



INTRO:

[Spooky music playing]

Welcome friends. It's almost midnight, and you've found your way to The PikeCast. Come along as we careen through the catalog of the most formative horror writer of our young adult days, Christopher Pike. From adult perspectives, we'll revisit these YA books our parents probably would never have let us read had they known what lie inside. We tackle one book per episode, in a freewheeling and unbiased chat. So grab your battered paperback, pull the flashlight from the kitchen drawer, climb under your bed covers and devour a good book with us.

[Spooky music ends]

COOPER:

Greetings, fellow Pikers and welcome to The PikeCast. I'm Cooper Beckett, and I'm thrilled to be joined by my lovely co-hosts...

CASSIE:

I'm Cassie, hello!

BECCA:

I'm Becca, hi!

COOPER:

And today we are talking about Christopher Pike's 1991 book, DIE SOFTLY. And we're gonna be talking about it in great detail, spoiling each and every plot twist - so consider yourself thoroughly warned. I would also like to welcome our guest Piker this week, Joe Lipsett from the Horror Queers Podcast. Welcome, Joe!

JOE:

Hello! Thanks for having me

COOPER:

So happy to have you here. I've been listening to Horror Queers for quite awhile, and I really enjoy it!

JOE:

Aw, thank you.

COOPER:

So I wanna know, before we get into the podcast itself, how did you discover Pike?

JOE:

Well, I can actually thank my love of horror to Christopher Pike and one of the things that I love to do is throw my sister under the bus 'cause she was kind of, like, my gateway horror person.

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

So my parents had a very strict like, they didn't like my sister and I to watch television or watch movies for a lengthy period during the late 80s. So my sister and I had to make ourselves do with reading a lot of books, and my sister's three years older than me, so she was constantly reading at a higher level. And I kept seeing these lurid, trashy YA horror books that she was reading, and I so desperately wanted to read them! And my parents forbid me to touch them. So I snuck into her room and just stole a couple of them, and of course they were all Christopher Pike's. And I got hooked! I gave myself nightmares, I was convinced that being a teenager meant doing drugs and having sex with everyone.

COOPER:

You mean *taking* cocaine, not doing!

JOE:

Yes! [Laughing] And basically, this kind of started me on my journey. Eventually my sister would introduce me to Clive Barker, and a bunch of other horror films. So Christopher Pike was very much my entry into all things horror, but also just it kind of anticipated where my interests would ultimately go - 'cause I do host another podcast, which is all about young adult literature and their film and television adaptations. So Christopher Pike is kind of the intersection of both of those interests.

COOPER:

Absolutely. And what keeps you coming back? Like, years later, you're still talking about Pike - you just had an article about him. What is it that you feel is his enduring quality?

JOE:

Yeah, so I just wrote a piece for the latest issue of GRIM MAGAZINE, which was all about teenage horrors. And for me, Christopher Pike is - there's very much an element of nostalgia, and I know you folks talked about that on your kind of opening primer episode. And it's very true, I feel like if you read Pike during a certain section of your life, you would automatically be - I don't know, like you said, we're all Pikers, and it very much feels like people who read Pike and had that influence means that you will think fondly of these books. But, I just find there's something strangely calming and very, like, rewarding about revisiting them,. So I try to read the *FINAL FRIENDS* franchise every year, and I usually go back and reread a couple of the other kind of standalone books. But I just really love Pike, and I think he's more emblematic of the best that this YA horror was doing back in the 90s. Like there was a *ton* of other ones that you could cover, but really, for me, Pike is the best of them all.

COOPER:

Yeah, and he grew out of the Point Horror, where he started, and then just became his own brand and his own type of YA horror, I think.

JOE:

Yeah, like he's so much more mature and risqué than a lot of the other writers. And this sounds a little ridiculous when you're reading it in 2020 because some of the scares and the profanity and even the quote unquote dirtiness of these books is going to feel a little bit juvenile. But back in the day, *nobody* else was doing this stuff - at least not for this audience!

COOPER:

No, none! So I wanted to also mention as host of the Horror Queers podcast, I'm sure our audience can guess that you are part of the LGBT community.

JOE:

That is correct, yes! I identify as gay.

COOPER:

All three of us are!

JOE:
Ooh!

COOPER:

And so it's a really cool thing I think to revisit Pike, who was writing at a time when it was a really, you know, really, really rough for the LGBT community - not that it's any treat today. And revisit it in that vein, and sort of see what's behind his words, I think? We may be getting a little bit extra out of it? Have you found that to be true?

JOE:

Yeah, I mean, there's only a few interviews with the author himself, like he was a very private person. I mean, this is a nom de plume, so that's not his real name. But he's pretty much on the record as saying that he was trying to push the envelope with depictions of race, and his depictions of female protagonists. And he doesn't really talk a ton about queer characters, but they do sort of pop up - a little bit more in the later books. But I, like, especially for this book, I have a queer reading, for sure.

COOPER:
Oh, yeah.

CASSIE:

Joe, tell us, what your three favorite Pike books are - the standalones that are outside of the trilogies or any of the franchise series.

JOE:

Okay, yeah, this is honestly really tough 'cause I know when you folks were, like, 'hey, do you want to come on this?', and I said, 'yes!'. And then I think I gave you... pretty much the first 20 books that he wrote as options.

ALL:
[Laughing]

COOPER:

Yeah, which was pretty convenient for us! 'Cause that just meant whichever one we want to start with.

JOE:

Yeah! And I would love to hear the three of you talk about why you opted for DIE SOFTLY, 'cause it's not the first film, and it's not the most obvious book, either.

COOPER:

It was an easy one, because we all had it.

CASSIE:

Yup!

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

Oh! Well, that makes sense.

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

Yeah, we didn't have to wait for ThriftBooks to deliver anything. We could just do it.

JOE:

Yeah, 'cause tragically, a lot of these are actually very difficult to track down now.

COOPER:

They are!

JOE:

I used to scavenge used bookstores, but, sorry! To come back to the question, three favorite standalones. So the first book that I ever read of his was FALL INTO DARKNESS, and that one - I think actually still *really* holds up despite the fact that half of it is fully a court case, which is not the kind of thing that you'd expect from a YA, not all of the time. It's also the only film adaptation, so if you ever want to cover that, that has to be your bread and butter!

CASSIE:

Yes!

COOPER:

Oh, yeah, we're planning on it.

JOE:

The other one that I really love is SCAVENGER HUNT, it's the one that gave me the worst nightmares as a teenager, because it - well, I won't spoil it, because I can't remember which of you is the Pike novice.

COOPER:

Becca is our Pike newbie!

BECCA:

Yes.

JOE:

So that one really scared me - I think it's got some of the most atmospheric imagery in it. And then one final one... Ummmm. Gosh, there's just so many good ones!

CASSIE:

[Laughing]

JOE:

I think MONSTER is the other really interesting one. It's the one I wish had have been adapted into a movie, 'cause I think it would've been fantastic.

CASSIE:

Yes! A good 'creature feature', I think.

JOE:

Yes!

COOPER:

Yes, and I think I've been, I was an independent filmmaker for awhile, I grew up wanting to write movies. And I couldn't understand why nobody was adapting these!

JOE:

Oh, I know!

COOPER:

And, like, really the only notable YA horror adapted into a movie is I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER, and that's *barely* an adaptation! And it was only done by a filmmaker who got famous for SCREAM, and then wrote that. So, I always had this fantasy if "if I ever get famous, I'm going to adapt WHISPER OF DEATH"!

JOE:

Yes, 'cause that's a good one!

