

Welcome to Pick Up and Deliver the podcast where I pick up my audio recorder, step out

for a walk, and deliver an episode to you while I stroll around.

I'm Brendan Riley.

Well, greeting listeners, it's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago.

The sun is out.

No, I'm lying.

The clouds are out.

It's a slate gray and chilly.

It's not actually that cold for early March.

It's perfectly fine except that it has been significantly warmer within the last week,

so it feels extra cold today.

Also because it is slate gray overcast, it feels gloomier than it's maybe right to feel.

That said, there are tons of birds around.

There's a cardinal, lots of little chirpin' friends up in the trees

Keepin me company here, so there must not be a hawk around.

These folks would not be nearly so noisy and active if there were a hawk around.

Lots of sparrows on other birds having a good old time while I'm walking to talk to you

folks.

So, I thought I would take a few minutes today to look back at some reading I've been doing.

I try to do four reading episodes a year in which I reflect on the previous quarter

of reading.

We're in March which means we're nearly done with the first quarter of 2025, which means

I'm kind of late to reflect on the last quarter of 2024.

Nonetheless, here we are.

So today I'm going to talk about the books that I read in October, November and December of

2024 and a little bit about what I thought of them and if there's a game that feels like

it thematically or connects in another way, I will mention that as well because this is

a board game podcast.

But if you're not somebody who wants to talk about books, this maybe isn't the episode

for you because it's mostly books with a little bit of game.

But I encourage you to stick around.

I think I make for a good conversationalist about books.

Anyway, let's jump right in.

The first one I want to talk about is the Penguin Pool Murder from 1931.

This book is by Stuart Palmer and I did read this book although I listened to it because

my wife read it to me.

This is one of our driving books.

Sometimes when my wife and I have to take long trips in the car, we will designate driving

book that we keep in the car and then while we're driving she will read to me and we'll

enjoy the book together that way.

It's a thing we've been doing for as long as we're married and it's a nice way to pass

the time and we both really like to read so it's a nice way to get another book read.

She also doesn't like to listen to recorded books so if I download an audiobook and played

it she would just fall asleep.

But if she doesn't mind reading out loud and if she's reading out loud she can pay attention

to the book.

And I can it's like I have an audiobook but it's a better audiobook because it's live

and it's my wife.

So we listened to I listened to the Penguin Pool Murder which is the first of a series

of books about a detective sort of in the vein of Miss Marple.

She's meant to be a spinster at least in the first book although at the end of the first

book she appears like she's getting married but they describe her as like late 30s and

then she acts like she's much older than that.

And then when they actually made the movie they cast a woman who was in her early 50s in

this character which actually fit the description of the way she acted a lot better although like

I said in the book she was described as being in her late 30s which for 1931 still would

have marked her as off the market because she's too old.

And I'm reminded of the horrifying scene and it's a wonderful life when George Bailey

discovers that Mary never found the love of her life because he hadn't existed and there

she was in her 30s single working at a library -- that was the worst. [sarcasm]

So that's kind of the Penguin Pool Murder.

It is a relatively weird murder novel in which someone is killed at an aquarium in New York

and the our amateur sleuth gets involved because she's there with her students.

The most memorable thing about it for me was basically the description of the life of a

like a middle schooler in New York at the time because she sends her middle schoolers running

around New York trying to find information for her and it's quite clear that they walk

themselves home in New York.

And it just it feels to me really different from the world we live in now in terms of how

much we let kids do.

It wasn't a great book.

I'm not gonna... we're not gonna read any more of the ones from that series.

I did get the movie of it which you can hear me talk a little bit about in the most recent

movie roundup but yeah generally not worth checking out.

That's the Penguin Pool Murder.

If you were gonna try to play a game that went with it I think just like the movie I would

suggest awkward guests which actually does kind of fit you have a bunch of different people

who ended up at the place where the murder happened and you have to try to figure out which

one had the best motive even though they all have conflicting motives.

You're also trying to figure out where were they during the murder and which alibis can

you trust and so on.

And that really works well with awkward guests.

So the next book I want to talk about is Shakedown from Scott Sigler.

This is a 2023 novel.

Shake Down is a military sci-fi adventure novel.

