Not Your Mother’s Library Transcript

Episode 69: Graphic Novels Galore

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers’ advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Rachel, and today we welcome back our most recent guest, Audrey. Why? Because she is really fun to talk to, and it turns out that both of us love graphic novels! There needs to be at least one comic-centric episode of this podcast every year, because I say so. Anyway, in case you have not listened to the previous episode where we first introduced our special guest, let me do it again. Or, you could listen to that one. It's good. (clears throat) Audrey is a librarian in our children's section. She is a Slytherin, but we are not holding that against her. And she has some impressive artistic skills that you may have seen on display in the Story Time Room. Is there anything you want to add about yourself?

Audrey: I need to ask: What House are you in?

Rachel: (chuckles) Last time I did the test online I was a Ravenclaw, so…

Audrey: I think I may have asked you that before.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And I couldn't remember.

Rachel: It's been so long, but yeah. (laughs lightly)

Audrey: (sighs) Well, I guess that's okay.

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: Slytherins and Ravenclaws are kind of often grouped together, you know?

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Like, there’s the Gryffindors and—

Rachel and Audrey: (in unison) —the Hufflepuffs.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And then there's the Ravenclaws and the Slytherins.

Rachel: The light side and the dark side. (laughs)

Audrey: Yeah!

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh sensibly)

Audre: But I'll let it go.

Rachel: (chuckles) We can be allies, it's fine.

Audrey: Yes, we can be allies. Anyways, thank you for the nod to my artistic abilities. I haven't been able to update…update the board in the Story Time Room, uh, with a new artwork… Although, no, I did!

Rachel: I was gonna say, I…I…

Audrey: I did this last…yeah.

Rachel: I was down there the other day and I saw somethin' on there.

Audrey: Yes, this last week I did it. I did, like, a quick, like, um, chibi character.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Like, the Japanese chibi characters because I'm doing that for one of the art clubs for the kids.

Rachel: Oh, cool.

Audrey: So, I just drew one on there real quick. I might update it later.

Rachel: She says, "real quick…" It looks incredible, so.

Audrey: (laughs in delight)

Rachel: Check it out if you get the chance.

Audrey: Oh, well, thank you. Um, but I digress. I am so excited to talk with you about graphic novels.

Rachel: Yay-es!

Audrey: A lot of adults tend to shy away from books of this format, and I think some of it has to do with the notion of being, quote, ‘too old’.

Rachel: Mmm.

Audrey: Um, some people are embarrassed because they don't want to be seen reading (stresses words) comic books.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Because that's something that kids do, right?

Rachel: Right. Yeah.

Audrey: Wrong!

Rachel: Oooh… (giggles)

Audrey: Wrong. Wrong! (thumps table once) Graphic novels, according to the Buffalo Erie County Public Library, “Are a format, not a genre.”

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: “And they are similar to comics in that they use sequential art to tell a story.” So, really, they can be any genre from nonfiction all the way to high fantasy. And, by the way, nothing wrong with reading comics, either!

Rachel: Mm!

Audrey: If that's what you enjoy, you should read it. Um, and I think as librarians, like, sometimes I feel like people think that we're judging people by what they check out.

Rachel: Right! Oh, absolutely. (chortles)

Audrey: And how…they're like, “Oh, you don't read…?” It’s…we don't do that at all, FYI.

Rachel: No! If you're checking out anything—if you're showing an interest in anything we have in our collection, we are happy. It doesn't matter what it is.

Audrey: Doesn't matter what it is, we're definitely not judging, and it doesn't matter the format that you consume it. So, if you're really into audiobooks, too, we are super glad that you are consuming any sort of literature in any format.

Rachel: Yep. Absolutely.

Audrey: So, anyways, Rachel, tell me, what do you recommend?

Rachel: Okay, I’m going to kick off the episode with the three-volume series “Clementine” by Tillie Walden. Okay. This is a spinoff of a spinoff of a spinoff. We all know about “The Walking Dead,” right? It’s a popular zombie apocalypse TV show based upon the grisly comics by Robert Kirkman. Lesser known is an episodic video game of the same name by developer Telltale Games. This was a choose-your-own-adventure story where the player’s decisions affected the ending. In it, you first step into the role of Lee Everett who rescues a young girl named Clementine. They join with other survivors to protect themselves from the undead. “Lee promises to reunite Clementine with her parents while teaching her rules of survival in this new world.” That’s the basic premise. The entire game is heart wrenching, just like the original show. Now, the graphic novel series I want to talk about follows Clementine’s journey as she grows up in this horrific world where the walking dead aren’t the only enemy she has to fight off. There are scavengers, cannibals, cults, gangs—all of the bad stuff—and Clem has to make her way through them all while meeting allies of the same age along the way. This series is by no means appropriate for children despite the fact that it is, effectively, a coming-of-age story. I always get this tight ball of panic in my chest whenever kids—fictional or otherwise—are plunged headfirst into harsh reality, having to act like adults because, if they don’t, they will literally die. There is something so inherently wrong about it that makes me want to rip up a piece of paper! (chuckles nervously) Just don’t get attached to any one character, or trust them. It is definitely worth the read, though. Walden’s powerful storytelling and character insight paired with their trademark art style make for an absolutely incredible time. The final volume

