

## *Elatsoe* Transcript

Welcome to Reading the Rainbow, brought to you by the Dauphin County Library System. For the book curious looking for their next good LGBTQ+ read. Listen in as queer library staff discuss the Own Voice stories they've been reading.



Em: My name is Em and I use they/them pronouns.

Annika: I am Annika and any pronoun is good for me. Darcie Little Badger is a Lipan Apache writer with a PhD in oceanography. She is an earth scientist, writer, and a fan of the weird, beautiful, and haunted. Her critically acclaimed debut novel *Elatsoe* was featured in Time magazine as one of the best 100 fantasy novels of all time. *Elatsoe* also won the Locus Award for best first novel. Her second fantasy novel, *A Snake Falls to Earth*, received the Newbery honor and is on the National Book Awards long list. Darcie is married to a veterinarian named Taryn.

E: Today we are talking about *Elatsoe*, which is a ghostly YA murder mystery set in a contemporary America shaped by the ancestral magics and knowledge of its indigenous and immigrant peoples. *Elatsoe* is a 17-year-old Lipan Apache girl with a very special ability that has been passed down through her matriarchal ancestry, the ability to raise animal spirits from the dead. When Ellie's beloved elder cousin dies under mysterious circumstances, she must track down his murderer, a man named Dr. Abe Allerton, to the strange and dangerous town of Willoughby, Texas, a place none too willing to give up its dark secrets. With the help of her family, her trusty sidekick ghost dog Kirby, and her pointy-eared best friend Jay, Ellie sets out on a mission to investigate her cousin's murder and find justice for her family. The book is accompanied by beautifully interwoven chapter illustrations by Rovina Cai, which tell a tale from the past that parallels Ellie's present peril, a story of her ancestor and namesake, her sixth great-grandmother, *Elatsoe*. And some content warnings for this book: there are some depictions of violence and scenes of racism. So yeah, what did you think about this book?

A: I thought she was fabulous with world-building, like the various creatures that she came up with, like the cave drawings that came to life and eat people. I mean, that's fabulous. I loved all of the historic stories and things like that, like the heroism of her sixth great-grandmother. It was fabulous.

E: Yeah. No, I agree. I loved this book. I feel like this is one of the most delightful reads that I've had in a long time. And I know that you, Annika, like audiobooks. Did you listen to this one? Because I listened to this.

A: I did. I did go through the book because I saw about the...

E: The illustrations?

A: Yes.

E: Yeah.

A: I'm like, well, I'm not going to miss that. I had to look through too. And they were very, very gorgeous.

E: No, I loved not only the voice of Darcie Little Badger, like as an author, and I watched a lot of interviews preparing for this podcast episode. And she's just seems like such a delightful person. And she's so smart. The fact that she has like a PhD in oceanography and the way she talks about like, how she thinks about monsters in this world comes from like, you know, a science-y place. It's just, it's a really interesting way that she looks at fantasy. And I also really loved the voice of the narrator of the audiobook, Kinsale Hueston. I just thought that it was, well, I don't want to say delightful because it is

a murder mystery. And it is like a gruesome murder mystery that it is like about a town that does have a systemically dark past, you know?

A: Right. You put it very well there. It is a really good read. It flows so well. And it's beautifully described. You kind of tend to forget that this terrible thing has happened.

E: Yeah.

A: So like at the very end, and you're like, oh, yeah.

E: It's like the characters are so charming. Like I really love the characters. I loved Ellie and I loved Jay and I loved their relationship as best friends. I love that, you know, so there are aspects of fantasy in this, obviously. And one of them being the Fae exist, right? And Jay is like a descendant of the Fae to some extent. And I finished reading this, and I logged it on Beanstack because I'm trying to log my reading more. And I put a review and I was like, I'm so glad her family is behind her too. Like she's so determined and she also has her family there, which is nice. I thought the characters were all great.

A: Yeah, you have so many YA novels where the things happen to them instead of them taking active role in their own lives. But yeah, Ellie absolutely is taking an active role in everything. And she's like, if you aren't on board, whatever, I'm doing it anyway. Yeah, I'm gonna get this guy. And she's a fabulous character because of that. Also, the fact that she is ace. I mean, as an ace, I very rarely get to see myself in stories. So I was super excited to read this because of that.

