Tuck (00:00)

Shopping for sex toys can sometimes feel overwhelming or dysphoric, but shopenby.com aims to create a better experience for the queer, trans, and gender nonconforming community. Shopenby.com is a Black and trans-owned sex toy company, and 2% of all proceeds are donated to organizations focused on improving the lives of queer and trans people of color. Shopenby.com is also a carbon negative company, and every sale funds renewable energy and forest conservation projects. Visit shopenby.com, that's s-h-o-p-e-n-b-y.com, and use the code GENDERREVEAL at checkout to get 10% off and bring more pleasure and affirmation into your life.

[Gender Reveal theme plays]

Tuck (00:50)

Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I'm your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Music ends]

Tuck (01:09)

Hey everyone. Hope you're all hanging in there. Welcome to this penultimate episode of season 11 of the Gender Reveal podcast. This week I am very excited to share our chat with author Alison Rumfitt. You might have heard of Alison from her debut novel Tell Me I'm Worthless. Now she has a new book coming out next month called Brainwyrms. And if you thought that Tell Me I'm Worthless was a little intense, boy howdy this one really kicks it up a few notches. In today's episode, Alison and Ozzy and I talk about everything from worms, horror, and kink...

Alison (01:43)

There's a lot of people who are involved in kinks who I don't think realize they are.

Tuck (01:46)

To the different ways Alison approaches writing about TERFs in her two novels.

Alison (01:52)

Previously I would have been like, they have an ideology and it's worthwhile to try and work out how they got there and maybe now that's not where I am. I'm more like, they just have worms in their brains.

Tuck (02:00)

Before we get to that, I have a very exciting announcement, for some of you at least. Mckenzee and I are going to be together, in Los Angeles, for one hot second in November. And I, well I wanted to book a Gender Reveal show that ultimately didn't work out because the venue offered us showtimes at either 4pm or 10:30pm on a weekday and I just wanted to check in with all of you actually because in my opinion those are not times that successful weekday events happen. But just for the future, please let me know if I am wrong and it turns out that all y'all out in LA are always going to events at like 3pm on a Wednesday. That would be great to know. Happy to be wrong. Anyway, instead, I am doing a 2 Trans 2 Furious book event at the wonderful North Figueroa Bookshop in Highland Park. It is on November 10th at 7pm. It is a free event. Mckenzee will be reading, I will be chatting with Mckenzee and/or another cool trans person, TBD, haven't really figured that much out yet. Maybe I'll know by next week. But, for now, I just wanted to let you know so you could get it on your calendar. North Figueroa Bookshop, November 10th, 7pm. See you there.

Tuck (03:10)

And speaking of 2 Trans 2 Furious, if you somehow have been thinking about getting a physical copy of the book this entire time but have not done it, it's gotten a little bit more complicated now. So I have made a website where you can see a list of all the ways to acquire the book depending on where you live. In Canada you can just order a copy, in the US we now are doing wholesale only so you order it from a local bookstore. Either your local bookstore or the website of someone else's local bookstore. Or we also have a wholesale discount, so if you want to buy a bunch of copies you can do that and it will be pretty cheap. And then we also have the PDF for everyone. I will stop talking about this soon because we are about to sell out of our print run, and then you will never hear me talk about it again. But, just one more time, that is all at tuckwoodstock.com/2-trans-2-furious.

[Electronic music plays]

Tuck (04:08)

Alison Rumfitt is an ex-poet who writes boundary-pushing horror fiction that explores the dark corners of contemporary queer life. Her first novel, Tell Me I'm Worthless, reinvented the haunted house as a vicious avatar of facism. It was published in 2021 in the UK and 2023 in the US. Her second novel, Brainwyrms, with a Y, pushes things to even more dizzying extremes, asking how far someone will go to fulfill their desires.

[Electronic music ends]

Tuck (04:44)

The way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Alison (04:51)

Is that the gender reveal part of the gender reveal?

