

Compound Fracture 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.

River: And my name is River and I use he/him pronouns.

E: And today we are talking about *Compound Fracture* by Andrew Joseph White. Andrew Joseph White uses he/him pronouns. He grew up in Virginia and began writing before he could actually write, offering scribbled paper to his parents with demands that they read the illegible nonsense back to him. After drafting several novels in middle and high school, he attended George Mason University for his bachelor's and master's in creative writing. He is the author of three New York Times bestselling horror novels for teens and young adults—*Hell Followed With Us*, *The Spirit Bears His Teeth*, and *Compound Fracture*—all of which have received different honors. His work focuses on the intersection of transgender and autistic identity through the lens of horror, monstrosity, violence, and rage. His upcoming novels include his adult debut, *You Weren't Meant to be Human*, and two more YA novels, *You're No Better* and *Beast Warden*. Andrew has settled just outside of Washington, D.C., with his wife, their cat, Poppy, and a library's worth of books.

R: So, on to *Compound Fracture*. On the night Miles Abernathy—sixteen-year-old socialist and proud West Virginian—comes out as trans to his parents, he sneaks off to a party, carrying evidence that may finally turn the tide of the blood feud plaguing Twist Creek: Photos that prove the county's Sheriff Davies was responsible for the so-called “accident” that injured his dad, killed others, and crushed their grassroots efforts to unseat him. The feud began a hundred years ago when Miles's great-great-grandfather, Saint Abernathy, incited a miners' rebellion that ended with a public execution at the hands of law enforcement. Now, Miles becomes the feud's latest victim as the sheriff's son and his friends sniff out the evidence, follow him through the woods, and beat him nearly to death. In the hospital, the ghost of a soot-covered man hovers over Miles's bedside while Sheriff Davies threatens Miles into silence. But when Miles accidentally kills one of the boys who hurt him, he learns of other folks in Twist Creek who want out from under the sheriff's heel. To free their families from this cycle of cruelty, they're willing to put everything on the line—is Miles?

E: And really quickly, before we get into our discussion here, books like this that are, as you will come to find out, rather graphically violent and upsetting at times, we usually try to provide a trigger warning. But instead of that, I'm actually going to read a letter from the author himself, because I think it does a really good job not only talking about what's going to be in this book, if you're interested in reading it, but it also just provides a lot of context for the setting in which Andrew Joseph Wright is writing. “Hopefully, by the time this book goes to print, I'll have scrapped this letter and written a new one. I mean it. I'm desperate to write a different intro to this thing. If I do write a new one, I'll write about how much I love West Virginia. I'll write about family reunions in the mountains and steep switchback roads and venison in the freezer and my half-remembered Appalachian drawl and, and, and. Instead, I have to write about how tough it is to be trans in America right now. By the time *Compound Fracture* is released, I'll be 26 years old, and I'll have seen bathroom bills, state-sponsored attempts to remove trans kids from supportive parents, crackdowns on gender-related care, and so much more. And if you're disabled on top of it, ChriSaint I guess what I'm saying is, I'm sorry it's so difficult. We shouldn't have to fight so hard to exiSaint We deserve better. But, of course, this is a book about fighting as hard as you can. So please note that we're going to deal with some difficult topics. Graphic violence, including police violence, transphobia, opioid use and withdrawal, and disturbing images. This is a book about an autistic queer trans kid who loves his family and all the people who love him back, as well as all the people who want him dead. Actually,

this book is kind of like moonshine. It's going to burn like hell going down. And, well, looks like this author's note is still here. If I promise you that this book has a happy ending, does that make it better? Does that make any of it easier to swallow? Yours, Andrew.” Whew.

R: Yeah.

E: Yeah. What do you think about this book, River?

R: So I absolutely loved this book. I recommended it for the podcast because it was one of my favorite reads of the year. I had this on my wait list for so long. And when the library finally got a copy, I swooped and read it in one night. I think it's a really great horror novel because the horror of it isn't some outside force, isn't some supernatural enemy. It's a horror that a lot of us face day-to-day in this country.

