I've only read the first book in the series, the series is called *Brooklyn Brujas*, um but I did really enjoy the book. The worldbuilding is fantastic. The book starts out really exciting and with the magic starts right away. I love Alex, Nova, Rishi and I really want to know what happens next.

**kelly** [00:02:29] This is a first time for me reading Zoraida Cordoba and you have her work. I think it's also the first time reading any Latin X inspired YA if I'm I don't think I've read any else or anything else like this and I'm in love. I study Spanish literature, Iberian and Latin American literature and speak Spanish and teach Spanish. So this is my shit. I am so excited to be talking about this book today.

**transition** [00:02:55] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [00:03:00] Time to talk about world building in “through the wardrobe.”

**jessie** [00:03:03] So there's lots of Spanish use throughout this book, both in the naming of the Deos, but also characters using small amounts of Spanish in their everyday language, which I think in this in our podcast, at least, we haven't read a lot of books from authors who have a second language that they speak. So I thought this was really cool to have like little bits of it and not all of it was explained. Like, you kind of maybe need to look things up or have a basis of knowledge in Spanish, which was really cool.

**kelly** [00:03:33] Mm hmm. It's kind of like how we talked about some of the books by Black authors not being written necessarily for white people and not explaining different or, you know, *The Poppy War* they're not describing the kinds of clothes or cultural artifacts or whatever it assumes— it's written for people who have that knowledge or who pertain to those sorts of communities. And if you don't, that means you have some work to do, which I don't think is a bad thing.

**jessie** [00:03:58] Agreed. Agreed.

**kelly** [00:04:00] And even in the book even includes phonetic pronunciations in Ale's exposition, which I really liked, because clearly it shows that the author knows her audience and that a lot of them likely will not speak Spanish, which I think speaks to the demographics of YA readership more broadly and how that is changing.

**jessie** [00:04:21] Yeah, but it's also a good way to bring in people from maybe demographics we don't see as often reading white fiction. So people who speak Spanish or who are interested in Spanish culture are Latinx culture might be interested in reading something like this where maybe their stories don't get told all the time. So, you know, representation matters.

**kelly** [00:04:40] Absolutely. Magic has never been just for white people.

**jessie** [00:04:44] Mostly has not been for white people [laughs].

**kelly** [00:04:46] Mostly not, no.

**transition** [00:04:47] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:04:50] *Labyrinth* lost the world building kind of hinges upon taking you from the more or less contemporary Brooklyn space with *Brujos* and *Magic* and other kinds of beings, and then getting transported to Los Lagos, which is the fantastical part of the world. It's a purgatory or in between space, and it's almost exclusively inhabited by magical beings, *adas*, which is in the book spelling its "a-d-a-s" but in Spanish, "h-a-d-a-s" is fairies. *Avianas*, which are like harpy-type beings. *Maloscuros*, which were basically cursed *brujos* or whatever, emptied of their self and filled with bad magic or whatever. Blind giants, fairies, imps, *duendes* which is Spanish for troll. And in Los Lagos time doesn't correspond to the quote, human fabrication that it is in the empirical world. um So I really like that. And it's this whole thing reminded me it's like a very tried and true world building technique, especially in fantasy and sci fi, speculative fiction generally to set something in a different world because the rules, quote unquote, of where we live don't apply. And so you can do things a lot differently and defamiliarize things for readers. And Los Lagos and its inhabitants, for example, are described as fluid on page 165. So it kind of is fucking with your— How you think that the world works and then means that, like a lot of cool stuff can be then justified right under the magical system and in the world building.

**transition** [00:06:28] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:06:31] Shout out to the awesome map that this book included the place names are awesome. The descriptions are cool, the drawings are awesome. We'll make sure to post this to our Instagram when it comes when the episode comes out and all of the Spanglish place names like Mar del Fin, Bone Valle, Laguna Roja, Wastelands del este, the river luxaria. It's so good. Selva of ashes. uh I just I love it, love it.

**jessie** [00:07:02] [chuckles]

**transition** [00:07:02] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:07:04] OK, so I did nerd out a little bit in the research rabbit hole arena—

**jessie** [00:07:10] —such a Ravenclaw.

**kelly** [00:07:10] —such a Ravenclaw. —on two different tropes that we see in Labyrinth Lost. And the first is the Tree of Souls, which is reminiscent— we find that in the middle of Los Lagos, at the center of the labyrinth. Right?

**jessie** [00:07:24] Yes.

**kelly** [00:07:24] And it's to me reminiscent of the world tree, which is a very common element in mythology, folklore and religious traditions, the world over. World trees show up in let's see I have notes. All over pre Columbian cultures, which I would say is the most important for this specific novel for Zoraida Córdova. So all over Mesoamerica from Maya, Aztec, Itzapan, Mixtec, olma—Olmec and Arts, which are all indigenous civilizations and traditions from Mesoamerica, what we now call Central and Central America and Mexico. But world trees also show up in Baltic mythology, Persian mythology, Judeo-Christian mythology. There's a tree of immortality, which is basically a tree of life in the Koran, in Norse mythology. Yggdrasil is the world tree. That shows up in Greek mythology, Roman mythology, all Hinduism, South Asian religions, there's it's just everywhere. This trope is everywhere. And I think it's, uh, I like the culture jamming that happens in the book. I think it's really effective and makes it accessible. This figure in particular, this image is accessible to people basically from any culture. The world tree in these various traditions is often what we call an axis mundi, which is a Latin term for like a world axis or whatever, and it's a point that connects earthly and divine spaces. And that's kind of what we see with Los Lagos. Right? Which is it's this kind of in-between area. And then the world tree is a connection between the divine and the ancestors. And then also it's a portal that gets used in the novel to go back to the quote unquote, real world. We see these sorts of important trees all over literature, Tolkien, Game of Thrones, et cetera, et cetera.

**jessie** [00:09:23] Yeah, it was pretty cool. And kind of it was funny because I just thought of it like Alex's family is there. So it's kind of like her family tree. [laugh]

**kelly** [00:09:31] It is like a family tree!

**jessie** [00:09:34] Because all the ancestors are there.

**kelly** [00:09:35] And they all get trapped there. So, yeah, definitely. So the labyrinth is the second of these figures that I kind of went down a rabbit hole with, and it's an incredibly

important symbol. And we see it in Greek mythology, for example, with the Minotaur. Right? And Theseus, who I think. Right? It's Theseus. Yes. It has to go and follow the rope to go to the center of the labyrinth and kill the Minotaur and that stuff. But the labyrinth is also incredibly important as a symbol in Latin American literature, especially in the work of Jorge Luis Borges, who's an iconic Argentine writer. I don't think this particular novel expands the symbolism of the labyrinth and like very much, but it's just it's everywhere, all over Latin American literature. And I think that that's in this the author is clearly making attempts in various parts of the novel, the writing, the world building characterization, et cetera, to explicitly connect to the Latin American tradition, history and culture. So I think that's important to point out.

**jessie** [00:10:45] Yeah, that's super cool. I had no idea. I've never read that author before. Maybe maybe time to check them out.

**transition** [00:10:51] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie & kelly** [00:10:56] Wands out!

**jessie** [00:10:56] Let's discuss all things magic. Again, like some of the previous books we've read, we have a polytheistic magical system in this world is made up of the Deos. So those are the gods. So we have La Mama and El Papa and El Fuego and like lots of different gods named after elements or different things in the world.

**kelly** [00:11:19] yep, You have El Cielo, which means sky and heaven. You have La Ola, which means wave in Spanish. And that's the water element. You have La Estrella, which is star.

**jessie** [00:11:32] And they all kind of correspond to something has to do with them, like based on their names. So like Estrella, Estrella [laughs] like helps Alex when she needs more light because she's the God of the stars, which was really cool to me. I thought that, like, bringing in those those words to correspond with what they can do.

**kelly** [00:11:51] Mm hmm. And the the Deos this like system is also integrated in the back stories of the different magical creatures that we encounter in Los Lagos, like the avianas are called "hijas del cielo" so Daughters of the Sky or Daughters of the Heavens. Right? And so and they're the ones with wings who can fly. um So it just like it's very well explained, I think, and very well drawn out, but in not in a way that made me feel like I'm waiting for the plot to start.

**jessie** [00:12:22] Right.

**kelly** [00:12:22] After all, this world building is done, which I think is pretty remarkable.

**jessie** [00:12:27] Well and I think some of it hinges on like the names that are given to them. And I think for anyone who doesn't have, like any knowledge of Spanish, that might be more difficult because you wouldn't understand, like the name like El Fuego corresponds to fire. So, like, that wouldn't make sense to you. But if you know what those words mean or if you take the, you know, time to look it up, then it is helpful because it gives you a background knowledge of them without actually having to add more like exposition to the story.

