

Best Book Club with Shanna and Jen Podcast
Episode 18 - April 28, 2021

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig Book Club Review and Discussion

Shanna: 'Between life and death there is a library,' she said, 'And within that library, the shelves go on forever. Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived. To see how things would be if you had made other choices...Would you have done anything different, if you had the chance to undo your regrets?'

Jen: Hello everyone and welcome to the Best Book Club Podcast. I'm Jen.

Shanna: And I'm Shanna.

Jen: And it is Book Club once again! Thank you all for joining us as we discuss "The Midnight Library" by Matt Haig! Thank you so much to everyone who joined in on the discussion over on our instagram and facebook pages. It is so great to get all of your insight, and it helps us become better and more thoughtful readers. Seriously, you guys rock. If you haven't yet, head over to Instagram and Facebook and join us. Sure, we are so clever, but you won't be disappointed in the quality of the readers we have to talk books with over there! The more the merrier.

Shanna: First of all, let us tell you all about who in the heck Matt Haig is. He was born on July 3, 1975. He studied English and History at the University of Hull in England and is now an author and journalist, who writes both fiction and nonfiction for both children and adults often in the speculative fiction genre.

Jen: Okay here is another genre that I had never heard of before! Speculative Fiction. So for those of you who don't know like me - **Speculative fiction** is a broad category of **fiction** encompassing genres with certain elements that are nonexistent in terms of reality, recorded history, or nature and the present universe, covering various themes in the context of the supernatural, futuristic, and many other imaginative topics. Yup that sounds pretty broad to me but based on this book in particular it totally makes sense.

Shanna: He actually has a really decent backlog of work that sounds really interesting. He has seven novels that are out now, and 11 children's books, along with a bundle of non fiction work. I was tempted to just sit here and read out the synopsis of all the other books, but no, come on Shanna, that's ridiculous.

Jen: Wow, that's incredible. I'm so surprised that I have literally never heard his name before. I mean obviously there are bajillion authors in the world, so I can't hear of them *all* but seven novels and eleven children's books is pretty substantial.

Shanna: An interesting note on his non fiction work though is that I read a lot of it was inspired by a mental breakdown he had when he was 24 years old. He is also someone who lives with anxiety, which I think you can tell reading this novel. I feel like you can usually tell somewhat when reading if an author has really been anywhere close to the topics they are writing about.

Yes, he has definitely struggled with mental health his whole life. I read a few reviews that said they didn't like that way he portrayed mental health in this book and I thought... I think he knows and I think he did a great job. I listened to a really good podcast where Jameela Jamil interviews him and they both talk so frankly and openly about their mental health struggles and it was really really great. I will link it in the show notes if anyone is interested. Jameela Jamil is hilarious and awesome so I highly recommend it regardless.

Shanna: Totally! He has a new book being released a little later on this year. "*The Comfort Book*" will be released on July 1, 2021. It appears to be a non fiction title that is made up of shorts meant to comfort us in a stressful world. Another fun fact for you, *The Midnight Library* was adapted for radio and broadcast in ten episodes on BBC Radio 4 in December 2020.

Jen: I looked into this and it looks like it was just a Christmas special that isn't available anymore. At least I couldn't find anywhere to listen to it. The book definitely has a Christmas Carol vibe to it so that totally makes sense why it would be chosen as a Christmas special.

Speaking of Christmas, I also have seen it compared to *It's a Wonderful Life* which is a movie I haven't actually seen...I know.. What kind of movie lover am I!? But, the fun thing is that apparently there are intentional nods to the movie in the book. If I had watched it, I would have caught them. Did anyone notice? All I know about the movie is the reference from *Friends* when Phoebe watched it and says "They shouldn't have called it "**It's a Wonderful Life**," they should have called it "**It's a sucky life** and just when you think it can't suck any more it does." Now, that sounds about right and is definitely a theme in parts of this book.

Shanna: The same studio he has been working with to this point "Studio Canal and Blueprint Pictures" has also optioned for a film to be made of *The Midnight Library*, with Haig acting as Executive Producer. Which I kind of think is a shame because it is formatted beautifully for a limited series.

Jen: OOO that should be good! I would really love to see the library on screen. But yeah I agree that a series would be better than a movie!

Shanna: I like to think I am pretty up to date on quite a few authors, but somehow Matt Haig and *The Midnight Library* completely slipped my radar.

Jen: I have been seeing this book EVERYWHERE for so long. I had a hold on it from the library for months because it is so popular.

Shanna: The month of April was Jen's month to pick out our book club book. Once I read the synopsis I was pretty dang excited to give this one a go.