COOPER:

That's my book, that's my Pike book! And it's really exciting that Mike Flanagan has taken the reigns of THE MIDNIGHT CLUB as a series and is planning to adapt other Pike books as part of that series.

JOE:

Yeah, I remember when they announced that they were adapting the, they're doing a couple of films based on R.L. Stine's FEAR STREET books that are coming out. So those will be the first

to come out next year on Netflix, it'll be a race to see if it's THE MIDNIGHT CLUB or these FEAR STREET adaptations. But I'm hoping that this will herald a kind of reemergence and even republication of some of these books!

COOPER:

A Pike-assaince, as you will!

JOE & CASSIE:

I /ove it!

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

But they better use the original covers, 'cause those later covers are *god awful*.

JOE:

Oh, they're hot garbage. They're so fucking ugly.

COOPER:

Okay, let's dig into Die Softly. So, in every Pike book, in the first two pages has this little excerpt from the book that is supposed to get you excited about the book. And I always found them very odd and amusing, so this is A PICTURE OF HORROR. [Reading from the excerpt:] Few people understood that the negative contained far more detail than a print could ever show. For most people a negative was just a blur of lines and shadows. But as Herb bent over the negatives with his loup in hand, he was in a position to see exactly what there was to see. *Oh, God*. Herb almost fainted. [Excerpt ends] And with that in our minds, we head into our first section called 'Remember Me':

REMEMBER ME: Summary, plot

BECCA:

He might have photographed a murder. Herb just wanted to photograph the cheerleaders in the school showers. He planted his camera high in the corner where no one could see it and rigged it to a special homemade timer. He did this Thursday night, and he hoped by Friday night to have an exciting roll of film to develop. But a girl dies Friday afternoon. On the surface, it appears to be nothing more than a tragic car accident. But when Herb finally does collect his roll of film, he develops a picture that shows a shadowy figure sneaking up on the girl who dies - sneaking up on her with a baseball bat. It makes Herb wonder if the girl was dead long before the car accident. But unfortunately for Herb, he doesn't wonder if the murderer knows he took the picture.

COOPER:

And, you know, that's a funny - I didn't read the [laughing] summary before I read the book again here. And it's not quite accurate, I don't think. Huh. Cassie, would you like to tell us what really happens?

ALL:
[Laughing]

COOPER:
So, everyone in the home audience, spoilers are HERE! Right now! So if you want to read the boko before you listen to the spoilers, turn it off and read the book!

CASSIE:
Yeah, I'm gonna ruin it for you. So [laughing] we've got Herb, who is this 18-year-old guy. He's got basically two friends, he doesn't have a lot of people around him besides, you know, those two friends. And his mother. These two friends he's known for his whole life, it's a pretty small town. Everybody kinda knows everybody, and he's in highschool. And the thing about Herb is that he's not very experienced with women, at all. He doesn't have a lot of, he doesn't talk to a lot of girls, he doesn't have a lot of friends that are, you know, the stereotypical kind of 'pretty but nice\ cheerleader type. But there are a lot of girls like that at his school, and he likes to *watch* them. And he's kind of a creep about it!

COOPER:
That he does!

CASSIE:
Yeah... He's not my favorite person, but.. He's a little bit of a creep.

COOPER:
[Laughing] Yeah I called him proto-incel once I actually realized what the plot of this book was.

CASSIE:
Yeah, and that's so accurate 'cause we kinda spend the whole book with him where he does this really gross thing as the back of the book says, putting a camera into a girl's locker room so that he can watch them take showers. And, you know, that's really gross on its own. But I think that we kind of go along with him as a character in a way that makes him a little more relatable so it's not gross. The way we do that is he's not really the one to make the decision to put the cameras in the locker room. He's actually kind of pressured into doing this from one of those two friends that he has, that I mentioned earlier. So, he does this, he puts the cameras in there, and instead of, you know, all the boobies and butts and things he's *hoping* to see, he gets a little more than he bargains for in that the girl that's the object of his affection, that he's like totally in love with an obsessed with, this cheereleader, Alexa Close, is actually *in* the picture, with the baseball bat, sneaking up on her best friend.

COOPER:

So, not a shadowy figure at all!

CASSIE:

Nope, it's definitely not a shadowy figure, we can make out who it is. And Herb likes her, so he's kind of in denial, and he sees this picture and he doesn't really know what to make of it. He develops it in his room 'cause really big into photography, it's kind of his only big, main hobby. Um, so he's going through the development process, and he's seeing this picture, and he's like, 'I don't really know what this is, I don't know what I'm looking at. Cut to the friend of his, Sammie, who's a girl, she is the one who pressured him into doing this. And suddenly, she's calling him and saying, 'I think Alexa killed her friend, I think the reason that this girl is dead is because Alexa killed her.' So in just the first couple of chapters, we have several characters dying, death mentioned from months before that we don't even get to kind of witness until much later, and at the heart of it all, it's kind of this gross guy that wants to see a bunch of girls naked.

[Laughing]

COOPER:

Well, one specific girl.

CASSIE:

Yeah, honestly, I kinda think he's just into all of it. He's just kinda like, LET ME SEE WHAT I CAN SEE! But yeah, he's definitely more focused on Alexa.

COOPER:

[Laughing]

BECCA:

She's his favorite fantasy!

COOPER:

She is! Alexa is his *favorite* fantasy.

BECCA:

When he said that, I was like, do you mean a crush? Like... [Laughing] What are you talking about, buddy?

COOPER:

I wondered if he meant someone who didn't exist, because his favorite fantasy, I didn't know what that meant. But I thought it was very odd.

CASSIE:

Oh, like that she's not real, like she's an idealized sort of caricature that he's made up.

JOE:

Oh, yeah. And that's what gets him into trouble, right? It's that he doesn't actually know anything about this girl, he just finds her attractive and then projects everything he wants into her.

CASSIE:

Exactly.

COOPER:

He seems to do that with everybody in fact, projects exactly what he expects into them.

CASSIE:

And I think that kinda gets him into trouble in several parts of the story, not just with the photos and with Alexa. So, uh, sorry I got off track!

COOPER:

So bring us around to the end here, what are we talking for climax?

CASSIE:

Toward the end, we kinda don't know who we can trust, because Herb really isn't a reliable narrator, and he isn't someone we can really trust to be making good decisions about the people around him. He doesn't know what's going on and he's, he's - like I said, he lacks experience with other people, so he's very impressionable, he's very gullible, he's very easily manipulated. And this kind of makes him a little bit more likable? Or at least somebody that we don't hate the entire time [laughing] after the beginning. And then we kind of circle around to an overall mystery of not just who killed the girl in the showers, and why Alexa was there with the bat, but who killed the guy from months ago, that we start the story with somebody already dead...

JOE:

This is a really convoluted climax!

COOPER:

Really, what it comes down to, is his favorite fantasy is like a black widow character.

CASSIE:

Right, she's a murderer! She's been murdering people all along. And she's been manipulating him into helping her cover it up in a way.

COOPER:

Joyfully, too!

CASSIE:

[Laughing] Yes.

COOPER:

And the shock to me, Herb doesn't make it out of the book!

JOE:

Nope.

CASSIE:

No, he doesn't.

COOPER:

It was funny 'cause I remember very little of the plot of most of these books. But about halfway through this one I remembered the end! And it's like, OH! It's that book!

JOE:

It's iconic. There's very few that Pike actually kills off his protagonists. There's a couple where it's like they've been dead the whole time, and that's the twist? But a lot of the time, it's like, oh we'll kill a bunch of supporting characters, but almost never the main character.

