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[00:00:00] Literaticast theme music plays.

Jennifer: [00:00:05] Hello and welcome to the Literaticast. I'm Jennifer Laughran, and I'm an agent at the Andrea Brown Literary Agency. Today my special guest is also an agent. We'll be introducing her later. But first, I wanted to say a word about schmagents. What is a schmagent, you ask? Well, you probably have heard this term banded around or seen it on Twitter because I coined it some years ago. And a lot of people use it now. And it kind of means, "fake agent." Like, agent, schmagent. Not a real agent, a schmagent.

[00:00:43] So, I'm not talking about new agents, here. There are plenty of people who are new, they're building their lists. They're at legitimate agencies, but they're just young or they don't have experience yet, or whatever. But they are legit. That's not a schmagent. A schmagent usually falls into one of two categories. Sometimes there's also a bit of a crossover.

[00:01:07] So, either they're just clueless. They have no connections or experience. They don't sell books, or they only sell to kind of suspect publishers. Publishers that you don't need an agent to submit to, for example. They have no experience in publishing but they started their own agency anyway. Red flags are, you can't find evidence of sales to any major publishers on their website. Their website is full of very obscure authors with no books. Or books that cannot be found in a bookstore and don't seem like real books. Or just, it's hard to find information about what they've done and what they've sold and who they represent. Believe me, a legitimate agent wants to brag about their clients' books. They love nothing more than to talk about their clients' books. So if you are feeling a lot of obfuscation, that's a red flag for sure.

[00:02:04] Then there's the type two, or class A schmagent. These are people who are actually scam artists. They're not just inept. They're not just bad. They are criminals. So red flags there. They say you have to pay an editor before they will rep your book. And they have a suggestion of

an editor, and oh, yeah, by the way, that editor is their wife. Or they charge a fee to represent you, or a reading fee, or any other kind of fee.

[00:02:35] Here's this thing. There's this adage. Money flows to the author. What does that mean? It means agents do not get paid until you get paid. Publishers give you money to publish your work, they don't take it from you. The problem is, a lot of times authors are dreamers. They have stars in their eyes, maybe they've been struggling for a long time with getting an agent or they're just clueless about where to even start. But they want to be published so much. And that makes them easy prey. I know when I sign into my Gmail, I see sidebar ads for scam publishers all the time. And obviously, I don't click on them, but if I was a little naïve or a little a desperate or just a lot hopeful, I definitely might.

[00:03:19] So, that's what I'm talking about when I talk about schmagents. Authors, you really gotta do your due diligence when you're researching agents that you're querying because not everybody has your best interests at heart. And it's really sad and upsetting when I get emails from people saying, my dad lost his life savings or thousands—many thousands of dollars because he wanted to be published so much that he paid some scam artist. And there's—I mean, I can't fix that. I'm sorry. It's sad. But it's not something that can be easily remedied, and certainly not by me, random stranger.

[00:04:03] So, you know. That's kind of a downer. I'm sorry. You know, there's lots of great agents and one of them is going to join me today. Kate Testerman is the president of KT Literary, her vary own agency. She's based in Colorado and she represents books for kids and YA including authors that you may have heard of, like Maureen Johnson, Trish Dollar, she's amazing. And she's also a good friend and I'm so glad to welcome Kate today. Kate, let me see if I can get Kate on the line.

[00:04:43] We're having some technical issues today, sorry.

[00:04:49] Hi Kate, can you hear me?

Kate: [00:04:50] I can hear you perfectly well, now. Thank you.

Jennifer: [00:04:50] Amazing. Technology.

Kate: [00:04:55] Woo-hoo!

Jennifer: [00:04:56] Woo! So, are you ready to answer some questions from the Tumblr?

Kate: [00:05:02] I would love to answer the questions from the Tumblr people.

Jennifer: [00:05:04] Let's get right into it. So a lot of authors ask, and this is asked to me all the time. They imagine that all agents live and work in Manhattan, and of course, we know that increasingly good agents don't have to be New York City-based, as you aren't and I'm not.

Kate: [00:05:22] Yep.

Jennifer: [00:05:22] But you were a New York agent and then life brought you to Colorado. How did you decide to make the leap to start your own agency?

