

Legends and Lattes 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.



Amber: Hi, my name is Amber. My pronouns are she and her.

Ashley: Hi, I'm Ashley. My pronouns are she/they.

Jamie: Hi, I'm Jamie. My pronouns are she/her.

Ashley: Today we are discussing *Legends and Lattes* by Travis Baldry. Travis is a full-time audiobook narrator who has lent his voice to hundreds of stories. Before that, he spent decades designing and building video games like *Torchlight*, *Rebel Galaxy*, and *Fate*. Currently, he has now written one book. He lives in the Pacific Northwest with his very patient family and their small, nervous dog. *Legends and Lattes* is his first book, which he began as a NaNoWriMo project. In an interview, Travis mentioned that during the COVID shutdown, he wanted a Hallmark Channel movie, but set in the *Forgotten Realms*, something escapist in the form of adventure fantasy. Travis is currently working on his second book, which will be set in the same world as *Legends and Lattes*, but will follow a different set of main characters.

Jamie: (synopsis) High fantasy with a double shot of self-reinvention. Worn out after decades of packing steel and raising hell, Viv the orc barbarian cashes out of the warrior's life with one final score. A forgotten legend, a fabled artifact, and an unreasonable amount of hope lead her to the streets of Thune, where she plans to open the first coffee shop the city has ever seen. However, her dreams of a fresh start pulling shots instead of swinging swords are hardly a sure bet. Old frenemies and Thune's shady underbelly may just upset her plans. To finally build something that will last, Viv will need some new partners and a different kind of resolve. A hot cup of fantasy slice-of-life with a dollop of romantic froth. Other prominent characters are Tandri, a succubus who comes to work at the cafe, Cow, a hob who helps Viv build her shop, and Thimble, a ratkin who bakes delicious pastries. Without giving a rundown of every named character, it's worth mentioning that almost everyone has an interesting addition to the story. Content warnings: sexual harassment, and stalking.

Amber: So at the beginning of the story, as mentioned in the book description, Viv is leaving her life of adventuring with her last score, which is a Scalvert's Stone. And this comes up pretty early in the book. So what that is, it's meant to bring what you need to you, I believe. So she takes it to find the right place for her cafe and hopes that it will bring the people she needs and the good luck she needs to help her succeed.

Jamie: Once she gets the Scalvert's Stone, she pretty much just like abandons her crew, just like merges off because they've been together for 22 years.

Amber: Yes, the scene where she gets her stone and leaves is so abrupt. And honestly, I don't know if I would have taken it as well as some of her friends did.

Jame: And once she gets the Scalvert's Stone, she's just out of there. No goodbyes to any of the crew. Like you said, very abrupt.

Amber: Yeah, she's like, got what I need. See ya. Bye.

Ashley: Right. She literally just says out and leaves. I'm sure they all followed and had more of a conversation, but just like setting that initial scene in the prologue, it's very clear that she's over adventuring and done with that life and ready for something different. This original gang comes up again, like throughout the story too, you know, and addresses how she left them. Because, yeah, like you said, I'm not sure how I would have handled something like that after 22 years.

Jamie: I really like how the whole situation was handled very realistically, as in social interactions and relationships are very important. So when something's not handled correctly, that later comes up and the characters have a chance to resolve that. Because those are kind of realistic confrontations and conflicts that most of us have. The other thing I really liked is how, as like Viv was getting the Scalvert's Stone, she noticed her back was hurting and she was like thinking how relieved she was to physically not have to do this anymore.

Ashley: Yeah, the fact that she was constantly throughout the book stretching her back, just like kept seizing up and she would feel like tweaks of pains and things. It just adds to that kind of, I mean, she's a barbarian orc, but she's also just very relatable in the fact that she was tired of the thing that she was doing for 22 years and wanted to move on, but has these lasting, you know, little pains and things. Just made it all the much more kind of like an everyday slice of life kind of story.

Jamie: It's very fantastical as far as it takes place in this like medieval type village with a barbarian, a succubus, and other fantasy characters, but they're really just building a community, putting together a business. It makes it intriguing, but at the same time, I'm just like, this is all very relatable.

