Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 52: Character Championship

(Brief intro music)

Mary: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Mary.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Mary: Today, we're fighting! Well not really…the library will be hosting the Character Championship from March seventh through the eighteenth. You can fill out a bracket with your favorite characters and turn it in within that time frame. Winners will be announced on April ninth! In honor of this event, we are making our own matchups; the best against the best in an effort to find out who will win against who. Will the winners be villains? Heroes? Or just regular people like you and me? Just a heads up, there will probably be a few spoilers. But let's get into it!

Rachel: The characters I choose to pit against one another will get progressively more badass, so prepare yourselves! First up are a couple of gentlemen brought to life by Jane Austen, both—ironically—from posthumously published works. It's Captain Frederick Wentworth from "Persuasion" versus Henry Tilney from "Northanger Abbey." The best way to judge them, I think, is with swoon-worthiness. Now, pros and cons for Captain Wentworth. He and female protagonist, Anne Elliot, start out already in love! They're engaged and everything. The major con is that their engagement gets broken off because Anne is persuaded by her family and friends not to marry an undistinguished naval officer with little to no standing or wealth. Boo.

Mary: Boo.

Rachel: Seven years later, though, Wentworth is rolling in the dough because of his outstanding service during the Napoleonic Wars. When Anne and her family rent out their estate because of severe financial issues, it's Wentworth's sister and her husband who take up residence there. Thus, their lives become ever-more entwined. That's destiny, darling. Wentworth is, at this

point, ready for marriage. Plus, he's a hot commodity. Anne, of course, is still in love with him, but every encounter they have is awkward as heck given their history. She goes through emotional turmoil if they so much as glance at one another. You might think this is a con, but it's actually a pro where romance is concerned. Drama, baby! Insert Anne's cousin, William Elliot. I'm going to preface with the fact that Austen was alive during the early 1800s, a time when marriage between cousins was a common occurrence amongst gentry to keep wealth in the family. Gross, yes, but it happened. Anyway, Anne's family is all over this, saying that she could get with William because A) he's a widower, B) he's rich, and C) he's the official heir to their ancestral home, the one they are currently forced to rent out because of their lavish spending. Anne is torn. This is great for moving the story along, though, because Wentworth goes all shades of green when he witnesses William's affections for Anne first-hand. Ohohoho. This ends up bringing our two lovebirds closer together. Anne quickly learns that William has some hidden nastiness. Mix this with Wentworth overhearing a conversation she has about holding onto "feelings of love even when all hope is lost," and bada-bing bada-boom, we've got a handwritten love confession. That's my boy! "Anne and Wentworth reconcile, affirm their love for each other, and renew their engagement." Her family admits they were wrong about him all those years ago and endorse their rekindled relationship. Happily ever after. The historical romance here is strong, but can it beat whatever is going on over at Northanger Abbey? Our heroine this time around is Catherine Morland, a tomboyish young lady who is rather fond of Gothic novels and tends to let her imagination run away with her. She attends the winter season in Bath with her wealthy neighbors and is introduced to…Henry Tilney! He's quirky, handsome, and emotionally intelligent. They dance together at a ball. You already know it's fate. I love it. You love it. We all love it. Insert Catherine's new friend Isabella Thorpe and her brother John—another interested fellow who is already bro-cho-chos with Catherine's older brother. We've got a love triangle, people! Things get complicated when the Thorpe's try to poison Catherine's relationship with Henry, because they see him as a rival for Catherine's affections. Catherine isn't really interested in John like that, though. She just wants to maintain her friendships with both the Thorpes and the Tilneys. This manifests awkwardness aplenty. Regardless, she is invited to stay with the Tilney's at their home, Northanger Abbey. Things get

a little dicey when Catherine lets her imagination get the better of her once again, assuming the place is dark and quite possibly haunted, investigating places she really shouldn't. Henry catches her in the act, and she fears their relationship is now strained because of her foolishness. This is made worse when Henry's father unexpectedly ousts her from their home. Rude! Not long after, Henry visits her to apologize for his father's actions. Turns out, the dastardly John Thorpe was having Henry's father believe she was a rich heiress and therefore a suitable match for his son. When he found out this wasn't true—and when a spiteful John lies again and instead tells him she's utterly destitute—he flipped his lid. Henry is not having it, though. He breaks ties with his father and instead reveals to Catherine how much he wishes them to be wed. What a stud. Eventually, Henry's father approves of their engagement once his daughter is married off to a wealthy man and he learns that while Catherine's family may not be rich, they are far from poor. Happily every after. Again! Okay, so, digest all that. Captain Wentworth has a lot going for him, including an established relationship, wealth, and rank—these mattered a lot back in the day. Henry is a charmer, though, and overall a lot less intimidating. If you're into Masterpiece Theater classics, versions of both novels were brought to the small screen in 2007. Rupert Penry-Jones plays Wentworth astoundingly well alongside Sally Hawkins as Anne, and their kiss at the end of the movie is the most edge-of-your-seat, shouting at the screen sort of sublime. JJ Field plays Henry, and his chemistry with Felicity Jones as Catherine is super cute. But both of our leading men get the girl, in the end, so everyone is a winner no matter who you root for.

