

# Unlocked Patreon Exclusive: Sparks Fly with Maia Kobabe

## SPEAKERS

Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor, Maia Kobabe

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)*

**Hannah McGregor** 00:10

Hello and welcome to another Witch, Please Patreon special bonus-

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:18

-exclusive.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:19

-Interview-

**Maia Kobabe** 00:20

-Experience.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:21

We have- Yes! Oh yeah, you know. You know.

**Maia Kobabe** 00:24

I'm a backer. I hear the episodes. *(Marcelle and Hannah laugh)*

**Hannah McGregor** 00:29

Now you get to see how the sausage is made. I'm Hannah.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:32

I'm Marcelle.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:33

We have a very special guest today. Celebrated graphic novelist, Maia Kobabe. Welcome, Maia.

**Maia Kobabe** 00:44

Hello.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:45

Welcome, Maia, thank you so much for joining us.

**Maia Kobabe** 00:48

Thank you so much for inviting me. I have been listening to Witch, Please since early 2016. And I'm pretty jazzed to be talking to both of you today.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:56

You were one of the original listeners. And in that time, you have become a celebrated graphic novelist.

**Hannah McGregor** 01:07

Listen, you've got a Wikipedia page.

**Maia Kobabe** 01:10

*(laughing)* I do have a Wikipedia page.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:09

So how much of your success do you think has come from listening to Witch, Please? *(Hannah laughs)*

**Maia Kobabe** 01:17

Honestly, a pretty big amount, maybe like 25%?

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:20

Get out of here.

**Hannah McGregor** 01:23

No, that is not bad. That is not bad. *(laughs)* But we did, we did encounter you first as an artist. Like I think you drew us at some point.

**Maia Kobabe** 01:37

Yes, I am Yes, a full time comics author and illustrator, I work from home I have since 2017. I spend most of my days drawing and listening to podcasts, honestly, is what I do pretty much all day. And so when I find a good podcast that can get me through the day. This is why I jokingly said 25% But like, literally podcasts are one of the things that fuels my career. Because, you know, if I'm listening to good podcasts and I'm drawing, time passes happily and I produce work. And I enjoy myself and life is good. And so being an artist and a lover of podcasts, I frequently will draw fan art of podcasts or their show or the hosts, both as a way to give back and be like I loved your art or your content. Here's some of mine. And also to be like, I want to be friends with like- *(unintelligable)*.

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:24

Yeah. Oh, Maia, can we be friends?

**Maia Kobabe** 02:27

I should hope so. We are all Instagram mutuals and have been for years. So I should hope that we are friends.

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:33

I know. But whenever somebody who's professional and successful requests to follow me on Instagram, I'm always like, they don't mean it.

**Maia Kobabe** 02:40

Oh, I meant it. Yeah. I'm deeply invested in your cats and your children and your makeup and your selfies. Yes.

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:47

Oh my gosh. I'm gonna weep.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:49

Yeah, Marcelle is having a rough week. So the more you can praise her the better.

**Marcelle Kosman 02:53**

I'm having a rough couple of months. It's going to be a few more, it's fine. It's fine. It's fine. We'll talk about it during Witch, Please Tell Me.

**Hannah McGregor 03:01**

Yeah, we will. So Maia, I want to I really, really want to talk about Genderqueer. But maybe since we're on the topic of fandom, we can start a little bit with your fandom art, because you do make a lot of zines about your fandom and your relationship to different fan properties.

**Maia Kobabe 03:21**

I do. Yes, I think I've always been a person who gets very into things, specifically stories. And Harry Potter for so many people is the big cultural moment of my youth, I am of that generation that was the exact same age as Harry when every book came out. There's an anecdote that I tell in genderqueer that I am dyslexic, I took it was very late learning to read. And what really finally pushed me over the edge aside from several years of remedial reading classes, was that my mom was reading the second Harry Potter book chapter by chapter two, me and my sibling at night. And that was simply too slow. I could not wait all day in between chapters. And at 11 I took the book and a flashlight into my bed and said to myself, I will not sleep until I learn to read.