Ashley: I was listening to a couple of different interviews that Travis did leading up to and just after the release of his book, I guess in the spring. And one thing that he mentioned in a couple of those interviews was that, you know, he came up with this idea during the initial COVID shutdown, and then that following November used it as his NaNoWriMo challenge to complete the entire book, which is really impressive. But just the fact that he wrote it during that time and was kind of craving, you know, it can seem like a mundane story, like, oh, this being, this orc wants to just open up a coffee shop. And that's literally the whole thing. That's the story. But that's kind of what he was craving, like, gee, wouldn't it be nice right now? I could just like go to a coffee shop, listen to some chill music and hear, you know, people chattering. And, you know, the barista is making drinks and like, he really missed that kind of environment. And so I thought that was kind of interesting. And also thinking like other books that I've kind of published recently along that same trend, it makes me think like, it's not just a trend, but it's like something that people are kind of craving or have been craving the past couple of years.

Amber: Yeah, I like that there's that blurb on the cover that says a novel of high fantasy and low stakes. And I just love that so much. Like, fantasy is often used as an escape. But I like that this is both fantasy and escape in the traditional sense where it's this fantastical world and your main character is an orc barbarian. But it's also an escape as in like, wouldn't this be nice? And it's so cozy. And I think you're right, Ashley, I think it's a really big trend in sci-fi and in fantasy. That it's like something not normal for like everyday world rules is happening, but it's also very cozy. I just love that so much.

Jamie: Speaking of coziness, I really love how they went into the sensory experiences of smelling the coffee, tasting it, the lattes, and then the food that Thimble would make for the cafe, the biscotti, the cinnamon rolls. He really put a lot of thought and detail so that you were actually experiencing the same sensations yourself. It also made me really want some coffee while I was reading this.

Amber: Made me really want some cinnamon rolls. Yeah, I love the trend of cozy fantasy and like books that are just calming and nice to read. I think in a previous episode of the podcast, we talked that the trend in especially queer, like cozy sci-fi and cozy fantasy that it just keeps popping up because all queer people want is a coffee shop.

Jamie: That was *One Last Stop*.

Amber: Yes, one last stop.

Ashley: I wasn't in on that one, but I love that book. I've read it multiple times. I think we've talked about this before, though.

Amber: Yeah, I think a couple of the ones we've done have been like that. *Life for My Common Stars* has the magical donut shop. There's one that we considered talking about, *the Heartbreak Bakery*. It's such a nice trend. And I think this book, I think, encompasses that probably more than any of the other ones. This whole thing, it's just a fantasy coffee shop AU.

Ashley: And what struck me as impressive with this book, and this might be because prior to becoming a published author, he has narrated hundreds of audiobooks, is that it's only 305 pages. It's on the shorter side, right? And none of his descriptions of things goes on for paragraphs and paragraphs. Yet he's still able to capture that coziness and develop the characters in a way that you're just really drawn into their circle. Thimble has what? Two lines? And yet I see fan art for Thimble everywhere.

Amber: I love Thimble.

Ashley: So I just thinking not so much about the plot, but the writing style. I was just very impressed with and very appreciative of the short descriptions. But it was just enough to get the sense, really want to sit down and have a croissant with a chocolate center or a cinnamon roll and a cup of coffee. And also like the dialogue and the character building and everything. I was very impressed with his writing and was kind of shocked that it was his first stab at writing a book.

Jamie: I was also really impressed in that he was able to give a distinct voice to all of his characters. Like Tandri, Cal, Viv, Thimble all had very distinct ways of speaking, and he was able to capture that really well.

Amber: Yeah, when I was trying to think of which other characters to mention in our introduction, I was like, well, these ones are the ones that come up the most. But almost every character that has a name, you're like, oh, they have a really like distinct character to them and a distinct contribution to the story. And I was like, I can't add all of them. But like, I kind of want to because there's like the kid that comes in to play his lute. And then what I think is an electric guitar. I couldn't tell. I'm pretty sure it was it was a fantasy version of an electric guitar. And then like the woman who lives across the road. Just everyone was so interesting.