Tuck (04:56)

It is, yeah. That's the gender reveal part of gender reveal.

Alison (04:58)

Two word answer is trans, and then a space, and then woman. And then sort of another space after that and then a full stop.

Tuck (05:09)

Great. In your bio, your work is described as boundary-pushing horror. What boundaries are you pushing?

Alison (05:15)

I don't know. I guess I would say boundaries of taste, especially with the new one. I also try to, so I come out of a background of experimental British poetry, so I also try to approach wrting horror with that in mind. Right? I try to write horror prose in a way that feels akin, or feels inspired by, contemporary British experimental poetry. Just because that's where I learned to write, and did all my studying. And even if I'm not a poet anymore, I acknowledge the deep influences that had on me. So in Tell Me I'm Worthless, and then in Brainwyrms as well, there were points where the more traditional narrative prose style breaks. I like to think that that is, I'm sort of pushing different sort of boundary there of what people might expect from contemporary horror. Because I don't think people go into contemporary horror with thinking, this book is going to have a poem in the middle. Or, this book is going to have a section that is written in play script. Whereas that is the case with what I write. So yeah, I guess that is the boundaries that I am writing.

Tuck (06:31)

I do love how lyrical it is in sections, how experimental it is, and one thing that I love is the different ways that you use pronouns in the book which is so funny to say, as trans people, but not third person pronouns. But I think you use the pronoun 'you' in so many interesting ways in both of your books. And in Brainwyrms, the new book, sometimes when you're talking to 'you', you're writing the story as one of the characters and sometimes you're addressing the audience, and sometimes you're addressing the audience somewhat sincerely and kindly, like hey maybe you should take a break right now, and sometimes you are like drawing them into the narrative and yelling at them about the kinks you've assigned to them. I was just wondering if you could talk about what appeals to you about second person, what as a device?

Alison (07:18)

What appeals to YOU about second person? Sorry, that was a stupid joke. I just, it's sort of an easy way to draw this connection that is not something that people expect. Like they don't expect a narrative to start addressing them. It can almost be mean, I don't know that's fun, it can be fun to be mean and it was, again, it was something that came out of the experimental poetry side of things. Where it was, I often did stuff in performance where I would address members of the audience and give them instructions and tell them particularly to think about things or say things and divide the room up in that way. It was interesting I guess to try to attempt that on a scale that, I'm obvioulsy not performing it because it's written down. So it's interesting to see I could get away with that. And if it was possible. And I think it was. I liked it enough in Tell Me I'm Worthless that I tried to do it again in Brainwyrms, but in a different way.

Tuck (08:19)

Speaking of similarities, both of these books are about radicalization, among other things, and I'm sure you had to think a lot about that as you were writing the books and after writing both of them, do you feel like you have any kind of insight to this problem of radicalization and specifically fascist, right-wing radicalization. I don't want to ask if you have an answer because that would be such a wild thing to be like, can you solve this personally? But I feel like you must have learned something about what's going on just from thinking about it so much for these books.

Alison (08:54)

If I do have insight, it is in the books. And it's the sort of, the reason I wrote books rather than just sort of doing specific tweets about it is that I don't know how I would put it into a contained aphorism. I guess it's just that anyone of any type can be sort of vulnerable to radicalization and it's a a constant awareness of that and a constant sort of self-criticism I think is the way forward for us to avoid that. Is just, constantly thinking about, okay I have this thing, this reaction, why do I have this reaction? What is the politics behind it? If I don't like that I'm having that reaction, what can I do to not have it? I mean, the internet makes it very easy to get drawn into these types of posting where you have, if you have a reaction that is against you, you either back off and then don't think about what you said or you push further down into it and then again you aren't doing any sort of self-criticism there. Tell Me I'm Worthless is a book entirely about self-criticism and self-awareness and Brainwyrms is a book about lack of self-awareness. So that's a big thing. That's my big broad idea I think. And not that I'm perfect at that either, I don't think anyone's perfect, but it's the goal I think we should reach for.