Jen: I had such a hard time choosing a book! You'd think that it would be easier for me to do! This book had been on my radar but I didn't actually know anything about it, only that everyone loves it, and then our friend Jennelle read it and absolutely loved it and when she spoke about what the story was, it just clicked and I was like YES this is the book! Okay so here is the synopsis for any of you who haven't read it yet and are just here to find out the nonspoilies.

Shanna: Between life and death there is a library, and within that library, the shelves go on forever. Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived. To see how things would be if you had made other choices . . . Would you have done anything different, if you had the chance to undo your regrets?

Somewhere out beyond the edge of the universe there is a library that contains an infinite number of books, each one the story of another reality. One tells the story of your life as it is, along with another book for the other life you could have lived if you had made a different choice at any point in your life. While we all wonder how our lives might have been, what if you had the chance to go to the library and see for yourself? Would any of these other lives truly be better?

In *The Midnight Library*, Matt Haig's enchanting new novel, Nora Seed finds herself faced with this decision. Faced with the possibility of changing her life for a new one, following a different career, undoing old breakups, realizing her dreams of becoming a glaciologist; she must search within herself as she travels through the Midnight Library to decide what is truly fulfilling in life, and what makes it worth living in the first place.

Shanna: "The Midnight Library" was the Best Fiction winner of the 2020 Goodreads Choice Awards. It actually JUST won, by only 5 votes, beating out Fredrick Backman's 2020 release, "Anxious People" which we have both read and loved.

Jen: Really?! That's hilarious! Well, I guess not hilarious. But it is funny. If I had known about the voting I definitely would have voted Anxious People though. Darnit.

Shanna: Before we head into the spoiler portion of the podcast, let's see what we each thought of this one. How many dollars ... or stars ... dollstars (hehehe) did you give this one Jen?

Jen: I'm afraid to say! I think you and most of the world will disagree. Maybe. We've established that I never know what you're gonna say. Everyone in book club loved the book but I am putting only three dollstars in the jar. Don't hit me!

Shanna: Oh I would probably never hit you! I am surprised though!

Jen: I was also surprised! I really really liked the first half of the book. I loved the idea of the library and trying out the other lives. But at about half way it lost me. The lives got tiresome and the ending was just so obvious and you know it's obvious if even I know what it's gonna be. I held out hope though that there would be some twist, but it didn't come. Hopefully that's not too spoilery.

Shanna: Yeah the ending was pretty obvious. I had it nailed down by page 70, and really I had a pretty good idea a lot earlier than that. We have established that I am a pretty good guesser though so I didn't know if it would be as obvious to other people, and uh, especially you.

Jen: Because I really liked the idea of the story, I can't think of any other way it could have been done because if any other route was taken it would have changed the entire message and the entire point. So I don't have any ideas about what could have made it better.

Shanna: Oh yeah I knew where it was going and I was perfectly happy to just go along until we got there. That's not always the case though, so I was impressed this one could keep me caring anyways. I gave this one 5 whole bucks! I know, I was actually thinking it was going to be a solid 4 stars, but then by the end I just really liked the way the book made me feel. I know I will definitely be recommending it to people in my life, so that bumped it up to 5.

Jen: See and I found this book to be SO STRESSFUL. I did not feel good almost at all while I was reading it. Because of certain aspects of my personality, I could not handle it but we will get into that in a minute. I've recently realized that I have to be a little more honest with my dollstars because I am poor. Normally I probably would have given it 4 stars and it actually makes me uncomfortable to give it 3, especially because I do think it is a very important book and could be very helpful for so many people. It's just not helpful for me specifically at this time.

Jen: Alright, from here on out there will be spoilers because we can't hold back any longer! It is time to get into this book!

Shanna: Ok, so like we were just saying, this book was not hard to predict. At all.

Jen: No. It was very predictable and that honestly didn't bother me at first. I knew where it was going pretty quickly and I was okay with it. Obviously she needed to choose life in her root

life. Obviously. If she had chosen any of the other lives, it would have not only negated the whole point of the story but would have actually been problematic I think.

Shanna: So I think that the reason I liked the predictably in this one where I would normally have not liked it, is because it was a story around depression and suicide. If it had left me feeling unsure that we were going to leave Nora as a happier and healthier person, it would have been a very upsetting and stressful read for me!

Jen: Yeah and I can totally see that! That outcome for her was also really important to me. I just kind of wish that it would have wrapped up a little sooner? I don't know. I think it may have been when she went to the states to make wine that I stopped caring about the lives? It's not a long book so if anything was cut, it would have probably been too short?

Shanna: I can see that, and I definitely think it would have been too short if any had been cut. I have lives I enjoyed more than others for sure, but I was still enjoying all of the lives the entire way through. Each one was serving a different purpose, and I was always eager to see what each life's lesson would be.