**kelly** [00:12:57] Mm hmm.

**transition** [00:12:57] [spellcasting sound]

**jessie** [00:13:00] In Labyrinth Lost we see... Kind of like how you mentioned that we have a polytheistic magical system. We've seen this before in other books we've read for the podcast in particular, we see humans as essentially vessels for powers that are connected. So the magic is connected to the Deos, but it manifests through the brujos and brujas. And brujexes is trying to use the it's hard to do this gender, not the like gender neutral version and pronounce it.

**jessie** [00:13:26] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:13:26] But we're gonna try. One thing that NOVA talks in– when he's explaining to Rishi, Alex and Alex and Novar explaining how the magical system works to Rishi after she's been around, she's been sticking it out on this underworld journey for a long time. And then they're like, oh, maybe we can tell you what's going on now. [jessie laughs] um So Nova says this on page. I did not write the page down. Fail. But Nova talks about the importance of belief and how he doesn't– he just knows that his powers come from somewhere. And for him, that's the Deos. And he knows that it's like this embodied knowledge of the like embodied aspect of belief and why that's important for the magical system, but also the like divine or Non-worldly element, I guess. but then again, magic is also intimately connected to the material world. We see the importance of the eclipse, for example, in the Devourer's wanting to get all the energy from the Tree of Souls. And also we see the land of Los Lagos, which is basically kind of which is like decimated because of the devourer's shenanigans. We see it responding to Ale's magic and getting regenerated so that I thought that that was a really um cool part of the magical system is that it's divine, material and all things in between,.

**jessie** [00:14:55] Right. Which I think makes the most sense in a world with magic, because as much as Nova talks about like having a belief, it's a lot easier to believe in something when you have proof that that thing exists, like it's less faith and more like I can see that this thing is real. So for like Rishi, who is– I think we're supposed to assume that she is of Indian descent, she comes from a different religious–religion, religious background. But we still see that obviously she believes and sees that this magic is happening, which is a lot easier to do when you can see it happening.

**kelly** [00:15:31] Yeah, the empirical evidence helps significantly.

**jessie** [00:15:34] Yeah, just a little [laughs].

**transition** [00:15:37] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:15:39] Another part of the magical system that's really important is this idea of communal knowledge that is like collaboratively produced throughout time and space. And this manifests in the form of the Book of Cantos, which has its essentially it's a spell book right?

**jessie** [00:15:55] mmhmm.

**kelly** [00:15:55] but that each family has and every there's this tradition of documenting all of different spells and prayers, and I don't like– potions, remedies, all of these sorts of elements, traditions. And also there's like diary entries, reflections, just like regular writing.

So I thought it was kind of a cool palimpsest and then also emphasizes how this magic is actually is quite literally a magical tradition that comes from the family. And then it's like built over time.

**jessie** [00:16:28] Right. What what does Cantos mean?

**kelly** [00:16:31] A canto is... It's kind of from the verb Cantar, which is to sing,.

**jessie** [00:16:36] OK, that's what I thought.

**kelly** [00:16:38] But I think it's like guess it's essentially like an incantation,.

**jessie** [00:16:41] Oh ok, Because I thought it was like book of songs and I was like, I guess spells can be like songs. That's kind of cool. Um, but obviously my Spanish is much more limited than yours. [both laugh]

**kelly** [00:16:52] That's Ok! I mean it is related to that I would say. I think it's more related to like incantation than it is to song because it's actual magic spell implicated.

**jessie** [00:17:01] That makes sense. Mm hmm.

**kelly** [00:17:03] Speaking of Cantos, I am. The difference... I think it's it was cool how in the book itself, magic is culture and language specific. So Lula on page 11 says that "spells are for witches. brujas do cantos."

**jessie** [00:17:20] Mm hmm.

**kelly** [00:17:21] And there's a there's a distinguish among like essentially ethnic and cultural lines.

**jessie** [00:17:27] right.

**kelly** [00:17:27] –. Of what kind of magic is what.

**jessie** [00:17:30] Yeah. Which is really cool because I know I know that Zoraida talked about it like at the end of the book and the her like notes kind of, but talking and I feel like I've seen it as well on Instagram and stuff with a lot more people talking about being brujas or brujos and brujería. And I thought that was really interesting to see, like how, um, like the notion of witchcraft culturally has changed over time.

**kelly** [00:17:54] Mm hmm. Absolutely.

**transition** [00:17:55] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:17:58] Ritual is also really important in this magical system. We have all the different cantos which have different ingredients and words that you have to say and movements, etc. Also the death day ritual, which is like a brujo quinceañera, like a brujeria quinceañera except it happens when you're 16. And how would you explain it? It's essentially like a blessing? Or you accept your gift or something?

**jessie** [00:18:25] Well and I guess it...Yeah, and I guess it doesn't necessarily happen when you're 16, but when, like your power, like you come into your powers because I

assume that Lula had already had hers, even though she's younger, I'm sorry, not Lula. Rose had already had hers, even though she's younger than Alex.

**kelly** [00:18:41] Mm hmm.

**jessie** [00:18:42] But I do think I mean, the notes section at the end did make it seem like they tried to sync up the death they party with with a birthday to make it more festive.

**kelly** [00:18:53] Right.

**jessie** [00:18:53] Yeah. It's like when you get your blessing from your ancestors that allows you to keep doing magic without the repercussions we see happening in Nova where he's basically like his magic is basically like eating him alive, kind of? Like I don't know what would happen to him if he kept going. he would die?

**kelly** [00:19:08] The implication is, yeah, that's the implication as far as I understood it anyway.

**jessie** [00:19:13] Yeah. So you can't do magic without the blessing of your ancestors. Kind of like a like kind of like in COCO where like if Miguel doesn't help his what's the guy's name? I don't know, his grandfather. Spoilers for COCO I guess then.

**kelly** [00:19:30] Great grandfather!

**jessie** [00:19:30] Oh, yeah. Great grandfather. Like, he'll be forgotten and then he just like disappears. He doesn't get to be in the afterlife anymore. So I guess it's kind of like that. Yeah. Similar.

**kelly** [00:19:40] Hmm. Yeah. Blood is also an important part. Like there is... And the author talks about it in the paratextual materials at the end, but the relationship to like Santería and Vodoun, right, the idea of sacrifice and blood sacrifice and is being important in ritual and Nova on page 96 says "blood is life" and that it's necessary to go through the sacred tree to the portal to Los Lagos is necessary for when Ale wants to connect to her ancestors at the very end, she puts her like her blood on the soul tree or the Tree of Souls. But I don't think we've seen a lot of this type of ritual in the books that we've read.

**jessie** [00:20:25] No, and probably because some of it is I think people think of things with doing with with sacrificing animals or blood magic as like hedonistic. And we also haven't seen many books with like a foundation in I don't know anything about Santeria, but any foundations and like voodoo, which, you know, came from Africa. So I don't think we've read a book that has had that before. And I'm guessing people just think it's gross. [laughs]

**transition** [00:21:00] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:21:00] Magic is also hereditary, but we find out that it's diminishing over time. But so it's not really clear to me when this magic started showing up and like at what point in the decline we are at. Right. And Encantrixes are an exception.

**jessie** [00:21:14] Mm hmm. So Alex is the exception because she's trying to get rid of her powers because she thinks they're a bad thing. But she's also like the most powerful bruja in her family and I'm guessing in a long line of brujas and brujos .

**kelly** [00:21:29] Mm hmm.

**jessie** [00:21:32] So, yeah, I also don't know, like when this started, like, is there a reason that there's a diminishment in their powers?

**kelly** [00:21:38] Yeah, there's some sort of curse or something. Maybe we'll find that out later.

**jessie** [00:21:43] Yeah, because I think there are two more books, and I think the series is finished, so.

**kelly** [00:21:49] I think the last book comes out in 2020.

**jessie** [00:21:51] Uh, that's so far away.

**kelly** [00:21:53] Only a few months.

**jessie** [00:21:55] I know. Don't remind me. [laughs] Yeah, so maybe we'll figure out more about that as the series goes on, because I'm interested to know, like, why some of them have very weak powers and less like Alex is so powerful.

**kelly** [00:22:10] Mm hmm.

**transition** [00:22:10] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:22:13] Alex experiences magic thematically, so physically and emotionally in her body, which I thought was similar to, for example, what Zéile does in Children of Blood and Bone.