Tuck (10:16)

We had Gretchen Felker-Martin on the show a couple seasons ago, and she said something that I now bring up all the time, which is that she made her TERF characters than she thinks they actually are in real life because they had to be interesting characters for them to be interesting in the book. Is that how you feel as well?

Alison (10:36)

If you look at Tell Me I'm Worthless and Brainwyrms, there's definitely a difference between the way the TERFs are.

Tuck (10:45)

Totally.

Alison (10:46)

One of the main characters in Tell Me I'm Worthless is a TERF and is a character with a lot of things going on and a lot of internal life. And then the TERFs in Brainwyrms are deliberately cartoon 2D villains. So there's a couple reasons for that, one is just that they're different kinds of books and they need to be doing different things. I do think post-Tell Me I'm Worthless I was less interested in what was necessarily going on internally. I maybe agree more with Gretchen now than I would have previously because previously I would have been like, well these are people who do have an ideology and it's worthwhile to try and work out how they got there. And maybe now that's not where I am. I'm more like, they just have worms in their brains.

Tuck (11:30)

Totally.

Alison (11:31)

It's not as complex as I initially thought.

Tuck (11:34)

Well, can we talk about that? Because your second book, Brainwyrms, it's so full of literal and metaphorical worms and there's all these incredible analogies and metaphors happening on different levels of that. So, again, at the risk of just asking you to kind of regurgitate in a less poetic way what your book is, I wanted to talk like, what makes worms such a rich metaphor or symbol for you?

Alison (11:57)

They're such a fantastically simple thing. And they're so completely different from humans that it is easy to view them with this strangeness. You can put, obviously a phallic thing, you know? There was that woman recently that found out that she did actually have a worm in her brain

Tuck (12:15)

Yeah.

Alison (12:16)

Any parasite is scary, but there is something very particular about the idea of a worm, because it's so long and it's coiled, it's similar to the idea of, you don't want a snake inside of you. So I can't necessarily say that I chose worms beyond that I thought of the phrase, or people say, oh they've got brain worms, and then I was like, what if they literally did have worms. And then the book happened. But worms are cool. I remember seeing some film as a kind of, I can't even remember what the film was, but I just remember seeing a scene of scientists in the forest putting metal prongs into the ground and electrifying the earth and then worms come up. And I was like, that's really cool. It's cool that there's all of these things under the ground constantly that are just shifting. You don't really see them. They're a very good thing for the environment. It's a sign of healthy soil. But people are unsettled by them because they are so slimy and phallic. That was a real waffle, I don't really...[trails off]

Tuck (13:26)

It's funny, I had just got this tapestry that my friend made that has this huge worm on it and I have to say I really have been looking at it differently since reading your book.

Ozzy (13:39)

Speaking of the worms, in your book, this whole book is kind of about a non-consensual kink that is so extreme it could destroy the world. But you also write really beautifully about kink in this book. One of my favorite parts was, there's this one point where the main character Frankie is fantasizing about her partner impregnating her even though she doesn't think that's biologically possible. And you write, quote, "the fantasy expanded out forever, became less about the fetish and instead became something else. The dream of a life." I was just curious how you would summarize what you wanted to explore about kink in this book.

Alison (14:22)

I think that sums it up in a lot of ways. There's a lot of people who are involved in kinks who I don't think realize they are. So an example that I've talked about with friends before is there's guys that are obsessed with cigars. They're on YouTube and they make videos about cigars and they are obsessed with the shape of cigars, they are obsessed with the act of smoking and how it looks to have a cigar in your mouth, and if anyone in the comments even remotely brings up what having a cigar in your mouth looks like, they are pilloried and kicked out and people hate it. But that is how a lot of the internet actually functions.There is micro-communities of people who get themselves into kink without realizing that is what is going on. I don't necessarily think they are consciously getting off on it at all, but the way the communities are put together is very similar to kink communities.