And by the morning I was a reader and this is this sort of magical alchemy moment of my childhood where you know, yeah, two years of preparation and finally reaching the right age, brain development etc. But also this one book and this story that I was so passionate about, like tipped me over from being illiterate to being literate by the morning and then from then I became a very voracious reader and to this day I maintain a habit of reading 100 books a year, which I track on Goodreads.

**Hannah McGregor 04:30**

You read so much! Because I am also a Patreon supporter for Maia's work and one of the things that you share is like what I read this month. And every time you do a monthly wrap up the list of everything you read this month, I'm like I read a quarter of one book. How?

**Maia Kobabe** 04:49

Okay. I don't have a real job. That helps a lot.

**Marcelle Kosman** 04:54

Woah, artists everywhere right now are like, hey.

**Hannah McGregor** 04:56

No, artists everywhere right now are like, yeah.

**Maia Kobabe** 05:02

I do a lot of audiobooks, I would say, say like half of all the books that I read are audiobooks, again, that I listened to while I am drawing, while I am working, while I'm cooking, while I'm washing the dishes, while I'm driving.

**Hannah McGregor** 05:14

While you are patiently laying out page by page of your new zine on the floor.

**Maia Kobabe** 05:02

Yeah, I weave audiobooks and podcasts heavily throughout my life. I also read a lot of comic books. I read a lot of middle grade, because I'm looking to be publishing in the middle grade market. So I'm trying to keep up so, I've read a lot of short books, that also helps.

**Marcelle Kosman** 05:32

Okay, Maia, I have a question for you. And if you don't want to answer this, that's totally okay. We can just blow right by it. But considering that Harry Potter was so formative to your relationship to reading, would you be interested in talking a little bit about JK

Rowling's transphobia and how that's impacted your relationship to the series?

**Maia Kobabe** 05:53

100% I was assuming we would get into that. So for any listener who is not aware or didn't pick up by so my book title I am trans and non binary, I use the pronouns ee, em, eir, and yes, I had such a strong relationship to Harry Potter in my youth, and it's been really tough being an adult trans Harry Potter fan. Your listenership will be familiar with this.

**Hannah McGregor** 06:15

100%.

**Maia Kobabe** 06:16

Yes, in 2019, after a couple of the first instances of JKR liking transphobic tweets, and also meditating on the magic in North America, and many topics that you talked about in the original Witch, Please run, I wrote a 20 page zine called Harry Potter and the Problematic Author. And I posted it on Instagram. And that same month of October 2016 that I published it, I was actually the first ever guest on The Daily Profit podcast. So I'm also mutual with your friends, Lark and Jesse. I guested on Book Three, chapter one. I will post so if people want to listen to way more, you can find it there. And that was kind of the beginning of me being like, I don't know, this author that I love, my childhood hero. I'm really wrestling with how her politics seemed to be really divergent from mine. And then I published that and then in like, December is when she fully came out as a TERF.

And because my zine was already out, a lot of people were sharing it when she wrote her transphobic screed and so, in December Vanity Fair reached out to me and I was quoted in a Vanity Fair article. It's titled "JK Rowling's tweets show the divide between the writer and the phenomenon that she's created." And then the next summer in 2020, when she's really just the leash is

off I was also part of a video piece put together by the Washington Post, which was called “Queer Harry Potter fans respond to JK Rowling's comments on transgender women.” Lark and Jesse of Gayly Profit were there. There were other queer and trans zine makers and YouTubers, and then also the writer-activist Jacob Tobia. So I was part of that as well. So I feel like I have spoken a lot about this, but it was like a slow process of letting go. I mean, I still have one set of the Harry Potter books, but I got rid of my second set.

I used to have, I counted at one point there were 15 pieces of Harry Potter fan art, like up in my bedroom, I've taken down all but one which was signed by the illustrator. And I'm like, this is more about the illustrator than the author. And I no longer identify with any Hogwarts house. I don't wear Harry Potter pins. I had like 10 Harry Potter T shirts, I got rid of all of them. I'm like, I can't move through the world advertising myself as a fan of this series. Because I know for a fact it will make trans and non binary people feel unsafe, Because it makes me feel unsafe. When I see other people walking around with Harry Potter merch, I'm just like, I need to know if you have that, if you are a critical and engaged listener, like if you have Witch, Please merch then I'm like, Okay, we're on the same page. If you're repping Gayly Profit, or even like The Harry and the Potters, like the Wizard fans, like some sort of fan made sort of secondary content. But like I feel like unironically, wearing Harry Potter emerged in 2014 shows that you are either completely ignorant or actively a TERF.