E: Yeah, it's state violence is the big bad, right? And not just like any state violence. It's generational trauma and generational violence. And it's a story from a really particular part of the country where the same family has held police power for generations. And the effects that that has not just on Miles as the main character, but the community as a whole, right? Like the story isn't, I mean first and foremost it is about Miles Abernathy, but it's also so much about what Twist Creek has dealt with because of the Davies family. Yeah, it's, I loved this book. It was definitely one that, and I think I told you while I was reading it at certain parts, I like jaw dropped. I couldn't believe what was happening and how bad it was getting at certain points in time. And it's something that really, like once it starts it doesn't really stop for the entire book.

R: It doesn't let up.

E: Yeah. And it does start on a pretty, I mean Miles gets the shit kicked out of him really early.

R: Yeah.

E: Really early on.

R: Like it's brutal and it's very descriptive.

E: Yeah. And I actually honestly forgot about the, because we talked about it in the trigger warning, just him, like the opioid issues.

R: Yes.

E: Because he does get prescribed pain medication and his family already has a history and families that Miles knows already have a history of having issues with opioid addiction. That's a whole other thing that I kind of forgot was a part of this novel because it is important, but it also is not the driving, I don't know what I'm trying to say.

R: No, I know exactly what you're trying to say. It's not at the forefront of this book, but it is still a really important theme that happens within it.

E: It feels almost small in comparison to the rest of everything else that's going on.

R: It's a big deal.

E: Yeah.

R: It's a big deal for Miles. It's a big deal for Miles' father especially.

E: Yeah, absolutely. Well, let's talk about Miles.

R: Yes.

E: And Miles' family and kind of where they find themselves. So we have the Abernathy family as our sort of protagonist family and then we have the Davies family, which is definitely our antagonist family. And we have what is an inciting incident for the town, which happens in, do we have a date on when that happens?

R: 1917.

E: Yeah, there we go. So 1917 at the height of coal mining unionization and fighting for safer work conditions and adequate pay and more than anything just human dignity and decency. And so you have Miles' ancestor, Saint Abernathy, who's leading this charge in Twist Creek to unionize the mine workers against the police force predominantly, which is the Davies' and has been since at least 1917.

R: Yes. And Saint's very public execution is carried out by a Davies, the sheriff at that time.

E: And then the labor union efforts stop happening pretty much.

R: Yeah, they were completely crushed.

E: Yeah, there's a massive, the Twist Creek Calamity is what they call it locally. It's this all out brawl that ends up killing a lot of people. But also, like River said, ending up with Saint Abernathy's public execution. And the town never really heals from that point on, especially the Abernathy family. Miles talks about how they're kind of outcasts, even generations down the line.

R: They are pariahs. Nobody wants to be associated with an Abernathy.

E: Well, because there's other things that happen after that point.

R: Yes. Yes, Saint's daughter. Yeah. I believe killed someone, one of the Davies.

E: And then Miles' grandfather's brother was killed by a Davies. It goes back and forth, very like Hatfield and McCoy.

R: Yes.

E: But if one side had the guns and the other one didn't.

R: Yes.

E: Essentially. I mean the Abernathy's do have a gun, but they're not literal cops. Yeah. Do you want to talk a little bit about Miles as a character? As our protag?

R: I would love to talk about Miles as a character.

E: Yeah. Let's get into it.

R: Yeah, so Miles is 16 at the beginning of this book. Going into senior year of high school? Junior year of high school?

E: I think he's going to be a junior because Cooper is a senior.

R: Yeah, you're right.

E: And he's graduating. Or no, maybe Miles is going to be a senior.

R: Well, whatever the case.

E: He's an upperclassman.

R: Yes. He's nearing the end of his high school career. And he, for the first time presumably in his life, goes to a crazy high school rager for the end of the school year just so that he can deliver these incriminating photos he has of the sheriff to his friend Cooper, whose mother was killed and whose entire family was upended. And we'll talk about Cooper a little bit more.

E: Yeah.

R: A lot more probably. So yes, Miles is the protagonist of this book. That's what gets told from his perspective. And there's a quote that I think really sums up at least how Miles feels about himself in relationship to the other Abernathys and their legacy. He says, "I can't help but wonder if this has somehow managed to write itself into my genes. Epigenetics, you know? Stress messing with your DNA and getting passed down in your cells. If you took a blood draw from me, could you see all this in there if you searched hard enough?"