Alison (15:28)

And then I was thinking about the politics of kink and how kink spaces can become political. But even people who are consciously into kink can imbue their kink with a particular political idea that maybe doesn't have, or maybe it does have, but they like to convince themselves that they're not just doing this because they find it hot, that they're doing this because it is in some way revolutionary. And then that is where I cracked what Brainwyrms is about really. It's like, oh yeah, there's people that are into just this thing, but then they're like no this isn't just that it's hot, it's also beautiful, it's also a better way of organizing the world, it also gives us power. And then Frankie is much more lonely in terms of her, she doesn't really have a community. Because the moment she does engage in community she can't help but fuck it up. You get the sense from her that she's gone through lots and lots of different communities in the past and maybe burned her bridges. So she can't really engage in them so much anymore. And that's why she's like, oh no there's a person who's new on the scene, there's this person who's much younger who I don't need to worry about knowing about my baggage. I can just project everything on to them.

Tuck (16:43)

I thought it was very interesting timing because as I was reading this book, my friend who is getting FFS found out that the medical code to get FFS covered by insurance was transvestic fetishism. And I was thinking about how much of this book is, you're talking a lot about, like Ozzy said, how fetish and kink, whether people are thinking about that as their whole life or thinking about it as just a sex thing, you have a fun riff about how everything is just a sex thing. But it's funny to me to see this book and think about how so many cis people are like, trans people are just this fetish kink thing, and it's like no, it's not that these people have a crazy kink because they're trans, they actually have a wild kink because they're shoving parasites into their bodies. But I think there's a lot of interesting subtext about that. About what is a kink, what's not. What is a fetish and what's not. Was that something you were thinking about a lot? The way that trans people are viewed as inherently a fetish or a kink just for existing when you were writing it?

Alison (17:53)

Yes. Yes I definitely was. I mean it's not really the main crux of the book.

Tuck (17:59)

Right.

Alison (18:10)

In a way, I was like, well I wrote my book that's very specifically all about transness. And this one, I wanted it to be a part of it but maybe not solely what the crux of the story was. Later on there is a character that just is seeking out chasers just because it's the only sort of fulfillment she can get. It's just through sex and from other people that fetishize her. And she starts to see herself how they see her, so that is definitely part of it yeah.

Tuck (18:27)

I think it's great to be able to write books that have trans people but the whole plot isn't about trans people as, you know, that's the only thing we have to talk about. I was interested, I have a couple of questions about this intro to the second book. This sort of fictitious intro and, you know, obviously some of it is borrowing from real life and some of it is not from real life. But one thing that you say in this fictious intro, so I'm taking it with a grain of salt, is "I'll never know what sort of writer I would have been if I didn't live in this fucking world that forces me to write about transphobia." And that struck me as resonant because I feel that way about my work to some extent. My work is also about focusing on the issue at hand with regards to trans people and what would I be doing if that wasn't what we had to do? So if the world sort of magically became less transphobic and less fascist, do you think you would write horror stories about something else? Do you think you'd write happier stories about trans people? What do you think you would do?

Alison (19:27)

I don't know what I'd do. Luckily, I think from the, I've got enough sort of energy from these two books that I'm now working on two things that which are not explicitly about transness at all. So maybe I've gotten there. One of them is very much about fascism so I'm not, I haven't left there, but I'm at least not consciously thinking about, there are no trans women in the novel, or if there is I don't know yet. That's not me being like, I'm not writing about trans women anymore! It's just how it has happened. So maybe I've gotten there. Maybe, I don't know, having two, well one somewhat successful book and then one that seems like it might do well, maybe that's the way of getting out of that? Or maybe I'll get drawn back and I'm just on a temporary reprieve from it. But the we'll see. The introduction is written from me in the future, well not me exactly but some sort of version of me. I don't know. I don't entirely know why I did it. I just wrote it and then I was just like, that's funny so I was gonna include it.

Tuck (20:37)

Okay so I was gonna ask you why and then the answer is, because, whatever. [Laughing]

Alison (20:41)

Yeah, I don't know. I don't know why I do anything. Things happen and then, it's not on me to tell you what they mean.