Jamie: It feels more realistic because of the way that he portrays the world where you have all of these unique individuals interacting with each other, having conflicts with each other sometimes, but being able to like work and resolve them. Much more interesting to read about than when you just have characters who are good or evil.

Ashley: There are several secondary characters who are introduced. So like Amber mentioned, the musician who wants to start playing at the cafe. And then there's also a student who wants to just kind of sit there and study without buying anything. They're just like such a character pulled from real life. And

just like those tiny little annoying things that if you work in a coffee shop, these are the things that you have to deal with on a regular basis, which kind of made me laugh having worked in a coffee shop myself, but also him finding a way not to just use that to just kind of add to the environment. But like you said, Jamie, like everyone plays a part in the story and an overarching theme is just kindness. So people make these little, I don't want to say mistakes, but they're those little minor conflicts. But in the end, everyone finds a way to make a contribution to the overarching story, which is really nice. And just wow, look at all these people learning and growing from each other and just doing nice things. What a world.

Amber: I also like that, is that despite it being this like wonderful little escapist fantasy, that's just so soft and nice to read and you just want a coffee and a curl up by the window. There are also these wonderful little subtle themes throughout the book. And one of them, like you said, Ashley, is kindness. Just everyone's so nice. I wish real life was like that. There are a lot of really good little themes in here. One of the ones that I really liked was each of these characters in other fantasy settings, they would usually fill a specific role. And in this book, most of them don't stay within the expectations you would have for that kind of character.

Jamie: Yeah, like Viv, our protagonist, is a barbarian orc, which would normally be one of like the baddies or somebody that the main character is fighting against. But in this one, you're really rooting for her just to be able to accomplish her dream of having a coffee shop, being able to contribute to the community. And then she meets Tandri, who is battling against stereotypes that are forced on her. And she just wants to be taken seriously.

Amber: And then Hob, too. Honest, I'm not 100% certain what Hob is meant to look like. I Googled it, and there are two possibilities. One is a version of a Hobgoblin. And the other one is kind of like a small, wrinkly old man. Kind of what I envisioned Hob as. Cal, when she met him, he was working by himself. Didn't she wait at the dock for a while, just waiting to see if she could find someone who was different from everyone else? And that's how she ended up meeting Cal.

Ashley: Yeah, I wasn't sure if Hob meant like Hobgoblin, like you said, Amber, or like a hobbit. But regardless, that scene where she's watching him, it's very clear that the other people in the shipyard building boats and things kind of kept their distance from him, did not interact with him. Clearly, he was the black sheep. And for whatever reason, they thought he was not a good person to work with. But then having Viv sit there all day, observing different people and specifically observing Cal and the work that he was doing and how he was doing it and his methodology and all of that, and kind of looking past the physical appearances to see what he was actually doing. So it's not just Viv or Tandri who have these stereotypes that they're battling. It's pretty much everyone in the book. So even like from her old group, Gallina, she's a little gnome, but she's also, I guess, in the world of D&D, she would be a thief, right? She deals with daggers and works very quickly and things and is just way stronger and a very important part of their party than one would think. I really liked her. I also really like Cal. And going back to the character development and everyone having such a well thought out story, even just Cal's thing is saying, "hmm." And just that one thing really pulled him together. And for a couple of days afterwards, I found myself going, "hmm," also. But yeah, pretty much everyone in the story is kind of battling against these stereotypes. And even Viv catches herself doing that with Tandri a bit when they first meet, which I thought was interesting, since Viv is constantly fighting that as a very large person in a town where there aren't a lot of other works.

Amber: I mean, the whole shop is also something that nobody else has ever seen or knows how to handle, which I thought was really fun. I hadn't actually thought very much about coffee in fantasy settings, but nobody in this book has ever heard of coffee until Viv comes and sets up her shop. And it's just, it's so funny. Bean water and a lady stocking.

Jamie: Lady stocking was a filter, just to be clear, just to be clear.

Amber: Yes!

Ashley: A coffee filter.