Jen: Okay, so here it is, I found every life she went into to be so stressful because she went in not knowing ANYTHING. I think I would have 100% liked this book more if she went into the lives with *that* Nora's memories. I hate not knowing things. I hate being asked a question that I don't already know the answer to so this book made me SO uncomfortable.

Shanna: Hahahaha and see, I wasn't too worried about that. Like I WOULD have been, if you know, she hadn't just decided to kill herself. I also would not love to be thrown into a life with absolutely no prior knowledge, like, in real life, for me. But she had already made a pretty big bold choice, so how much worse could things get?

Jen: Also, because Nora didn't know the basic stuff about her lives, we spent so much time with her trying to figure out like where her house was and who was alive. That got a bit boring for me after awhile. The predictability mixed with the immense stress just killed it in the end for me.

Shanna: Oh for sure, I would not have enjoyed this book if it had made me feel stressed out.

Jen: My little heart was pounding in stress lol. Also, based on what little we did know about Nora's personality and also taking into account her deep depression, it just didn't quite make sense to me that she would walk into these lives so confidently. Like she was oddly unphased with having to give a huge talk or that she had to perform in a concert. I would have been running for the hills. Perhaps because she was on the verge of death, she had nothing to lose?

Shanna: Yeah that's what I was thinking. She already chose death, and if it doesn't work out, she will be dead, so, you know, I guess at that point there isn't much more letting go that can be done.

Jen: Even if I had chosen death, there is still no way I would have been fine with giving a speech completely unprepared. That's actually my worst nightmare. Worse than death. I still liked the book - It was good. But it wasn't my most favorite book in the world. I can definitely respect why literally everyone else loves it. And honestly, I meant it when I said that I LOVED the idea. I mean, I picked the book. I'm so glad that everyone liked it though.

Shanna: The idea was so good! You know how much I love weird time stuff, so that was also a hit with me.

Jen: Totally. I can really see how this is a Shanna book for sure. Weird time stuff is not really in my wheelhouse pretty much at all.

Okay so let's get into the story!

Shanna: The book starts with the sentence "Nineteen years before she decided to die, Nora Seed sat in the warmth of the small library at Hazeldene School in the town of Bedford." Nora is 16 years old here and she is playing chess with the school librarian, Mrs. Elm.

Jen: Okay this seriously gave me The Queen's Gambit stress flashbacks. Right off the get go, it was like, "Mrs. Elm made her first move. A knight hopping over the neat row of white pawns." I was like OH NO.

Shanna: RIGHT?! I don't hate chess!! Or at least I DIDN'T!! Now every time chess is in a book I get sweaty. Not to worry though, this book had an acceptable level of chess talk.

Jen: It turned out alright in the end. There are quite a lot of chess metaphors in this book and it was lovely instead of awful. There was one quote that stood out to me "At the beginning of a game, there are no variations. There is only one way to set up a board. There are nine million variations after the first six moves. And after eight moves there are two hundred and eighty-eight billion different positions. And those possibilities keep growing. There are more possible ways to play a game of chess than the amount of atoms in the observable universe. So it gets very messy. And there is no right way to play; there are many ways. In chess, as in life, possibility is the basis of everything. Every hope, every dream, every regret, every moment of living." I just found this to be so beautiful and so interesting. Is that true!?

Shanna: If you happen to be someone who is looking for a detailed list of all two hundred and eighty eight billion possible chess moves, I recommend reading The Queen's Gambit. Ok. That's it. That's the last one I swear.

Jen: I think that we have established that it will never be the last one.

Shanna: At the end of this scene, Mrs. Elm gets a phone call that Nora's father has passed away. Then we move 19 years into the future to "27 hours before she decided to die" A

countdown has started. Pretty much immediately in this chapter, a man knocks on her door and it's a man that she recognizes. His name is Ash and he is a surgeon who asked her out for coffee a few years ago but she declined because she had a boyfriend at the time. Unfortunately, the reason he was knocking is because he found her cat dead on the side of the road.

Jen: This was so sad because she went from thinking that maybe he was there to ask her out again to finding out that her beloved cat was dead.

The next day, because she spent the night burying her cat, she ends up being late for work at the music store she has worked at for thirteen years and her boss fires her.

Shanna: This was so scuzzy. I get it if he had to let her go because the business isn't doing well, and maybe it had been a long time coming, but man, come on. He was such a butt hole about it.

Jen: Right? He told her that "times are tough I can't pay you to put off customers with your face looking like a wet weekend" That's a horrible way to fire someone!