E: Yeah. I've read this already. But every time we've talked about it outside of the book, I get chills remembering.

R: Yeah, goosebumps.

E: Yeah. It is such a profound – because not only is Miles dealing with this generational trauma, he's also dealing with the weight of being a trans person in a really small town. So he's just –

R: Yes. And I should have mentioned the night that he goes to that party, he also sends a coming out e-mail to both of his parents before he leaves.

E: Yeah. He's like, cards all on the table.

R: Yes. Yes. Like this is his moment.

E: And he wants really badly to right things in Twist Creek because his father and his mother, they're terrified of the consequences of taking the Davies to task, right?

R: Yes.

E: Because there's been generations of trauma very recently within Miles' lived lifetime because of this car accident that River mentioned kills Cooper's mother, horribly disfigures Miles' friend who we'll talk about in a little bit. That's Dallas, they're a really interesting character too. And then also injures Miles' father. Miles' dad is in the car and he's horribly injured and can't work anymore really.

R: Yes, and that's the catalyst too for talking about opioid addiction.

E: Right. So there's all of this tension because everybody knows that the Davies are bad and—

R: Now Miles has the proof.

E: He has the evidence.

R: He has photographic evidence of the sheriff causing this accident and then watching people burn and not doing anything, not calling for help.

E: And Miles is so driven by his own personal philosophy, right? Like that's a major factor in the narrative of this novel in that Miles is unabashedly a socialist, right? He doesn't believe necessarily in the police as an entity at all. And he also feels like, really driven by this sense of justice, right? Like he has to right these wrongs and he knows that he has this evidence and he feels like it's his personal responsibility to do something about this because he's the one who has the photos.

R: Yes. Well and he also, he's taken on sort of a role, and this is another theme that plays heavy throughout the story, he's taken on a role as family historian.

E: Yeah.

R: In his own right. He's dug up a lot of records, takes a lot of care to store these things with legitimate archival methods and just has all of this information on his family's past that a lot of them don't even know.

E: Yeah. And part of that I think can be explained by Miles' revelation that he is autistic, right?

R: Yes.

E: Like he realizes through reconnecting with his friend Dallas who's been diagnosed with ADHD that Miles very well may be autistic. Like he doesn't know for sure, but when he does some personal research he realizes, oh, like this makes sense. Miles says, "It's unnerving to see your entire personality reflected back at you under the symptom list of a developmental disorder. It's everything I tried to cover up, everything I thought was me being weird or weak, a cluster of quirks and failures coming together like a constellation. This reminds me of when I figured out I'm trans. It was like putting on glasses for the first time. The world comes back into focus and you look back at the rest of your life and go, oh, that's why. And now I'm holding glasses again. I've lifted them almost to my face and a small sliver of the world has unblurred, but I'm scared to put them all the way on."

R: And Miles also at a point shortly after this decides and says the phrase, "I'm not autistic. I'm some unsocialized dog."

E: Yeah, and I know you wanted to talk about that.

R: I did want to talk about this because Miles is referred to throughout the book in several instances as a dog, as an animal. And I think this is a really, really common motif for trans men specifically. And in this vein of horror literature, absolutely. It's also worth noting that Miles has a dog. Her name is Lady and Lady is extremely loyal, goes everywhere with him. She's a very good judge of character. So in the same way that we see Miles compared to an animal, compared to a dog throughout the book, we see Lady there being, as a dog, also this crusader of justice.

E: Yeah!

R: Just a really interesting parallel.

E: Yeah, that's a really good point. I hadn't thought about that like that because, yeah, we do have a dog who is a pretty like relevant character and protects Miles from a lot of what happens and serves as this like comfort, quite literally comfort creature to him throughout the course of the book. So while he's being met with all this dehumanizing language, we're also, yeah, seeing that exact creature really, I don't know, provide a lot of support to Miles.

R: Yeah.

E: Yeah, that's interesting.

R: And I mean Lady can maul as many people as she wants. I'm still not going to see her as an antagonist.

E: Yeah, no, I don't think she is. She's, I mean, she's a lady. What can we say?

R: She's a lady. She's just a sweet little lady.