**jessie** [00:22:23] mmhhmm.

**kelly** [00:22:23] Talking about calling up anger and love and those being necessary to for like magical power to manifest in the protagonist. And as in most first person, Y.A. novels, we kind of we take the journey with the protagonist as a reader and we see the like learning about magic and learning to accept magic. Accepting yourself is like a main plot arc. um And so at the end, on page 297, we have Ale summarizing for us how she now thinks of magic, which is magic is a living thing. It's part of me. I summon it, call it like a snake charmer called the Snake out of its slumber. The magic answers back.

**jessie** [00:23:06] Yeah. And I think this kind of speaks to, like you talked about, how anger and love, like she uses those to call on her magical abilities, but also how, like, our emotions have power over us and can influence, like, how we move through our lives. So for Alex, like when she's angry, she, like, hurts Nova on accident. She has the ability to hurt other people or beings. But when she's like moving through the world with love, it's like a different experience for her magic. So kind of like our feelings are really like how we move through the world is like kind of important and powerful.

**kelly** [00:23:41] Right. I like that connection you drew also because love is the— healing power really relies on love. Lula explains that to Alex. Right, that when you feel the warmth right when I'm healing you like that's love that that I feel for you. Right. It's like a physical manifestation of emotions, which I think is really compelling, especially with like... Given that we're so used to separating our minds and our bodies and then not thinking about our



emotions, but in reality it's like a bodymind, no space, everything's happening all at once. It's all co-constitutive of our experience.

**jessie** [00:24:16] Right.

**transition** [00:24:16] [spellcasting sound]

**jessie** [00:24:20] So in the story we see there are repercussions for using magic and not and then everything comes back to you times three sort of way that we see kind of and, uh, like witchcraft today, like white witchcraft, [kelly laughs] It's a lot of white ladies.

**kelly** [00:24:37] Lots of them.

**jessie** [00:24:39] Yeah. But literally all the magic recoil happens whether you were doing something bad or good. And I think... I'm not really sure what to make of this other than like you have to be careful about what you're using your magic for. But I'm not 100 percent sure why.

**kelly** [00:24:54] Maybe it's like a balancing mechanism? Or that's like how it was originally conceived. Obviously doesn't work for the Devourer, right? But we do see this aspect of the magical system, the recoil playing out in a lot of ways. It's a it's a different way of we saw this also in Kingdom of Souls. You know, magic has a price is a pretty common trope.

**jessie** [00:25:15] right.

**kelly** [00:25:15] That I think we've been seeing a lot more lately than in previous novel- than in like earlier novels we read for the podcast. So, for example, Nova and the marks left by Magic, we have this recoil that's worse if you don't like have it sanctioned by accepting a blessing from your ancestors if you don't have a death day. Also, Ale's beef with magic, right, is that it destroys brings her family pain, loneliness, death. But her struggle is thinking about slash dealing with the consequences of her magic and the choices that she makes.

**jessie** [00:25:47] Right. I guess maybe part of it is like trying to show that, like, every choice you make has repercussions. And sometimes even when you're doing good things, the repercussions can be bad. So like Alex is like healing people and that hurts her. Maybe she's healing bad people. I don't know.

**transition** [00:26:05] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:26:07] Um, we see glamours again with, like, magic used to deceive and imprison. Like, the whole idea that magic is isn't bad in and of itself. It's how you use it.

**jessie** [00:26:18] mmhmm.

**kelly** [00:26:18] Same with like what you see in technology and sci fi stories. Right. The technology itself isn't bad, but are you using it for good or are you using it for evil? And we see that a similar dynamic playing out in Labyrinth lost. We keep seeing these glamours with Like Agosto and the others, you know, that the like look twice comes up over and over and over again.

**jessie** [00:26:37] Which is very similar to like other stories we've seen where faeries are involved because they're like Tricksters.

**kelly** [00:26:42] Exactly, exactly. And we have a muggle equivalent to the "sinmagos" and the only substantive contact we have with a sinmago is Rishi.

**jessie** [00:26:55] Yeah, I'm guessing that means like kind of translates to without magic.

**kelly** [00:26:59] It does. That's right.

**jessie** [00:27:02] It's working.

**kelly** [00:27:03] Your Duolingo is working. [both laugh]

**jessie** [00:27:07] Uh, yeah, so, yeah, Rishi's the only one, um. Yeah, I guess at the school. We have at the very beginning, we have a scene where Alex is at school and she makes a snake come out of that guy's mouth because he's being a bully.

**kelly** [00:27:23] That's right!

**jessie** [00:27:25] But that's that's the only other one. And I like the whole time we were reading it, though, I thought for some reason, like Rishi was also going to end up having magical powers because I don't know how she ended up like I know she got to Los Lagos, but I was just like, something's going to happen with her. So I'm anxiously awaiting for the next book for her to have some kind of powers we don't know about, maybe bring in another magical system.

**kelly** [00:27:45] I'm glad you brought that up, because I think that the book is like actually does characterized Rishi and position Rishi as having powers like there, but they're like magical in a different sense, like Alex talks about her Rishi's power to be herself at all times, no matter what and how it's like its own kind of super power. Yeah, I think we'll probably see that dynamic and like Ale maybe and Alex learning a little bit from Rishi, like how to do that, I guess as they as the novels go on, they'll be my guests.

**jessie** [00:28:20] Yeah. As I was rereading the book, for some reason in my mind, I kept thinking that Rishi was actually one of the avianas and that just like bumped into them. So in my head before I even started reading, I was remembering her as being a magical being. But she's not she's just you know, she's a she's a muggle, but maybe not really [both chuckle].

**jessie & kelly** [00:28:42] wands Away!

**transition** [00:28:42] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [00:28:46] Now we're going to talk about conflict villains and good versus evil in our segment, get me Kylo Ren. [pause] Side note, I watched The Last Jedi a few days ago

**jessie** [00:28:57] For the first time?

**kelly** [00:28:58] No, no, the second time, I think. Kylo Ren! uh!

**jessie** [00:29:03] I know, I know, yeah. I like him.

**kelly** [00:29:07] me too [laughs].

**jessie** [00:29:07] What can I say? He's exactly my type.

**kelly** [00:29:10] Emo sociopath!

**jessie** [00:29:12] I know. I know. I have a type.

**kelly** [00:29:14] you heard it here first listeners.

**jessie** [00:29:17] I'm editing this out [both laugh]

**kelly** [00:29:21] Alejandra is bullied at school, that's kind of the first instance of villainy, quote unquote, that we see in the novel and she's trying to blend in. Right. But something always sticks out. She's the weird person and she definitely gets targeted for it.

**transition** [00:29:38] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:29:38] So the Devourer is the main villain we have in Labyrinth Lost. And I think we've come up with a pretty compelling read of the Devourer on a metaphorical level, wouldn't you say?

**jessie** [00:29:50] Yes.

**kelly** [00:29:50] Dangling the lead, suspense.

**jessie** [00:29:53] Suspense.

**kelly** [00:29:53] I— we posit that you can read The Devourer as a metaphor for a colonial takeover and resource extraction, specifically white supremacist, colonial takeover and resource extraction. Do you want to talk about the race part?

**jessie** [00:30:08] Yeah. So the Devourer is the only character in the book who is described as white. Maybe some of the kids at the school. I don't really remember those kids because they were like not instrumental to the story. So maybe that kid that bullied her was also white, which would still make sense,.

**kelly** [00:30:23] Probably.

**jessie** [00:30:25] -all things considered. Yeah, but as we move through Los Lagos and like we see Alex's family and even Richie, like we don't have any white people. But the devourer is described as having like a white face. So, you know. white people are trash. [laughs].

**kelly** [00:30:40] That's right.

**jessie** [00:30:42] Sorry, Kelly.

**kelly** [00:30:44] That's OK. Stating the obvious, The Devourer Let's start from step one. So just like taking all the energy, doing whatever she wants with it, like consumption for consumption sake, basically power for power sake is kind of the feeling I'm getting from

this character. Also, we get the sense that the Devourer will simply move on to the next realm when she's exhausted all the resources from Los Lagos. And that's particularly why it's threatening. Right? It's just going to keep expanding this um extraction. The Hunger for power and domination is insatiable. And this also recalls the legacy of struggle of indigenous peoples fighting for the land. We see that various times throughout the novel with the first with the avian as and then with the adas. And then they are coming together. And there's definitely a discourse of we need to fight. It's when people stop fighting for the land that, you know, all is lost, basically.

**jessie** [00:31:39] Which really makes me wonder what's going to happen in the future books because I feel like the Devourer was a really good villain and defeated at the end of the story. And I'm wondering if she's going to come back somehow because I dunno who the villain will be in the next book.