Kate: [00:05:29] It's so long ago. I mean, I say that like I'm super old. When I was looking to move out to Colorado, and that was the life choice. I was with a big agency and I had conversations within my agency about staying as a member of the agency. Like, setting up a sort of satellite office. And at the same time, I also talked with some of our friends about their experiences setting up their own agencies. And our good friend and food guru Barry Goldblatt said to me, my only regret in starting my own agency was that I didn't do it sooner.

[00:06:12] And I kind of took that to heart and I was like, you know what, this is the perfect opportunity. I'm going to be starting, in one fell swoop, over the course of two months, I left my job in New York, moved to Colorado, got married, became a step-mom, started my own business. Kind of just did everything all at once.

Jennifer: [00:06:34] Reinvention. Reinvention.

Kate: [00:06:36] Total reinvention, yeah. And it was great. I mean, I loved—I loved being in charge of myself. The vacation package is fantastic. You know, and I loved that the work I'm doing directly benefits me. That wasn't something that I had at my previous agency. And also, in the almost-ten years now since I moved out here. Technology when it works, but social media and the other ways that we have of keeping in touch with editors and with the bulk of New York publishing, or the bulk of publishing which is still based in New York, has expanded to such an enormous degree that I'm in better contact now with editors than I ever was when I had a Madison Avenue, or Park Avenue address.

Jennifer: [00:07:25] Oh, totally. Can—and your agency is now growing. I saw that you added a new agent, so can you...?

Kate: [00:07:30] We did! We did. So there are now, four-ish agents. Two senior agents, two full agents and an associate agent. You know, we all do young adult and middle grade and then Sara Megibow and Hannah Fergesen, who is actually based in New York. Sara's here in Colorado

with me, also do some adult speculative fiction. But there is now three of us in Colorado, one in New York, and one down in Phoenix.

Jennifer: [00:08:00] Whoa. That's all over the place.

Kate: [00:08:01] I know! We are all over the place, and I think for me, what I love is that it means okay, we've got an author speaking at New York Comic Con, Sara or I don't need to fly into New York. Our New York agent can go and represent us there or, you know, it's an easy trip out to California from here, versus flying cross-country.

Jennifer: [00:08:24] Gotcha. A new question, because I agree with all of that, actually. And I should say, my agency also has agents in LA, San Diego, San Francisco, Chicago, and New York.

Kate: [00:08:36] Yep. Yeah!

Jennifer: [00:08:37] So, we're all-over-town, too. And you know, technology is very useful.

Kate: [00:08:43] It is. We actually had, we had our agency conference call an hour ago and we do a video conference call for those of us who can do that. Hilary, our new associate agent chimes in via telephone because that's what she can do right now. It's great. It means that we can stay in touch in a way that wasn't available to us maybe ten years ago but makes things so much easier now.

Jennifer: [00:09:07] Sure. So, as far as working with an agent. This is an anonymous question.

Kate: [00:09:13] Uh-oh.

Jennifer: [00:09:15] Uh, yeah... The author says, I have an agent. She's a great agent. She seems to really love my books but we've tried with a couple different manuscripts and they haven't sold. I know my agent sells books but just not mine, apparently, yet. At what point do I give up and go to learn to be a carpenter or something?

Kate: [00:09:33] First of all, I think you would agree with me when I say the first thing you need to do is talk to your agent. If there is still a project, if there is still a manuscript that absolutely speaks to you, the story that you have to tell, I mean, you keep trying. I have a stable of authors, and I hate the way that makes them sound like ponies, although I do love ponies. My client list includes multi-published authors. Authors where we have been submitting around a third manuscript. Authors that I sold five years ago and haven't sold anything else, since. I'm not one who's going to

drop somebody because I haven't sold them unless that author comes to me and says, I want a whole new fresh start. I don't agree with how you're doing something, or I don't like how you're working. You know.

Jennifer: [00:10:25] Or sometimes you do just maybe need a new fresh pair of eyes or something.

Kate: [00:10:27] Or you do, just a fresh start. I mean, I had a client who I dearly love, loved his work and went through some life changes and said, you know what? I'm starting everything fresh. I'm doing a new agent. I'm doing a new publisher and all of that. And I can't argue with that. Sometimes you need a fresh start and you need a new perspective on things. But for your anonymous questioner, you know, if you want to keep going, if your agent is willing to keep going, you just keep trying. I mean, I've—I would love to say my guiding idea or business plan is persistence but it's optimism and then persistence.