E: Oh, I have this, kind of in reference to Miles' parents who we talked about a little bit already. But Miles' parents, they clearly love Miles. They are very scared for Miles because of: A, him getting the absolute snot kicked out of him. He goes to the hospital, and he is really pressured by Sheriff Davies who comes to visit him to not share the details of what happened to him. Like Miles knows who assaulted him.

R: It's very overt. The sheriff is like, well, you did hit your head awfully hard, so I'm sure you don't remember anything, correct?

E: Right.

R: It's very, very transparent that's what he's trying to do.

E: Yeah. And Miles' parents, they don't want Miles to push this at all. They're worried about his physical health after this, his mental health after this, especially because, like River mentioned, Miles leaves this very well-thought-out email the night that he goes to this party and then wakes up the next day, just—

R: Not the next day, it's three days later.

E: Actually, yeah, you're right. He is unconscious for several days. They really do a number on him because of, one, who Miles is, but also because of this photo.

R: Yes, the evidence that he has.

E: Yeah. So parents are worried for, A, his safety, and, B, they don't know what to do with this trans information.

R: He's already a target.

E: Yeah.

R: And they just, they basically, well, his mom especially basically just says not right now.

E: Yeah, and I feel like that is a very relatable thing for a lot of people, and we have a quote about this.

R: So Miles says, "There's a whole spectrum of reactions to coming out. Getting kicked out is one extreme. Being accepted wholeheartedly is the other. But in the middle there's this." In reference to the very awkward relationship he has with his parents after sending that email.

E: Yeah, they basically say, like, yeah, we read it. Okay.

R: Yeah, and you don't see that a lot in queer media and queer literature. It usually is one of those extremes, getting kicked out or being accepted. And that's just not the case for so many queer people.

E: It's this awkward sort of middle ground where there is this unspoken tension.

R: Yes, like his dad accepts him but isn't willing to defend him to his mom.

E: Right. They don't fight about it.

R: They don't fight about it.

E: They don't talk about it at all.

R: It's just really, really awkward.

E: Yeah, I mean, it's tough, and there is somebody, to some degree, seems like they accept Miles for being trans, but then—

R: Let's talk about Cooper.

E: Okay, let's talk about Cooper.

R: He's really important.

E: Yeah. The people closest to Miles and the Abernathy's writ large just get hurt as a result.

R: Yes, because Cooper's mother was killed in the accident, and now his father is always either drunk or high and is completely out of it all the time.

E: And Cooper has taken over the family business. I mean, he graduates, but—

R: As a teenager, does absolutely everything.

E: Yeah, so Cooper is Miles' best friend, has been Miles' best friend from the time they were both small children, and he is one of the people that Miles initially comes out to.

R: Cooper takes Miles home from the hospital.

E: That's right. Yeah, because he's there.

R: And it's revealed that he's the one that took Miles to the hospital as well.

E: Yeah, I'm pretty sure they were going to kill him, because Cooper mentions, like, if I hadn't shown up...

R: Yeah.

E: And he's also like, Miles, you owe me this.

R: Yes.

E: That's a whole other thing that we didn't even talk about.

R: Yes, that's a whole other thing.

E: Ugh, Cooper.

R: Oh, Cooper.

E: And somehow, when Miles gives Cooper these incriminating photos of the accident that killed Cooper's mother, I don't know if it's implied that, like, Cooper drops them, or because Noah ends up with them.

R: I think he still has them.

E: Okay.

R: Because there were three copies.

E: That's right. Noah is Sheriff Davies' son, who is the generational antagonist against—

R: Just a wretched little creature.

E: Oh, my God, terrible. But honestly, like, I was going to say Cooper's no better, but he is better. He's just bad in some other ways.

R: Yes, that's true. We're talking about Cooper right now.

E: They're all connected.

R: They are, and that was one thing this book did really well, was make characters that weren't straightforward, good or bad, and weave them together in ways that make all of them at least a little bit sympathetic.

E: And Cooper, I mean, you really feel for him, right? Like, he's lost his mother. He's got all of this responsibility, not just to keep himself afloat, but his father, who can't work anymore.

R: And can't even take care of himself.

E: Right, can't take care of himself, can't work, you know? Cooper goes to school and then goes to the gas stations, and I think he is so fueled by retribution, like this need for violent justice when he finds out this information.