**kelly** [00:31:53] I don't know.

**jessie** [00:31:55] I haven't even looked up what it's about, so, I mean...

**kelly** [00:31:58] It's from Lula's point of view, I think.

**jessie** [00:32:01] [surprised] Oh! I was not expecting that.

**kelly** [00:32:03] That's at least what the excerpt in the back of the novel I have is. it's from Lula's point of view.

**jessie** [00:32:09] Mine did not have an excerpt for the second book. So.

**kelly** [00:32:12] it Says Lula's story, Bruja Born.

**jessie** [00:32:14] OK,.

**kelly** [00:32:16] We'll see.

**jessie** [00:32:16] alright Well, yeah, I assume they're going have to deal with some of that dads stuff.

**kelly** [00:32:21] MMM Definitely. um Another aspect of this Devourer metaphor for colonialism and white supremacist colonialism is the fact that this trauma is inflicted over generations. And I think this was... What was the aviana's name, the main one, Madra?

**jessie** [00:32:36] Yes,.

**kelly** [00:32:37] I think that– so she's explaining the impact over generations and she says, quote, "their entire generations who will never know what it's like to roam Los Lagos freely. They'll never know what it's like to sleep under the shade of the forest lights or run through the vessel. Yes, Shora spared us, but our lives have been punishment ever since" and I think this is a pretty explicit way of addressing the legacy of, like the loss that happens when this sort of. I don't know what you even call it when the land is exploited this way and the indigenous peoples are exploited in that way, and it's this um like layering of the except like this multilayered acceptance, maybe not maybe that's not the right word, but the like the loss of what could have been but can't versus like the future of liberation as being still being possible and holding those things, like together at the same time.

**jessie** [00:33:36] Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, it would be a difficult position to be in and we kind of see, like the people obviously of Los Lagos have tried to rise up and take over and were unable to defeat Saurabh just because she had so much power. So, like, you know, white power, whatever.

**kelly** [00:33:55] Mm hmm.

**jessie** [00:33:55] BOOOO

**kelly** [00:33:56] So but I think it is important that it keeps coming back to, like, that legacy of struggle and how it talks over and over again about how they keep fighting. And then when Ale shows up and is finally like turning the tide of this conflict, then they show up again, like it doesn't matter who they like to keep fighting.

**jessie** [00:34:15] Well she helps, she does help, like, free some of them, like the the Meadowkin who like the faeries, like they were literally in chains and trapped where they were. So she does help, like, free the people for the sake of it, even knowing that they were trying to keep her there like she does the right thing a lot, but not in like a sappy, you know, kind of way.

**kelly** [00:34:39] And not like a white savior way. Yeah, exactly. also Because she's not white.

**jessie** [00:34:43] Yeah. She cannot be a white savior [laughs].

**kelly** [00:34:45] Nope.

**transition** [00:34:45] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:34:49] We see a pretty classic conflict trope, villain trope in Nova, which is the deal with the devil like this Faustian bargain with the devil. um And I feel like I should have seen this coming. Did you feel like that? Did you see it coming with the first time you read it?

**jessie** [00:35:09] No, but I'll tell you why after you say your thing.

**kelly** [00:35:12] OK, so I feel like I should have seen this coming because Zoraida Córdova totally dropped breadcrumbs along the way. So and I was like giving the book for writing the are notes for the episode for recording. I found this quote on page 176 and Nova says it and he says, "Not all monsters look monstrous. Sometimes they're perfectly normal humans. Sometimes they're so beautiful. You would never suspect." Just like, come on, Kelly, are you losing your touch?

**jessie** [00:35:42] Yeah, but I feel like this was a really difficult one. And I know we'll talk about this more later, but it's hard because Nova is covered in tattoos, like he's a brown person and he's been incarcerated. Like all the things add up to make me think like he can't be the villain because like it's too many stereotypes for like what white people see as villainous that I was like, nah he's not going to be the villain. Like, that's just not going to happen.

**kelly** [00:36:07] no.

**jessie** [00:36:07] He's just like this real hot dude, you know?

**kelly** [00:36:09] We're totally going to see a redemption arc. It's already on its way with, like, the fact that Nova finds Ale's dad and brings him back. And that's like the final cliffhanger.

**jessie** [00:36:18] Yeah, but like, where the fuck was her dad?

**kelly** [00:36:20] Like, how did Nova find him? I feel like that's a book 2 question.

**jessie** [00:36:24] Yeah, I'm I'm assuming he's like didn't leave of his own free will because he also seems confused that he's back. So whatever. But yeah, also getting rid of nova's tattoos at the end. I know they were like killing him or whatever, but I'm like not as interested now. [kelly laughs]

**kelly** [00:36:38] maybe he can get tattoos that aren't killing him now.

**jessie** [00:36:43] Yeah, that's a good point. Anyways, so like, wow, Nova does look like a normal human with his tattoos and, you know, his back story. I thought there's no way he's going to be the villain because, like, too many bad things have already happened to him.

**kelly** [00:36:56] Oh, you're so right. I'm so white.

**jessie** [00:36:57] Yeah. Sorry, not sorry.

**kelly** [00:37:00] Womp, womp. [both laugh].

**jessie** [00:37:02] I don't think I wanted him to be the villain.

**kelly** [00:37:04] I, I don't, I definitely didn't. And I but I was like, oh, this betrayal I think makes sense. It's like desperation.

**jessie** [00:37:11] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:37:11] Desperate circumstances create... Like sow the seeds for people to take like desperate actions, right, or make choices, make specific choices that, you know, can be read as villainous depending on the context. But in reality, if it's like if it was the only chance Nova had not to die, I mean, I do it.

**jessie** [00:37:32] I get it. Like, his motivations are very clear to me and and like, acceptable. I know he betrayed Alex, but like, I don't know [laughs]

**kelly** [00:37:42] No, the motivations are totally acceptable, especially because it's described as like he's the product of all this systemic violent bullshit, which is the actual villain.

**jessie** [00:37:51] Yes. the systems.

**kelly** [00:37:52] Not the brown man or the brown boy, Right? Who is caught up in the system and spit back out.

**jessie** [00:37:58] Yeah, exactly. So is he a villain? I'm going to say not really.

**kelly** [00:38:03] No, he's not a villain. No, no. Yeah.

**transition** [00:38:07] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:38:10] The last point I want to make about in the "Get Me Kylo Ren" section is actually a question. OK, this might have been a misreading of mine, but we still don't know how or why Tía Rosaria or Aunt Rosario was murdered, correct?

**jessie** [00:38:25] That's correct. It's really weird because when Alex is with her in Los Lagos, she says there are like welts on her neck. And I don't know for sure, like, how that means she was killed or why. But, yeah, it's it's kind of confusing. And I'm assuming that will come up later.

**kelly** [00:38:47] I'm not making up the that she was murdered. Correct? There is that that is implied in the novel. Right?

**jessie** [00:38:53] It is kind of implied, and I think that's what we're supposed to understand with the markings on her neck, but it seemed like also maybe a spell was going on or a canto was going on at the time. So I'm not 100 percent sure because she said she had to die for another purpose and now she's taken over a Los Lagos. So I'm also assuming this isn't the last time will be in Los Lagos.

**kelly** [00:39:14] Definitely not.

**jessie** [00:39:16] Maybe with Lula, who is like, not that interesting to me, so I'm like, if I'm going to read the next book, but I'm also like, huh, what is this going to be about?

**kelly** [00:39:26] Maybe she'll get more interesting.

**jessie** [00:39:29] Yeah, I mean, I assume she has to, but right now she just seems like one of those girly girls, which is fine if people are that. But that's not interesting to me personally. [laughs] But like, be whoever you are, I also don't care.

**transition** [00:39:41] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [00:39:47] Onward, magical listeners! Just as one does not simply walk into Mordor, one does not simply read fantasy without talking about representations of race, class and gender. This is our segment about powers and bodies and how they relate.

**jessie** [00:40:00] Let's start with race.

**kelly** [00:40:01] Let's! So we talked about this a little bit earlier, you mentioned that there are no white people in this book except for people who are bad, villains, which... Appropriate. And um I just wanted to clarify that racialization is actually happens explicitly in the language of the novel. And it's not just with like the names and the ethnic implication, like the ethnic differences.

**jessie** [00:40:26] Mm hmm. We have a lot of brown people in this book. And I think Córdova does describe like Rishi's skin color and what, like other characters' skin colors and like what their hair looks like. This was something I thought Córdova did really well.

She describes every character in a way that tells us what color they are. And obviously, the only white person is a villain or a bully, which is kind of like a villain anyways. So I really appreciated this. And, you know, get Rishi is not Latinx. So we get also like different cultures as well.