COOPER:

Yeah, I was really surprised by that. So [laughing] thank you, Cassie. I know it was very convoluted and to give you that as your first plot summary, that... You acquitted yourself very well.

CASSIE:

It was a test!

ALL:

[Laughing]

BECCA:

You passed!

COOPER:

So we're going to head into our next section, The Midnight Club, where we're gonna discuss the characters themselves. So, let's talk about Herb.

CASSIE:

[Disgusted grunt]

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

So, Cooper, I won't agree with you that this is proto-incel.

COOPER:

Okay.

JOE:

And, partially, that's because I think that's a very 2020 read onto like a 1991 book.

COOPER:

I will firmly agree with that, absolutely.

JOE:

But I think it's also because of what Cassie said, which is what Herb to me is more of a pathetic character? Like, he doesn't have the imagination and the desires of an incel because his goals are so low stakes. Like, this is a guy who literally just wants a picture - it's not like he thinks that he's owed sex with Alexa, although he would be happy to take it if the opportunity presents itself.

COOPER:

And it does!

JOE:

Well... It sort of does.

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

Like, I think one of the things that always struck me with this was I really related to Herb, and I didn't get the grossness of it? Like, when people you know, looking through some of the Goodreads now, the reviews of it, people are like, oh he's a pervert, he's disgusting. And I'm like, he's the kind of person who has an active fantasy life, and he can't separate reality from fantasy. And I mean, I don't think that excuses his behavior, he knows what he's doing is wrong, but I think that he also thinks this is a victimless crime.

COOPER:

And so we don't get too far off field here, I remember very much being excited by Herb's plan to photograph the naked girls when I was 12 reading this, so I also identified with him. I feel like this book is a great introduction because a lot of his books have female protagonists, and this was one that definitely pinged that very, very early sexuality radar in my head and made me feel things that I didn't quite understand, I think. [Laughing]

JOE:
Mhmm.

BECCA:
Um, I would like to add on that as Joe mentioned, it's not excusable that he did that obviously, but like [laughing] while he's doing it, like, I don't know. Like, I don't sympathize with him at all... Kind of, maybe... A little bit. But, like, he has that internal conflict, like, 'Should I do it, should I not do it?' And as Cassie mentioned, Sammie's like *pushing* him to do it, and he is kind of a pathetic character, so he does it. [Laughing] So I don't know, like I kind of feel like he's forgivable in a way? Like in a small way, I guess? Like he's still gross, I'll admit that.

CASSIE:
[Laughing] I think I'm a little harsher on him, I think, just 'cause, so this is gonna be one of the only instances where this is a book that I didn't read when I was younger, so I thought I had actually, so when we scheduled this, I thought this was one that I'd read [laughing]. And I was like, cool, I'm gonna revisit it!

COOPER:
[Laughing] Oh, no problem!

CASSIE:
I read it last night and I had *not* read this one! And reading it as an adult, I think, makes me a little more judgemental, and so I highlighted specific parts to which I know we have a section to go over it, but just to focus on his character, I think that there was a sense that he... There was *power* that he got from putting a camera there, and from that, so I think that Sammie was maybe a catalyst to doing it, but I think the ability to do it and the desire to do it was already a part of him, and he knew it was wrong, like Becca said. He knew it was not a good thing to do, he didn't care. He knew it was taking advantage of the girls, he knew it was gross, but there's even a part where he says, "The decision was being made for him", so he's like, this isn't me anymore, this is someone else doing this for me. And like Joe said, it's *pathetic*. It's so gross to me, like he's such a gross guy to me! [Laughing]

BECCA:
I get that!

COOPER:
He does at one point feel bad about taking advantage of her, and it's like good! You should, 'cause that's the thing!

ALL:
[Laughing, vocalizing agreement]

BECCA:

Something I enjoy, like we talk about this kind of in our little, like, introduction. You guys were talking about, if I'm making this up I'm sorry [laughing], I feel like you guys were talking about how the characters were relatable, like they were real characters that felt like real people. So the fact that Herb later is like, yeah, this is wrong, that really shows, 'cause if I do something wrong, like the next day, I'll say, oh, I did something wrong, like, I'll reflect back on it.

COOPER:

Yeah.

BECCA:

You know? So I feel like that made some, like he had a conflict, and now he's gotta work with it.

JOE:

I've seen critiques of the book that the ending is, like, too fantastical. Like why does Herb put himself into this position? And I think it's a testament to what you've just described, that he feels like the only way that he can make right all of the deaths that he's been partially responsible for is, he's like, well the cops won't be able to catch this girl because she's too savvy, so he feels like he has to martyr himself. And to me that gave him like very much like, oh, this is me paying the penance for all of the things that I've done, which have gotten my friends killed.

CASSIE:

Yeah, I can agree with that.

BECCA:

It was like the ultimate sacrifice to the story.

COOPER:

He's going to be the posthumous hero, he's going to be the one that everybody talks about, 'remember when Herb took down the psychotic ring of senior cheerleaders?'

JOE:

The Sugar Sisters!

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

Right, the Sugar Sisters!

CASSIE:

Which, you know, that is such a cool name by the way, too.

COOPER:

It is!

JOE:

It really is!

CASSIE:

And just their whole thing, obviously this is a spoiler 'cause we're on this podcast, but when they talk about how they put some of the cocaine in the cookies and stuff, too, and how they tasted better to begin with and then stopped tasting as good. [Laughing] I just, I *loved* all these little details that they had throughout the book.

COOPER:

Yeah! Let's talk Sammie.

CASSIE & JOE:

Oh, Sammie.

COOPER:

And I don't wanna wait for the...

CASSIE:

Problematic section? [Laughing]

COOPER:

Well, I don't want to wait for the, I need to highlight this: [reading from the book] Sammie was also overweight. She didn't have a body, her body had her. She could've been an attractive girl, Herb knew because he'd seen her baby pictures.

COOPER:

And that's how we introduce this character!

CASSIE:

And she's not supposed to be a bad character, she's supposed to be his best friend. It's gross.

COOPER & JOE:

Yeah.

COOPER:

It's rough. [Laughing] But it's very indicative of this type of book at that time, and I think Pike was pulling away from it because if you look at the Point Horror, the 'good guys' are pretty - or sometimes Black Widows - and the bad guys are often, you know, the overweight, or the 'different', or the 'weird'. So he may be playing with that?

CASSIE:

Yeah, I think he definitely switches it up a bit in some of his books where he, it's kind of like a red herring almost, where the one that you think is the one be trusted is beautiful and to be protecting is the one that's actually doing the damage.

JOE:

Yeah, and this to me is also a testament to Herb's character. So this description isn't Pike, this is Sammie's-- this is the way that Herb sees Sammie. And it clearly demonstrates this sort of fictitious reality that Herb is living in, where if a girl is pretty then she's a cheerleader and she's going to go to Los Angeles and become a star. And if she's ugly then she's Sammie and she's gonna stay in town and she doesn't care about her looks. So it's very much like a virgin horror kind of like, a hag and a beautiful ingenue kind of dichotomy. But yeah, it's real real rough. And I would argue also that I think this is our queer character. I've always read Sammie as a coded lesbian.

CASSIE:

Yeah, I can see that.

COOPER:

Okay, yeah I could buy that.

JOE:

Now I should clarify, I see this also as a coded lesbian through the eyes of a heterosexual man - so it's a woman who doesn't care about her appearance, who has a bowl cut, who wears unflattering, baggy clothes. She doesn't try to make herself attractive to men.

CASSIE:

A lot of flannel, they mention.

JOE & COOPER:

Mhmm.

COOPER:

But it was the early 90s, everyone was wearing a lot of flannel!