just dropped in July, and we do have all three titles at Oak Creek Public Library, so check 'em out. The perfect pairing does exist, too! My readalike selection is "Little Monsters" by the writer-artist team Jeff Lemire and Dustin Nguyen. I've spoken about these guys in a previous episode when covering graphic novel series "Descender," and I think so many years of working with one another has really honed their creative talent into something significant. "Little Monsters" is about "The last children on Earth…who also happen to be vampires. For longer than they can remember, [they] have lived a life of eternal wonder amongst the ruins of humanity. But shocking events fracture the group and set them on a path of discovery that will shatter their innocence forever. Their ultimate survival depends on their ability to work together against the humans." I…okay.

Audrey: (chuckles)

Rachel: Seeing the world through the eyes of children is always fascinatingly weird. (laughs)

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: Yeah. Every one of us was a kid at one point, so we can understand just how complex and bewildering and marvelous but also awful that experience can be. Add in the whole 'I'm a mythological monster' thing to the mix, and that is some sweet tea! Pour me a glass of that!

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: And I know there are books out there where the kids are written as one-dimensional, or they do things that make no sense and have you pulling your hair out by the roots. But this ain't that. "Clementine" and "Little Monsters" both have some of the most believable characters you will come across in comics. Prepare to get invested and feel the urge to explore every dark corner of their haunting backstories.

Audrey: I have read one of Tillie Walden's graphic novels, and I can't remember what it…the one where they're traveling across country in a car?

Rachel: And it's, like, very cosmic?

Audrey: Yeah, mmhm.

Rachel: Yeah. I don't remember the name…“Across a Field of Starlight?” No, that's a different one. (takes a deep breath) It's really good.

[The title in question is “Are You Listening?” See this episode’s show notes for more information!]

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: Their art style is just so good.

Audrey: Yeah, yeah, I did like her writing, and that was the first time that I had read anything by her.

Rachel: Nice.

Audrey: But it looks very interesting. “Little Monsters…” The first thing that popped into my head with “Little Monsters” was…do you remember that movie from the 1980s called “Little Monsters?”

Rachel: Mmhm. With the guy under the bed and he's, like, a blue monster guy? Yeah.

Audrey: Bed…blue…and the kid from…his brother was in “Boy Meets World.” It's not Ben Savage. It was one of the other Savage brothers.

Rachel: Yeah, I can picture him. They do look very similar, actually.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: Now that I think of it.

Audrey: Yeah. That movie used to freak me out.

Rachel: Yeah. No, it was one of those where it's, like, you were probably too young at the time to watch it.

Audrey: (giggles) Yeah.

Rachel: But it was the eighties, so. (laughs)

Audrey: Right? Yeah. (laughs) Oh, well, that actually kind of segues nicely into my first suggestion, and I wish…I tried to see if there was a copy on the shelf, and there wasn't. Um, “My Favorite Thing Is Monsters” by Emil Ferris.

Rachel: (gasps) Nice! So good.

Audrey: And, um, this is such a good graphic novel, and there's so many things to talk about with it, but let me give the listeners a little bit of a rundown. (shuffling papers) And I like to get my summaries from Goodreads, so this is from Goodreads.com.

Rachel: Solid source. I like that very much.

Audrey: Yes. Yes. “Set against the tumultuous political backdrop of late 1960s Chicago, My Favorite Thing Is Monsters” is the fictional graphic diary of ten-year-old Karen Reyes, filled with B-movie horror and pulp monster magazines iconography. Karen Reyes tries to solve the murder of her enigmatic upstairs neighbor, Anka Silverberg, a holocaust survivor, while the interconnected stories of those around her unfold. When Karen’s investigation takes us back to Anka’s life in Nazi Germany, the reader discovers how the personal, the political, the past, and the present converge.” So, you've read this, right?

Rachel: I have, yeah.

Audrey: Okay, have you read the second one?

Rachel: I have, and I did not see the ending coming!

Audrey: Okay, don’t tell me what happens!

Rachel: I won’t, I won’t, I won’t! (laughs)

Audrey: I…I have just a little bit left in the second one, but let's go back to the first one.

Rachel: Yes.

Audrey: (thumps table) Because you really…not only is the story very good in this, but the, uh, the artwork in it is incredible. It's, um…what's different about it is, one, it really does look like a journal that a kid keeps.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: It's like—

Rachel: A very artistically talented kid, yes. (laughs)

Audrey: Yes! Um, it…it's kept like a notebook, and most of the drawings look like they're done in, like, a Bic pen, and it's also very highly stylized. But what's unique about the…the, uh, drawings in this is that what is being drawn isn't actually what's going on. What the drawings are are the metaphors for what's going on in the story. So, "My Favorite Things Is Monsters," the main character is, like, this little werewolf and, um, Anka Silverberg is, like, some sort of undead zombie. And, like, her friends are, like, Frankenstein or vampires, but that's not actually what's going on. It's this young, ten-year-old girl in 1960s Chicago, but she personifies the world around her to be more like the pulp fiction horror comics that she…

Rachel: Yeah, to make it more digestible for her.