Shanna: She leaves the music store and wanders around town aimlessly and finds herself reminded of all the things she didn't do and now regrets. She gets a text from her ex, Dan, who she left two days before they were to be married. She runs into Ravi, her brother's best friend who was also a member of the band she left just as they were about to sign a record deal. She gets a text from her former best friend, Izzy, who she was supposed to move to Australia with but backed out and Izzy went without her.

Jen: Then, she runs into someone from school who reminds her that she quit swimming when she could have made it to the olympics. She gets a call from the mother of the boy she teaches piano to telling her that because she forgot about his lesson, they weren't going to do them anymore. Her elderly neighbour who she picked up prescriptions for said that he doesn't need her to anymore.

Shanna: She was having a very crappy 24 hours.

Jen: So crappy. It was just crap after crap after crap. It's a sucky life and just when you think it can't suck anymore it does! See. Honestly though, I felt bad for her but also at this point, Nora does a pretty good job at convincing me she is terrible. I actually made a note that she was kind of a jerk. Of course, we are looking at the story through her regrets so she thinks that she was a jerk. It was very effective on me anyways.

Shanna: It's one thing after another and Nora is plagued with the regrets of everything she didn't do and also feels like she has not only ruined her own life but also the life of others. So that night, after leaving a sad social media post, a voicemail to her brother and a suicide note, she overdoses on her medication.

Jen: Keep in mind that this happens on page 23 so the story progressed very fast.

Shanna: Yes we really jump right into it. I was expecting a slower burn to get to the library but I actually liked that we got right there.

Jen: I think that I would have liked more of a slow start to the book. I really enjoyed the first bit and I think I would have preferred to get to know Nora a little bit better before this point.

Shanna: Eh. I am sure it's just a personal story telling preference, but I didn't need more time hanging out with her while she was suicidally depressed. Too depressing. I am sure he could have done it well based on my opinion of the rest of his writing through the book, but I was glad to get to the working through it parts faster.

Jen: Well when you put it that way...Reading a story about someone who is depressed doesn't really bother me, but I also don't generally struggle with depression so I can see how that would not be great for some people. I didn't necessarily want to be with her longer on that day, but I just felt like the beginning was a bit rushed. It was very fast paced right from the get go which isn't necessarily bad but I felt a little jostled. And yeah she was depressed but I found her voice to be actually quite funny in the beginning and I didn't find that in the rest of the book. We do get to know her a little better throughout the story, but a lot of what we get to know is not who she is but more who she would have been.

Shanna: Ahh and this is where I would say that I am glad she didn't go into each life with the other Nora's memories! I think if she had their memories then we would have been getting to know who she would have been, but since she was always root life Nora, I always felt like we were getting to know her more in every life.

Jen: It's exactly midnight and Nora is engulfed in mist. As it starts to thin, a building she has never seen emerges. A large rectangle shaped, columned building with a big clock with the hands pointed to midnight at the top. She steps inside and sees rows and rows of endless books.

Shanna: Then out of nowhere an older woman who Nora recognizes appears. It's Mrs. Elm, her school librarian. She explains to Nora that the library is a place between life and death and the books are portals to the lives that Nora could have lived had she made different choices.

Jen: One book, different from the others, is the books of regrets. This book is grey, where the others are green and is also bigger and heavier than all the rest. In it are all the regrets that Nora has ever had.

Shanna: I loved that. It was also the moment I was pretty sure I had figured the entire book out, but still, I loved it.

Jen: Nora can choose to go into any life that she wants to see how things would have played out had she made the decisions needed to get there. She can stay in each life as long as she wants and if she finds one that she really likes, she can choose to stay there forever otherwise, if she's not happy, she will return to the library. In each of these lives, she starts from that day at midnight.

Shanna: Which, fun fact, is today's date! The day that Nora decided to die was April 28th. I was like OOOOOOOOOH THE UNIVERSE IS DOING THE THING!!

Jen: I love when the universe does the thing!

Jen: The first regret she decides to undo is not marrying Dan. So Mrs. Elm finds the book that holds that life and when Nora starts to read it, she finds herself transported to a pub called The Three Horsehoes. She and Dan always had a dream to open a pub in the country and it turns out that if she had married him, they would have. In this life, she has a different cat named Voltaire who isn't dead, and she is still friends with Izzy.

Shanna: Ugh. Yuck. Dan.

Jen: It quickly becomes apparent that her and Dan aren't happy. The pub isn't doing well, Dan has a drinking problem and he cheated on her. So, now Nora knows that she doesn't have to regret that decision and she returns to the library.