**kelly** [00:41:01] Mm hmm. And I really appreciated that Córdova emphasizes the afro part of like AfroLatinidad that. So AfroLatina. Mama Juanita, for example, is described as, quote, dark as night when she appears in the day and like in the circle. And Ale gets into this later when she's actually in Los Lagos and describing, like the legacy of her family. And it like the how many different races and cultures and experiences are like had to accumulate over time and are combined over time and then like show up in Ale. So she says on page 187, "my mother's family were run out of their lands in Spain and fled to and fled to Mexico. My dad's ancestors were African slaves in Ecuador. They went to Panama and then Puerto Rico. Somehow my blood comes from all over the world and settled in Brooklyn. Brooklyn is my home." So this notion that like the. It's like not erasing the [pause] like not engaging in colorism as far as like not erasing the black slash African part Afrolatinidad or Latinidad, that in general, like Latin identity or Latin identity, because that is something that happens in cultural discourse quite often.

**jessie** [00:42:23] Yeah.

**kelly** [00:42:25] And just this, the legacy of slavery and colonialism, right? So there if you're enslaved in Ecuador, probably means you're working or you're like laboring for these Spaniards, like white Spaniards, right, white, colonial white colonial powers. And then like Panama and Puerto Rico...it's like the legacy of how all these different plate, these it's like not a straightforward back story or lineage story. And I appreciated the nuance because I think it's actually very. Very emblematic of how it actually works.

**jessie** [00:43:06] Yeah, and, um, Córdova does address that also in the author's note at the end, talking about how Santería and Voodoo came to uh, Latinx cultures and like how those [pause], like how Africa things coming over from Africa and like mixed with Catholicism, which is voodoo, um, came to be, which I thought was really interesting.

**kelly** [00:43:31] Yeah.

**jessie** [00:43:33] Let's talk about class.

**kelly** [00:43:34] Let's! Nova, I would say is our most is the character who ... Brings class into discussion more than any other.

**jessie** [00:43:43] Mm hmm. And I think, like his back story is just heartbreaking and is a reminder that when the system gets in the way, it sets people up to fail to become the villain. There's an implication before we know more about Nova that because he spent time in jail, that makes him a bad person, and that's just terrible and wrong. And, you know, I don't know what that was like, a hard part to read.

**kelly** [00:44:09] Yeah.

**jessie** [00:44:09] I think he's really well handled and really well done.

**kelly** [00:44:13] Because you see how this prejudice of incarceration stays with someone, regardless of... I mean, white people would interpret it that way, but also how that can be



present like that prejudice of someone who's been incarcerated can exist also in these communities of color.

**jessie** [00:44:29] Right.

**kelly** [00:44:30] –and inform peoples like the snap decisions or the snap impressions that they make out of Nova. And I would say that, like Nova is the quintessential [pauses] he....like, is the....A survivor of all of these violent and interrelated systems like the foster care system and the police and the police state and the carceral state, and I guess I wish we would have learned a little bit more about his back story. We get a little bit of it, and I'm assuming he'll, you know, show up in the other books to. But as like. There's a pretty big juxtaposition there with what then happened to Ale and her family, right? He talks about like he he makes Ale confront her privilege, basically.

**jessie** [00:45:17] Right. Right. Which is interesting because I think by, you know, other people's standards, Alex would seem like, uh, like her her mom's obviously struggling to provide for her family. But we do see how even someone who is struggling with a parent is a lot different from like a child struggling on their own because like Nova is dealing with also homelessness at one point and talks about like catching animals in Central Park to eat. So there's still a divide and what the classes look like, even if.

**kelly** [00:45:53] Yeah, totally like food insecurity. Yeah. It actually provides like a nuanced picture of people who are working class or or, you know, living in poverty rather than just like I don't know, especially I think in like the current political climate you hear about, You know, people in poverty or working class people, but you don't actually have discussions about what that lived experience looks like, and that's something that I think Zoraida Córdova really exceeded in in this novel is showing like the spectrum of experience.

**jessie** [00:46:23] Mm hmm. Yeah. Because, like, it's not just like classes and just like here's upper class, middle class, like poverty. Like it's not just three levels of things, like it runs a spectrum. And how you deal with that or how you feel about that's going to be different based on your circumstances.

**kelly** [00:46:43] Right. And especially when you see this with um with Nova, with like how he's racialized. Right? He's not I mean, having being a Latinx person in the justice system is very different than being a white person in the justice system or in the foster care system, for example.

**jessie** [00:46:58] Yeah. So I know he's supposed to be a villain, but I feel too bad for him to call him one.

**kelly** [00:47:03] I don't think he is supposed to be a villain. I think you're right. I think you're totally right that he's not, but that he plays into all the stereotypes and so that, like, hegemonic culture would read him as a villain. But he's not that way.

**jessie** [00:47:18] Well, and also he's like putting on a show in some ways, like trying to be perceived as tough. The tattoos help with that. And some of that obviously is a survival mechanism because he has been through some really tough things. But I think some of it's obviously for show and like Rishi calls him on that every once in a while, which is also funny.

**kelly** [00:47:39] That's a good segue into talking about gender, because he's really the only fleshed out example of masculinity that we have in the novel.

**jessie** [00:47:47] Mm hmm. Yes, for sure.

**kelly** [00:47:50] And it's very like masculinity is seen or like all the male characters are either very briefly mentioned, like the ancestors or people in the circle, not as important as the women, which we'll talk about in a second, but then also like unknowable. Mysterious, right? You get this, like, idea that the father figure is absent. Right? So we don't know. We don't have like that... Example of masculinity there anymore, or it's like a void almost, and a Nova does give off this impression of like unknowable. Mysterious,.

**jessie** [00:48:23] Right. Yeah, no dudes, no dudes. [kelly chuckles] just nova.

**kelly** [00:48:31] Almost all the characters are women. So it's the flip side and they're strong, badass women.

**jessie** [00:48:36] Yeah. Including the villain, like literally everyone, which was really cool!

**kelly** [00:48:42] Yeah. It was something that I...Don't really think I explicitly noticed while I was reading the book, but then like going back and reflecting on it, I was like, oh no, that's like really awesome and hardcore. There are practically no dudes in the book at all. And the another part that's emphasized of this, like essentially high hyper visibility of of women in the novel is the matrilineal passage of knowledge, power and magic and not necessarily matrilineal, but like through women, regardless of which side of the family tree they're from or whatever. So we have Mama Juanita, Aunt Rosaria, who is the godmother, Mama Juanita was the other and Encantrix, correct?

**jessie** [00:49:28] I think so. And I think she's like she is also Alex's grandmother or great grandmother.

**kelly** [00:49:36] And then Rosaria is the godmother. And when Alex and her are reunited in Los Lagos, we the story kind of develops why that relationship is so important and like really like mentorship, part of the godmother relationship, which I thought was really cool. And we also have Lady who is queer. After two failed marriages to men, she marries a woman and then is also the local expert in all things like brujeria. She teaches the young, teaches classes to the young brujexes, brujos, brujas. So really, it's this lineage is passed out or the knowledge is passed down through the book. But it especially the novel, emphasizes the importance of like women passing knowledge to other women.

**jessie** [00:50:25] Right. Which I think is actually something we see in a lot of like, uh, for people of color, a lot of stuff is matrilineal. So, you know, grandmothers are very important in Black culture. Um, obviously, I can't speak to every person of color like group, but.

**kelly** [00:50:45] [sarcastically] What, you don't speak for all groups?!

**jessie** [00:50:46] No, we are not a monolith.

**kelly** [00:50:49] We don't tokenize on this podcast [laughs]

**jessie** [00:50:52] But anyway, so it's interesting and it makes sense in this context also because we do see that there are like Afrolatinas. So we see like some of their culture is also going to come from Black culture. Um, yeah, it's pretty cool.

**kelly** [00:51:06] Definitely.

**transition** [00:51:07] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:51:09] I think the novel's implying that there's only women are Encantrixes, correct?

**jessie** [00:51:15] I think so.

**kelly** [00:51:18] It seems like a logical extension of like the magical system and the importance of, like, matrilineal power, et cetera.

**jessie** [00:51:25] Yeah, I didn't know if Encantrix had any roots in Spanish. Like, does that mean something?

**kelly** [00:51:31] Like an encanto is like an enchantment or it can also... Or like "encantar" or when "casa encantada" would be like a haunted house. So there definitely is like the like a magical slash beyond the veil implication with the word.

**jessie** [00:51:46] I guess what I'm wondering if it's one of like in Spanish, a lot of the words are like gendered, correct?