Audrey: Yeah! To make it more believable for her, or maybe easier to handle, because the reality of what's happening around her is, like…

Rachel: It's intense.

Audrey: It's intense.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: So, when you open the book… (laughs) If you're just, like, a passerby and you haven't read the synopsis on the back, you're just browsing and you open up the book and you kind of see almost these grotesque, pulp fiction covers… 'cause, you know, like, at the end of every chapter, she does, like, this pulp fiction cover. You might look at it and be like, "Wow, who would read this? This looks horrible!"

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: You know? Like…or, "Why is that being drawn?" You gotta remember it in the context of the text that you're reading, which is that…it's the metaphor that you are seeing. But there

are also scenes where, like, her older brother takes her to the art museum, and Emil Ferris um, her…her drawings that the most of the story is done is very stylized in this monster…childhood notebook sort of way, but then, uh, when you have scenes, like, where she goes to the art museum with her brother, she very clearly has the artistic ability to make things, like, hyper realistic.

Rachel: Oh, yeah.

Audrey: And the colors and, like, it's super, super brilliant. So, not only is the artwork incredible, but the story is as well (thumping table multiple times, distorting the recording for a second). And, I don't know about you, but I found the portion where Anka is describing her, uh, childhood in Nazi Germany to be probably the most compelling part of the first book. I don't know.

Rachel: Oh, yeah. I mean, if you're thinking about it, too, because she's... Well, she's recorded it on tapes, hasn't she?

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: So, the main character is listening to them back.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: But you're not given it all at once.

Audrey: Right.

Rachel: It's doled out throughout the story.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, and it goes from when Anka herself is a young girl—

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: —to when she grows up, and it's harrowing. (laughs uncomfortably)

Audrey: It…there's parts that's hard to read!

Rachel: Man. Oh, yeah.

Audrey: It's like…because you know that that's true. You…you know that people actually underwent those things.

Rachel: Yeah, well, and a lot of it, too, is, like, you know the Holocaust was just the worst, I…indescribably awful.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: But there's a lot more that goes on, um, pre-Nazi occupation, too. And, like, before everyone's put in concentration camps.

Audrey: Mmhm. Mmhm.

Rachel: Like, the downfall is imminent and that is illustrated in here.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: And it's like… (sighs) this poor child!

Audrey: Yeah. Yeah.

Rachel: What she went through is unbelievable.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: So, to kind of illustrate that other side of it, too.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: Because I feel like a lot of times the focus is on the concentration camps, which—

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: —for good reason.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: But yeah, the…kind of seeing how society is crumbling.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: You know? And again, it's from the eyes of a child….is just upsetting in the extreme.

Audrey: Yes, yes. It's very…it's very compelling, too, especially the way that it's told. Because, like you said, it's her recounting her past, and she's tell…telling it on cassette tape, and she's, like, stating it matter-of-factly, but it's, like…you think about actually, like, going through that.

Rachel: Right.

Audrey: I don't know if I'd be able to, you know, keep my cool if I was recounting it. I don't know, like, some people who have gone through stuff like that, maybe they…or just get to a point that…

Rachel: Yeah, some kind of distance from it.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: But it's clear, too, that Anka is suffering mentally.

Audrey: Yes!

Rachel: Um, if not during the tapes, at least throughout the rest of the story it becomes clear that (affects a high-pitched voice) she's going through stuff! Heh.

Audrey: Mmhm. Mmhm. Well, and…readers, when you first…I mean, the open— and this is not a spoiler at all.

Rachel: Right.

Audrey: When you open the, like…some of the opening scenes are Anka's murder.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Like, she's deceased, like, at the beginning of the…of the story. So, um, check it out.

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Audrey: But my follow-up with that would definitely be to suggest the second one. And Rachel, you have finished it. I am not quite there. So, the first volume is very big and then the second one is smaller.

Rachel: And it was delayed quite a while. I remember ordering it for the library.

Audrey: Oh, you did?

Rachel: And then having to order it again, and then a third time because it kept being delayed. But it's worth the wait.

Audrey: Mmhm, yeah!