Shanna: I think this was the perfect life to start with, since it got Dan's character out of the way right off the bat, and set us up with a good frame of reference for him and his actions in every other life. It was a cool way to take the guilt she was carrying around with her and let her know that actually a lot of it was also a huge "him" problem. It was cool seeing that choice she always considered a regret actually turn out to be a bullet dodged. We go on to see a ton of different iterations of this, but yeah, I thought this was a really good jumping off point.

Jen: Totally. I agree! She trusted her gut that she shouldn't marry him and she has been second guessing herself since. It was a nice lesson in trusting herself and her feelings.

Jen: The next life she chooses is one where she decides to keep Volts as an indoor cat so that he doesn't die. When she wakes up in that life, she can't find the cat anywhere and then when she does find him under the bed, he is dead. She is obviously really upset but Mrs. Elm explains that he was sick and would have died anyways so nothing she did caused it.

Shanna: Oh, whew, I was about to be really upset at a cat plot hole, but that's right the Voltaire in the Dan life was an entirely different cat that just had the same name. Ok, we are good. Moving on.

Jen: When Volts appeared in the Dan life, I was so excited. And then when it was another cat with the same name, I was disappointed! I would have loved a life travelling cat. But for reals,

Volts being dead the second time was actually so upsetting. When she touched him and he was dead, it was just awful.

Shanna: Next, Nora asks to see the life she would have had if she had moved to Australia with Izzy. She is suddenly in a beautiful pool, surrounded by nice people. Her clothes are all cheery with pineapples on them. It seems that this life would be a good one but when she gets home, she finds that her roommate is not Izzy. When she asks her what happened to Izzy, she learns that she died in a car accident a month after they moved there.

Jen: I had such high hopes for this life! I just wanted Nora to have a break from the sadness for just a little while. She obviously had high hopes too because it started out pretty good but then it just got so sad.

Shanna: That pool scene was lovely. I was also thinking this could be it, but then I saw the ... lots of pages left and thought no probably not.

Jen: This is true. I'm not sure what I was expecting each time but I guess I wasn't expecting everything to be awful each time. Finding out about Izzy was also very upsetting and then seeing how that grief manifested into Nora just being stuck there was very sad.

Shanna: The next life she chooses is the one where she doesn't give up her swimming career. She finds herself in a really fancy hotel room and after a quick google, she finds out that she had in fact made it to the olympics, twice and now she covers swimming for the BBC. She also finds out that Izzy is alive in this life but it's not clear whether they ever even became friends. She also finds out that her dad didn't die of a heart attack in this life because he went on a health kick while she was training for the Olympics. In this life her dad cheated on her mother, they ended up getting a divorce and her mother turned to drinking and died earlier than she did in Nora's root life. Such a bummer. It's funny how much technology can change a story! If this was set in a time before the internet and cell phones she would have been hooped. If I was dropped into a life with nothing but my social media to go by, oh dear. I am not sure how quickly I would be able to figure anything out. But maybe that's a good thing.

Jen: Probably definitely a good thing. In a lot of her alternate lives she was super successful and famous so I guess that makes the googling a bit easier. I honestly can't see a life where I would have made choices that would have made me famous. More famous than I am now, I mean.

Jen: Nora had so many talents and so much potential but the depression just dragged her down.

Jen: When Nora was a child she had dreams of becoming a glaciologist and so she tries out that life. It is here where she is given the task of watching for polar bears while the others in her group go off to do glaciologist type things. Of course a polar bear shows up and as it's about to

attack her, she realizes that she wants to live. Luckily she scares the bear away and doesn't die.

Shanna: This was good, but I also think there is a pretty big difference between an overdose and being eaten by a bear. Not that it's a competition or anything.

Jen: Yeah actually what she realizes is that she doesn't want to die which IS different than wanting to live. The fear of being eaten by a bear definitely trumps the fear of overdosing in my mind.

Shanna: While there she meets someone like her named Hugo. He claims that he is what he calls a "slider" and instead of a library, he moves through different lives from a video store. During a very unsatisfactory sexual encounter with Hugo, she returns to the library.

Jen: This is definitely one of the book club questions, so don't worry, we will be coming back to this. Then she tries the life where she stays in the band and becomes a super famous rock star. Everything seems great at first, but then she finds out that her brother is not in the band with her because he died of an overdose. Back to the library she goes.

Shanna: This is the only life that made me a little stressed out. I mean, being thrown onto a stage for an encore of a song you don't know, and then being a guest on a podcast about a life you haven't lived, that sounded like a really hard one to pull off.

Jen: I feel like I can hardly pull off being on this podcast sometimes! Much less one that I hadn't prepared for about something I knew nothing about. I also thought how annoying it would have been to be the one interviewing her lol.