**Marcelle Kosman** 09:07

Interesting. Yeah, yeah. What was your experience in those media responses? Did you feel like they were thoughtfully and responsibly done? Like, did you feel good about your experience with Vanity Fair and The Washington Post? Or did it feel sort of like they? I don't know. We're just doing the news but I don't know. Yeah, I'm, I'm so curious.

**Maia Kobabe** 09:30

I felt pretty good about them. I mean, I definitely felt like JKR is a very famous person, and they know that it'll get clicks. So there was a certain sense of like, they are capitalizing on something that is very current and almost like viral in this moment. But I also felt specifically the fact that the Washington Post reached out to like so many different people. I think there were like seven or eight of us in the video, a variety of different voices, a variety of different backgrounds. And it was edited together really nicely. I did feel like the end result was I think that I and all of the other people who participated could really be proud of even if it was like, oh, yeah, this is WaPo trying to get clicks or whatever.

**Marcelle Kosman** 10:07

Right. Right. Okay. Okay, that's heartening, in a way.

**Hannah McGregor** 10:11

So what's this sort of perhaps somewhat unexpected being thrown into the limelight of representing like, queer and trans Harry Potter fans, do you think in any way that prepares you for the public response to Gender Queer?

**Maia Kobabe** 10:31

Oh my god, that is such an amazing question that I actually wouldn't have thought about until I was actually going back and remembering the dates and titles of these articles before our conversation. And I was like, Oh, I forgot that I did a mini round of interviews before this. So for anyone who's unfamiliar, my book, Gender Queer, a memoir, which is a graphic novel, it came out in May of 2019. Was the most-

**Hannah McGregor** 10:55

And it might not say this, but it rules.

**Maia Kobabe** 10:57

Oh, thank you.



**Hannah McGregor** 10:59

It's really, really beautiful. I really, really love it.

**Maia Kobabe** 11:01

I almost quoted you in it. That was one of the pages that sadly ended up on the cutting room floor during drafts. But-

**Hannah McGregor** 11:06

Listen, I understand it. That's how editing works. But you are in my book. So-

**Maia Kobabe** 11:11

I know. I know. And I haven't read it yet, but I have it on preorder and I'm so excited. Anyway, Gender Queer was the number one most banned and challenged book in America in 2021. And at the rate we're going it is likely to be the most banned and challenged book of 2022 as well. There's been so much kerfuffle, I don't know, I don't actually don't know what percentage of your listenership is Canadian. But if you're following American news, we are having a big amount of debates and arguments about literally any inclusion of trans and non binary and queer voices in the public sphere. From queer history, being on the curriculum in schools, to queer books being, you know, available in school libraries, to queer athletes being able to participate on sports teams, to queer people of all ages, being able to receive health care. It's huge right now.

And it's scary, and it's really frustrating. And it feels like an extremely organized effort to erase trans and non binary people from the public sphere. My book happened to have won a couple of awards and 2020 from the American Library Association. And because of that, many librarians purchased it. And so it was in many libraries. And when a couple of sort of big profile censorship cases happened, it spawned a ton of copycats, and such cases, a bunch of other places, which is how and it just, it was really just like a viral thing. And unfortunately, or fortunately, I don't know, it

just happened to fall right around the US midterm elections of last year, too. And then a couple of politicians made it a real talking point. And then I got sued by a congressional candidate from the state of Virginia.

**Hannah McGregor** 12:38

Oh, I didn't hear about that. For being too gay?

**Maia Kobabe** 12:42

I won't go into it too much. But basically, a congressional candidate who ended up losing his race, thank god, sued a Barnes and Noble for carrying both Gender Queer and a Sarah J. Vas novel. The second book of the Avatar series, a Court of Mist and Fury, saying that they were obscene and should not be available to minors.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:01

What fucking year is it?