E: I liked too that it wasn't a main aspect of the plot. I liked that it was just like kind of mentioned in jokes about like, never wanting to, it added to Ellie's character in a way that was very humorous. It wasn't a negative aspect in any way. There was never any...

A: It wasn't really in your face. It was incidental. Yeah. So that is nice because a lot of LGBTQ things, you end up focusing a lot on the coming out story and stuff like that. But just the fact that she's allowed to be ace and it just doesn't matter is wonderful.

E: Well, and she also has this very wholesome friendship with this like very goofy romance-oriented young man, right? Like, you know, well, I don't want to say romance oriented, but we meet him doing a very silly like post breakup thing, which is funny.

A: I also love the fact that he is a straight male cheerleader.

E: Yes. Yeah. And it comes in handy. Like he's very strong and like, like it helps them because they do get into some like dangerous situations, right? Like, Willoughby, Texas is dark and dangerous and the people do not like them. And, you know, they're both very strong and capable characters who I think are very fleshed out. And yeah, it's, I don't know. It's nice. It's nice. Something that I learned when I was watching interviews with Darcie Little Badger and one of them in particular was a really good one from Comic-Con at Home 2020, where she talks to the moderator about how she thinks about colonialism and magic. She said something about the fairy rings in particular. Fairy rings are another thing that, you know, exists in this world in association with like the European fae who have come over into the, Turtle Island, you know, the First People's lands, right? And, you know, their backgrounds are both, they both have this ancestral lineage that has some sort of metaphysical gift, right? Like Jay is descendant from the European fae and he can travel in fairy rings and only white people, essentially, are allowed to travel in fairy rings. Darcie Little Badger talks about like colonialism in this, the idea of, you know, what does Indigenous magic look like when encroached upon by outside forces, like colonial, neo-colonial magics? And she talks about and a lot of them are derived from Lipan Apache traditions that are, you know, verbal stories that have been passed down. And a lot of those monsters have been sort of, you know, disappearing, pushed out. And one of the other things that has come into play is these different monsters. Like for example, there's these haunted scarecrows that are sort of a result of, you know, monocrop farming and desecrating the land

and really poor agricultural practices as a result of European settlers. I would highly recommend if you're interested in this book, which it's very good, definitely like listen to Darcie Little Badger talk about it and her thought process that goes into it. It's really an interesting way to think about fantasy and neo-colonialism.

A: Now that you mention it, like the fact that all of the bad guys are within the European bent is very interesting.

E: Yeah.

A: I never thought, I didn't think about that while I was reading. But yeah, clearly vampires are not a Native American thing either. Well, actually they might be, I don't know.

E: Yeah. Yeah, I learned a lot from the lore in this, right? Like I loved all of the stories of Sixth Great Grandmother and all the monsters that she fought and how she developed this gift of being able to raise spirits from the dead and how you only raise animal spirits, but not human spirits because they're very vengeful. It's a lot of mythos that I was not privy to before reading this. And so I really appreciated the way that it was presented in, again, like a very delightful tale. Obviously not, because it is sad, you know, Ellie's cousin is murdered in a terrible way, but they do get vengeance, right? That feels good. Not like too heavy spoilers, but it does end in a way that feels like there's justice. Another thing that I heard Darcie Little Badger say, how does a young woman like Ellie seek justice for somebody she loves in a world that so often seems to be stacked against her? Like, that was a big thing that she thought about when writing this.

A: And that is a very timely question as well, shall we say. Not just in this book, but in, really in the real world too. Which is something that's really nice about fantasy is that you can really look deeply into real world problems in a fantastic way. It makes it a little bit easier to stand back from and not be quite as overwhelmed by real world issues.