Tuck (20:46)

Totally. So in addition to these two horror novels, you've put out a couple of other things. You've co-wrote this Morbid Obsessions and then there's also this poetry collection? Question mark? That I also don't - are you pronouncing it Tyranny? There's a parenthesis to also make it Tranny, so I don't know how we're saying this.

Alison (21:06)

Yeah, I have to call it Tyranny because I'm not about to have people just running around calling it Tranny.

Tuck (21:11)

Totally.

Alison (21:12)

That was poetry that I wrote. That one's out of print now. You can go onto the book piracy site that I wrote an impassioned defense for and you can download it. I've put it up on there, it's fine. And I also recently was like, if you do want to pay me for it I will send you the PDF and you can send me some money for it. When I was struggling a bit financially. But that's mostly a long poem about the Handmaid's Tale.

(21:43)

And then Morbid Obsessions is a non-fiction thing I wrote with the author Frankie Miren. I was writing abotu TERFs and she was writing about SWERFs, and we were like, why do we write about these people that hate us? And that's what the morbid obsession title is referring to. It's like, they are obsessed with us and then we are obsessed with them, and why are we obsessed with that? And is it really useful to be obsessed with them? I've also got some other stuff I've been putting out. I've put out a short story recently called "The Nonce." It's about pedophile hunters. That's not a horror story so that was a really interesting challenge to write something that is not overtly, obviously it's dealing with dark subject matter, but it's not overtly horrific. And then there's a big thing, well there a couple things that I'm working on that I can't really talk about at all.

Tuck (22:31)

Okay well going back to, what are your feelings on the Handmaid's Tale? [Laughs]

Alison (22:36)

Well, okay, so this is the thing. It was written from a particular perspective when I was still an undergrad and still, I was a very angry undergrad -

Tuck (22:45)

Totally.

Alison (22:55)

and a very angry poet. An older poet who was a major figure in the scene that I was joining questioned whether my poetry was like, whether it actively hated the reader, and I was like, well maybe. But I didn't particularly like that. I've liked some stuff that Margaret Atwood has written, I don't like the Handmaid's Tale. I don't particularly like the book, I really don't like the tv show.

Tuck (23:09)

Yes. Who does?

Alison (23:12)

Well, I don't know, television critics? I find the whiteness of it's imagination really gross. Particularly that imagines things that happen to women who are not white and then sort of subjects white women to that as this, I don't know, I just think that's a very particularly telling contrivance on Atwood's part. Atwood's politics are really odd. Her trans politics are better than you might expect in general. But then she sort of seems to be approaching it from a scientific or biological basis where she's like oh there's transsexual slugs. And it's like, well okay sure. But that's a very particular thing to hinge your allyship on, is the fact that there are slugs that are transgender. I don't know

Tuck (24:01)

Totally. [Laughter] We could talk about, I'm sure you've talked about this so much, but you start both books with a content warning but also I thought it was interesting, in the first book, you put like a preemptive disclaimer with the content warning that's like if you don't like this content warning don't yell at my publishers basically. And I was interested in that part of it. Did that effectively deter people from yelling at people about it?

Alison (24:29)

I don't think anyone got yelled at about it. So that was -

Tuck (24:34)

Great!

Alison (24:44)

I guess it worked. I've been interviewed, someone wanted to interview me about content warnings, and I tried to give my honest opinion. I think they're fine, but I also don't think anyone should be pressured into having one. If someone wants to do one they should feel fine doing and not get any hate on that. But also, if they don't want to do it, that's also whatever. It's up to them. I just thought it was going to be a very useful thing to do with this book. And also, I was very very nervous around Tell Me I'm Worthless about potential responses just because of the content. And the fact that we didn't really get, for the most part, we didn't get the responses that I was scared about. It meant that either the content warning worked or I didn't need to have it there. I did it with Brainwyrms just because I did it with the first one and I thought it would be weird if I didn't do it for the second one. It'd make me look odd. And also it allowed me to do a joke in Brainwyrms, that I'm not gonna spoil, but it allowed me to set up a joke that happens later in the book.