Rachel: My goodness! (laughs lightly)

Audrey: Yes, and like all graphic novels, it's, like…you can read 'em pretty fast. Um, but let me give you the synopsis for book two, also from Goodreads: "The most anticipated graphic novel of 2024, concluding the story of young Karen Reyes, the most inspiring 'monster' in contemporary fiction. Set against the tumultuous political backdrop of late [19]60s Chicago, 'My Favorite Thing Is Monsters: Book Two' is the eagerly awaited conclusion to one of the most acclaimed graphic novels of the past decade…In Book Two, dark mysteries past and present continue to abound in the tumultuous and violent Chicago summer of 1968. Young Karen attends the Yippie-organized Festival of Life in Grant Park and finds herself swept up in a police stomping. Privately, she continues to investigate Anka's recent death and discovers one last cassette tape that sheds light upon Anka's heroic activities in Nazi Germany. She wrestles with her own sexual identity, the death of her mother, and the secrets she suspects her brother Deez of hiding. Ferris's exhilarating cast of characters experience revelations and epiphanies that both resolve and deepen the mysteries visited upon them earlier. Visually, the story is told in Ferris's inimitable style that breathtakingly and seamlessly combines panel-to-panel storytelling and cartoon montages filled with B-movie horror and pulp monster mag iconography." So, I mean, it's just…I think it's brilliant. Did it win an Eisner Award?

Rachel: It won so many awards.

Audrey: It won so many, yeah.

Rachel: It is next-level media, really.

Audrey: And in addition to, like, the story of Anka, there's like two or three other storylines going, too.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Like, there's, you know, uh, Karen's, uh, sexual identity crisis going on, and there's, uh, her older brother Deez. Like, what was his involvement? He…did he have some sort of sexual relationship with Anka, like…it's all very mysterious. (laughs)

Rachel: And I will say it does…and not…I won't spoil anything.

Audrey: Uh-huh.

Rachel: There is resolution at the end of book two.

Audrey: Oh, good!

Rachel: Uh, it threw me for a loop.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: And took me a while to digest it but, um, it fits perfectly. Yeah.

Audrey: Okay. Oooh, well now I'm excited!

Rachel: (giggles) I know.

Audrey: Because I love it when there's something of, like, a sequel or a series and it comes full circle.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Like, I am not one of those readers that likes to have questions left unanswered.

Rachel: Open-ended, yeah.

Audrey: Like…kind of like the last season of “Lost.”

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Rachel: That was going to make it into the podcast at some point.

Audrey: (still laughing) At some point.

Rachel: Someone was going to bring it up. (laughs)

Audrey: Yeah, um, like, I like things being resolved.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: 'cause…'cause that…I don't know. To me, that tells me, like, the writers thought things all the way through.

Rachel: Mmhm!

Audrey: But I pass the ball back to you.

Rachel: I'll catch it very easily.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: Because your picks tie in so well with my next ones!

Audrey: (giggles)

Rachel: Because I think that visual media is an excellent way to present concepts related to mental health, right? So, my next recommendation is about loss, grief, depression, and maybe coming out on the other side. It's "The Flip Side" by Jason Walz, and here's the blurb: "Theo's best friend has died, and he can't pull himself out of his sadness—a sadness that those around him don't seem to respect or even notice. And then something even more disconcerting: His town literally flips upside down and everyone disappears except for a threatening, shape-shifting monster and a snarky teenage girl who knows her way around this flipped world. Is Theo doomed to spend the rest of his life in this scary state?" It just works so well, because if you've ever gone through something like Theo where the death of someone you knew and loved was maybe a long time coming but no less painful, then you know that it actually does

feel like your entire world has been turned upside down. And shaken, repeatedly, like an angry monkey with a jar of pennies.

Audrey: (chortles)

Rachel: It's upsetting, and foreign, and basic actions somehow seem almost alien. Remove the metaphor and make it reality: Theo is trapped in a topsy-turvy new state of being with no escape in sight. This alternative world is his depression made manifest. Whether or not he gets free of the monster eating his insides is for you to find out. A really good readalike is "Constellations" by Kate Glasheen. I picked it since it deals with trauma and the journey toward healing, yes, but the main opponent in this story is addiction as a way of coping with severe gender dysmorphia. "Are you supposed to be a boy or a girl? It's a question that follows Claire everywhere. Inescapable on the street, in school, and even at home. A black hole forever trying to pull them in. But as long as they have ride-or-die best friend Greg at their side and a drink in their hand, everything will be okay. Right? Except, Claire can never just have one drink. And when harassment at school reaches a fever pitch, Claire begins a spiral that ends in court-ordered rehab. Feeling completely lost, Claire is soon surrounded by a group of new friends and, with the help of a patient counselor, finds a space to unpack all the bad they've experienced. But as Claire's release gets closer so does the question: Can Claire stay sober and true in a world seemingly never made for them? Set in 1980s Troy, New York, 'Constellations' is a portrait of a queer teen living in the margins but determined to find their way ahead." Now, I first came across Glasheen's work when they were publishing a weekly web comic called "Varsity Noir," and their art style is truly striking. Harsh ink lines softened by watercolor. Excellent scene setting. Memorable character design. The whole nine yards. Seeing their work in print has made me super, super happy.

Audrey: Ooh, so, tell me more about "The Flip Side." Is that one of the ones that…I feel like…is that newer?

Rachel: It is new.

Audrey: Okay, because I felt like I saw that on the new graphic novel shelf.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: And I remember looking at it and being like, “Hm, I wanna read this,” but I didn’t.

Rachel: Yeah, it might have grabbed your attention…the cover is, like, really darkly saturated.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: And, yeah, it’s…it's a pretty one, that's for sure!