R: This isn't a spoiler because it's in the book description, but when Miles accidentally kills one of his attackers in an altercation shortly after he gets out of the hospital, Cooper is very involved in the aftermath of that, and Cooper's idea is sort of good riddance. Why don't we do this all the time?

E: Yeah, we got one. Let's get the other two.

R: Yes.

E: Because there's three of them, right? There's Noah, who is Sheriff Davies' son. There's his friend Paul and his friend Eddie, and Paul and Eddie, Eddie is the skeevier of the two of them.

R: Yes, Eddie, they talk about filming his younger sister, or younger step-sister, like naked in the shower and posting it on the Internet.

E: Like he's not as sympathetic. I think—

R: Violently killing a dog as well.

E: Yes, yeah, they're bad people.

R: Yes.

E: I think Eddie, of anybody, I mean, Noah sucks. He has a dad. You know what, why am I making any excuses for him? He's a terrible person. He's not a good person, and I don't really feel bad for him.

R: He is.

E: Eddie gave me a worse feeling as a character for some reason because of the stuff he's described as having done.

R: Well, and one thing this book does is question that sort of retributive violence.

E: Yes.

R: But the way that Eddie's described to you as a reader, you kind of are okay with him being dead, and that's the same moral conundrum that Miles is facing.

E: Right, and Cooper too.

R: And Cooper too, yes.

E: He uses that to like...

R: Yes, because it is repeatedly brought up how gross and skeezy Eddie specifically was.

E: I think at one point Cooper says that they're doing Twist County a favor if they do kill these three young men, like how much trouble have these three boys led by Noah because he's the sheriff's son of the sheriff's son of the sheriff's son for generations.

R: And if they're taken out, how much trouble would be prevented?

E: Exactly, right.

R: They'd be the good guys then, Cooper and Miles, for taking out these pests, but it's not that easy.

E: No, and Miles at a certain point, he doesn't want to do it anymore.

R: He does not.

R: And Cooper is like, no, we're already too far gone. Like, we're in this together.

R: Yes.

E: Like, you started this, now we're going to finish it, whether you like it or not.

R: Cooper is very passive when it comes to defending Miles, and very, very aggressive when it comes to arguing with Miles.

E: Definitely, because he's this person that Miles comes out to, and he acts like he accepts Miles for who he is, but there are moments when he's trying to argue with Miles or justify some of his behavior that he deadnames Miles first and foremost.

R: Yes, there's a very, very pivotal scene where Cooper is grabbing Miles and shaking him and screaming his deadname and saying, look at me.

E: Yeah.

R: And he knows he's Miles' oldest friend.

E: Right.

R: He knows he doesn't like to be touched. He knows he doesn't like eye contact. And he knows darn well what the boy's name is.

E: Yeah, and kind of goes out of his way to try and snap Miles back into it by any means necessary.

R: Yes.

E: And Cooper also is putting Miles in a really confusing situation romantically because Cooper's looking for, like, emotional support and stability, and Miles doesn't know really what it is to have a romantic attraction at all.

R: Yes.

E: And Cooper feels comfortable with Miles enough to be emotionally vulnerable and I think is kind of a representation of a lot of what young men sometimes seem to go through where it's like, okay, I have this person that I feel emotionally vulnerable with. This must mean that there has to be a romantic connection there.

R: Yes, and he feels entitled to Miles.

E: Yes, and Miles doesn't really know what to do with that because he definitely loves his friend, but he doesn't know if he *loves* his *friend*.

R: Yes, and even when they do seem to have the beginnings of something romantic and they sit down to talk about it, and Miles asks Cooper about his sexuality, Cooper is very reluctant to say anything.

E: Yeah, he's like, yeah, I know you're a boy.

R: Yeah

E: And it's like, but do you?

R: But like no homo, that doesn't make me gay.

E: No, exactly, and it's like, no, but it does make you gay. Your friend is telling you he's trans.

R: That's another such a common trans experience to have in relationships, especially with teenagers like this. It's hit a little too close to home. It hurts.

E: Definitely, definitely, and having somebody who says that they support you, but to an end, right? Like as long as you're doing what they deem is appropriate, in this case like a murder spree. But there's one particular moment that I think is really important, and it's when Miles gets publicly outed in a way that is incredibly upsetting and also has a fight with Cooper at the same time. And Cooper has every opportunity to stay, but I mean they have a fight, and then...