**Maia Kobabe** 13:02

Yeah, under a law that had been written in like 1970, during that wave of sort of book censorship. I was relatively sure this entire lawsuit was very much a publicity stunt to try to gain attention to his political campaign. But very happily, on August 30, a judge tossed out the case on due process issues and said, actually, that the law was somewhat unconstitutional and was violating the First Amendment freedom of speech rights. So a happy, happy result, but it was a summer of having a lawsuit hanging over my publisher's head. So it's been wild. And yeah, maybe it's possible that doing those earlier sort of more Harry Potter related but still on the topics of trans people's voices in media interviews did kind of prepare me a little bit for the many interviews that I've done because of the Gender Queer book challenges, book bans, lawsuits, media kerfuffle, etc. Yeah.

**Marcelle Kosman** 13:59

How has your publisher been? have like, like, like-

**Hannah McGregor** 14:03

Have you been well supported?

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:05

I did this during our recording earlier, but like, good publisher, medium publisher?

**Hannah McGregor** 14:11

Bad publisher?

**Marcelle Kosman** 14:13

How would you say that's gone?

**Maia Kobabe** 14:16

They've been pretty good. It's a relatively small company. So they were not super prepared to handle this. But my agent has been wonderful. And then the publicist that I worked with for most of the past year, was absolutely wonderful. And then a great organization called the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, which was literally created to help cartoonists face censorship actually did pay for all the lawyers represented in the case. So I feel very supported. I have had a lot of a lot of backup and a lot of support during all of this absolutely bizarre, the weirdest last 12 months of my entire life to date.

**Hannah McGregor** 14:52

It can't be. I mean, you just don't put out a book, thinking probably a congressional candidate will sue me for this.

**Maia Kobabe** 15:00

Definitely not, especially a book that has been out for two and a half years. And it's pretty much like it's had its media cycle. I toured. It had all its initial press. It was a Midwest book from a new debut author from a medium sized publisher. People were reading it, it was doing well, but it was not making national headlines.

**Hannah McGregor 15:20**

No. And it's also not a, like having read it, It's not the kind of book I would expect to get taken up in this way. Because it's not, and this is not saying anything against militant books, but it's not militant.

**Maia Kobabe 15:39**

No, it's relatively gentle. It's a memoir. Yeah, it's one person's story of growing up, coming out, you know, wrestling with gender and sexuality and finding language for non binary identity and then coming out to family, friends, community, workplace, etc. And I have had a pretty easy go of it in life, I am a middle class, mid 30s white person who still lives with their parents rent free. I grew up in the liberal bubble of the Bay Area, at no point was I ever worried that coming out would threaten my safety, my housing, my friendships, my relationships to family, my abilities to get a job. And I mean, that's part of why I wrote the book is because I was like, I have so much privilege, I should use it for something. And I in fact, worried that the book might be boring, because all of the conflict in it is internal. I have faced so little external conflict with the world, I thought, as anyone who's never met me gonna find this interesting, but they have.

**Hannah McGregor 16:48**

Yeah, yeah, guess for good reasons and bad reasons.

**Maia Kobabe 16:51**

Indeed. Indeed.

**Hannah McGregor 16:52**

It does. It does seem like its own kind of, like sinister Black Swan effect. Do you know this phrase, it's, we use it in publishing to talk about, like totally unpredictable outcomes with books. So like Harry Potter itself is frequently referred to as a black swan event, because it's an absolutely non reproducible phenomena. Like, none of us can put our finger on what made it the series that it

was. Because if any of us could say, then somebody could reproduce it, and it has not proven to be reproducible, and it's not non reproducible, because the author is a genius.

**Maia Kobabe** 17:31

No, that is not it. If anything, I think it's more where it came out in relation to the development of the Internet, I think it's a bigger factor.

**Marcelle Kosman** 17:39

Oh, absolutely.

**Hannah McGregor** 17:41

It's all of this stuff. Right? And who happened to pick it up at the moment? I mean, 50 Shades of Grey is another example. You know, it's not that lots of people don't enjoy reading smutty fanfiction. It's like, well, why did this take off? Yeah, you know, it was a particular moment. It was the person who got their hands on it. It's all of these things. And it does seem like the the negative response to Gender Queer has been it's own kind of black swan event. Like the book was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But I also hope maybe that means it has gotten into more hands of people who want it.