ALL:

[Laughing]

CASSIE:

That's fair, that's totally fair.

COOPER:

It was a great time. [Laughing]

CASSIE:

It was, I miss it. [Laughing]

BECCA:

So I just wanted to point out when you guys were talking, well the synopsis said that a shadow-y figure was in the photograph. Were they talking about Sammie? Because, remember her reflection was in the mirror, so I feel like they were talking about her.

COOPER:

Hmm, okay, maybe, maybe they're mentioning Sammie.

BECCA:

The flannel reminded me.

CASSIE:

Well, I think that they said that, in the back, that the shadowy figure was sneaking up with the bat.

COOPER:

Oh yeah, right, right.

CASSIE:

And I think that in the picture the shadowy figure is just next to the doorway in the mirror reflection 'cause she was watching them. So they're kinda, in my perspective, they were trying to imply that Herb didn't know who it was, you know? Even though he did, because he was just trying to tell himself that that wasn't the girl he loved.

BECCA:

Ahh, okay, I see what you're saying.

CASSIE:

That's just my interpretation, but I could be totally wrong. [Laughing]

COOPER:

No, I think that's where I came down, yeah.

JOE:

And Cooper, you might have better insight into this as an actual author, but I've often wondered if it's ad copy people who are writing the backs of these books?

COOPER:

Usually, yeah, because authors are usually very bad at writing the back of their books, which I can attest to. I have, I struggle so much with writing the back copy of a book, because you know what the book is about, but you can't figure, like what will get *you* interested. Just read the book, READ THE BOOK, for fuck's sake! [Laughing]

CASSIE:

Just 'READ THE BOOK' in big letters on the back cover. [Laughing]

COOPER:

Yeah, read it and you'll find out what it's about! [Laughing] It's about, you know, a guy taking pictures of naked cheerleaders, come on, read it. And there's murder!

CASSIE:

Cocaine!

JOE:

So much murder and coke.

CASSIE:

Taking coke. They took it all over town.

COOPER:

[Laughing]

JOE:

Oh, '91! Where cocaine was just widely available in these small towns.

CASSIE:

Guns too! Not just cocaine but guns, too!

COOPER:

Cocaine and guns! So again, speaking of guns, how can you afford this? I like Theo, but isn't it weird that he has a gun over at their house, and he just sleeps there on the couch randomly?

CASSIE:

Yeah, yeah, he just falls asleep in people's houses and they don't know he's there, he goes driving around with a gun he forgot he had on his passenger seat, like, what's happening, Theo?!

COOPER:

It could be indicative of a bad family situation for Theo, and you know, a surrogate mother in Herb's mom. So absolutely it was just, it struck me like I couldn't figure out what was happening at first. Like, wait a minute, he was shooting in the back? What was he shooting?

JOE:
Mhmm!

COOPER:
So, yeah, Theo with the gun: good friend, got his back, I like Theo.

JOE:
[Disgruntled sound]

COOPER:
No?

JOE:
I find Theo to be just a little underwritten? Like, all we get of him is that he's a little bit drunk, he's good with a gun, and then he shows up at a convenient moment.

CASSIE:
Yeah. He's good filler.

JOE:
And I find it frustrating, like particularly with this book, there's maybe a few too many characters, and as a result we don't get to spend as much time with all of them.

COOPER:
There are definitely too many characters. [Laughing]

JOE:
So all we know of Theo is just that he's very upset about what happened to his brother and it's like, that's what you need to know, because that will inform the plot.

COOPER:
And moving on to Alexa Close. Herb's favorite fantasy.

CASSIE:
Oh, Alexa.

BECCA:
She's somethin'.

COOPER:

She's a cheerleader, but 'the good kind'. The kind that eats at McDonalds. Did anyone else notice a lot of McDonald's in this book? Like, more than any book I've ever read I think do people go to McDonalds.

CASSIE:

It's like Mac & Me but... Book form.

COOPER & CASSIE:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

That should be on the cover! It's like Mac & Me, but book form!

CASSIE:

With more cocaine. [Laughing]

COOPER: Yeah, with more cocaine!

COOPER:

So Alexa, she, you know, we get this sort of idealized version of the cheerleader trope in that she's sexy but she's nice to him, you know. She's part of the group but she's still willing to go to McDonald's with me, and how do we feel about Alexa?

JOE:

I love Alexa.

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

I love a bad bitch, and Alexa's confidence throughout this entire book, like she is a *mastermind* when it comes to, like, pivoting and coming up with a Plan B, C and D, and just getting rid of people who get in her way.

COOPER:

And using absolutely everything in her arsenal to get that.

BECCA:

She was prepared.

CASSIE:

She had like a rough life and instead of deciding to escape or be good despite the bad stuff, she just... "I had a rough life so I'm gonna kill everybody who upsets me." [Laughing]

COOPER:

Yeha, she went all in, you know, she really ran with it.

CASSIE:

You've gotta respect her goals I guess. [Laughing]

JOE:

She's clearly a psychopath, and I'll confess that rereading this as an adult, the sexual abuse of a minor was the part that didn't sit super well, because it suggests that because she was sexually abused by her father, she might have become this.

CASSIE:

Agree.

JOE:

The way she's written, I'm like, oh no girl, you were *always* gonna become this psychopath.

CASSIE:

Yeah!

COOPER:

And she was the kind of person that sort of leaked her psycho all over her friends because she made her friend, I would argue that she took over Lisa and turned her into what she is. She took over Stephen and turned him into what he is.

JOE:

And Roger.

COOPER:

And Roger! The late Roger Corbin. Theo's brother.

CASSIE:

She does it so quietly that nobody can really see it, nobody can pinpoint it. Nobody knows that it's happening while it's happening.

COOPER:

I will mention that I remember being very skeptical of her the entire time because here was this very sexy girl who was talking to the guy that I was identifying with. [Laughing] And being real nice to him, and wanting to hang out and giving him a kiss on the cheek. So it was like, she wants something! She couldn't just be nice, that's weird!

JOE:

It's one of the most frustrating aspects of the book that you're just like, there is NO REASON for her to be spending time with you. She doesn't like you. She is manipulating you. [Laughing]

BECCA:

Yeah, I was super suspicious of her the whole time. Like, I knew, I knew. But I, like Joe said, I loved her, man, she was a queen. [Laughing] There's that one part where like she um, Herb sees her father in the wheelchair, and she's like, "I gave him something that he'll remember for a long time." I'm like YES, QUEEN! THAT IS WHAT'S UP! Thank you! I'm a fan.

COOPER:

[Laughing] So let's move on to a fairly underwritten jock character, Stephen.

BECCA:

Ugg!

JOE:

I love that he's so bland.

CASSIE:

He's *oatmeal*.

JOE:

He's there for Alexa just so she can have, like, molded him into doing whatever she wants, and she sets him loose.

COOPER:

Yeah, and his attack on Herb is great because he forgets to put his car in park, and the car just rolls away. I mean it's, it's uh such a weird like, this book feels odd in every scene to me. Like we go to a new scene and it's almost like it's a different book, it's constantly writhing, and I think that's what makes it to complicated and so hard to describe, is because these scenes sometimes feel out of nowhere like when they're talking about throwing water balloons on the porch.

JOE:

And then that becomes significant!

COOPER:

Yeah! And that was the one coincidence that I couldn't get on board with.

JOE:

One too many?

COOPER:

Yeah it was like okay why randomly is *that*, why are they randomly it?

CASSIE:

Also, how did they not recognize her? Like you saw her in a flash, you've known this girl your whole life, how did you not know that's her until it's the very end, what?!