Jennifer: [00:11:09] Right. I mean, and I have many clients, including some of my best-selling clients that have the most books, and I didn't sell their first book or even maybe their second book.

Kate: [00:11:20] Right.

Jennifer: [00:11:21] You know, it was the third book that hit, or whatever.

Kate: [00:11:24] Yeah. And I can't help but think, you know, you and I were just in Los Angeles at the SCBWI conference and I had a chance to sit in on Stephanie Garber's keynote speech. This bestselling author of *Caraval* who's talked about like, this is the fifth manuscript she wrote and went through several agent searches. It isn't always the first manuscript but everything that you write helps make the next book better.

Jennifer: [00:11:55] Absolutely. So a kind of a follow up to that. Do you feel like everything is slower this year than it used to be, or what?

Kate: [00:12:07] I do. I think a lot of publishing is still reacting and processing what happened in, say, early November.

Jennifer: [00:12:20] Of 2016?

Kate: [00:12:21] Of 2016. And our focus, possibly has changed. If somebody is going to pick up a phone I can't argue if that phone is going to be your senator instead of to an agent. I wish you could do both, definitely. That would be nice.

Jennifer: [00:12:37] Yeah.

Kate: [00:12:37] But I do think that there is a moment right now within the industry where it does feel like people are going, let me either hunker down and work with what I have or if I'm not finding exactly what I want that speaks to the narrative that I want to convey in my work, then I— they take a little bit more time. And that's not entirely new. I know that a lot of times it feels like submissions don't get read until you tell people that somebody has read it and there's an offer.

Jennifer: [00:13:15] Yeah, it's so annoying.

Kate: [00:13:16] Right? Just read it and you can be the one that comes in with an offer.

Jennifer: [00:13:19] And we'd love you the most, right?

Kate: [00:13:21] We would!

Jennifer: [00:13:24] Yeah. I totally agree with that. I mean, I do think that maybe it's starting to get back to normal but now we have summer vacation, so.

Kate: [00:13:32] Right. Right. I just went—I was just away a week or so ago and I reached out to pretty much every editor that is considering a manuscript and said, hey, I'm going on vacation. It would be so great if I had a bunch of responses when I got back. And they're dripping in. But some of them are good responses, like, I love this, I need a little bit more time. And some of them are very nice rejections, so we take what we can get.

Jennifer: [00:14:00] Yeah, I mean, you gotta nudge. Everything takes forever, but I do, to answer that question, I do think that this year has been particularly rough. That being said, I mean, it has to get back to normal because we have to have books to publish in the future.

Kate: [00:14:14] Absolutely. And actually, Jenny, you mentioned, this was a question that came up in our agency conference call today. Like, what's your timeframe for nudging? Do you have one? Or is it situational?

Jennifer: [00:14:28] It's kind of situational. I definitely nudge if there's interest from somebody else, of course. And I tend to nudge around six weeks, something like that. Or, depending, maybe a picture book, I might nudge at three or four weeks because it's so short.

Kate: [00:14:42] Right. Right.

Jennifer: [00:14:42] Novels, maybe like six to eight weeks.

Kate: [00:14:45] Okay.

Jennifer: [00:14:45] But it also depends on if there is a holiday in there or something like that that might change it.

Kate: [00:14:50] Yeah, we were talking, you know, I mean, it's summer. If at this point if you haven't heard, I don't nudge people again until Labor Day, practically.

Jennifer: [00:15:00] Yeah. I mean, then you have the problem of, is everyone going to send right after Labor Day?

Kate: [00:15:04] Right. But I do think a lot of people. I mean, this was always—this was sort of my plan as a reader as well. I mean, I closed queries for most of the summer except for conferences. And I am getting so much more reading done so that I do feel for the couple more submissions that I'm looking at, but that maybe this applies for editors as well. I'm taking this summer to get caught up on the reading and to be able to respond to people and hopefully their editor's doing the same thing.

Jennifer: [00:15:36] I think it's hilarious how we all work on like a school schedule. Well, it all starts back up again in September. Why?

Kate: [00:15:44] Well, you know, it's funny. Out here in Colorado, my kids go back to school next week.

Jennifer: [00:15:48] Oh, God.