Amber: A coffee filter before they got the coffee machine. But yeah, just everyone being like, I don't know about this. And then it just growing on everyone. It was so cute. I just loved it so much.

Ashley: And even the building itself before Viv purchases it, it was like an old rundown livery. I was like, yeah, we can turn this into a coffee shop. So like even moving past that expectation of the building itself and turning into something different is kind of cool.

Amber: Speaking of the building, this is slightly off topic. I really liked the first few chapters just feeling kind of like a game of Sims, where they're like, all right, we have the supplies, now we're going to build it.

Jamie: Yeah, very soothing to like just have a list of tasks that need to get completed in order to have a coffee shop so you can go ahead and bring that community building.

Amber: Right. And then up until the end of the book, Viv is also like has so much money saved that like that's not even a factor that also takes some of the stress off of the situation. Just yeah, it was just like a little game of Sims.

Ashley: Cheating with the Rosebud and Motherwood cheats. Another thing that I found really satisfying, and it's like, it's a pretty minor thing, but throughout the book, they update the menu, and I don't know why, but I really enjoyed that almost as much as I enjoyed the descriptions of the food itself. And the drinks. But just like seeing it grow was very satisfying and kind of marked like the different milestones that were happening throughout the book.

Jamie: It was also fun just to see what description Tandri would give the item. Like some of the descriptions were "coffee, exotic aroma and rich full bodied roast." Latte was "a sophisticated and creamy variation." Cinnamon roll was "heavenly frosted cinnamon pastry" and pimplets, like biscotti, "crunchy nut and fruit delicacies." Just very satisfying to think about.

Amber: I like the one, I can't find it, but the one for the chocolate croissants was like something about a flaky pastry with a sinful center.

Ashley: Oh yes.

Amber: Correct.

Ashley: "Midnight Crescents, buttery fold over with a sinful center." That's a good one.

Amber: One of the other things that came up throughout the book was Viv actively working on creating the life that she wanted instead of falling back on the things she was used to. So it's a very low stakes book, but things do come up. And Viv being an orc barbarian, the easy and natural response that she would have had for the last 22 years is just hit it with her sword. But now that she's a business owner and she's trying to build a life here, she can't do that. And it was just really interesting to see her actively working on that and the people around her making an effort to help her with that. Like

especially Tandri was very concerned with her being able to stick to building the life she wanted rather than falling back on her fighting to solve her problems.

Jamie: And I like that even though it's low stakes, it's more the normal kind of conflicts that people would have. Like there was a point where the future of her coffee shop was questioned because of some setbacks that they had. And at that point, Viv had very little money left over. And so she was wondering, is she going to be able to afford to rebuild and be able to keep the life that they had created? And it's just realistic stakes. But I mean, it's the kind of thing that can really change your whole life.

Amber: And what I really liked about that situation was that the reason she was able to sort of heal and move on from it was because of all the relationships she had built. Which is also like very realistic when stuff happens in your life, it doesn't happen in a vacuum because you have people around you who care about you and who presumably or hopefully want to help you get past it. And I just like that the relationships we saw Viv build earlier in the book sort of came back there to see those people helping her out when she needed it.

Ashley: Yeah, which is probably very different from her previous role as an adventurer with her party, where if something goes bad, you don't get paid and you move on. And so I imagine like having done that for 22 years and coming to a crossroads at your new journey, like your first reaction might be like, oh, well, I tried, moving on, like, next. But the fact that she built this community around her rather like build up that support system that was able to help guide through those kind of barriers that came up was really nice.

Jamie: I think it ties back into what we were talking about with what people create. I'm thinking a lot of series where the aim, whether stated or not, of the protagonist is to build a community around them to have that emotional support. And that's such a draw.

Amber: I think the idea of a found family, a family that you've built with people that you've actively worked on your relationships with is also just really popular. I can think of very few fandoms where as soon as it gets popular there are people immediately like, okay, well they have a castle where they all live in a different part of the castle but they all are together all the time, because they love each other. And it's just, it's so sweet and this one just kind of like gives you that without needing the fan fiction, especially for something that's really escapist that I think a lot of people are drawn to. I think there's really only just the two main antagonists, kind of, in this book and the Madrigal is the first one that Viv has to deal with. So the Madrigal is sort of the underground crime boss of Thune. And early in the story, some of the Madrigal's, I don't know if henchmen is the right word but it works.