**kelly** [00:51:54] Mm hmm.

**jessie** [00:51:55] So I didn't know if Encantrix had like a gendered noun form.

**kelly** [00:52:01] Well, I think the. Encantar also means to love, which is kind of interesting.

**jessie** [00:52:07] Oh, OK.

**kelly** [00:52:09] I don't. There's an cantrip in- encantrix in World of Warcraft, the Internet site.

**jessie** [00:52:17] Yeah, yeah, I saw that when I was trying to look it up, but I was like, I don't know anything about World of Warcraft, so I can't speak to that.

**kelly** [00:52:24] I mean, enchant, the "-ix" suffix, I think, in like. Maybe it's not Latin, but I think a lot of the time it like denotes femininity.

**jessie** [00:52:37] OK.

**kelly** [00:52:38] The ix.

**jessie** [00:52:39] Yeah, so I assumed it was only women that were Encantrixes, but I think. But I also don't know if, like in Spanish, it was like a feminine noun, you know?

**transition** [00:52:51] [spellcasting sound]

**jessie** [00:52:53] So on page 149, Madra says "the Deos are more than male or female. They are both and neither at the same time. they are the creators and the destroyers of the world." So while there is a lot of emphasis put on women and females in this book, it was interesting to see that the deos were kind of like more non binary, which was like hard for me to wrap my head around because they're their names were also like masculine and feminine. So I just, like, made them whatever that was. But I think that's more of like a language issue in my head than an actual issue. So either way, I thought that was kind of cool.

**transition** [00:53:31] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [00:53:34] Let's talk about ability, bodyminds, other things.

**jessie** [00:53:39] So Alex has panic attacks in the book, we mostly see this at the beginning of the book. There are a lot of things going on in this story that can be helped by therapy I think.

**kelly** [00:53:47] So true!

**jessie** [00:53:48] Alex, probably should have gotten help after seeing her dead Aunt Rosaria.

**kelly** [00:53:54] Oh, my God. Yes.

**jessie** [00:53:58] Or after accidentally killing her cat.

**kelly** [00:54:00] That would be so tragic! Oh, my God. You need so much therapy after that.

**jessie** [00:54:06] Yes.

**kelly** [00:54:06] Where are the... Where are the like brujería... where's like the Brujeria terapéutica? Where's the like bruja therapy.

**jessie** [00:54:15] Yeah. Like the whole Mortiz family should have talked to someone after the dad left because like where was he? And like, why did he leave? No one seems to know. There's so many things going on that would take a real toll on anyone's mental health. So it's not surprising to me that Alex is like holding in her magic. She doesn't want to deal with it like they're not talking about things, which I know is kind of what pushes the story forward.

**kelly** [00:54:39] Right.

**jessie** [00:54:39] But also like y'all need some therapy. [laughs]

**kelly** [00:54:43] And we do see how this isolation that Alex does and the like, the secrecy, the holding herself back has physical manifestations, kind of like what we saw with Alina in the Shadow and Bone books. Right? Then Rishi at the end of Labyrinth lost talks about how after Alex has accepted her magic and is like coming into her own about how she, like, glows or wears it on her skin or like looks so beautiful or just I don't know. So there is an implication that Magic expresses physically and that it changes her hair, makes her hair curlier, right, too.

**jessie** [00:55:24] Is that why my hair's so curly? [laughs]. that seems practical.

**kelly** [00:55:25] That I think it's because You're a book witch.

**jessie** [00:55:30] Book witch that's me. [both chuckle]

**kelly** [00:55:34] And I think that the reason why we don't see Alex having as many panic attacks as the book is going on is because she is coming into her own with her magic and isn't trying to hide it anymore.

**jessie** [00:55:44] Yeah, which makes sense.

**kelly** [00:55:45] Totally.

**jessie** [00:55:47] We also get some ableist language in this book, which was like a little disappointing. Nova's eyes kept being described as bipolar because they were always changing color. I think they kept calling each other crazy. And I was just like, huh, I don't like that.

**kelly** [00:56:04] Yeah.

**jessie** [00:56:05] So there's that. I just thought I should mention it.

**kelly** [00:56:08] An aside.

**transition** [00:56:08] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [00:56:12] Another thing that I think with that I'd like to talk with you about, because I'm not really sure how to like, wrap my mind around it is the way addiction shows up in the novel. Um, power is addictive. It's like explicitly described that way. We see this in The Devourer. And then Lula also makes this comment disparaging certain Encantrixes for using the recoil of their magic as a drug. And she says on page 60, "they conjure to get high or feel numb."

**jessie** [00:56:40] Mm hmm.

**kelly** [00:56:42] So I guess it's maybe perhaps not the most compassionate or nuanced discussion of addiction.

**jessie** [00:56:48] Right.

**kelly** [00:56:50] But I don't I, I mean, I think it still has. It's still interesting, right, to analyze.

**jessie** [00:56:56] Well, and I think maybe kind of with Lula, it's kind of a way of showing us that the recoil happens different for different people, because for Alex, it's very painful. So it's not something she would want to keep happening, even though, you know, in the end of the book, she's willing to help people who need her help, even though the recoil is a symptom of that. But yeah, the yeah, the power addiction. And obviously, Zara is like the main focus of that. And like, literally she becomes the devourer. Like being addicted to power is kind of what is her downfall. So. Yeah,.

**kelly** [00:57:37] And like her most salient characteristic.

**jessie** [00:57:40] Mm hmm, yeah,.

**kelly** [00:57:41] Like it kind of takes over her entire identity.

**jessie** [00:57:44] Right . Well, I guess we see it also with Nova a little bit in that he can't, like, control his need to use magic or whatever, but he's using it to keep himself safe. So maybe that's kind of a different kind.

**kelly** [00:57:57] By any means necessary.

**jessie** [00:57:59] Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So I don't know yet as far as addiction goes. Yeah. It's not like. Yeah, very compassionate or kind and reading of what that is,.

**jessie** [00:58:12] And I wonder if we'll see any of these other any of the other people, especially Alex, struggling with this later on when she starts using it now that she's started using her magic more.

**jessie** [00:58:23] Yeah, or we might see it also with Lula, because I feel like there's going to be a desire for Lula to use her magic more because she is Alex's older sister to kind of show her up. So we might see what that looks like as she uses her magic more and more, how she deals with that and the recoil and like the repercussions of that. I feel like she's not going to be happy that her sister is more powerful than her [both laugh]

**kelly** [00:58:47] That that's probably going to cause some sisterly tension.

**jessie** [00:58:50] I think so. I think so.

**transition** [00:58:52] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [00:58:56] Finally, it's time for Shipwrecked, a segment about asexuality, sexuality, sex, romance and relationships, and sometimes we take liberties and do some shipping of our own.

**kelly** [00:59:06] Sister relationship, speaking of sisters, good segue, good segue. Did you get a charmed vibe?

**jessie** [00:59:13] Until you just said that, I did not, and maybe because I kind of I never watched that show,.

**kelly** [00:59:17] I totally got a charmed vibe, not from like the original necessarily, which is just like three white ladies. But the CW reboot is all they're latinas. And one of the sisters is AfroLatina. So I thought that was kind of like an interesting coincidence. I thought, like, the banter between the sisters was really cute and charming in the, like, bathroom scenes.

**jessie** [00:59:41] And which is funny because neither of us has sisters. [both laugh]

**kelly** [00:59:44] I know. So maybe it would be a less charming if it is something either of us had experienced.

**jessie** [00:59:49] Yeah, because I have never. [both laugh].

**kelly** [00:59:52] But it just seemed like. That was very good character building and world building, even though we weren't like learning about magical creatures in Los Lagos, we were learning about how they relate, how the sisters relate to one another and the sort of intimacy that they experience.

**jessie** [01:00:06] Mm hmm. Yeah, because, like, for me, I was like, man, Lula is so annoying, like taking her sister's clothes. Like she's very concerned with, like what she looks like and making sure that Alex is like into boys or whatever. And I'm just like, calm down, just let her live her life.

**kelly** [01:00:24] Definitely like an older sister vibe, which I mean as an older sister I respect.

**jessie** [01:00:29] I get it. But I guess it's hard because my younger siblings are brothers. So I'm like I was like, I don't care what you do. [both laugh].

**transition** [01:00:35] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [01:00:38] Moving on, like beyond sisterhood, the blood family is just incredibly important in the novel in general. And it's definitely not like a white version of Blood Family, which is like nuclear family. Like you're too like you're one point six kids and your dog or whatever. It's definitely an extended family. It's like we see this with the death day and the all of- and Alex channeling all of her ancestors' power like generations and generations of her ancestors. But one thing I thought, like an unintended consequence maybe, is that this excludes the most marginalized who don't have close kinship ties like Nova, right? So if you don't. If you can't like it, if you have no one there to do a death day for you, then what you just like, doomed to die because of the magic that you can use or something? It just seems...