JOE:

Although we have identified that Herb has a terrible memory because he doesn't remember that Alexa moved to town when they were in second grade, he only remembers her when she gets hot.

CASSIE:

That's true, yeah.

COOPER:

They really do go all in on Herb's memory. They talk about it a lot, like a surprising amount.

JOE:

It almost uses photography as both a mechanism for voyeurism, but also as a, like a, you can't trust what Herb is saying, you can only trust the photographs.

CASSIE:

Yeah, he's very, very unreliable. Even in the conversations he has on the phone with the policeman, he switches his answers from one thing to the next, and when the police catches him on it and he's like no you said this, suddenly he doesn't know. Did I say that? I don't know, I don't remember that, I don't think I said that. And it's like, what are you doing? I was there for it, bud! [Laughing]

BECCA:

I like when he gets off the phone and he's like well, I've been lying the last two days.

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

I do think that's one of the other elements that makes this book stand out a little bit more compared to some of the others is that this is a book that takes place in about thirty hours, like it starts on Thursday afternoon and wraps up on Saturday afternoon, so I guess 48 hours. But the characters are awake for all of Friday and into Saturday, so their memories are unreliable, and it kind of ends up almost infecting you as a reader because you're just like, propulsive reading. By the time I got to the everything happening on the cliff edge where Sammie gets shot over and Stephen gets shot, you're just like, WHAT IS HAPPENING? How? What? The speed with which this is all going down is crazy.

COOPER:

Yeah. It reminds me of some of King's scenes where a lot of people get killed, you know, where he just - it's like suddenly, time expands and *this* happens, and then *this* happens, and you're just sort of seeing it. And that's some of the best, I think, Pike does here - he's just like, BOOM, okay, now we're doing this! Are you ready for it?

JOE:

Yes! And characters aren't prepared, so we are not prepared.

COOPER:

Right! Okay, Lisa. The cheerleader he *doesn't* like. And I think with good reads 'cause she is the "bitch cheerleader".

CASSIE:

Poor Lisa though! She gets probably turned into a monster by the prettier cheerleader, and then she gets *murdered*! She does not have a good time, like from my perspective, I can just imagine she meets this pretty cheerleader who wants to be her friend, and she's like WHOA! The most popular girl wants to be my best friend, this is awesome. Then they start doing cocaine, then they start getting into shenanigans--

COOPER:

Taking cocaine!

CASSIE:

Oh. right yes, sorry! They don't do cocaine, they take it places.

JOE:

They definitely don't snort it.

COOPER:

No, 'cause Pike's not gonna tell readers how to actually do cocaine.

CASSIE:

That wouldn't be appropriate for a children's book!

ALL:

[Laughing]

CASSIE:

So, they're sharing boyfriends, they're sharing everything, secrets, lives, drugs, and it's just - the way she gets treated, the way that she's very clearly the "bad one" of the two of them for the entire book, and then by the end you've learned that she was probably manipulated just as

much as Herb and just as much as anyone else. That was very powerful to me, I was like, "Oh, fuck! Poor Lisa. I hated her, now I feel bad!"

JOE:

We only get Lisa through Herb's interpretation as the victim of her ire, and then also through Alexa's perspective, which is, like, I mean, clearly Alex cannot be relied upon to tell the truth about Lisa because she was already done with her.

COOPER:

But according to this passage I've got here, "Lisa had a way of making people feel obligated to her." Let's move on to Roger for a bit. Our dead-before-the-book-starts character.

CASSIE:

I think it's interesting that he's dead before the book starts, but then we get him very early on in the dream sequence.

JOE:

Yes! And it's supposed to be meaningful, but we don't know why yet.

COOPER:

I mean he's really a non-character, but he is the - it's an example of how manipulative Alexa could be that she was able to turn into what seems like a good guy - Theo's brother - into this drug running addict whose having menage a trois and drug runs - I was impressed that they seemed to be legitimately polyamorous.

CASSIE:

Yeah, I personally didn't take any negative connotations to it when they were even talking about it in the book.

COOPER:

I think it's suppose to be, if I look at this through the lens of especially early 90s television, the people having the threesomes are the psychopaths.

JOE:

It's very sensational, and I think because it's also teenagers, you're thinking OH, this is unusual for teenage girls! Because I think we're used to the cat fighting, right?

COOPER:

Right, and instead they're sharing boyfriends, and probably getting down together a little bit.

JOE:

Sure.

COOPER:

It's very, very intriguing. [Laughs]

CASSIE:

I think with Roger, too, it kind of shows how widespread Alexa's damage is going, because it went from just her and Lisa to her, Lisa, and Roger, and then he dies, and now that's impacting Theo, that's impacting other people and other families. It's just spreading outward, like a poison.

COOPER:

Yeah, and that's really the catalyst for everything because none of this would have gone down this way had Roger not died there - been murdered, sorry.

JOE:

Well, maybe. I think there's every indication that as long as Alexa was in town, some of these events - they might not have gone down in this order or with these people, but I always take the insinuation is that this kind of trouble and violence will accompany wherever Alexa goes.

COOPER:

Mm, yeah. Herb's mom? My only comment is she's 43, and that makes me sad because I'm 2 years younger than her.

ALL:

[Laughing] Aw!

COOPER:

That's it, that's all I've got. [Laughing]

JOE:

She was so kind!

COOPER:

She is, and I used to be younger than the protagonist, but now I'm almost as old as their parents.

JOE:

That's the problem with reading books - we get older, and they stay the same.

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

But yes, she's very permissive, she's very kind. But ultimately, she - I think sometimes in these books, the parents exist only to go to another room because they have to be gone to let things

happen, you know? Although she is very excited that Alexa came over in the middle of the night to hang out in her son's bedroom with him.

JOE:

You gotta be worried when your teenage son installs a darkroom into his bedroom. You're like, oh god, please meet a girl, please meet a boy!

COOPER:

Can you just be a little normal PLEASE? [Laughing]

JOE:

I do think there's a weird insinuation in this book, and this is very apropos of the 90s, but there's every assumption made that because Herb had a loving mother, he's turned out okay, whereas Alexa has turned out to be a psychopath because she had a sexual abuse history with her father. And then nobody else has parents at all.

COOPER:

That's very true! Even the Corbins - and there's two of them in this book!

JOE:

Yeah you suggested Theo maybe has a bad home, but like, why is he just constantly over at Herb's house? Why is he allowed to get drunk all the time?

COOPER:

Yeah! The casual beer drinking, it's just like, but isn't your boss around? You're at work! It was weird, it was weird to me. I think we're rounding it out to our last real character and I don't know that he's really a character, but Fitzsimmons, our cop, who half this story is told to.

BECCA:

Like, I liked him, but he had like that one creepy line where he was, like, "I would want to see the pictures, too" and I'm like, BACK UP, DUDE.

CASSIE:

Yes! That part was so gross!

COOPER:

Well, and he does want Herb to survive this, like he's really trying in their conversation, "Just come hang out with me so you don't get yourself murdered! Please!" But he is way too permissive as a cop, I think.

JOE:

I think it's partially because he's trying to gain Herb's confidence, so he's acting like a colleague as opposed to a cop. So he's saying things that Herb wants to hear, to try to get him to open up

so that he will maybe come into the station and remove himself from danger. And then when he gets the sense that that's not going to work, that's when he gets a little harder at the end.

COOPER:

Right, and he didn't make it.

BECCA:

Does he ever show up?

COOPER:

Nope, he didn't make it.

BECCA:

Aw.

COOPER:

Herb died, there's a funeral - it was just like suddenly!