**Maia Kobabe** 18:20

Yeah, definitely. Not every book that is banned and challenged sees this sales bump, but mine has, and I am grateful for that. And I do think that a lot of people have heard about it, who wouldn't have otherwise and I've had many people say, you know, send a message online or whatever, and say, Oh, I saw this book was being challenged. So I decided to read it and I really enjoyed it. Like that kind of thing. So that's exciting. And I am grateful for that. But actually you mentioned 50 Shades of Grey and like fanfiction does remember that I didn't fully answer your question at the beginning, which is like that I do, amidst all of this, of my sort of memoir work, and then I guess, media work. I'm also a big

fan, and I'm very into a lot of stuff. And I have pretty much entirely moved out of the Harry Potter fandom sphere aside from listening to podcasts.

But now my new thing is Kpop. I'm so into Kpop and I have always found that drawing fan art and writing fanfiction are two ways to get me out of creative slumps that work better than almost anything else. Specifically if I'm in a drawing slump and I'm feeling very unmotivated and I don't know what to work on. Drawing fan art of a favorite character or favorite story is almost always what gets me back to being excited to make things and that is one of the reasons why I find fan stuff just so delightful and joyful. And I've also made a lot of friends through fandom who I've maintained even through our maybe falling out of love of a specific media property. But I have found fandom space very inspiring, very delightful, very joyful.

And aside from the zine I already mentioned, "Harry Potter and the problematic author," I also contributed a short story to a collection called "Trans affirming magical care," which came out in 2020, which was edited by another non binary cartoonist, Alex L. Coombs. And it's a whole collection of specifically trans and non binary related Harry Potter content. I believe it is still available as a digital zine. I think the print run is sold out. But we sold it to raise money for the UK charity, Gendered Intelligence in the summer of 2020, as well, so that was another fun thing to be able to be like, the story I drew was called "Tonk's Tale" and it's about Tonks as an explicitly non binary character.

And in my story, when Tonks arrives at the Hogwarts dorms, a third door opens for them that is a non binary dorm. I still do really believe in the power of fans to rewrite and retool and rework stories to make places for themselves or any sort of marginalized group that were not originally included. And I do think that there's a lot of value in that.

**Marcelle Kosman 20:58**

Oh, that is beautifully said.

**Hannah McGregor 21:00**

So beautifully said. And I think maybe a beautiful note on which to end this conversation, which has been such a joy. Maia, you're so much fun to talk to. I feel like you did research and took notes, which I'm always impressed by. Because I've never taken a note in my life. And I certainly don't know how research works.

**Maia Kobabe 21:20**

I bet you have. In all those degrees, no?

**Hannah McGregor 21:23**

Mmmm. Hard to prove. *(laughs)* Thank you, Maya. Thank you to all of our Patreon supporters. We are so lucky. You're so kind. Thank you for being patient with us in this summer of our discontent. *(laughs)*

**Maia Kobabe 21:44**

This was an absolute delight. I was so excited to be invited. Like I said, I've been a listener for many, many years. This is one of my all time favorite podcasts. I never unsubscribed during the long hiatus. I never stopped following Twitter. Literally when the reboot was announced. I texted multiple people like this is the best this has made my week. This is the best thing. This is the best news I've had in a while. And I genuinely believe that I learned as much from listening to Witch, Please and Secret Feminist Agenda as I did in my entire master's degree program. Specifically, just like it has really impacted my thinking so much, just like all of these academic topics that I didn't hit because I have two art degrees. And specifically, like a feminist lens on literary criticism that has just been really valuable and joyful in my life. So thank you, thank you for your work, means a lot. *(laughs)* I have made Marcelle cry.

**Hannah McGregor 22:41**

You have made Marcelle cry.

**Maia Kobabe 22:42**

I have won the interview. (*Hannah laughs*)

**Marcelle Kosman 22:47**

No, the real win is when you make Hannah cry, because she's not as fragile.

**Hannah McGregor 22:53**

It's hard. I'm a harder nut to crack. Oh my god, you know who's really good at making me cry?

**Marcelle Kosman 23:01**

Is it me?

**Hannah McGregor 23:02**

This asshole right over here. Yeah. It's you. It's you. It's you. Bye listeners.

**Marcelle Kosman 23:09**

Bye!

**Maia Kobabe 23:10**

Bye. Take care!

***(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)***