Kate: [00:15:49] I know. It's a little crazy but what I like about that is they go back to school and I still have three weeks of summer.

Jennifer: [00:15:57] Fair enough. So this is a different tack. A questioner asks, how does the literary agent world, or publishing in general, maybe, view fanfiction. Does it hurt an author's image or make an author seem immature in any way, or does it help? I cringe as I suggest *50 Shades*, ie, maybe they have an established fan base. Not that I would ever mention it in a query, but not sure if an agent would do some online sleuthing before offering representation.

Kate: [00:16:26] You know... for the most part, it's sort of a two part answer. For the most part, I think that fanfiction can be a useful way to sort of learn the craft because you can concentrate on plot and setting without maybe needing as much work prior to putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard in terms of character. Because you have those characters.

Jennifer: [00:16:52] Right. And the world is already built.

Kate: [00:16:54] The world is already built unless you're doing sort of an alternative universe situation. You know, I think there's a difference perhaps, or there's a different perspective on authors working on fanfiction for novels. Because you're kind of within that same world versus authors working on fanfiction of characters from TV, movies, comics, maybe. There is an author I follow on Tumblr who is an amazing fanfiction writer and I have reached out and spoken to her many times, and like, do you have original work that you can send me because I would love to work with you on this. I mean, the characters that her version of these characters has almost replaced the traditional, the canon characters in my head. Because I'm like, oh well, yeah, of course that's what this guy is. I mean, that's what it is. So I think there...

Jennifer: [00:17:58] Yeah, I mean, that's fair. Look, my version of Harry Potter is a hundred times better than Jo's. So.

Kate: [00:18:05] For the most part, if you're querying me, if you have tens of thousands of followers on your fanfiction, tell me about it. If you've got twenty, I don't really care.

Jennifer: [00:18:16] Yeah, I mean, I think is, is it going to show up in a bad way. Like, are you plagiarizing? Is there some kind of issue, or you have...

Kate: [00:18:25] I mean, and that's... I mean, yes. Obviously, that's a huge issue, but that's not every fanfic writer. I mean, thank God.

Jennifer: [00:18:31] No no no, not at all. And that's not—I just mean, if there's some kind of situation that will show up in a bad way, maybe get rid of that first. Or something.

Kate: [00:18:41] Yeah. Sure. But, you know, I will admit, I don't do too much digging on an author until after I've read and loved a full manuscript. You know, if somebody queries me, I don't do a Google search.

Jennifer: [00:18:55] Oh, absolutely not.

Kate: [00:18:56] Even if it's at a partial, I don't really check until I've actually read the full manuscript and said, you know, I'm interested, let me set up a call, let me do some Googling.

Jennifer: [00:19:06] I definitely Google when I'm offering representation.

Kate: [00:19:10] Yeah, definitely.

Jennifer: [00:19:10] I mean, look. I don't want to find out that you're a secret Nazi.

Kate: [00:19:14] No. I don't want even a—and especially a not-secret Nazi. No Nazis.

Jennifer: [00:19:19] Fair enough. I guess a not-secret one would be...

Kate: [00:19:23] Would be just as bad.

Jennifer: [00:19:24] Just as bad. Anyway. Okay, that's a good answer. So, first, before I ask the next question, I have a quick definition, and then you'll know what the question is.

Kate: [00:19:36] All right.

Jennifer: [00:19:37] So, quick definition. A comp title means comparison titles. That is books that we compare your book to in queries and when it comes to marketing.

Kate: [00:19:48] Correct.

Jennifer: [00:19:48] So a reader asks, do you have any advice about comp titles. I'm finding my manuscript inevitably has things in common with all kinds of other books in the genre so what does an agent want a comp title to tell them? Style, story, audience, or all of the above?

Kate: [00:20:03] I don't think it needs to be all of the above. I think two or three aspects, but in terms of comp titles, I'm not looking for the next Harry Potter, the next Rainbow Rowell, like... I want known titles, but if the only thing you're reaching for are the bestselling books in your age range, or genre, that's not helpful. Like, I want to be able to see something that's within the last, what do we say, three or five years. A recent title, certainly. If you're reaching back to the books that you read as a child and that inspired you to write this story, that's not super helpful, I think.

Jennifer: [00:20:46] Well, I don't know. I mean, I can send one of those.