Tuck (25:40)

I was noticing how different the UK and US covers are for Brainwyrms and the copy that we have is just a plain, no illustration because it's the ARC but I was so glad that we didn't the final US version because I was like, I actually just don't want to look at this all the time. So I feel like that in itself -

Alison (26:01)

Oh it's so good! I love it!

Tuck (26:03)

I mean it's incredible. But I'm just like, I'm a squeamish baby and I just don't want it on my coffee table 24/7, I wanna kind of choose when to engage. But I was just thinking that the cover is like a content warning basically, it's like if you are a little baby who can't handle this cover, you're not gonna handle this book.

Alison (26:21)

This cover is a literal scene that happens in the book.

Tuck (26:25)

Yeah.

Alison (26:26)

My hope was, could we get away with a cover that is in some way reminiscent of nasty 80's paperbacks. Obviously it's glossier in a way that those wouldn't have been. But I think it has the vibe certainly, the feeling of those. Which made me very happy.

Tuck (26:47)

Yeah. Actually speaking of this, when I was reading this book I was talking about it with my friend and my friend said something that made me laugh a lot which was, I love that horror is just a genre that's like, hey I can imagine something way more fucked up than you.

Alison (26:59)

Yeah [laughs]

Tuck (27:00)

But I do feel like just reading Brainwyrms really messed up my brain for a few days. Not in a bad way, but I could tell, that there was a presence in my brain from reading this book. I was wondering what it was like to inhabit all of those characters for so long and really fully put yourself in that headspace for the period of time of writing the book. If that affected you at all, or if I'm just a little baby once again.

Alison (27:26)

I enjoyed it more than Tell Me I'm Worthless because Tell Me I'm Worthless I really didn't like hanging out with those two. Actually, not just those, I also didn't like particularly writing the flashback, the Edmund section in that was really challenging and upsetting.

Tuck (27:45)

Yeah.

Alison (27:55)

So Brainwyrms is more, Frankie sucks, but she's fun in a way that the people in Tell Me I'm Worthless aren't. Like she is a bitch in a way that is funny. So I kind of enjoyed her more and didn't find it as difficult.

Tuck (28:01)

Great. I love that it was easier for you. We've talked about this before a lot on this show, but trans people obviously have a particular interest, a particular skill in creating body horror. Do you feel like your interest in body horror, as a writer, is directly tied to your transness at all?

Alison (28:17)

Oh definitely yeah. When I first, as a teenager when I realized I was trans I would constantly imagine it in terms of trying to come up with these body horror narratives or stuff like that. And it's definitely a thing I'm interested in just because, yeah, it's interesting to think about the body as something that can transform and change. I mean, it is something that transforms and changes, you know? I mean the great thing about Cronenberg's latest film, Crimes of the Future is that that imagines body horror as a good thing. Right? It imagines these transformations finally as a thing of beauty and inevitability that should be accepted. And denying it is the thing that's going to kill you rather than leaning into it and acknowledging it is the way out. Which is such a lovely idea.

Tuck (29:05)

Yeah. Wait Ozzy, didn't we have something that we were like, this is Crimes of the Future?

Ozzy (29:10)

Yeah I think it was, there's a Paul B. Preciado quote that you use as an epigraph at one point that mentions utopian organ dreams.

Alison (29:23)

Yeah.

Ozzy (29:33)

And I feel like, I mean I guess while we're on the subject I was kind of curious, because Brainwyrms is so much about the fascist sensibility taking over, do you have any positive utopian organ dreams that you would like to share with us? That aren't about fascist worms taking over the world?

Alison (29:44)

I don't. I mean it's a pessimistic book in a way. I don't necessarily have utopian - but partly the inclusion of that Preciado quote is that I have issues with you, in particular -

Tuck (29:55)

Of course.