Audrey: Yeah, but that looks really good.

Rachel: Yeah. They're both emotionally intense stories—

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: —but definitely stories that need to be told, you know?

Audrey: Need to be told, yeah. “Constellations” must be newer too, right?

Rachel: It is. I think maybe last year it came out?

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: I can't quite remember, but…

Audrey: This one—“Constellations”—looks really good. I…I mean, the other one looks good, but this one has really caught my attention.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: So, webcomic. Are you viewing that on Webtoon?

Rachel: Indeed I was, yes! (laughs)

Audrey: Okay! So, Webtoon, for listeners who don't know, is a digital graphic novel/comic book reading platform, and they have an app, and a lot of the material is free.

Rachel: Yeah, completely.

Audrey: There are things that you can… You can buy coins to then go ahead and buy episodes earlier than the release date, but most of it is free. You don't even have to make an account, I don't think. You can if you want to save, like, you're reading progress.

Rachel: Right.

Audrey: I think you can just go on there and read.

Rachel: Yeah, and it's available on desktop, as well, which is where I first used it.

Audrey: Is it? Okay.

Rachel: And it's interesting because it's obviously formatted to be mobile friendly.

Audrey: Yeah. Yup!

Rachel: As scrolling down…but on desktop it's just as easy to use your cursor to flick all the way down, and it's nice!

Audrey: Yeah, 'cause that's how I use it, is on my mobile app.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And I would use it to, like, read in between whatever…you know, errands or whatever.

Rachel: I would often use it on my lunch breaks here at the library. (chuckles)

Audrey: Yeah. Yeah, and Webtoon one of the earlier formats that came out with that since it has been released, which I think is, like, probably a good…I'm probably gonna get this wrong. It's been around for at least five to seven years, for sure.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Um, it may have been released sooner than that, but…

Rachel: I remember talking about it on an episode during COVID.

Audrey: Okay, so…yeah.

Rachel: So, it was at least around since then.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: Probably longer.

Audrey: Okay. So, like, yeah, around five to seven years.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: And I'm so glad that we're talking about this, because this actually goes into my next recommendation. And Rachel's over there dancing! (laughs)

Rachel: It's one of my favorites. I'm so excited!

Audrey: And I actually discovered this comic on Webtoons [sic].

Rachel: Yeah!

Audrey: And that is "Lore Olympus" by the great Rachel Smythe. I cannot sing enough accolades for this. First of all, I'm not sure if Rachel Smythe was the first one to do this, but she was one of the first people to do this, and that was…she got picked up. Her Webtoon comic, "Lore Olympus," was originally just published through online platforms.

Rachel: Mmhm,

Audrey: (bangs fist on table) She got picked up!

Rachel: (snickers)

Audrey: By a major (bangs fist on table again) publishing firm.

Rachel: Yeah. (laughs)

Audrey: This is incredible! I mean, do you know, like…I am so impressed by that. Like, she literally went from creating community-based content to getting picked up by a major publisher and having like, these beautiful hardcover books.

Rachel: Mmhm. And not only that, but you can get, like, special editions at Barnes & Noble that have, like, special covers.

Audrey: Oooh, yes. Yes!

Rachel: And they're gorgeous! (chuckles)

Audrey: Oh my god. And, I mean, I am just like…

Rachel: She has, like, a set of postcards.

Audrey: Really? Like she's got, like…

Rachel: All sorts. There's all sorts of stuff. It's so pretty.

Audrey: See?

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: This is all the more reason to believe in your small little art projects.

Rachel: Yes! Mmhm.

Audrey: You know, you never know what's gonna get picked up. But I think one of the reasons it got picked up is because it's such a great story, and the artwork is incredible. Let me dive into a summary: "Scandalous gossip, wild parties, and forbidden love—witness what the gods do after dark in this stylish and contemporary reimagining of one of mythology's best-known stories from creator Rachel Smythe. Persephone, young goddess of spring, is new to Olympus. Her mother, Demeter, has raised her in the mortal realm, but after Persephone promises to train as a sacred virgin, she's allowed to live in the fast-moving, glamorous world of the gods. When her roommate, Artemis, takes her to a party, her entire life changes: she ends up meeting Hades and feels an immediate spark with the charming yet misunderstood ruler of the Underworld. Now Persephone must navigate the confusing politics and relationships that rule Olympus, while also figuring out her own place—and her own power. This volume collects episodes 1-25 of the #1 Webtoon comic, Lore Olympus."

Rachel: And we do have it here at the library.

Audrey: Yes.

Rachel: We have all of them that are out so far, so check 'em out. (chuckles)

Audrey: Yes, yes. So, it's interesting because the way and the amount of things that are published on Webtoons [sic] doesn't necessarily directly translate to, like, the cutoff of where a book is gonna be.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: So, I was kind of interested when I heard that it was gonna get picked up and…and released. I'm like, “I wonder how they're gonna cut that up?” Because the end of a quote unquote ‘season’ on Webtoon didn't even, kind of, get through the first book of the hardcover format.