R: Yeah, Cooper's like stalked off doing whatever it is Cooper does. They make sure to mention that the whole town is there.

E: Right.

R: Everybody's dialed in.

E: Right.

R: And this is sort of the beginning of a very long, climactic series of events. That Miles gets outed like this, and that scene made me want to throw up.

E: It's awful.

R: It's awful, and you feel it.

E: Yeah, and it really, going back to Miles' family, it's kind of this moment where they realize like, oh, we might not understand our child, but we know that what just happened was really wrong.

R: Yes, specifically it talks about his grandmother and how she does not understand being transgender whatsoever, but in that moment she knows that something has been taken from Miles that was his, and that's the grievance. She'll stand by him through that, obviously.

E: And not only that, after that point, they're like locked and loaded. They go home and they're like, get the guns.

R: Oh my goodness, yes. I mean his grandfather's brother was killed, so his grandpa's sitting there with his rifle, and he's ready to get his revenge. He's ready to end this.

E: Yeah, they all are, and I think they were kind of, there's such an underlying tension in Twist Creek, and you come to realize this, not just because of the way that Miles' family reacts to finally some kinetic energy transferring into, what is it, active? I don't remember science. But that transfer of like, okay, there's been an incident.

R: Because they're having this every few decades. Somebody gets killed, and that's just the way that their life works.

E: And that's why they're trying to tell Miles to keep his head down. But they're not the only people who feel as though the Davies are a blight on the community.

R: Oh, absolutely.

E: Because other people, Eddie's little sister, his stepsister in particular, for the first time, a couple of weeks go by, and she like looks Miles in the eye. Like they have a very positive interaction, and this girl has never spoken to Miles before.

R: Because it's sort of, I mean, people don't know.

E: But they kind of know.

R: But they know. They suspect that Miles or another Abernathy had something to do with these mysterious deaths of these young men.

E: Even the people who are close to the Davies are being exploited in some way, and it's more beneficial for them to be friends with the Davies than it is to be foes.

R: Yes. They give an example of a girl whose father had been processing game out of season for years, but because he was giving money to the Davies it was all fine.

E: Yeah.

R: But then the one time that he didn't pay off the sheriff, he goes to jail and her whole family is uprooted.

E: Yeah. This contrasting group of people, right? Like you've got on one camp those who are aligned with the police, and on the other camp those who are aligned with I guess just the people, like everybody else in the town. The way that they operate is so drastically different, and it's so nice to see, like you said, kind of an alternative for Miles to Cooper's idea of like okay, the only way we can get out is if we go out swinging.

R: Yes, and I think this is a really good time to talk about Saint Abernathy.

E: Yes, we haven't talked about Saint at all. Thank you for bringing that up.

R: We have not talked about— So after Miles' accident he starts to see this dirty, crusty, soot-covered ghost of a man appearing periodically. He realizes after looking at old pictures that this is his ancestor Saint Abernathy. And Saint is a silent figure. Saint cannot speak and this is really important because Miles wants to be like Saint. And wants to end the bloodshed but also continue his legacy. So Miles is committing all these acts of violence because Saint famously kidnapped, like, the mine owners son and was sending out fingers until they agreed to the union demands.

E: Was the mine owner's son also a Davies?

R: That's a good question.

E: I feel like he was, but I could be wrong. But I think that was part of the reason why it was like, this is a problem for these two families.

R: Yes. And then Saint was eventually captured and publicly executed. So Miles is seeing him in varying states of decay. With the stake—they shoved a railroad spike right through his mouth and pounded.

E: Yeah.

R: It's pretty gruesome. But Miles is doing all of this because he thinks it's what Saint would want him to do. I mean that's an oversimplification, but it is part of the narrative. But the more we learn about Saint as the book goes on, the more we learn that he too has a softer side, and this isn't necessarily what he wanted. The reason I bring this up, there's a quote, Miles is seeing this specter of Saint after, it says, "When I raise a hand to him," meaning Saint, "The old bandana tied tight around my wrist. "We're doing it!" I can't figure out the look he gives me. His face is too rotten to make out the expression. The railroad spike distending his jaw into a permanent grimace.