Kate: [00:20:50] Sure.

Jennifer: [00:20:51] Here's—for me, it's sort of like a, you know it when you see it type of deal. Like, last week, on the podcast that is going to air next week—confusing! I spoke to Mackenzi Lee about Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue.

Kate: [00:21:05] I'm so excited. I love her. I absolutely love her by the way.

Jennifer: [00:21:08] My comp that I invented, myself.

Kate: [00:21:11] Okay.

Jennifer: [00:21:11] I'm not her agent by the way, or anything, I just...

Kate: [00:21:13] No, but as a bookseller you have a fascinating perspective.

Jennifer: [00:21:16] Yeah. So my comp is, it's a YA Brideshead Revisited meets The Hangover.

Kate: [00:21:22] Okay. Yeah, and there, where you're taking a past title plus the current, or plus a more recent one, I do think that that works.

Jennifer: [00:21:31] So it isn't really like either of those, though, but it does have wealthy libertines and gay love, like Brideshead does. And it's a wild hilarious romp including too much drinking and random nudity like The Hangover.

Kate: [00:21:43] It's kind of—that's a kind of perfect comparison.

Jennifer: [00:21:46] And when I say those two titles in juxtaposition with each other, it usually provokes a laugh and people get what I mean. I was once entranced by a comp an editor gave me for a title. It was something like, Wuthering Heights meets The Terminator. And I was like, what? I'm listening.

Kate: [00:22:04] How? What?

Jennifer: [00:22:07] Okay... tell me more. And so that's the sort of thing where, you know, I want it to make me think. And it can be—so it can be the audience, like, for kids who loved Wonder and Fish in a Tree.

Kate: [00:22:19] Sure.

Jennifer: [00:22:19] Or it can be kind of tonal or about actual content. But it probably doesn't want to make it sound like you just literally copied the premise of another book.

Kate: [00:22:28] No, absolutely not.

Jennifer: [00:22:31] I don't want to get too deep in the weeds as far as query letters go, but I must as, because we were talking about comp titles. If you had one tip for authors regarding querying, what would it be?

Kate: [00:22:42] Imagine the query letter like the back of the book. It's the flap copy. It's what you would pick up if you're looking at the book in the bookstore. I guess, sub advice to that is share it with somebody who hasn't read the book before you start sending it out. I think so many

authors that we know now are using critique groups and writing groups which is fantastic, but they spend so much time working on the manuscript that I don't know that they always think to share the query letter within that group. And I think that's a usually helpful time to make use of the critique group, but also show it to somebody who maybe reads in your genre but hasn't read your manuscript yet and say, does this sound like something you'd be interested in?

Jennifer: [00:23:36] Right. Does this make sense?

Kate: [00:23:37] Does this make sense? Yeah. Please.

Jennifer: [00:23:40] For me, my one tip is specificity. I feel like specificity is really your friend. When you say something like, I don't know, nebulous, like, the world as she knew it changed forever.

Kate: [00:23:53] Oh God, yeah.

Jennifer: [00:23:52] That's totally vague, it's unmemorable. It tells me nothing. But when you make it specific, it acts like little hooks in your mind. So, the placid suburb of her childhood now contained maneating mermaids swimming in a lake of blood. Well, okay, that's something interesting.

Kate: [00:24:08] That is much more specific. I do like that. I think sometimes authors are so careful, or concerned about not giving things away when the query letter has to entice us to read on and if you're totally vague, it's not interesting. It just becomes this sort of... once... in a dark world... well, that sounds like every other movie, thank you very much.

Jennifer: [00:24:35] Exactly. So, finally, how does an author define success for a book. So other than getting on the New York Times Bestseller list. What happens that makes you think that a book is a successful book? Is it a certain number of copies sold? A second printing? An author earning out? Or do you look at it as a case-by-case basis?

Kate: [00:24:55] I mean, the easy answer is yes, of course it's a case-by-case basis, but the first thing that springs to mind is it's the second book deal. It's the publisher who says, this met our expectations, or we believe that this will continue to meet our expectations. Or it did better than we wanted it to do and we want to continue to be in business with you. So here's your offer for your proposal, for your option book. That to me is success. I mean, earning out, huge royalty checks every six months, those are very nice, too.

Jennifer: [00:25:27] No doubt.