Rachel: Mmhm. Right.

Audrey: So, that was very interesting. One of the first things that drew me to the, uh, story was the art. It's got a lot of pink and dark blue, or at least that's how it starts out. Like…it's not, like, super detailed drawings. It's…it’s a…the linework is a little bit lighter.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: A little bit more approachable for most people, I would say.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Um, but I also really like how Persephone’s drawn. She's not drawn as, like, this scrawny little nugget.

Rachel: Nope! She's a voluptuous babe. (laughs)

Audrey: She's a voluptuous lady!

Rachel: (laughs more)

Audrey: And it was really…it's just done so well on so many levels. Um, do you know what volume they're out on now?

Rachel: I'd say seven or eight, at this point.

Audrey: Okay.

Rachel: It's hard ’cause, like you, I read it as a Webtoon and I'm still up to date on that. (laughs)

Audrey: See, I have, like, completely lost my place with it on Webtoons [sic]. And I'm kind of like, “I'll just review it and book format.”

Rachel: Which is nice, too, to have the physical photos in front of you.

Audrey: Yes, mmhm.

Rachel: It's really nice. Like you said about the colors: it's kind of watercolor-y.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Um, the gods and goddesses are their own colors, as well.

Audrey: Yes!

Rachel: Like, they have their own color themes. Persephone is pink, Hades is—

Audrey and Rachel: (in unison) –blue.

Rachel: I think Zeus and Hera are, like, gold?

Audrey: (echoing) Gold.

Rachel: Yeah. There are a whole bunch.

Audrey: And then I think Artemis is, like—

Rachel and Audrey: (in unison) –purple.

Rachel: That's right, yeah.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: Um, so, that's really interesting. I want to dive into why the artist chose those colors. And I like it a lot, too, because I think the myth of Hades and Persephone is really popular nowadays.

Audrey: Mmhm.

Rachel: Especially in, like, the dark romance genre.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: (sounding exasperated) But it's, like, always all the same.

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: And this is not.

Audrey: Yes!

Rachel: It is…like, Hades is really a vulnerable character!

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: And has a lot of depth. He's not just some, like, broody, sexy man. You know? (laughs)

Audrey: Yeah, like there's…there's…there's substance there.

Rachel: Yeah! And in the original myth, we all feel for Demeter 'cause, like, her daughter was stolen.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: But in this one it's like, mmm, Demeter has some problems of her own she needs to work through. So, it's just…it's overall just very original, and I like it a lot.

Audrey: After I had read that, I tried to get into other Hades and Persephone stories.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: And one of the ones that I had attempted to read was "Neon Gods" by Katee Robert.

Rachel: I've heard of that, yeah!

Audrey: And I couldn't…I…I tried. I…I'm not here to, like…I know my…on the last podcast I destroyed "Rumpelstiltskin."

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: And I'm not here to knock on Kate Roberts' writing, but I could not get into it. It was, like…it was all very, like, "50 Shades of Gray."

Rachel: (clicks tongue) Ah.

Audrey: And that's fine if that's your thing.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: But I'm, like…coming from that where it's, like very—

Rachel: Yeah!

Audrey: Like we said, there's substance!

Rachel: I think it's hard once you have an idea of these characters in your head to be like, "Oh, this character writes it that way." Well, I don't like that way.

Audrey: Yeah. (lauchs)

Rachel: So, I'm going to stick with this. (laughs)

Audrey: Exact. So, I, like…again, so many compliments and shout-outs for "Lore Olympus." If that's something that you're interested in, like Rachel said, we have them here, so check 'em out. Or you can go to Webtoons [sic]!

Rachel: And the author/artist is kind enough to put trigger warnings on both versions depending on what's going on in whatever volume.

Audrey: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I kind of forgot that.

Rachel: So, pay attention to those! (chuckles)

Audrey: Yeah, good point.

Rachel: Because it does get kind of dark.

Audrey: It does. It does.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: So, uh, the readalike to “Lore Olympus” would be “Asgardians: Odin,” which is… This is actually considered a children's, uh, graphic novel series. But I would say it's more for older kids, probably middle grade.

Rachel: Sure.

Audrey: Um, but it also, uh, dives into mythology, but this is north…Norse mythology. Um, there's the Asgardians, and each, uh, book is a different Norse god. So, there's Odin, Thor, Loki, that sort of thing. And I think George O'Connor also does a Greek gods series, too. But if you're in that vein of, like, mythology and stuff, this would be a good one. Uh, but the summary from George O'Connor's website is: “Welcome to the Nine Worlds, home of Gods, Valkyries, Dwarves, Jot… Jotnar?”

Rachel: (wheezes)

Audrey: “and more!” I’m sure I’m butchering that. “Travel the burning rainbow bridge to Asgard where Odin, king of the Aesir, surveys his realm. His thirst for knowledge drives him ever onward, but nothing is learned without sacrifice… In Asgardians, George O’Connor’s highly kinetic illustrations bring these gritty and astonishing tales of war, betrayal, and the quest for enlightenment at any cost to vivid…startling life.” So, I have not read that one, but it's…it seems very similar, and the drawings are a little bit more detailed but…seems enjoyable enough.