JOE:

That's because Herb can't read the situation, he never understands what's going on. So he just assumes, and it's like, DUDE JUST SAY "YES, COME I'LL EXPECT YOU IN 30 MINUTES!"

COOPER:

The PikeCast has to take a quick break, but we will be right back!

[COMMERCIAL BREAK / INTERMISSION]

COOPER:

Welcome back to the podcast, and we're moving into Spellbound - discussion of the book's plot. Yes, we've already talked about the plot a lot. But really, what I want to know more than anything else is what intrigued you about this plot? And what did you find just, like, "Well that's stupid"?

CASSIE:

I liked the plot, I like that there's a bit of, sort of suspense to it. I liked that there's this underlying mystery of, you know, death and scandal and something going on that you're not quite aware of. I think, like Joe had mentioned about some of the characters, I think there were some points of the plot that were a little too convenient. It was like these little puzzle pieces that were needed only to make other pieces around them fit, and they didn't necessarily - like Theo, he just drove up suddenly with a gun to shoot and save Herb from Stephen. Just little things like that, where you have to suspend your disbelief, and if you can do that it's an enjoyable ride, but [laughing],

there are A LOT of moments that you have to do that in order make it enjoyable, I think. Which I enjoyed it, I had fun! But I'm also very used to Pike's books. [Laughing]

COOPER:

And how about you, Becca? For a first time Pike, like this is your very first Pike! Did it make you want to read more?

BECCA:

Yeah! So, I'm going to be honest, like before I read this book, I was like, "oh my god, I'm going to hate it, and my co-hosts are gonna hate me, this is gonna suck". [Laughing] But I got into it, and I feel like yeah, there are some elements of it that are like, cheesy. But I read a lot of YA to begin with, and I feel like it holds up pretty well - like yeah, again, cheesy sometimes, but I don't know, I was into it. And I was really enjoying it the whole time, I was thinking of *Scream* the entire time because you have these problems and at the very end, that climax was so long. After people die on the cliff, we have Alexa seducing Herb, and I just started thinking of Billy Loomis for some reason. Alexa tells Herb everything right before step-by-step, like this is what happened, and it reminded me so much of Billy Loomis explaining to Sydney Prescott, like, "this is what I did, buddy, this is what I did." And I don't know, I love *Scream*, so.

COOPER:

Yeah, Billy kind of took Stu and made him into what he was, huh!

CASSIE:

That's a really good comparison, I like that! I didn't pick up on it while reading but now in retrospect, I can definitely see that.

COOPER:

And we know Kevin Williamson is a fan of Christopher Pike, so maybe he was inspired!

BECCA:

Nice! Yeah, but, yeah, I liked it, I liked it a lot more than I thought I was going to.

CASSIE:

Yay!

COOPER:

That's good! I want to talk briefly about the very odd structure of this book.

JOE:

Oh, the framing device, you know?

COOPER:

Yeah, so we open with a dream, then he wakes up and begins a conversation with a police officer about the first 2/3 of the plot. And then he stops talking to the police officer, and then climax. So it's a really odd framing thing, I thought.

JOE:

Yeah this is a little unconventional for Pike, he tends to favor one or the other. So he'll open with a dream that portends what's going to happen through the rest of the book, or some kind of ominous warning. Or he'll do the right, we're at the end, and then we're gonna jump back and catch up until we get back to the climax.

CASSIE:

I think it's interesting because with this book, we spend a lot of the time like you mentioned talking to the police on the phone, and this isn't the only one of Pike's books that deals with most of it being in an interrogation, or like 'Fall into Darkness' with the courtroom. In 'Execution of Innocence', that one is also largely told outside of a linear storyline, and they're giving the information to the police who are trying to figure out what happened.

JOE:

Same with 'Gimme a Kiss'!

CASSIE:

Yes! And I love that, I love that Pike's not really focused on specifics. He's got a little bit of this, a little bit of that, maybe you'll have some ghosts sprinkled in! It's so varied, and I'm just so glad we're doing this podcast 'cause I'm so excited for these books! [Laughing]

JOE:

Yeah this is gonna be very interesting for you, 'cause you're gonna think you figured out how Pike writes, and then basically it'll be what Cassie said, "Okay, so is this supernatural or no?" Then your diagram splits [laughing], and it's like, "Okay, is it ghosts? Is it immortal beings returned from the past or the future?"

COOPER:

Is it dinosaurs?!

BECCA:

I'm so excited!

CASSIE:

Yeah, you're in for a treat!

COOPER:

In the book's plot, I don't know if it fits in plot, but I really need to talk about it. I'm a photographer, and NEVER in anything I've ever read except photography manuals, have I had people go into such detail about how photography works and how you print photos.

CASSIE:

I was gonna ask if that was accurate!

BECCA:

For a year, I took off of psychology and I went to photography, and I was really happy to see him go so deep into it, to be honest. Like, it was like the explanation, but I'm like, yeah I'm here for it the whole entire time he says this is what you do next, this is the developer, I was here for it, Cooper, I don't know about you.

COOPER:

Well, there's a, Francis Ford Coppola, the director of the Godfather, once said, "I'm gonna put a recipe in every movie, that way if you don't like the movie, at least you got a recipe out of it."

CASSIE:

I love that!!

COOPER:

Yeah! In the Godfather someone teaches you to make spaghetti sauce. So Die Softly teaches you, in shocking detail, how to develop film!

BECCA:

I was so excited about it, and then when Alexa shows up, I was like, 'is he really going to have to explain this all over again?' Like I really thought he was gonna tell her every step of the way.

COOPER:

I don't wanna hear it again!

JOE:

I like that we spend so much time talking about the development process, and then so how did I set up the timer? Oh, I just, you know, fused the camera... to the VCR... and you're like "I don't think that's a thing".

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

You know, i don't think I had those old VCRs where you actually have to turn the dial for time - I think that might work, but I'm not sure.

CASSIE:

I've never heard of using a VCR to take pictures, so the whole time I'm reading, I'm like, "IS THIS A THING? Or am I just a fool?!" [Laughing]

COOPER:

No, it's not a thing, but maybe possibly you can do it? No one has ever done it, I don't think. But maybe possibly you could!

CASSIE:

It probably gave some ideas to some teen boys in the 90s who tried to steal their parents VCR to take it to school. [Laughing]

JOE:

Possibly one of my favorite Pike conventions is just the crazy convenient like locations for something to happen, like in this case, I'm so glad that there used to be that air conditioning unit that had the giant platform that I could, like, hop skip and jump and put a VCR onto. ANd you're just like, "I love you, Christopher Pike."

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

How did he hide that?! It made no sense to me.

JOE:

And how did he angle it? The shelf - anyway, the logistics are not.. You have to let it go.

[Laughing]

COOPER:

Wasn't he worried about the lens fogging up? 'Cause I would be as a photographer, I'm concerned about foggy lens.

CASSIE:

With the hot water! That's a good point! Look, he had one thing on his mind, Cooper. Well... A couple of things on his mind.

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

Was that a tit joke, Cassie?

CASSIE:

Yes! Just a poorly done one!

BECCA:

It was good, I liked it. Can we put a laugh track right here?

[LAUGH TRACK]

CASSIE:

I thought it was interesting 'cause going back to the photography part, I've obviously never developed any photos, so I didn't know a lot of what he was talking about. And I read it all, and I was like, "Oh, this is cool! I don't know if this is true or not, but I'm gonna read it." When Alexa comes into his room the next day, or a couple hours later or whatever, and she says it smells like vinegar, I thought that was a nice touch because, as someone who doesn't know anything about developing photos, you would notice that and comment on it. I liked that they had both perspectives, and it seems like Pike has some experience developing photos.