Alison (29:56)

Well, who doesn't? But in particular, the line he tries to particularly draw around, say borders and stuff, I think it's a very, he tries to draw a very one to one parallel that is inelegant and I think maybe just not quite sensitive. So me including that quote is not me saying, oh he's great and I think this quote is great. It's, here's something that I'm interested in thinking about and as the book goes on we're going to be thinking about it some more. And that's always what I try to do with epigraphs. I'm very into epigraphs, I'm glad that Brainwyrms was allowed to use the epigraphs that it has.

Tuck (30:39)

Wait, what's the Brainwyrms one?

Alison (30:40)

Wait, I believe that it has an Eminem epigraph.

Tuck (30:44)

Oh yes. [laughs]

Alison (30:45)

I don't think that was taken out, yeah. I was like did they not tell me that they couldn’t use it?

Tuck (30:51)

I forgot.

Ozzy (30:52)

That was also iconic. I can only hear that line as being trans now.

Alison (30:56)

I mean that whole song is, I mean Eminem is trying to shock, but in that song in particular, in trying to shock, he kind of accidentally comes across some very trans ideas. So I just thought that was interesting. Again, I'm not saying, ah I think Eminem is great and unproblematic right? It's like, here's this shock thing that I'm going to unpick in a very literary way.

Tuck (31:27)

Speaking of which, you also use Isabel Fall's Helicopter Story as an epigraph. What's your relationship to that story? We talk about that a lot on the show I feel, but we can ask about it again.

Alison (31:38)

I just think it's a really good story.

Tuck (31:40)

Totally.

Alison (31:41)

Honestly, I think there's not really much more to say around the backlash and that, beyond that it was sad and all that.

Tuck (31:49)

Right.

Alison (31:50)

People got away with it and have got away with not really doing the responding to it that they should have. And it's just very sad. But also I sometimes think that that can't take away from the fact that it's just a really good story and that's the main thing. That's sort of what I was like, yeah this is a good story and it's about stuff that I'm interested in so I'm gonna use it. And if that doubles as a slight provocation of saying anyone that was on the other side of it, this story is maybe not a safe place for you, then that's, it double as that. But that wasn't the main reason that I used it.

Tuck (32:24)

That's interesting though. Okay, so you wrote this piece in Dazed that said that you were kind of tired of all these horror movies lately being about trauma. But also your first book you explicitly say is about trauma in part, so is it that other people are doing it wrong? Or...

Alison (32:44)

I mean, I'm a horrible hypocrite. I just was very particularly angry about Halloween Kills when I wrote that. Not Halloween Kills, Halloween Ends. Well, Halloween Kills and Halloween Ends. And I was very particularly angry about the way that that trauma narrative was constructed and so I was just taking it out on that. It's not, my hope of Tell Me I'm Worthless is that it's sort not just about trauma as a vague concept and it's specifically about these people's trauma. I guess that's the difference, right? It's, I was struggling with narratives that sort of just say, we're about trauma! And it's like okay, but there's no specificity to the trauma. There's no political engagement with what the trauma is. It's similar to how people are like, well Hereditary is about grief so we're going to make stuff about grief. Well Hereditary is about a particular, Midsommar as well, they're about a particular grief. And they're about how it feels, it's not just there because that's a way to make the story serious. And then obviously people just didn't know how to respond to Beau is Afraid because it was, again, very particular, and people were like, what is this even saying? It's really clear what that's saying actually. I love that film. Have you seen that film? That's a really trans film.

Ozzy (34:03)

Yeah.

Tuck (34:03)

Yeah, Ozzy has. Ozzy go for it.

Ozzy (34:05)

I guess I remember thinking a lot of the scenes of street harassment and what it feels like to be out on the street felt sort of trans. But I would love to hear more about what was trans about it for you.