Rachel: Very cool.

Audrey: Yeah, that would be my recommendation for that.

Rachel: My final recommendation is anything and everything by Matt Kindt. Really, because my man has worked for Dark Horse, Valiant, Top Shelf, Vertigo, BOOM!, and so many others. What makes me recommend Kindt today, though, is his graphic novel “Spy Superb” that I finished reading just the other night. It was off-the-wall wacky enough that I couldn’t pass up an opportunity to discuss it. “Who is the perfect spy? A spy who doesn’t even realize they are a spy. AKA the ‘useful idiot’.”

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: “This particular useful idiot is named Jay. Jay is sent on missions without even realizing he’s on a mission. Until he picks up the wrong phone with the wrong secret intel and now Russian hit-squads and elite assassins are after him. But Jay believes he was a sleeper agent—and really is the ‘spy superb’. His complete obliviousness and lack of survival skills may be the only thing that saves him in this globe-trotting espionage tale…where nothing is what it seems…but also…kind of actually is what it seems.”

Audrey and Rachel: (giggling fit)

Rachel: And, oh, I’m going to make a such big stretch right now, but please stay with me! It’s worth it, I promise.

Audrey: (chortles)

Rachel: So, there’s this TV show called “Community,” which is a comedy about a group of students at a terrible community college. It’s peak, so watch it if you haven’t. Anyway, some episodes were produced and directed by the Russo Brothers of “Captain America: The Winter Soldier” fame. With me so far? It goes deeper. In “The Winter Solder,” there is this pop culturally famous scene where Cap is attacked by a bunch of Hydra agents in an elevator. It’s very well-choreographed and shot—just excellent camera work by the Russos. So, in an episode of “Community,” the college’s dean gets attacked in an elevator by a bunch of undercover paintball players.

Audrey: (chuckles under her breath)

Rachel: So, I need you to understand that the dean is not a fighter. He’s not skilled in any way whatsoever, or even the slightest bit coordinated. What happens is that these enemies try to take him out, and by pure random happenstance and total accident the dean manages to dispatch them one by one while apologizing and screaming in panic the entire time. I’ll put in a sound bite so our listeners can appreciate exactly what goes on.

Audrey: (laughs in delight)

Sound clip: (fade into a tinny version of “Daybreak” by Michael Haggens set as elevator music in the background throughout the entire clip) (short, high-pitched scream) (paintball shots) (another short scream) (grunting in pain) (another short scream) (smacking sound) (drawn-out groan) (heavy impact followed by a shout) I'm sorry. (two more paintball shots, louder than before) (grunts of pain) (two short, staccato screams) (guttural groan) (heavy, panicked breathing)

Rachel: It’s the best, and an obvious nod to that scene in “The Winter Soldier.” When reading “Spy Superb,” all I could think was that the character Jay embodies the dean from “Community.”

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: He’s a total fool without realizing it, and that’s half endearing/half eyeroll-worthy. Heh. Seeing the same sort of scenario play out across the page gave me flashbacks to the dean’s high-pitched caterwauling.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: And the best part is that the other characters actually call Jay out and are like, “Do you even understand what is happening right now? Are you seriously that far up your own butt?”

Audrey: (laughs)

Rachel: But the fella somehow just keeps on truckin’, survivin’ in the face of all odds, flyin’ by the seat of his pants. Oh, it is incredible. There are too many great readalikes to name, but I am partial to Kindt’s more recent independent projects like “Revolver,” “Mind MGMT,” “Black Badge,” “Pistolwhip,” “Dept. H,” “Grass Kings”—anything! Anything. I also recommend reading them in print, for the most part, because some have codes and clues in the margins that are a lot easier to decipher if you can actually physically turn the book on its side. So, that was my big super stretch. Thank you for staying with me!

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Rachel: Unless you turned off the podcast, for which I apologize.

Audrey and Rachel: (laugh)

Audrey: I love interactive books.

Rachel: They’re so much fun, aren't they?

Audrey: (quietly) I love them.

Rachel: I mean, you can say they're for kids, but we're all just big kids, really, so… (chuckles)

Audrey: Truly. Yeah, we do have a lot of those in Children's, for sure.

Rachel: Mmhm.

Audrey: Like, we have a board book that's in the shape of a steering wheel.

Rachel: (whispers) Nice.

Audrey: And, like, “Let's drive down the street!”

Rachel and Audrey: (laugh)

Audrey: (sighs) So… Wow, everything that we have talked about has kind of, like, segued perfectly into the next thing.

Rachel: Yeah! Funny how that works.

Audrey: So, you're talking about “Community” and how, you know, funny that is. I love that show, by the way!

Rachel: Oh, nice.

Audrey: Um, it's so funny.

Rachel: It's…man, it's ageless, too. I…my husband and I watch it every year, and it's so good. It never grows old.