COOPER:

Oh yeah, for sure, without knowing anything about him I can tell that Pike has developed pictures. When I read that it was like, well! Somebody's a photographer!

JOE:

Yeah, it's actually a fun thing because nobody knows who he was and he was so inherently private, it's fun to do the deep dive into each book where you're like, okay, so what is the factual thing that he's including about himself in this book that will give us a clue as to who he is in real life? It's like this, the name 'Ann'...

COOPER:

Oh, yeah Ann is in almost every book I think. But not in this one.

JOE:

One of the things I find really fascinating is - and it never occurred to me when I first read it, but upon this revisiting, when I saw that this was published in '91, and this was basically about a small town that's being corrupted by secretly, and the teens are up to no good and the parents don't seem to know, and there's this secret drug running organization - this is all taking place a year after Twin Peaks debuted!

CASSIE:

Oh my God, I didn't think about that!

COOPER:

Yeah, that's true.

JOE:

It just struck me, oh this small town of secrets! It must've been hugely influential.

COOPER:

Yeah, I mean that influenced everything on TV for the next 3 or 4 years at least.

CASSIE:

Laura Palmer had this very appearance of being so sweet and nice to most people, and then she had this secret, seedy underbelly to her life, a lot like Alexa... which I didn't think about that comparison, but that's a really good one!

COOPER:

And Lisa's the one that shows up dead earlier on in the story! And not wrapped in plastic, because that would be too on the nose. Okay! Shall we get to The Eternal Enemy? Our thoughts on the antagonist, which is Alexa.

JOE:

I think drugs are the antagonist!

CASSIE:

Yeah, cocaine! Cocaine's the real problem.

ALL:

[Laughing]

JOE:

Don't do drugs, kids!

COOPER:

Okay, yes, cocaine is the antagonist. And don't let someone put drugs under your nose when you have tape on your mouth, that's a good lesson.

JOE:

Ugh! I just love everything about the end of this book because not only do we get Alexa delivering this fantastic villain monologue, but then uses the most insidious way to kill someone!

COOPER:

It really is!

JOE:

And I love that she thinks she can get away with this. He would have rope marks all over his arms and feet, but sure, Alexa, yeah, just cover him in tape and force him to snort strychnine.

COOPER:

I mean, the other ones went over the cliff, so okay, I get that. But yeah, there's no way - this is someone who's really, really high on, among other things, her own power at this point. She can do *anything*, and no one can fucking stop her. And it's why I like the sort of background scene at the funeral, like it's that scene where there'd be music or a song playing. Maybe Bittersweet Symphony, I don't know, while she gets shown the pictures of her murdering this guy.

JOE:

Give it that Cruel Intentions treatment!

CASSIE:

Yes! I love it, very 90s.

COOPER:

Exactly! So it sounds like we're all aboard, this is a good enemy. She's a strong villain, a strong character. And she really comes to life in the story.

BECCA:

And I think it the fact that we gave her the backstory of her father really added to making her such a developed character in such a short book.

COOPER:

And he gets to just live there! And still watch her do all these things.

CASSIE:

I had a lot of respect for her, but then that ending - like, what did you expect would happen there, girl? How did you think you'd pull that off? All of the diabolical, like manipulation and the smart, intelligent little sinister things she did to kind of choreograph everything else that happened... All for her to be caught over something that - OF COURSE YOU GOT CAUGHT DOING THAT, GIRL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? I mean, I do agree with everything else you guys are saying, she was very strong, powerful, girl's gonna do what she wants, kill who she wants, take whatever cocaine she wants. [Laughing]

COOPER:

So powerful that Amazon named a device after her.

ALL:

[Laughing]

BECCA:

That's a damn queen right there.

JOE:

It's unfair to you folks but I'm kind of comparing her to some of the other Pike villains, and I don't think she's the worst of them all. I do think that she is quite memorable, like when you talk to people who have read of Pike, if you mention Die Softly, they will always talk about the end of this book, and how she kills someone by forcing them to basically kill themselves with cocaine. Like, that is *memorable*.

COOPER:
Eventually you're gonna have to breathe!

JOE:
That is cruel.

COOPER:
Yeah, it's rough. And this is a book with no supernatural elements at all! So it is purely the evil that humans are capable of. Okay, we're gonna move on! The next topic is Thirst - titillation and sexuality in Pike's world. Have you noticed he doesn't actually talk a lot about the sex? He talks a lot about some things, but the sex is just there.

JOE:
I think one of the things I like about this is that it's very frank in the acknowledgement that people want sex and they're having sex, but it's not exploitative? Like, he doesn't need to titillate you aside from the mention of "Oh, Lisa looked very good from that position in the photo" and you're like, Oh Herb, you're such a perv, okay creeper.

COOPER:
I'm very curious from our female point of view here, how the sexuality and titillation struck the two of you.

CASSIE:
I think it seemed fairly typical, being a story told primarily from a teenage boy's perspective that the things that he's focused on are her looks. Like, her legs - how tan and long and beautiful her legs look, and all these little things he just, his whole world is focused on girls and seeing these girls without their clothes on and getting to bed these girls. I think that kind of works to his disadvantage, because that desire for something he's never experienced and for the experience of just sex in general... it's what undoes him. It's what blinds him to everything else, and it leads to his death. And I loved that it's used that way! It's done in horror a lot. You have sex, now you're gonna die! The virgin usually survives, it's a trope, and I think Pike kind of played with that in this one which I liked a lot.

JOE:
But I like that in this case, it's not if you have sex you're gonna die, it's that you can't just be thinking of sex. Like, if Herb had kept his wits about him and acknowledged she's sexy and a

murderess, he probably would've been fine and instead he just lets little Herb do too much of the thinking.

COOPER:

Okay, and now for a little of the section named for the book that we're discussing this week! Where we discuss some of the more problematic elements to the writing and the plot.

BECCA:

I feel like we focused on what I found problematic, like the fat shaming of Sammie.

COOPER:

Sure, and we do acknowledge that this was written at a different time and that this was written in a different way because he was writing for a machine of a publisher at this point. And he was writing to what they wanted him to write. So with that said, yeah, this is problematic. Yeah, this is rough that the 'hero' basically is fat-shaming and exploiting people around him. How about you, Cassie? I know you said you had a few things on your problematic chart.

CASSIE:

Yeah, so I mean, we've kind of touched on all of them. There was the fat shaming, especially the part, "Somewhere inside hidden beneath the rolls of fat was the real Sammie" - that was like, what the FUCK? [Laughing] What does THAT mean exactly? Like, yeah, so, that.. I mean, and again, that's not me blaming Pike, that's not me saying Pike shares these views. I don't know him personally, so I'm not trying to hate on him or anything. But I do get, for the times that this book was written, and the character - I think it's a believable thought for the main character to have had, and for his way of thinking to have been. Which, it isn't good, but it's understandable for what it is.

COOPER:

And it does really reinforce that he *isn't* a great guy, that he *isn't* a great judge of character.

JOE:

Yeah.

COOPER:

And that's really part of hsi character, so if you look at it that way, that's - that's yeah, not Pike saying it, that's Herb saying that.

CASSIE:

Yeah, and I agree with that. And I think between that and the - I think it was Joe that actually mentioned that the police officer was kind of trying to appeal to Herb, and my problematic thing that I had highlighted that Becca mentioned, was when they're talking and Herb's explaining to the cop what happened, and the police guy is like, "I can understand why any teenage boy would take photos of a bunch of naked teenagers; hell, I'd probably look at them myself." And I

was like, dude! This is a GROWN ASS MAN, and these girls are like, 15! Ew! And I will say though, with Joe's perspective being that he was just trying to buddy up and appeal to Herb, that makes WAY more sense for me, and makes it less gross.