**jessie** [01:01:35] Well, not only that, like he mentions that his grandma tried to do the death day for him, but his family was so fractured, including his ancestors, that it didn't work.

**kelly** [01:01:45] So it's tragic.

**jessie** [01:01:47] Families are trash. [kelly laughs] So that's what I got from that. like. Don't trust your family. Find a new family. Like, don't even worry about them. You know, that's what I took from it. [laughs]

**kelly** [01:02:00] I'm not sure that's the message that the book is sending...

**jessie** [01:02:04] I mean, that's what I got. [laughs]

**kelly** [01:02:05] But I, I do think that we that there is like a chosen family or like the importance of kinship is then highlighted with through this through like the circles, which are the different covens basically of the different witches. I thought that was really cool about how you had a circle that you the mom has a circle and then Lula has her own circle and you kind of figure out how you fit in a larger community of kinship ties, basically.

**jessie** [01:02:37] Yeah. The only thing I wasn't sure of is if the people in your circle were also related to you necessarily, because I know in like Lula's circle, two of her cousins are also in the circle.

**kelly** [01:02:48] I don't think so. I don't I don't think especially with, like, the mom's circle. I don't think that everyone was related because you have like that it was almost like a neighborhood feel or a friend like these are, you know, family, friends or whatever.

**jessie** [01:03:05] Yeah, I guess it's also hard too because I know, like in Black communities, people are like your family. But then you learn when you get older, like they're not related to you in any way, shape or form. They're just like your family, you know? Like they've become part of your like, quote unquote, family. So I also wonder if, like, maybe some of those people aren't actually related to them at all.

**kelly** [01:03:24] Yeah, that that's very likely. Or that, like, the blood tie isn't necessarily the most important thing. It's like how— what have you shared. I have a prediction. That Nova is going to become a part of a family or like a community or a kinship group, and then he'll get a death day and then he'll be OK.

**jessie** [01:03:43] That's my hope. Which segues into my hope for Alex and Rishi and Nova. So Alex is in love with Rishi. So we have queer characters.

**kelly** [01:03:55] yay!

**jessie** [01:03:55] And not just like side characters, but also with Nova. So I don't necessarily want them to be in a love triangle because I don't want to have to choose between Rishi and Nova.

**kelly** [01:04:06] Well, you don't. I mean, in a like monogamous situation, you would have to, but they're like 16. So we're not going to get into polyamory. Maybe,.

**jessie** [01:04:16] But maybe we will because I'm also like, can they just all be together? Like, Alex is at the top of the triangle and she's with Rishi and Nova who don't necessarily like each other that much. But I'm not sure if it's just like they're both vying for her.

**kelly** [01:04:30] Or like Nova could be like a second.

**jessie** [01:04:32] Yeah. OK, that's all that's one thing, that's my hopes for them.

**kelly** [01:04:38] I loved how the novel didn't. ...Again, it wasn't like Alex being like, oh, God, does this mean I'm queer or does this mean I'm a lesbian? No, you just like our feeling, your feelings, and they are what they are. And it's just like normalizing queer love, basically.

**jessie** [01:04:53] Yeah, well it's funny because as I was reading at this time, I think I had forgotten a lot about the book because I read it kind of like a while ago, maybe when the book came out and I was like, huh, does Rishi have feelings for Alex or does Alex have feelings for Rishi? And I just totally forgot all about it.

**kelly** [01:05:08] Yes and.

**jessie** [01:05:09] Yes and. [laughs] And Nova too.



**kelly** [01:05:13] Yes and and.

**jessie** [01:05:14] Yeah. Yeah. So I appreciated that about those. Cool. We should have that more often.

**kelly** [01:05:20] Yeah.

**transition** [01:05:21] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [01:05:23] There were no sexy times.

**jessie** [01:05:25] No. There was like the kiss between Rishi and Alex. And that was kind of it.

**kelly** [01:05:32] But it was so tender and beautiful and a love,.

**jessie** [01:05:36] But there's also so much going on in the story that the the romance part of the story isn't really the big part at all,.

**kelly** [01:05:43] Which we appreciate.

**jessie** [01:05:46] Yeah, sometimes I'm I want that. And sometimes I'm like, there's too much other stuff going on who would have time for romance.

**kelly** [01:05:53] And if I, you know, if you need to if you're going to like get also like channel that into reading romance or whatever.

**jessie** [01:06:00] Yeah. Read romance if you want to. It can be great. It can also be trash like.

**kelly** [01:06:05] Jessie is the one with the recs. I am not the expert.

**jessie** [01:06:11] So many recs. I will get Kelly to read them eventually.

**kelly** [01:06:13] A bonus episode.

**jessie** [01:06:15] Yeah.

**transition** [01:06:16] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [01:06:20] Now we're going to talk about writing style, narration, characterization, plot structure, and basically whatever else comes to mind in a segment called Kill Your Darlings.

**kelly** [01:06:30] I need to gush for a second about how absolutely glorious the Spanglish was, it's everywhere, the Spanish English mixing, it's we've indicated as a legitimate linguistic expression of Latin X in Latin America diaspora communities. And I think that's super rude and really important.

**jessie** [01:06:51] Yeah, it was wonderful. I also just looked stuff up. If you don't know it, it's not that hard.

**kelly** [01:06:56] Come on. Yes. [jessie chuckles].

**jessie** [01:07:00] Like some of the deos I didn't know what they were like, represented representative of. So it's like just look it up. It's fine. Mm hmm.

**kelly** [01:07:06] Also it's "Deos".

**jessie** [01:07:08] Oh OK. Yeah.

**kelly** [01:07:11] And I love how each chapter begins with a quote from the prayer ritual or writing often from the Book of Cantos. I just thought this was a very effective way, like kind of a shorthand for putting more of the paratext, like the worldbuilding stuff in there and making you feel more connected to the magical tradition. It makes it feel like fleshes it out more without necessarily having to spend a lot of time doing it.

**jessie** [01:07:35] I don't know if you noticed, but when you started saying it, I was shaking my head.

**kelly** [01:07:38] And rolling your eyes!

**jessie** [01:07:39] Yeah. Kelly loves, like, additional little things from other like not real books.

**kelly** [01:07:45] I love the paratext. We like can segue to my next comment. [jessie laughs] It is now Canon on this podcast that I love paratextual materials.

**jessie** [01:07:58] If you didn't already know. [kelly laughs].

**kelly** [01:08:01] So the especially at the end of the novel, like in an author's note, which Córdova does in Labyrinth lost. She discusses the social, cultural and historical information that influenced her writing. And I think I'm just like into this because of the idea of giving credit where credit is due, citational justice, but also it gives readers some agency and kind of makes it so the learning doesn't have to stop when the book is done. Like you can.... Like Cordova suggested further sources for learning about Santería or something like that. So we can... Like I'm totally going to look up some of those things so I can learn more. I think it's a really great way to keep the learning happening after the book is done.

**jessie** [01:08:40] Yeah, we talked about it in one of my children's lit about the importance of, like, citing your sources and like where it was mostly to do with like where stories come from, as opposed to like saying like this is a story based on like a Korean folktale like, but where did it come from? Like, you can't just say those things. So it was really cool that she like was like, here are the books I read about Santería and Voodoo. And like here are where these stories come from or stories similar to them. Like, I thought that was really good. And it's very important for people to know, like. I'm sure there are some readers who think like, oh, death day, that's like a quinceañera and they're like the same thing, you know, like now they're going to conflate those two things if they don't read the end notes. So putting those right also lets the reader know what is fiction and what is fact, you know?

**kelly** [01:09:29] Right. Exactly. Because then you wouldn't. Yeah, totally. And then you wouldn't. If you're operating under that assumption, then you wouldn't understand the like Día de Muertos why that's so important in the Death Day conception. And then I also really

like how it's not just historical information, it's also Zoraida Córdova gives like contemporary information about like what is the... What are connotations or typical everyday uses of the word bruja in contemporary Spanish. um And which is not something that I was really expecting to see contextualized, which is—

**jessie** [01:10:04] —Also the history of that. And like how it was seen as something bad in the past and how people have taken that back to make, you know, as a powerful thing.

**kelly** [01:10:13] Absolutely. So rad. Love paratextual materials. Jessie. That's another thing I like that are we're just going to know that we agree to disagree on this.