The two things that drew me to it one it was available as an audiobook in my I think

hoopla which you know I'm when I listen to audiobooks the top priority and picking one

is I can get it free from the library.

And then Scott Sigler is a writer

I have read a bit of before he wrote an interesting trilogy of books about sort of zombie

apocalypse the first one I think was called infected has a triangle on the cover and it was

really good although pretty gross like a visceral kind of body horror stuff that was like

I said pretty good but gross.

But I like his writing it's very dynamic very engaging good characterization and so I thought

I would check out Shakedown.

The premise of Shakedown is really interesting.

There's this character who has gotten himself into some military hot water and he's afraid

he's going to be court martialed and sent out of the fleet and then said he gets an offer

instead of getting court martialed and sent to jail he gets an offer to join the crew of

this sort of legendary ship where every like it's really dangerous to go work on the ship

like people die all the time.

It's got a terrible death rate and it nobody knows why.

And so he agrees to go rather than get court martialed and the whole premise of the novel

is.

It is a ship that the human fleet this is in the far future when we have like space going

fleets or whatever.

The human fleet has this ship that we have control of but we didn't create and it is

essentially a interdimensional; it travels interdimensionally.

It's able to get around certain kinds of detection because it's not in the same plane

as human kind.

But the dimension that is traveling in is basically hell.

If you think about the warp as defined in Warhammer 40k this is a Warhammer 40k ship but we don't

have any psykers on board so we don't have any people doing magic to keep the evil thoughts

out of the heads of the crew and so the crew slowly goes mad while they are under.

So essentially a space submarine novel in which claustrophobia becomes lovecraftian horror.

As far as these things go it's a pretty good book.

I enjoyed it quite a lot and I was excited to read the next one when it was done only to discover

that came out in 2023 so the next one isn't out yet.

Curses.

What have I done?

Started reading a series that's not finished?

I'm a fool.

So I'll keep my out for future books from Scott Sigler in this series.

That one is called "Shakedown."

I thought it was pretty entertaining.

I haven't played very many submarine games but I suppose the one I would point to best

is Captain Sonar.

This is a game of dueling submarines and if you're playing at the full player count of eight

players that's pretty compelling.

One player on each team plays the captain.

There's a navigator, a weapons person and I think an engineer and you are in real time

sort of calling out things that people have, things that people are doing, you're making

moves on the ship, you're firing weapons and stuff and so you're trying to keep track

of where the other ship is as well.

It's a pretty interesting game.

I've played the simple version of it just called "Sonar" but I haven't played the full

Captain Sonar game and it is one I should play.

It's kind of a bummer that I haven't played it actually but it's just never been on the

table when I had a chance at my game club and I haven't made it happen.

I totally could and probably should but that's Captain Sonar and the novel is Scott Sigler,

"Shakedown."

Another audiobook that I read.

Next up is a new John Scalzi novel that I picked up used at a bookstore.

This is Agent to the Stars.

I think new, I don't know how new it is, I don't know when he wrote this but there it is.

Agent to the Stars, the premise is there's a character who is a feisty talent agent working

his way up in one of the big talent agent companies in Los Angeles.

He has a good reputation but he's still relatively new to the business so he doesn't have much

in the way of strong clientele because Boss calls him in and says, "Hey, I've got a job

for you. I need you to help figure out how to sell an alien race as a publicity thing."

So basically there's an alien race that wants to do commercial trade with human beings

but they are odious and creepy looking and so people are scared of them.

And basically his job is to figure out how to set up people to accept this alien race when

they arrive.

That's kind of the idea.

It's very funny, it's written with a really rye sense of humor.

In terms of tone it reminds me a lot of red shirts, more than Old Man's War which has a more

serious tone.

I thought it was fine.

It's definitely a book like I enjoyed it but it immediately went on the sell pile.

I'm not going to read it again.

I don't know maybe in 20 years I'll have fun memories of it and I won't remember it

so I'll read it again.

But for the most part it's not a book I'm planning to read again.

Like I said I thought it was fine and funny but not deeply memorable.

It also didn't have the kind of long term world building that Old Man's War did where

it led me to five books and a novella all of which I really enjoyed.

This one was much subtler or much less monumental.

That said like I said it was very funny, really good writing when John Scalzi wants to be

funny he definitely knows how and this book hits that right in the nose.