COOPER:

Oh, yeah, for sure - like, hey! Everyone likes sexy cheerleaders!

CASSIE:

And I've seen it on Law and Order and stuff! So those are the two things that stood out, and I think it's cool too that we're having this discussion, 'cause I didn't think of it from the buddy cop perspective. I was just like ew, gross guy! But I like that we're getting into it [laughing], it's a new perspective for me to have on it.

COOPER:

Okay, let's move on to the Season of Passage where we discuss the best writing and the worst writing we found in this book.

CASSIE:

Ooh, I have one! I only have one thing that I liked highlighted, but, "He was thrown down again, and it felt like another dimension where people looked the same but acted differently. Where blood stained the ground and no one seemed to mind. But before he could walk over the blood, he had to watch it fall." And I thought that was such a, like, wow! I really liked it.

COOPER:

Ooh yeah, very nice passage! Mine is, "She had snorted one gram of cocaine too many, and burned out the inside of her skull before she drove off the face of the wicked cliff and caught on fire at the bottom."

JOE:

Like that! That's very film noir, right?

ALL:

[Agreement]

JOE:

This is queueing you towards film noir, which means you should be looking for the femme fatale!

COOPER:

Yes, exactly! How about you, Becca?

BECCA:

I don't know if you want to put this in good or bad writing, but there's this line that I really enjoyed, like I laughed a bit at. "His blood was hot, his thoughts were naughty." Alright, that's golden! [Laughing]

COOPER:

That's not only a good line, that's cover text!

BECCA:

That had me crackling!

COOPER:

I've got, "Herb chewed on the whole of his life for a moment." I like that.

CASSIE:

I like that!

COOPER:

Another, "The moon had finally risen, a dull yellow quarter crescent. It hung above the dark hills like an artist's tired afterthought."

BECCA:

I like how you guys have such good lines, and I'm like, "He was naughty!"

ALL:

[Laughing]

CASSIE:

I love it, Becca!

COOPER:

Your line was great!

BECCA:

It's pretty golden.

COOPER:

Yours is the only one going on the cover of a book, I mean, come on! That could be the tagline for this episode, for fuck's sake.

BECCA:

It really should be, honestly.

COOPER:

Okay, so last one in the good section, “What are you doing, loading your ammunition? Cameras only fire blanks, you should know that by now.” And that’s a thought from Herb.

CASSIE:

That’s a good one! The other one I had that’s not a full line, but like I told you guys, I really like when they do the thing and they say the title, so when Alexa says, “Just be easy, and I’ll let you *die softly*”, I was like YES! SHE SAID IT! [Laughing]

JOE:

Yes!

COOPER:

It’s like that Leo DiCaprio meme from Once Upon a Time in Hollywood - YEAH! I get that! Die softly, look what you did! I’m always a fan of when that happens.

CASSIE:

I told you guys I’m gonna look out for it every time we read a book now.

JOE:

‘Cause some of these titles sound a little like Bond titles, like you can imagine the 25th Bond movie being Die Softly!

CASSIE:

Or Execution of Innocence!

COOPER:

Yes! That’s a great one. [Laughing] This isn’t good or bad, but it’s just interesting to me, “Herb swallowed. The lump was back in his throat. The damn lump. He should have it operated on, it might be cancer. It might be something worse.” Like, randomly in the middle of the story, suddenly we’re worried about cancer!

BECCA:

That sounds like my anxiety talking, I tell ya.

CASSIE:

[Laughing] Same.

BECCA:

That’s something I’d think about!

ALL:

[Laughing]

COOPER:

It was just like, whoa, Herb, calm down! It's not cancer, for fuck's sake!

JOE:

He's such an anxious guy, right?

COOPER:

He is, he really is. Okay! Now we come to Last Act. Our final thoughts and our rating out of 5 Pikes! So who would like to go first with their final thoughts?

CASSIE:

Are we giving half Pikes?

COOPER:

You can give a half-Pike! Or you can throw a head on a Pike, if you wanna give it a little extra oomph.

CASSIE:

[Laughing] Okay, so I will give this one - so, I will say as well, I have a lot of his other books to compare this one to. So this isn't my favorite of his works, but it's also not the worst one I've read, or the one I liked the least. So I think I'm gonna give it 3.5 Pikes or 3.5 heads? 3 Pikes and one head on a Pike. [Laughing] Just jam that on there. And that's not to say, you know, 3 is the basic middle line, so I will say that I liked this one. I liked that it was really involved and that you kind of weren't sure. And I like that they flipped the script on a couple different things that you aren't expecting. That said I think he does it maybe a little bit better in some of his other books, so this is kind of in the middle for me.

COOPER:

How about you, Joe?

JOE:

I'm probably gonna give this one.. 4 impales Sammies?

ALL:

[Laughing]

CASSIE:

Oh noooo!

COOPER:

Poor Sammie!

JOE:

The worst! As if this character hadn't been hurt enough. That end was... Mean.

CASSIE:

It was rough. The blood drips...

JOE:

I think, kind of like what Cassie said, I really appreciate how this book flips the script on certain things that you'd expect. And I also think it's really tried and true Pike, like you're gonna see a lot of similar thematics, a lot of similar characters, this is quite representative of what he's going to deliver - particularly in the non-supernatural books. So I found that this was more or less a good reread, apart from the fatphobia stuff, I think it's enjoyable.

COOPER:

How about you, Becca?

BECCA:

I am gonna go with 3.5 also, 3.5 Pikes. Like I said, never read this before, and it was enjoyable. I was turning pages nonstop wanting to know what was happening. Yeah, there were some issues, the fatshaming and all that. But I enjoyed it and we had a badass woman and we love those, so we love to see it. All in all, I feel like Alexa made this book for me.

COOPER:

For sure!

CASSIE:

Absolutely!

COOPER:

I'm gonna go along with Joe and give it a 4. For a book that I couldn't really remember, this one got me back to where I was, you know, sitting on my bed in my room at my parent's house with a flashlight under the covers reading, and it really, it really just took me away again to the world of Christopher Pike, and reading this made me so happy that we're doing this podcast 'cause it was like, OH YEAH, this is my jam!

So, Joe, thank you so much for being our very first guest on The PikeCast!

JOE:

I'm so honored, thank you for inviting me!

[Crew & guest all provide their social media links / how to find them outside of The PikeCast - see website for all links)

COOPER:

So, next time on The PikeCast, we will be reading and discussing WHISPER OF DEATH, which is my book that I think of when I think of Christopher Pike. And I can't wait! So thank you everybody, thank you again Joe. Cassie, Becca, you're awesome, thank you for doing this with me! And we'll see you in 2 weeks on The PikeCast!

CASSIE:
Whoo, bye!

BECCA:
Bye!

OUTRO:
You've survived the night, friends! You can peek out from under the covers and see the first blooms of dawn out the window. Thanks for spending the night with The PikeCast, and we'll hope you'll join us again next time! Until then, Pikers, pleasant dreams!

[Sneak peek listen of Cooper's AUDIOBOOK!]

The logo for 'The PikeCast' is written in a stylized, cursive font. The word 'The' is in a smaller, pink font above 'PikeCast', which is in a larger, bold, pink font. The letters have a thick, dark pink outline and a slight shadow effect, giving it a 3D appearance. The text is slanted upwards from left to right.