**jessie** [01:10:23] I like it in the like as an endnote, like adding to the story like, oh, here's what you need to know contextually for the story. But like within the story, I'm kind of like I don't I don't feel it's necessary, but like other people do, so like I'm not the only reader.

**kelly** [01:10:37] I love, like a random document or like an aside.

**jessie** [01:10:42] Jessie does not [both laugh].

**transition** [01:10:43] [spellcasting sound].

**kelly** [01:10:49] This the idea of "rememory" came up for me, so this is like a it's originally, I think, came out of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, but it's like a recognized narrative technique now for narrative exposition. So when you're living someone else's memory and experiencing it through your own. Like through yourself and your own perspective, and this happens twice in the novel in *Labyrinth Lost*, we see it with the two like not 100 percent good characters. We see it with Zara's back story. And then we also see Nova's back story from their original perspectives. And that's marked by italics in the text. And it's like this little flashback, essentially.

**jessie** [01:11:28] Which we've seen in other stories before. And I think that that's like a good use of that literary technique because otherwise, because so much is in first person, otherwise, we just have a bunch of like shit ton of exposition of people telling us their stories, which can get kind of boring.

**kelly** [01:11:45] Yes.

**transition** [01:11:46] [spellcasting sound]

**kelly** [01:11:48] And I have a question. Is there like a smells of YA [jessie laughs] hashtag or like Reddit?

**jessie** [01:11:57] Not that I'm aware of...

**kelly** [01:12:00] —channel, I have no idea because.

**jessie** [01:12:01] It's called a subreddit [laughs].

**kelly** [01:12:02] Whatever. I dunno. I don't know how it works. [laughs].

**jessie** [01:12:05] I'm older than you. I feel like you should know.

**kelly** [01:12:08] Yeah, but I'm not on the reddit,.

**jessie** [01:12:09] You know, it's okay.

**kelly** [01:12:12] There's because, like, this is remind– I remember thinking about this when we did the ACOMAF [A Court of Mist and Fury] episode with Rhys smelling like citrus and sea salt or something? I don't even know. But Nova apparently smells like, quote, "the rain hugging the new green of spring" from page 72. And I'm like, OK, smells of YA has to be like a new thing because there are a lot of... So this is like an evocative sensorially, like I get why the authors do this, but at the same time it's just like. No one smells like this. [laughs]

**jessie** [01:12:47] Yeah, I don't understand. I'm like, where are the like? And it's always dudes like what this smell like. And I'm like because like.

**kelly** [01:12:53] I want to know what she smells like!

**jessie** [01:12:56] Well, I just finished To All the Boys I Loved Before – reread for class, and they talk about like I think Peter telling Lara Jean that he likes the smell of her hair and she's like, oh, it's the shampoo I'm using. But the dudes always smell like the most random things. I'm like, what the fuck are they wearing that they smell like rain hugging the new green spring. [laughs]

**kelly** [01:13:16] I'm like, everyone is they're just like magical cologne or something in YA. I don't understand.

**jessie** [01:13:22] I have to say, I don't like that. Like, it always pulls me out a little because it does. What the fuck? No one smells like this.

**kelly** [01:13:29] It's like very genre trope-y, I guess.

**jessie** [01:13:30] Yeah, well, and for the most part, I feel like most dudes smell kind of the same because they're all wearing the same deodorant or whatever.

**kelly** [01:13:37] Or like axe body spray. [laughs]

**jessie** [01:13:38] Yeah, exactly.

**kelly** [01:13:40] But it wouldn't be like a very– imagine trying to like write an axe body spray in the vein of like Y.A. style.

**jessie** [01:13:48] Yeah. They should do those like those Terry Cruz commercials. They should do them but like with Y.A. you're like broody dudes, you know? [both laugh] It'd be so funny.

**transition** [01:13:57] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [01:14:01] Recommend, if you like.

**jessie** [01:14:03] If you like Chosen One stories, I really like this take on the Chosen One story because it didn't feel like one to me until I was like thinking back about it. I feel like it's a covert Chosen One story.

**kelly** [01:14:15] Yeah, there wasn't like a big prophecy or things like that, which was I, I liked the spin on it.

**jessie** [01:14:21] Yeah. Yeah. Like, Alex has to be the one to save them, but kind of because of the situation she put them in [kelly laughs] so they could.

**kelly** [01:14:29] Clean up your mess!

**jessie** [01:14:30] –Bullshit stories. Yeah.

**kelly** [01:14:31] Yeah. Fix your own bullshit. People dealing with consequences. That's another.

**jessie** [01:14:35] Yeah. Yeah. I couldn't think of like a comp title exactly because we get a lot of Chosen One stories, but not in this, this same vein.

**kelly** [01:14:45] Mm hmm.

**transition** [01:14:45] [jaunty string music plays]

**jessie** [01:14:50] Before we end, it's time for a real talk. Did reading this book make your perspective change in any way, or did it make you interrogate a concept, system or trend you hadn't before?

**kelly** [01:15:00] For me, this kind of labyrinth lost. I think gave us the most mmm nuanced gray area-y engagement with this with the chosen one that we just talked about in the previous section, but also this... How it how the free will in agency versus the like destiny or the magic that Alex is born with as an Encantrix , I thought that the tension between that was actually it was more interesting and less like uh "neither can live while the other survives," like Harry Potter prophecy style chosen one narrative. So I think that the pre will free will versus the like, the determinism or the destiny is. I think that tension is still there, and I'm curious to see how it plays out in future novels.

**jessie** [01:15:53] Yeah, I think they did a really good job because Alex isn't.... She's a chosen one, in a way, but of her own making, and so she wanted to get rid of her powers and her family left.

**kelly** [01:16:06] She made that choice.

**jessie** [01:16:07] Yeah. So if she didn't do that, she probably would have been fine. Someone else probably would have had to defeat the devourer. And she, like her family's gone. She probably could just live out her life and been fine,.

**kelly** [01:16:19] Well not really because like, look what happens to Nova. If she didn't get her family back. She would probably end up or Nova was.

**jessie** [01:16:28] That's true. Or she would have stopped using magic and she would have been fine.

**kelly** [01:16:33] Maybe. Maybe.

**jessie** [01:16:35] There's just a lot of choices at play here instead of like you have to do this or else.

**kelly** [01:16:39] yes, Which is why I thought this was way more interesting than other engagements with the free will versus destiny.

**jessie** [01:16:46] No, I agree.

**transition** [01:16:47] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [01:16:51] Finally, as a new feature of season two, at the end of every episode, we are going to suggest an action item that listeners can take as an extension that connects to some of the core themes that we've been talking about in the episode, about the particular novel. And we think of this as a way for readers, listeners to learn more shit, do less harm and continue to fight for our collective liberation, since that's what our project is about. So this week, this episode, we are suggesting the read *Open Veins of Latin America, Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* by Eduardo Galeano. So actually expanding this metaphor of the Devourer and not leaving it in the realm of the metaphor and actually looking about how the legacy of white supremacist colonialism, settler colonialism and colonialism actually manifested materially on populations over half a millennium in all over what we now know is Latin America. So check it out at your library or on Indiebound and we will link to it in the show notes.

**transition** [01:17:55] [jaunty string music plays]

**kelly** [01:17:59] Thanks for listening to JK, it's magic. We'll be back in two weeks for a discussion of *Crooked Kingdom* by Leigh Bardugo. As always, we'd love to be in conversation with you, magical listener. Let us know what you think of the episode, anything we missed or just say hi by dropping a line in the comments or by reaching out to us on Twitter or Instagram @jkmagicpod. you can post or tweet about the show using the #CriticallyReading and you can contact us via email at jkmagicpod@gmail.com

**jessie** [01:18:27] You can subscribe to JK, It's Magic on the podcast above your choice, and we really appreciate it if you would rate and review the show and spread the word to other rad listeners and readers out there. if you're interested in supporting JK, it's magic, you can make a one-time donation to us on Ko-Fi. You can also support us monthly on Patreon in exchange for a free mini-sodes bonus eps, swag and much more.

**kelly** [01:18:48] Podcast theme song is honorary Academy of Magic by Augustin C from the album *Fantasy Music*, which you can download on Free Music Archive Dot com. JK It's Magic is recorded and produced on stolen indigenous land. Arapaho, Cheyenne and Ute land for Kelly and Chickasaw Kaskaskia, Kickapoo, Mascoutin, Miami, Mesquaki, Odawa, Ojibwe, Peankashaw, Peoria, Potawatomie, Sauk and Wea for Jessie. Until next time stay magical!

**transition** [01:19:18] [upbeat string and harpsichord music plays]