Mary: My first matchup is Rhysand from "A Court of Thorns and Roses" series versus Xaden Riorson from the "Empyrean" series. Warning: This may contain tiny spoilers if you haven't read these books. I'd also like to mention that we've seen Rhys grow throughout four books and a novella whereas Xaden has only been with us for two books. But let's get into it. While they both have powers of darkness and shadows, are able to talk mind-to-mind, and both have the mind of a leader, Rhys is undoubtedly more powerful than Xaden since he is a High Lord. The most powerful high lord in Prythian, might I add. But Xaden has that shrewd battle spirit. Xaden finds a way to do everything himself—honestly, to exclude Violet whenever he can. Rhys does occasionally make decisions independently of Feyre but, in the end they're a team. He always

does what's best for his people, but he keeps his friends and the lasting relationships at the forefront. Xaden doesn't really care if he hurts feelings. He similarly makes executive decisions for his people but doesn't ask for advice or for input. Violet is often left confused and hurt by being excluded from strategy meetings. The vibes are just extremely different between these two powerful characters. While one is a compassionate, thoughtful leader, the other is simply confident, often arrogant. I think the age difference plays a huge role in this matchup, as well. Rhys is over five hundred years old, and Xaden is a mere twenty-something. The centuries of relationships, wars, and family trauma, and all the good things in his life have really seasoned him to be the best version of himself. On the other hand, Xaden has spent most of his short life being the 'other' in many ways and finds it difficult to include someone else as a true partner. He's used to doing it on his own and having the responsibility of keeping everyone safe whether they like it or not. I think it's clear that Rhysand is the winner in this match up. When you include your partner, your friends—heck, even your enemies—in your plans, you are far more likely to succeed. You're spreading the responsibility out, delegating the burden instead of carrying it all on your own back. It gives you more mental space to be a good friend, partner, and ruler. There you have it. Rhysand.

Rachel: My first bracket paired guy against guy, so this time it's gal against gal with Lisbeth Salander from the "Millennium" series by Stieg Larsson versus Daisy Darker from the book of the same name by Alice Feeney. They are wildly different characters but strong in their own ways. I'll start with Lisbeth. She's a badass with tattoos, piercings, an eidetic memory, and world-class hacking skills. She also goes through it. Lisbeth's upbringing is traumatic, making her asocial in the extreme. But she wields her strength with determination, solving crimes and punishing those who have caused grievous harm to herself and others. Spoilers: At one point in the series, she is framed for murder, shot in the head, and buried alive. She digs her way out of her own grave and manages to take down the dude who did it to her. Frightening. End of spoilers. Daisy Darker also has a messed-up childhood, including a dysfunctional family full of secrets. She suffers from a rare heart condition and has temporarily died eight times from complications and, even though she is now twenty-nine, has a short life expectancy. While her tactics are much subtler, Daisy sees her revenge enacted on each and every person who had

ever wronged her. Both of these characters' stories fall into the mystery genre and feature adult themes. Video tapes play an important role in their lives, as does the written word—journalism in Lisbeth's case, novels and memoirs in Daisy's. I won't spoil either plot too badly, and will only say that if you pick up their books, you're in for a ride. Personally, I think Lisbeth takes the cake because of what she has survived, but Daisy has some secrets hidden up her own sleeve to make for a worthy contender.

Mary: My second match up is Addie La Rue from "The Invisible Life of Addie La Rue" by V.E. Schwab versus Adeline Reilly from "Haunting Adeline" by H.D. Carlton. It's the battle of the Adelines! At first glance, they don't have much in common—they are born in different time periods, they have wildly different life experiences—but they do have some similarities. They both find themselves running from a dark entity and falling in love. In Addie La Rue's case, this 'dark entity' is actually an old god that she prays to after dark. It hears her pleas and it maliciously grants her wish in a way she did not intend: No one can remember her. Her writings, her art, her words are lost as soon as she creates them. And then she then carries the burden of this 'gift' the rest of her unnaturally long life. Adeline Reilly, on the other hand, is an author who unwittingly attracts her 'dark entity' in the form of a stalker with a serious amount of resources. This is money, technology, and connections. In this way, he chases her in every aspect of her life much in the way the ancient god does for Addie La Rue. Both call themselves 'gods'. I'm going to judge this matchup by the ability to never give up no matter how hopeless the situation is. This is a particularly difficult call since they both have so much trauma in their lives that they have to go through pretty much alone. I will say, there is an element of revenge in "Hunting Adeline" that really shows her in her villain era, which I don't think is a bad thing for her. But we just don't get that at this level in "The Invisible Life of Addie La Rue." This is such a difficult choice, but I'm going to go with Addie La Rue. She made it over two centuries without a real friend, with no end in sight, and the constant fear of a powerful deity. After all that time, she still showed strength and perseverance. Both of these characters are close to my heart and it kills me to pick one, but it's Addie La Rue.