I don't know what the board game equivalent would be.

This feels like a role playing game to me.

If you had a role playing game about a bunch of different people in LA who have to help

an alien figure out how to get along or one person's hunting the alien and one person

trying to hide them that part feels there to me.

Oh so maybe the Visitor in Blackwood Grove would be a version of that.

In that one you have human secret agents who are trying to figure out how to talk to

the visitor then you have a child who's trying to figure out how to talk to the visitor

and the one that succeeds first will win the game.

That's not quite what's going on in this book.

The aliens aren't quite so mysterious or difficult to connect with but that's the closest

thing I can think of.

So that's agent to the stars from John Scalzi.

Well the next book I read is Dark Tower 5, The Wolves of the Callah.

This is another Stephen King novel and the fifth of the seven Dark Tower, the fifth of

the seven Dark Tower novels and then there is an eighth one.

There is sort of number 4.5 which I skipped everything everything I've read says that you should

read the seven original novels first then go back and read novel 4.5 that reading the

wind through the keyhole I think it's called as number 4.5 is less satisfying than reading

it in the order it was published so that's I'm doing.

Following general wisdom of people who've walked the path before me.

What's the point of history if not to listen to it?

So Wolves of the Calla is an interesting entry in the Dark Tower saga because it does

almost nothing to move the saga forward by itself.

There are certainly story points in it that are very important.

It establishes lore.

It sets up things for future books but the characters on their way to the tower make no forward

movement during the wolves of the Calla instead they get distracted by the side quest which

feels really important and turns out to be really important and is very well defined but

it feels like after the Wizard and the Glass, King wasn't quite done with writing

western tales.

He wanted to write one more really true feeling western tale and he wasn't going to get

to do that if he pushed the characters toward the end of the story so instead he had them

stop and he basically wrote his version of the magnificent seven.

Like I said lots of good story lots of good world building.

King is top notch in the series.

I am liking these books better than anything else of his I've read although I do remember

the gripping feeling of reading misery.

For the most part his books I think they're good not amazing but these the Dark Tower

ones and they're getting better with each one.

So book five I think might be the best one yet.

Though I really did like book four and I thought book three was pretty great they're just

getting better and better.

The characters are very well defined interesting conflicts thoughtful development of villains

I liked it a lot.

So all in all Dark Tower five wolves of the Calla another banger well worth reading.

I enjoyed the audiobook I then went around online so people were sad that it was a different

audiobook narrator than the ones who did books two three and four.

This was the guy who did book one I guess.

It turns out the guy who's who did books two three and four had some sort of illness and

passed away.

It's very sad.

They did a they created a foundation for that audiobook writer to support his family

which I thought was pretty nice.

King and a bunch of the other people who really liked his work on their books then started

this foundation.

So good for you Stephen King.

That is wolves of the Calla.

I don't know what the board game version of this would be.

I may have said this in the past but Western Legends probably is your winner there.

This is a sandbox style game in which you can play.

You play somebody in the old west riding on a horse shooting a pistol.

You could be a desparado.

You could be a law person but generally Western Legends is the sandbox game about the

old west and I think it seems like that would be the way to go if you were interested

in playing a story kind of like wolves of the Calla.

That's that I can't think of any games.

Oh you know Shadows over Brimstone actually or Shadows of Brimstone might be a better fit

if you played one of the western ones because the western ones really closely connect with

the mythos of the idea of like these extra worldly villains showing up and while the villains

aren't inherently extra worldly in wolves of Colour they are kind of.

They're definitely not.

It's definitely fantastical.

So maybe shadows of brimstone would be your game to play with this fifth book in the Dark

Tower series.

Next up is a comic that I read and it's interesting.

I did not log that I had read this before.

I don't remember reading it before but I am surprised that I didn't because this is a

comic I bought because of the artist, the artist, D'Israeli.

It's somebody that I've seen a number of times and I've really enjoyed their work and so

this is a book I bought on the strength of the artist.

It is a sort of children's fable.

The like I said the title is Kingdom of the Wicked, the writer is Ian Edgerton, the artist

is D'Israeli.

This is a I think it's a one stop comic.

I don't... or a one shot.

I don't think that they did more although I didn't look.