Audrey: Yes. Yeah, there's so many one-liners, and…

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: My next suggestion is “Hyperbole and a Half: Unfortunate Situations, Flawed Coping Mechanisms, Mayhem, and Other Things that Happened” by Allie Brosh. This one came out a little bit earlier. I wanna think…I wanna say it was, like, 2012. And this was kind of, like, when blogs were still really popular.

Rachel: Yaah.

Audrey: And the whole, you know, app thing hadn't really taken off the way it has now. But, uh, Allie Brosh was making, like, this comedy blog, and she kind of did this autobiographical, humorous thing and it got picked up!

Rachel: (snickers)

Audrey: Kind of like “Lore Olympus” did, but in a very different way. Um, well, very different genres, I should say. So, here is the summary. (takes a halting breath) “This is a book I wrote. Because I wrote it, I had to figure out what to put on the back cover to explain what it is.”

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: “I tried to write a long, third-person summary that would imply how great the book is and also sound vaguely authoritative—like maybe someone who isn’t me wrote it—but I soon discovered that I’m not sneaky enough to pull it off convincingly. So I decided to just make a list of things that are in the book: Pictures.”

Rachel: (still laughing)

Audrey: “Words. Stories about things that happened to me. Stories about things that happened to other people because of me. Eight billion dollars*.”

Rachel: (vague sound of confusion)

Audrey: “Stories about dogs. The secret to eternal happiness*” And then, at the bottom, there’s an asterisk for the aforementioned eight billion dollars and the secrets to eternal happiness, and it says: “These are lies.”

Rachel: (laughs harder)

Audrey: “Perhaps I have underestimated my sneakiness!”

Rachel: (choking on laughter)

Audrey: So, what's so brilliant about this is that not only is it, like, super funny, but the drawings are, like, completely demented.

Rachel: (laughs anew)

Audrey: Like, she…like, she's on the cover of the book and she draws herself as, like, this cylindrical pink creature with, like, these eyes are on the side of—

Rachel: She looks a little like a Muppet. (laughs)

Audrey: A little bit, yeah! And then for her blond hair she has, like, just this triangle on the top of her head.

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: And her arms and her hands are, like, little curly lines. It's just completely demented, and the, um, the drawings are like your first-grade nephew, you know…

Rachel: (wheezes)

Audrey: …decided to draw, you know, a life story. It's hilarious. It is hilarious. It also touches on some, you know, mental health, um, issues. There's, uh, a couple of trigger warnings in there, especially regarding, um, like, self-harm and that sort of thing. And, um…but she does it in a very unique and…and funny way where it doesn't seem, like, so dark. And she's just a really funny writer. I don't think she's written anything else other than…she did write a sequel to this, which is… Gosh, now I can't remember the sequel to it. “Happiness and Other…?” I don't know. Either way, look her up by name and you'll figure it out! And it’s…it’s just, like, a continuation of the story. Um, but if you want a good laugh, it's funny. It's a fast read. There's a lot of things that are relatable, especially for those of you…like, I'm in my mid-thirties. Um, a lot of the stuff is, you know, things that we have all gone through and remember being…about being in our twenties. So, yeah, that's a…that would be my suggestion. Her, um…her sequel to that. And

then there's also another similar artist and writer named Sarah Anderson, and she has a series of books and I think, also, related content, as well.

Rachel: Yeah.

Audrey: Uh, that she calls “Sarah’s Scribbles”, but she came out with a book called “Adulthood Is a Myth,” and… (laughs) The, uh, summary on Goodreads reads: Are you a special snowflake? Do you enjoy networking to advance your career? Is adulthood an exciting new challenge for which you feel fully prepared? Ugh. Please go away.”

Rachel: (laughs)

Audrey: “This book is for the rest of us. These comics document the wasting of entire beautiful weekends on the internet, the unbearable agony of holding hands on the street with a gorgeous guy, dreaming all day of getting home and back into pajamas, and wondering when, exactly, this adulthood thing begins. In other words, the horrors and awkwardness of young modern life. Sarah Andersen is a young Brooklyn artist. This book is totally not autobiographical. At all.”

Rachel: (chuckles) I believe it.

Audrey: (sighs) So, yeah, there's a lot of, um…a lot of funny… I would say, like, ranking from, like, seriousness to, um, you know, not serious, or serious but in a funny way, you've got “My Favorite Things Is Monsters,” “Lore Olympus,” and then you've got “Hyperbole and a Half.”

Rachel: (laughs) Yeah

Audrey: Kind of just going down the line.

Rachel: It's all downhill. (laughs)

Audrey: Yes, yes.

Rachel: I…I remember seeing those online back in the… (funny voice) back in the day.

Audrey: Yeah.

Rachel: Not to date myself, um, but I definitely want to look back at those compilations. ’cause that's the nice thing, too: even if you saw them back in the day, to see them in print format is somethin’ else, you know?

Audrey: Mmhm, yes.

Rachel: And that's the end of the episode, listeners. Please check the show notes for a list of everything we just talked about. Remember to subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library. Until next time, happy reading. Bye!

(Brief outro music)