Alison (34:16)

I mean the whole street thing is partly creating this imaginary of what someone who is this fucking rich kid who hasn't had to do anything for himself and is able to just stay in his apartment right? What he imagines the outside world is. And it's just making that literal, what if the outside world literally is that? All of his worst fears come true.

Ozzy (34:39)

Right.

Alison (34:40)

But it's more just the specific sort of idea of being a disappointment to your mother. That's a very trans thing to be. [Laughs] And then, I don't know, just desecrating her bedroom through sex. It's obviously not literally trans but I got a lot of trans feelings from it.

Ozzy (35:02)

I mean the sex in that movie actually does remind me a lot of the sex in your books in a certain way. I hope that's not rude to say. Intended as a compliment, obviously.

Alison (35:12)

I don't quite know why but I'll take it as a compliment. That sex scene is amazing. It's very very funny. I guess maybe that's part of it, it's got dialogue, the people are talking throughout it rather than just sort of cutting to curtains billowing in the wind.

Ozzy (35:31)

Right, yes, definitely.

Tuck (35:35)

Okay well before we ask our last question, Brainwyrms is coming out in a few weeks and we release this it will be even fewer weeks, so how are you feeling?

Alison (35:46)

I went through a bit of a period where I really hated it but the moment I started to hate it was the moment that it was set and I couldn't really change it. So I was just like, that's why. And now I've come around again and I'm like, it's pretty good. I like it. It's very easy I guess as an author to see all of things you would do differently, but I'm like, well there is peace in going, the book is what it is and I put a lot of work into it and I think it's a good book and I think it's funny, I think it's nasty, I think it's the sort of book I'd like to read and that's why I wrote it. That's why I write anything really. Yeah, it's like this is something I'd like to read so.

Tuck (36:33)

Yeah. My whole thesis on trans writing in general is that I just want trans people to be writing the weirdest shit possible. Because that's always what's the most interesting. And I think you really do this. So I really appreciate you writing the weirdest shit possible.

Alison (36:49)

Literally. Literally the weirdest shit.

Tuck (36:52)

Yeah, that's true, it's true [Laughs]. All right, well, the way we always end the show is by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Alison (37:03)

I don't know. I went through a phase of being more like, specifically thinking around the politics of gender and I don't, I'm more now thinking about the present and just how people live. So I don't know. I'd just like it if people could live how they wanted and maybe, look maybe it would be great in the future if we all had the human instrumentality project and all became a big genderless blob. But I don't know if it's very useful imagining that or if it's more useful just being like, well what are we doing now? We're not in the big genderless blob, so yeah I'm more interested in the present I guess than the future.

Tuck (37:41)

Right. I think there's a hope exercise in sometimes being like what are we working towards? But yeah, if you're working towards big genderless blob I'm not sure that is super helpful.

Alison (37:53)

I'm not saying that that's what everyone's imagining of the future. People have much more well thought out ones than that. And I'm not deriding those ideas, that was just the first one that came to mind, is big genderless blob, I don't know.

[Gender Reveal theme plays]

Tuck (38:14)

That's going to do it for this week's show. You can find Alison @hangsawoman on Twitter and Bluesky and @alison.zone on Instagram. Brainwyrms comes out in the UK and US on October 10th. You can preorder it now if you dare. You can find us, as always, at genderpodcast.com where we've got transcripts of every episode and of course, we'd love for you to join us on Patreon where as a little treat we'll give you access to our bonus podcast Gender Conceal. This month's Gender Conceal episode is coming out later this week and will feature exclusive excerpts from our most recent live show. That is at patreon.com/gender.

Tuck (38:52)

Today's episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh, our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. We'll be back next week with the last episode of the season, and more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme ends]

Alison (39:18)

I'm not very good at imagining what needs to be talked about in terms of press side so I just let whoever lead.

Tuck (39:28)

Sometimes it's not press, sometimes you're like I've been having this thought.

Alison (39:32)

Oh I've never had any, I don't have any thoughts. Obviously I do, I've written books. But I don't have thoughts.

Tuck (39:39)

Deeply same.