Rachel: I've featured works of romance and mystery, so it's about time for some fantasy! My last bracket is Geralt of Rivia from "The Witcher" series by (soundbite pronunciation of Andrzej

Sapkowski) versus Roland Deschain from “The Dark Tower” series by Stephen King. The former is high fantasy while the latter is a mix of dark fantasy with elements of horror, western, adventure, and science fiction. Ya’ just can’t pin King down, listeners. Anyway, let’s begin with Geralt. He’s a Witcher, which is a magical being made solely to take down the monsters of his realm—everything from manticores to vampires. Witchers start out as humans before undergoing training and chemical trials to become killers who are highly resistant “to injury, poison…diseases,” and aging. Geralt is unique in that he was also exposed to “experimental mutagens,” a side effect of which drained his body of pigmentation. He is therefore called “The White Wolf” because he has stark white hair and hails from the Witcher School of the Wolf. This guy is old, grumpy, and grunts a lot. All around a great character. He inherits and comes to mentor a child—long story, don’t ask. Her name is Ciri, and their fates become forever entwined with one another’s as well as with that of a sorceress known as Yennifer of Vengerberg and a bard best friend called Dandelion. Fate plays a huge part in “The Dark Tower,” as well. Main character Roland is a bit of a prodigy himself, becoming a gunslinger at only fourteen years old. He, too, goes through a test: the “tiral of manhood” in which he must defeat his opponent with a weapon of his choice. Roland chooses a hawk, and while he wins the battle it is only because the hawk is sacrificed during the process. Roland does this sort of thing a lot, gaining enough infamy to the point of being known as The Gunslinger. He sets on a quest to the Dark Tower because it is his ‘destiny’ to do so. In this universe, that’s also known as ‘ka’, and a ‘ka-tet’ is formed when a group of people are bonded to one another through destiny. The Dark Tower is kind of the center of all parallel worlds, and through it Roland pairs up with three New Yorkers from our world: Eddie Dean—a heroin addict from 1987—Susannah Dean—a possessed woman from 1964—and Jake Chambers—a young boy from 1977. Together they try to foil a villain known as The Man in Black and reach the Dark Tower to…well, I won’t spoil it. But there are clearly a lot of parallels between Roland and Geralt. Not only in story, but in level of grumpiness and lack of coherent speech. My brain is telling me that Geralt would kick some serious Gunslinger butt with his Witcher powers, brute strength, and cunning swordplay, although Roland would certainly give him a run for his money since one should never bring a knife to a gun fight. Roland is also single-minded in his pursuit, even if that means giving up

those he cares about. Geralt is the exact opposite of that, caring for Ciri like a father. 'Ka' would like to teach Roland a thing or two about willingly sacrificing others…but that's a tale for another time than this.

Mary: My final matchup is going to be Allie Hamilton from "The Notebook" by Nicholas Sparks and Louisa Clark from "Me Before You" by Jojo Moyes. I've re-watched the movies for you all to both cement my opinions and to ugly cry.

Rachel: Aw.

Mary: Allie Hamilton is very much controlled by her parents in the beginning of her story. It isn't until after the war, after she meets Lawn Hammond that she takes the initiative to "do what she wants." She sees her life has been set out for her and she finally gets the courage to do what's in her heart: to see if she's meant to be with an old flame that never really went out…Noah. But when she finally sees him again, she's back in the same position, unable to make a decision that no one else can make for her. Who will she spend the rest of her life with? Louisa, on the other hand, has always been true to herself. She dresses the way she likes, she knows what she's interested in, she knows what she wants out of life. But she's in almost the same boat as Allie: Does she have the courage to do it? Her current boyfriend isn't the love of her life and I would argue that she knows it since the beginning of the story. As we know, being in a relationship is not the measure of how successful you've been in your life. So, for this matchup, I'm going with how true the character is to themselves. Allie finds the courage to make a huge decision for her life but only after the panic and the weight of making the wrong decision looms on her. Louisa never changed herself to fit in with what she thought others were looking for. She was independent even while making hard decisions and while faced with hard situations. For those reasons, Louisa is the winner.

Rachel: That's all for today, everyone. Thank you for listening to this episode! We will be back next time with even more reading recommendations. Check the show notes for a list of everything we discussed, and don't forget to subscribe, rate, and share the podcast to give us a signal boost. If you would like to reach us, you can do so through the Oak Creek Public Library website or Facebook page by sending messages to @OakCreekLibrary. We are so looking

forward to seeing everyone else's brackets for the Character Challenge! Until next time, happy reading.

Mary and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)