Ashley: Lack the lackey.

Amber: Yes, lack the lackey. Come to let Viv know that she has dues to pay for having a business in the city. And that's another one where she is like, "I could just stab them, and that would solve my problem," but they like come to other solutions, which are—without giving any spoilers away, the Madrigal is also someone who is not quite what you expect.

Ashley: Viv from the first page is very protective of the Scalvert's Stone, and is just like constantly, you know, once she goes to Thune and the Scalvert's Stone leads her to the livery which she turns into the coffee shop. From that point on she's like very protective of it she hides it and she's like checking on it every evening after the shop closes and it's just like a constant mention that you think like this has to be something that the reader also has to worry about what happens if someone takes it or, you know, whether maliciously or, you know, she's even worried that while Cal is doing renovations that he'll just like find it and pitch it.

Jamie: And this is really because Viv is convinced that her livelihood her luck her success has been dependent on the Scalvert's Stone, not so much the hard work that she and her friends have put in the community that they built, but rather this magical object.

Ashley: Prior to the start of like the main part of the book she's found this passage in research about Scalvert's Stones that she repeats to herself several times throughout the book. She finds this piece of information about a Scalvert's Stone and it will create a ring of wealth around you and like draw in what you need I can't remember what the phrase is but she like talks about it over and over and it's kind of like a little mantra that she very much believes in, rather than the hard work that she and her friends are contributing. It kind of bothered me a little bit because I felt like it should have rhymed, but it didn't that little phrase.

Amber: It doesn't rhyme in English, maybe it rhymed in whatever language they were speaking.

Ashley: True.

Jamie: So, Legends and Lattes is dedicated "for anyone who wandered where the other road led."

Ashley: I think we talked about that a little bit of, you know, it being a story of the kind of dropping everything and moving on to the next big adventure or small adventure of opening up a coffee shop and kind of making those bigger life decisions.

Jamie: And sometimes it seems like it takes more bravery to make decisions that seem like they're taking your life in a smaller direction. For Viv, the change from doing big quests all the time to intentionally making her life a little bit smaller, putting down roots.

Amber: Yeah, or even making decisions that seem so different than the thing than whatever you were doing before. Because Viv goes from adventuring and doing all sorts of quests to being the owner of a coffee shop, which are just two very different life choices.

Ashley: Yeah, and the fact that like, as an adventurer, there's always going to be a next job. Whereas, I thought it was really cute when, you know, they're renovating the coffee shop, beginning it ready and then they're like, so what are you going to do for opening day? Like, are you going to have samples? Like, how are you going to get people in the door? And she's like, well, I was just gonna open, I was just gonna start, I don't know. So like, even, you know, making this big change with a lot of unknown, that can be really hard, I think, to do.

Amber: Did we want to talk about Viv and Tandri? And what's the phrase in the description? Because it's so good. "A dollop of romantic froth." I really love that. That really is exactly what it is. And it's, it's not huge. Like, it doesn't have much to do with the plot. But it is really cute. It's just, it's just a nice addition.

Jamie: I really liked how, when Tandri is introduced, right away, Viv sees her more as an equal than a prospective employee. And they kind of just grow together more because of that, where it's a very slow burning kind of relationship. You don't get the romantic tension until they've been working together for a while. And it's just, it's very sweet, very slow.

Amber: And especially because Tandri is a succubus, I think that's, we talked about this a little bit before, but like, the way that they, not sure if fall in love is the right term, because it's just the way that they're sort of drawn together is so soft and subtle, even though she is a succubus, who the stereotype is that

they're seductresses. But like, the way that they get together is just really soft and light and fluffy. It is “a dollop of romantic froth” and that is all. That wraps up our discussion of *Legends and Lattes* by Travis Baldry, and we'll see you next time when we discuss *Summer Suns* by Lee Mandello.

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