E: Yeah, it's really interesting the way that Miles interacts with Saint, and uses the events of the past to justify his actions in the present. Which doesn't mean— I'm not trying to say that his actions aren't justifiable, right? Like if I was beaten within an inch of my life I think that I would want— You know?

R: Some sort of repercussion.

E: Yeah, exactly.

R: Yes, absolutely.

E: But Saint doesn't necessarily want violence to continue, right? That's the vibe we get from—

R: And we learn that the more time passes that Miles is seeing Saint, the more, sort of healed he becomes. And the more Miles is able to make out that this is not what Saint wanted.

E: No, not at all. And I think that this book makes a lot of really interesting commentary on the price of violence versus the necessity of violence, right? And to what ends people sometimes need to go in order to free themselves from oppression. And the effects that that has on someone psychologically, the effects that has on someone socially, but also the necessity of those things sometimes, right? And, Miles really struggles with this, as somebody who cares deeply about social justice, and feels as though violence sometimes is necessary. But then e wonders, to what end?

R: And he has such a deep, deep connection with his family and with his community. They may not always accept him, but you know, West Virginia's his home, this is where he grew up, this is where his family's been.

E: This book speaks so much to how probably a lot of queer people in rural areas of the country feel, knowing that the people around them that he people around them care about one another, but politics don't really help them at all. Neither side is really helping them at all. And Miles recognizes that there is this need for social justice in a place where people are just too poor to do anything about it, right? Like, their basic human needs haven't been met, and he has this ancestor who led the strikes against the powers that be for the sake of improving the lives of the people in his community, and Miles wants to follow in those footsteps. I really appreciated Miles as a character. I really appreciated the place that he grew up in, and the way that it shaped him, and the way that the community has been shaped as a result of what's happened, you know?

R: Well because regardless of whether you as a reader agree with Miles politically, they show you the inception of how these beliefs came to be.

E: Yeah.

R: And why somebody in Miles's position would feel that way.

E: Yeah. And why somebody in Saint's position would feel that way also.

R: Oh absolutely.

E: Like even going back to the union strike, I don't know, I feel like that's something that people know about—striking coal miners, specifically in Appalachia. If you want to learn some real world history, also, about like labor union strikes in regards to coal mining specifically, I would highly recommend the documentary *Harlan County, USA*. Have you seen this?

R: I'm halfway through it right now.

EL It's so good. I watched it while I was reading this book, because I was like, I wanted to know more, and that had been on my list for a long time. And it is a very harrowing watching experience. But it is like the documented, real-time—

R: Well and the documentary filmmakers were very much like, in it with the miners.

E: Yeah.

R: Like there's no, like this is not an outside perspective.

E: Yeah. So, I highly recommend that as a documentary if you want some, like, real world history on this.

R: Yes, very much sets the scene.

E: Yeah watch that, and then read this.

R: Yeah watch that and then read this.

E: Would you recommend this book?

R: I would absolutely recommend this book! I read it twice in a period of less than six months, and both times enjoyed it. Definitely would recommend this one. And I've also read all of Andrew Joseph's White's other works, and would definitely recommend those as well. They tend to skew more supernatural than this one does. This one's very real, gritty, real-world violence. But a lot of the same themes persist.

E: Yeah. I would also highly recommend this book. I haven't been able to read some of Andrew Joseph White's other stuff, because I'm a little squeamish. This one was kind of hard for me to get through at times, honestly. I really, really liked it, but I definitely had moments where I was like, I'm going to throw up. It's a gnarly book.

R: It's a gnarly book. I know we read the author's letter in the beginning, but just to reiterate for content warnings: gruesome violence against humans and animals, and just this very, police brutality, and burns, there's a lot of talk about that. So just tread with caution, take care of yourself.

E: Alright well, I think that about wraps up our discussion of *Compound Fracture* by Andrew Joseph White. Join us next episode as we discuss another queer book available in our collection here at the Dauphin County Library System!



This has been Reading the Rainbow, a Dauphin County Library System podcast for books by and about the LGBTQ+ community. If you enjoyed this podcast, please follow us for new book discussions. And if you're interested in this episode's selection, consider borrowing from your local library. Thanks for listening!