Kate: [00:25:29] But that next deal is a great symbol and sign of success.

Jennifer: [00:25:35] Right. That isn't to say that, I mean if somebody's book doesn't perform to expectations that they'll never work in this town again or something like that.

Kate: [00:25:44] No, absolutely not. I mean, but... I love when we get to a situation and I'm in this now. We just announced a new deal for my client Susan Adrian for her next middle grade novel.

Jennifer: [00:25:56] Congratulations.

Kate: [00:25:57] Thank you very much. We're very excited. Forever Neverland is coming out in December of 2019. Her first middle grade novel, Nutcrackedoesn't come out until next month. So the publisher likes what she's doing, loves this book, wants to continue to be in business with her.

Jennifer: [00:26:15] Right.

Kate: [00:26:15] And I think that's a nice sign of success.

Jennifer: [00:26:19] Yeah, and it's certainly gratifying for them to show that support with an actual offer.

Kate: [00:26:22] Yeah. It was very nice. And it's people that, you know, people—nice people that I like being in business with.

Jennifer: [00:26:31] That helps.

Kate: [00:26:32] It does.

Jennifer: [00:26:33] So, speaking of self-promotion.

Kate: [00:26:37] Yeah!

Jennifer: [00:26:37] It's self-promotion corner time. So do you have a book that maybe is coming out in August or maybe just came out?

Kate: [00:26:45] Well, I mean. One of the books that just came out that I think is super fun, my family was absolutely obsessed with Pokémon GO when it came out last year.

Jennifer: [00:26:54] Yes.

Kate: [00:26:56] And still are, to some extent. We were on vacation on an island on the east coast and my kids just loved finding Pokémon that

they'd never seen before. Kim Harrington is a client who was equally obsessed and said to me, the week or so after the game came out, hey I think I've got an idea for a book about this. And we ended up selling three books in a series called Gamer Squad to Sterling Children's Publishing. The first two came out yesterday at [crosstalk 00:27:25].

Jennifer: [00:27:25] Are they about Pokémon?

Kate: [00:27:28] They are a thinly veiled version of Pokémon GO.

Jennifer: [00:27:32] Okay.

Kate: [00:27:34] The first book is called Attack of the Not-So Virtual Monsters and it's about these kids playing a monster collecting app on their phones and something goes wrong and the monsters get loose in the real world.

Jennifer: [00:27:46] That's amazing.

Kate: [00:27:46] And so they have to use their phones to catch them again. I just made a great hand gesture that you can't see, but it's really effective.

Jennifer: [00:27:55] I get the idea.

Kate: [00:27:57] Yeah. And the second book is out as well, already, and then the third book comes out in a month or so.

Jennifer: [00:28:01] Fun!

Kate: [00:28:02] Yeah, so that's super exciting, and as I mentioned, Susan Adrian's Nutcracked for all of your ballet-interested or fantasy-obsessed readers who ever wanted to escape into the world of a book or a movie or a show. Nutcracked is wonderful. It takes as its basis the story of The Nutcracker. The main character is cast as Clara in her ballet company's Christmast production. And when she picks up the teacher's ancient nutcracker she actually escapes to the world where the nutcracker is seeking her help to get away from the Rat King.

Jennifer: [00:28:43] That's scary.

Kate: [00:28:43] It is scary, but it's like, it's this magical. I mean, if you ever saw The Nutcracker as a kid and like gasped in wonder at the Christmas tree growing to enormous size, this is the book. I mean, I'm getting chills just talking about it.

Jennifer: [00:28:58] I feel like I need to save that one for winter.

Kate: [00:29:02] It, you know what, it's a—it'll be a good winter book, but you know, in the way of publishing. A book that's meant to be a Christmas book is coming out in the fall, which is next month.

Jennifer: [00:29:14] Yeah, totally. So I've got one which comes out August 22nd. It is Stephanie Oakes' *The Arsonist*.

Kate: [00:29:23] Ooh. That's yours? How did I not know that?

Jennifer: [00:29:26] Yes. I don't know!

Kate: [00:29:26] I have... I'm going to have to run right down to my Tattered Cover local bookstore and pick up a copy on August 22nd.