Shanna: If this one had happened a lot sooner then I could see it being a game changer, but, in a bad way. At this point however I guess she was almost eaten by a bear, everyone she loves has died in some different and horrible way, and she's already been on a stage in front of a ton of strangers winging it, so she was better prepared than she would have been otherwise. Mrs. Elm was doing a great job.

Jen: She is realizing that all these lives and the regrets that she had about them came from other people's dreams and not her own.

Jen: Literally, even as I am saying all of these lives, I have had enough of them. I'm like...are we done yet. I'm a horrible person. Someone healing and coming to terms with who they are is boring to me. I just want to move onto the next part. Okay, Next life!

Shanna: Ahhh I love it. I don't think not enjoying a particular story telling style makes you a bad person. I mean, maybe, but probably not. I honestly thought we flipped through lives so quickly it didn't bother me at all. I love this realization on her part and I think it's such a great reminder

for the reader, in this case me, that other people aren't the boss of you and you don't have to live to please everyone else. You hear that kids? YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME.

Jen: OOO I just had a revelation! I think that a part of me not liking this form of storytelling as much ties into me hating hearing about people's dreams. Not their hopes and dreams, but their actual asleep dreams. I have mentioned it here before.

Jen: She decides to try a gentler life, one where she continues working at the animal shelter. She dates a nice guy named Dylan, he has a lot of dogs, she isn't super thrilled, and back to the library she goes.

Shanna: Oh my goodness my nose felt like it was full of dog hair the entire time I was reading this life. So much dog hair. No. No thank you.

No thank you is right. There was nothing about this life that felt great. Maybe he had to throw this one in so that there would be lives where she wasn't wildly successful. To make it a little more realistic perhaps?

Shanna: Then she decides to try one where she moves to America and marries a man named Eduardo and opens up a winery. That life was fine, nice even, but it's not the one. Then she tries out a whole bunch of lives but none of them are for her. This life did feel like a filler life. At least it was short. It was really different from the rest and I suppose served to show there was literally no end to the possibilities of a life lived.

Jen: It really surprised me that she would go through that many lives. I would be so so tired. I am so tired thinking of it.

Shanna: Maybe you were just too tired for this book right now. Although books that stress me out also make me sleepy.

Jen: Am I too tired for reading? I feel like this happens to me a lot. I'm like "too tired, hate all books".

Jen: Finally, she decides to try the one where she said yes to having coffee with Ash. In this life, she is married to Ash, they have a daughter named Molly and Nora is a professor at Cambridge University. Her brother is alive and well. It's been clear in all the other lives that she still struggled with depression - she always had antidepressants and self-inflicted scars but in this life she seemed to have neither of those things. At first she feels sure that this is the life that she wants to stay in but that sureness begins to fade when she realizes that the different choices that she made had negative impacts on some of the people she knows in her root life. Without her, the boy she gave piano lessons to turned to a life of crime and the elderly neighbour she helped out was alone in a care home. This mixed with the feeling that she hadn't earned that life, brings her back to the library.

Shanna: Ahh, so sometimes other people are a little bit the boss of you. I was sad when she had to leave this life, but that was once again probably my mama heart. That was such a nice life. I know that what made me sad was that in her root life that SPECIFIC ship had already sailed. She would never be able to meet Ash at that time and have Molly be the same kid. She could still have children and all that, but like, not THAT child, and yeah, that made me sad for her. Of course we saw through so many of her lives that she usually didn't have kids, and was perfectly happy without them, so that was totally a me projecting my own life and feelings on to the character.

Jen: Yes, I felt this too. The thought of going back without Molly was upsetting. Maybe that's why she didn't just jump out of bed and run to Ash's house. I feel like there would be a little bit of grief to work through there?

Shanna: Back at the library though, things aren't going great. A fire has started and the library and all the books are burning. Mrs. Elm tells Nora that there is a way to get out. There is one book that isn't burning. That's the life she is supposed to be in and she needs to find that book to get out. Nora finds the one book in the library that isn't on fire but it is blank. She must write this story herself. She starts out with "Nora wanted to live" and that didn't work. So she tried, "Nora decided to live" nothing. "Nora was ready to live" still nothing. The fire was raging around her. And then finally she wrote, "I am alive" and the library was no more. The song "Unwritten" totally started playing in my head here. I am not even making a joke, that is the 100% truth.

Jen: Literally don't know it. Should I? Maybe I do.

Jen: Nora came back to her root life at one minute and twenty seven seconds past midnight. She immediately pukes and then stumbles to her neighbours house to ask for help and he calls her an ambulance. From here, she repairs the relationship with her brother and with Izzy. She gets her piano student back and she visits Mrs. Elm in a care home where they play chess.