E: Yeah. I really like this book and that it presents a really, like you said, fantastical way to look at justice and look at like, how do you take a situation into your own hands and what does it look like when a family comes together and seeks justice? And what does it look like when a young woman, I don't know, she does throw caution to the wind sometimes. Sometimes you want to hold her back and be like, girl, please just take a breath. I recognize that she's like very angry and she wants to do something because— Something that we haven't talked about in this at all, which I think is important to mention, is that her cousin is murdered in what looks like a car crash, but she knows that it's not. I won't tell you why, but she knows it's not a car crash. And the police are not willing to investigate further. And so a big aspect of this is the fact that Ellie is kind of on her own in a legal sense, right? She does have her family and she has her best friend and she has her best friend's resources, which is his aunt who also has, you know, Faye ancestry. She comes into play when they're doing this, you know, paranormal investigation. But I like very much that there is justice here and it is good fantasy, good accessible narrative about like community resilience. It's just delightful also.

A: I mean, it is for being about dead things and murder. I mean, it really is delightful. And honestly, if she decides to continue like making books with these characters, I am so here for Ellie-Jay, like paranormal investigators.

E: Literally, like I would read seven of these books. Like honestly, I would read anything that Darcie Little Badger wrote. Her second novel, *A Snake Falls to Earth*, I think just came out recently. I could be wrong.

A: Yes, no it came out just recently, it's on our New shelf.

E: I don't know— It's on our New shelf. Is that you said?

A: Yes, I might go downstairs and like take it out.

E: Yeah, there you go. I mean, why not? Yeah, I don't know anything about that one. So I'm really excited to look into that. Yeah, I want to just mention something that I thought was really beautiful was that two of the main characters in this book are named after people and an animal from Darcie Little Badger's own life. Elatsoe, the name Elatsoe, or the word Elatsoe is a Lipan Apache word that means hummingbird. And that is, you know, the main character's name. It's also her sixth great-grandmother's name. And it's also Darcie Little Badger's grandmother's name in real life, which I didn't know until watching some interviews. That was really there's a really sweet interview with her and her mother. And it's I believe it's the native artist spotlight, Dr. Darcie Little Badger. And it's from the Onward Project on YouTube. And there's this video of her with her mother, just beaming, smiling behind her. And then behind them is this painting of her grandmother that Darcie Little Badger says she painted when she was in high school. And it's just—

A: Oh my goodness.

E: You can tell that she cares so much about this book that she's written. And it's such a good book. Anyway, Elatsoe is her grandmother's name. You can see a very beautiful painting that she made of her grandmother if you even just search Elatsoe on YouTube or Dr. Darcie Little Badger Elatsoe. And then Kirby, the ghost dog, who is Ellie's trusty sidekick, is inspired by Darcie Little Badger's first family dog. And his name was Kirby. She said that he was a very good boy in the interview, which I thought was really nice. She's really emphatic when she talks about how good of a dog he is, which is cute.

A: That's adorable. I was amused that the Waffle House is mentioned like several times and how good waffles are. It was just like a random thing, but it kept going throughout the book. And I'm like, okay, everyone likes waffles, I guess. Especially like at the end with the surprise passenger carrying the waffles down the street.

E: Oh, I forgot about that. That's right. I totally forgot about that.

A: I'm just like, that's so cute.

E: Well, and you know, it makes sense because Waffle House is just good. Also so Southern, true. Yeah.

A: Yeah.

E: That does take place in the South, where there are many a Waffle House.

A: It is true.

E: Many a local teen are known to spend their days.

A: And evenings and nights.

E: Yes. Yes. Yeah. More realistically, but in the evening.

A: Yeah. I did want to mention, we were talking about the teleportation and the mushroom rings.

E: Yeah.

A: And I just thought it was a great detail that like in this world, mushroom rings, they're like going to the airport. It's so normal that you have to like go to the mushroom ring station and you have to get

like, wanded and all that stuff just kind of like going on an airplane. But then you teleport to another mushroom ring. And I just thought that was so cool.

E: Yeah. It's like very well regulated. There's a whole like system of transport and you have to get like okayed, I think, to make certain transport or something. Yeah. Interesting.

A: Just like all her ideas on the fantastic are just so—

[silence from 0:15:41 – 0:18:19]



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