The premise is there is a main character who is a boy who had a very active imagination

with his stuffed animals when he was a kid.

Think about like Christopher Robin from the Winnie the Pooh books and when he

was an adult he went off and kind of stopped visiting the magical land of his toys but that

doesn't mean that they stopped existing and so they've carried on and things have gotten

not great.

So the main character is sort of having dreams about these figures and he's in therapy and

he's trying to figure out what's going on with his life and so there is a metaphor for

adulthood and childhood.

There is some fantastical storytelling.

There is some heroism, some drama.

It's a war comic at parts and it's all with stuffed animals and toys and such.

All in all Kingdom of the Wicked is a really solid comic.

I encourage you to check it out if you think that sounds interesting.

I think D'Israeli's art is excellent.

Clearly the connection for a game would be Stuffed Fables.

Now in Stuffed Fables you play stuffed animals going on adventures to protect the little

girl who owns you from nightmares.

So that's not quite the same as this but it feels very related.

Stuffed animals having their own world of adventures.

Now I thought Stuffed Fables was fine but kind of boring.

The rules were pretty complicated and I thought that the actual gameplay was not very fun but

it was very imaginative and an excellent production product design.

There's a lot of people who really did like it so the fact that it wasn't for me doesn't

mean it wasn't good.

There were a lot of people who really did like it and I encourage you to check it out if

that sounds interesting to you.

It is, it reminded me a lot of Mice and Mystics actually in terms of the feel, it's like

a newer version of it but in that vein.

That's Kingdom of the Wicked.

Only the last book I read and this, I will admit this is not a great list.

There's only six, six and a whole quarter.

That's not excellent.

But the last book that I read in December of last year was *Zoe Is Too Drunk for This Dystopia*.

Now I picked this for a couple of reasons.

One, the author's name is Jason Pargin or Pargin.

He is somebody I follow on TikTok.

I think he's very funny and I learned he was a writer.

He's in fact the writer who wrote *John Dies at the End* which is a well-known book.

Interestingly, *John Dies at the End*.

I thought was written by somebody else and it turned out that it was.

James Wong was the name, I think James Wong.

It's a name like that.

That and it turns out Jason Pargin when he started writing novels was an editor at an online

magazine and he didn't want confusion or potential conflict of interest to emerge.

So he wrote under a pseudonym so that to keep his writer life and his editing life separate.

But eventually he retired from that magazine and became a full-time writer and in so doing,

they've now been republishing his early books under his full name or his given name.

If there's one thing, the *John Dies at the End*.

novels are known for it's a kind of sardonic wit and this book is no different.

This is a sci-fi future novel where the main character has inherited her mob father's

vast estate and she's trying to figure out how much of it to leave the way it is and how

much of it to change so that it's more ethical.

She's trying to figure out what to do with all this money.

It's really interesting but it's also really violent and very funny.

And as I'm reading it, I'm like, "man, there's just a ton of world-building that's assumed

here."

It's assumed you know a lot of stuff and he just sort of explains it off-handedly.

And about the third time he explained something off-handedly, I was like, oh no.

And I went and looked at it, sure enough, I was reading book three in a series and so that

is why I didn't understand what was going on is that I was reading the third book in

a series without having finished read either of the first two.

So I did finish it because I was by that point well in and I was understanding it just

fine.

Then I went back and read the first one which I'll talk about in the next series.

That one's called "Futuristic Violence and Fancy Suits."

And then there's the second one is called "Zoey Punches the Future in the Dick" is

one I'm going to be working on in the future.

But a delightful book, well worth checking out.

Now if you wanted a game that went with this, I mean I feel like the Android universe probably

fits closest.

It is definitely a cyberpunk, gritty, hyper-capitalist, very violent place.

So Android Netrunner, or there's the old game Android which is a detective game, those

would fit pretty well for the kind of thing that's happening in Zoey's
Too Drunk for This Dystopia

Well that brings me to the end of my podcast.

I want to say thank you for joining me today.

I'd love to hear what you've been reading.

You can share that with me.

I go on over to Board Game Geek, Guild 3269 and give me that answer.

What have you been reading?

I'd love to hear it.

In the meantime, I hope that you're finding good books to read and I hope
that your next

walk is as pleasant as mine was.

Bye-bye.

[Music]

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