Jennifer: [00:29:34] On August 22nd, yeah. So it's a sophomore book from Stephanie. Her debut was *The Sacred Lies of Minnow Bly*, which was nominated for the Morris Award. *The Arsonist* follows three storylines. It's a girl whose dad is a criminal, a boy who is a Kuwaiti refugee, and the two bond when they find a book about a resistance fighter from 1980s Berlin whose death is a mystery, and they decide to solve it.

Kate: [00:29:55] That sounds amazing.

Jennifer: [00:29:56] It's really ambitious. There's three points of view interweaving, it's really... oh, the cover is absolutely gorgeous. So that is soon and I am into it, which leads me into what are we obsessed with this week?

Kate: [00:30:12] Ooh.

Jennifer: [00:30:13] So, I will go first this time. Mine is actually bookish. So it doesn't have to be bookish. But mine is, this time, it's a book called *There's a Mystery There: The Primal Vision of Maurice Sendak*.

Kate: [00:30:26] Ooh. I saw you posted that on Twitter, I think.

Jennifer: [00:30:30] I did.

Kate: [00:30:32] That looks amazing.

Jennifer: [00:30:32] It's by Jonathan Cott who writes *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, etc. It's part biography and part an exploration of the themes of Sendak's books. And part, kind of art history. It is very lovingly published by Doubleday and they did the art justice. It's on this heavy, luscious paper and lavishly illustrated both with art and personal

photographs of Maurice Sendak. I haven't gotten too deep into the text so I'm not sure what will be revealed that I didn't already know. But as an object, it's amazing.

Kate: [00:31:04] That sounds so. I mean, I can understand the obsession factor because, I mean, Maurice Sendak was amazing.

Jennifer: [00:31:12] I know... so what is your obsession?

Kate: [00:31:14] So, my obsession right now is Leigh Bardugo because I just finished reading, and I'm a little late and I apologize. I just finished reading *Six of Crows* on vacation and I brought it with me because it's actually on my stepdaughter Kaylee's summer reading list for seventh grade, going into seventh grade and I was like, well, this is great. I'll bring this book and then I can read it and then you can read it, and then we could talk about it. And it was, you know, one book that we could both read. It was less packing. But it ended and I'm like, I need the next book now! So, my current obsession is *Crooked Kingdom*.

Jennifer: [00:31:56] Did Kaylee read it?

Kate: [00:31:58] She actually—she came back. She didn't read it on that vacation, but she's leaving... she's probably at the airport now for a visit to grandma and grandpa camp this week. And so she brought it with her for this vacation. She'll be a little—it's a little more alone time.

Jennifer: [00:32:14] Yeah, fair enough.

Kate: [00:32:13] Yeah, so that's my current obsession.

Jennifer: [00:32:16] And that is a good one.

Kate: [00:32:16] I'm also getting caught up on season 10 of *Doctor Who*, which, I don't know that it's obsession, but it's definitely at the forefront of my brain right now?

Jennifer: [00:32:27] Who's the Doctor in that season?

Kate: [00:32:29] So, it's still Peter Capaldi and this is, I think, his last full season. The companion is Bill who I'm really enjoying. But as a storytelling, you know, in terms of story, it's interesting to watch and kind of take off the fandom glasses and go, well, this feels like a little bit of a reread of some of the stories that we've seen before.

Jennifer: [00:32:56] Yeah.

Kate: [00:32:56] And that is kind of interesting to me as a consumer of media, of stories, to go, I can love and be interested in something and still find reasons to critique it.

Jennifer: [00:33:12] Mm-hmm.

Kate: [00:33:12] That's what I've got going on right now.

Jennifer: [00:33:13] Cool. Well, thank you so much for joining me.

Kate: [00:33:16] Thank you for inviting me, Jenn. I love chatting with you all the time.

Jennifer: [00:33:20] Yay. Excellent. Well, we'll do it again, I'm sure.

Kate: [00:33:21] Sounds good.

Jennifer: [00:33:22] Talk soon, buh-bye.

Kate: [00:33:24] All right, bye.

Jennifer: [00:33:26] So, that's our show. Thanks for listening. As always, I can be found on Twitter @literaticat. Kate Testerman can be found on Twitter @DaphneUn, which is her alter-ego, Daphne Unfeasible. And there's a Patreon. If you'd like to throw a dollar in to support this podcast, you can do so at Patreon.com/literaticast. Thanks so much for listening, and we'll see you next time.