Shanna: Beautiful. I love it. It was all there she just needed a minute (and 27 seconds) to see it. That was one hell of a dangerous way to go about it. 0/10, do not recommend, but, the library was such a cool story telling device that I can look past it.

Jen: Yes. I love it love love love the library.

Discussion Questions:

Jen: The Midnight Library is different for each person who enters it. What do you think your Midnight Library would be and who would be your Mrs. Elm?

Shanna: Well, this almost feels like cheating, but probably a library. Or a bookstore. Because ... well ... you've met me. You're co hosting a reading podcast with me. I think it's safe to say books are my thing.

My Mrs Elm ... huh. Oh! Oh I know yes. Ok. My Grade 1 teacher Mrs.Suhosky. I loved her. I thought she was the best and she was so sweet. My dad would always say "Shanna ... what would Mrs.Suhosky say?" when I wasn't listening or misbehaving. He still says it sometimes!

Jen: That's perfect! Well, you know me and books are my thing and I just read this book and honestly, a library or bookstore or anything book related didn't even occur to me! Like what. What I thought of actually was somewhere out in the woods. Like a clearing with multiple paths leading off of it. And my "librarian" would be one of my childhood best friends' mom, whose name is Kim.

Shanna: Awe I love that! I was very much not clever enough to imagine anything but a library. Some of the answers we got over on instagram were SO GOOD and I was like HOW ARE YALL SO CLEVER? Like, here, I am going to read a few of them. @myhappyplace_ isinabook said their library would be their geography classroom and teacher. When I read that my brain automatically made their travel method like spinning a big cool globe or shooting darts at a map which I thought was awesome. And I loved this, and my brain would never have gotten here but its so good.

Jen: OH I love that idea!

Shanna: Brittalive said her library would be a closet with Sarah Jessica Parker handing her outfits. That's amazing.

Jen: This one was my actual favorite and I would like to change my answer please. I will take SJP in the closet with outfits thank you!

Shanna: Ok, last one and then we can move on, but sorry, our book clubbers are too interesting not to mention this last one as well. @cashe_cece_honey said theri library would be a record store with their grandfather as their Mrs. Elm.

Jen: A record store would be so lovely. I love it. She mentions how healing music can be and that is so right.

Shanna: I love how each of these “libraries” has their own unique vibe to them, and I swear I could go on reading other people's choices forever. I feel so boring now!

Jen: Me too! We are so boring. This is what I love about book club though. I love hearing other people's thoughts and perspectives so thank you all for your answers.

Shanna: Which of Nora's alternate realities did you find the most interesting? My favourite was also her favourite. The last one with Ash and Molly. I thought they were all interesting in their own way of course, but that one spoke to my happily married, mama heart. I really liked how she wasn't a mother in all of her lives, and how it wasn't “a thing”, so like I said before this choice is very much me projecting.

Jen: I was the most excited for the one where she stayed in the band. Obviously that turned out to be a huge disappointment for both Nora and myself. But yeah, I agree, the one that I enjoyed the most and the one that I wanted to stay in the longest was also the one that she wanted to stay in.

Shanna: This is exactly not what I thought you would say.

Jen: Why?!

Shanna: That was totally the most stressful one for me. Although, I guess you do tend to love high drama in stories, so maybe that actually makes perfect sense.

Jen: It was stressful but in an emotional way, not in a “I'm going to poo and embarrass myself” kind of way. I love emotional, dramatic stress, just not stress that can humiliate me personally.

Jen: Nora's book of regrets was the heaviest in the library. Why was that? How heavy would your book be?

Shanna: I think the weight of my book depends heavily on when you ask me. It also would have been heavier when I was younger, but as I get older I find that, I dunno, a lot of that stuff doesn't matter anymore. As we learned in the men writing women episode, now that I am in my thirties I am basically dead anyways, so I have no time for regrets.

Jen: Yes. My book of regrets gets lighter every year. There is very little that I regret now because I know that if I changed any of them, I would not be here today in this life and in this life, I wouldn't change a thing so there is just no way that I can have regrets.

Shanna: Exactly.

Jen: Each of Nora's realities contained both really positive and really negative aspects. Why do you think this was an important part of the story.

Shanna: It showed that there are always going to be highs and lows no matter what we choose!

Jen: Yean, no reality is ever going to be perfect! No choice is necessarily going to be the right one or the wrong one because there is no guarantee what the outcome is or what the consequences are.

Shanna: Nora's character goes through many changes throughout the story. What did you think of her as a character in the beginning and at the end? I liked her. Like you said she was a bit unlikable at the start but, turns out I kind of like unlikable characters, so I was ok with this. I didn't find there was a ton of change to her character really, maybe because we never really got to know her that well in the beginning? Her outlook and demeanour changes with each life, but that's the point right?

Jen: Yeah I agree that there wasn't a ton of change in her character throughout the book which I found to be a little surprising. I expected some changes as we went through the lives, but she stayed pretty much the same. I actually thought that her voice was quite funny at the start! She seemed like a jerk, but I think that's funny so I was okay with it. I know that this means little to you, but I was actually reading her as Bridget Jones at first which was highly enjoyable.

Shanna: Ahh yes. All that does for me is make her look like Rene Zellweger.

Jen: Who I love, so I was totally fine with that!

Jen: She got weird at the end though, I thought. I didn't get to the end and feel like she had healed or was on the way to healing. To me she seemed to be in a manic state. I think that's part of the reason I didn't totally enjoy it? I'm just not sure that I was convinced that she was actually going to be okay in the end. That being said, I do know that people's outlook can change profusely after a near death experience so maybe that's all it was. But it felt a little bit like Singing in the Rain. I left my book at work so I can't find the exact quote but there was one point where Mr....elderly neighbour man said "Thanks Nora" and she was like "No! Thank you mr. elrderly neighbour man! Thank you!" with her arms held open before dancing into the sunset. At least that's how I read it/remember it.

Jen: What did you think of Hugo's character and place in the story?

Shanna: Meh. I like that he wasn't some big "oh my god this is what I've been missing!" It kind of seemed like it was maybe going to go that way, but then it's like "the sex wasn't good" and I laughed.

Jen: I feel like he could have been completely deleted from the story and that would have been totally fine. I didn't actually need that information dump that came with him. None of what he revealed changed anything for me. I always dislike information dumps in stories though. I said this same thing with the Prophet in Piranesi and I've noticed it a few times in other books recently. It always bothers me. I did love that she left that life when the sex was disappointing though. That was a nice touch.

Shanna: Yep, life is too short for bad sex.

Jen: Her life with Ash was where she felt happiest. Do you think she ended up with him in the end?

Shanna: Awe I hope so!

Jen: Me too! I was really left hanging when the book ended before we got there. I really wanted to know. I wanted them to get together. I wanted the happy ever after with Ash and whichever versions of their kids that came next. I wanted that. Open ended endings....I like when everything is wrapped up.

Shanna: And I am pretty much always down with an open ending! As long as they don't leave a ton of story points completely untouched I am usually super cool with it.

Shanna: So, Final Thoughts?

Jen: I really enjoyed the premise of this book. I love the idea of getting a different perspective and getting a second chance. I really loved the quote "It is quite the revelation to discover that the place you wanted to escape to is the exact same place you escaped from. That the prison isn't the place, but the perspective.

Shanna: Yes I love that too. I think part of what I enjoyed about this book and reading it right now specifically is that we have all been living these very basic and redundant and

restricted lives for a while now, and having a reminder that so much of our happiness is about our own perspective was a nice shake up.

Jen: Absolutely. We are all in our own little prisons right now and it really is about perspective in regards to how we end up coping with it.

Shanna: I have been on a pretty decent reading streak lately! I don't think this is going down as one of my favourite books ever, which is usually what I reserve 5 stars for. Like I said I was ready to give this one its 4 "this was an excellent book" stars, but I don't know, this one just hit the right way at the right time for me.

Jen: I really enjoyed the philosophy behind the story and I really enjoyed the writing. I think Matt Haig has a great mind and lots of amazing things to say. I would totally read his other books. I just wasn't totally enamored with this one as much as everyone else but I did really like it and I do think that it holds such an important lesson. This book could really help someone out of a hard time if they happened to read it at the right time.

Shanna: Alright that is what we thought of *The Midnight Library*. What did you think? It's never too late to let us know your thoughts, we want to hear them. All of these questions are saved in our highlights on our Instagram page so feel free to head over there and let us know what your answers are. Next month's book club pick is *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes!

Jen: I'm so excited. I preordered this book and it has just sat there unread for months. I just haven't been able to squeeze it in and now I have to read it. Well not have to. Get to! So pick up a copy of that book and read along with us.

Shanna: You can find us at [best_bookclub](#) everywhere or you can email us at best_bookclub@outlook.com

Jen: And if you like what you hear, consider rating and reviewing us on apple podcasts! We would love that so much and it helps other book clubbers find us!

Shanna: Next week we are going to be talking all about the shortlist for the Women's Prize for fiction which is being announced TODAY!. We cannot wait to see which books made the list.

Jen: We've read a lot of them so I'm sure we will have a lot to say. Unless all the ones that make it are the ones that aren't released in Canada yet...I'm really hoping that's not the case, or we will have a very short episode!

Shanna: So we will see you next week for that!

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