



Season 3, Episode 22 - Our Top 10 Books of 2020

Mon, 1/11/21 • 47:54

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:10

Hey readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading Podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we read recently. And as you already know, we won't shy away from those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

We are light on the chit-chat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler-free. Usually, we discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we press books into your hands, but not today.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And I love lists, especially best of book lists.

Kaytee Cobb 00:45

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom for living in New Mexico. And I'm a stickler for waiting till the end of the year to decide on your best ofs. This is episode number 22 of season three. And we're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:56

All right, Kaytee, I am so glad that we are talking again, I'm glad we took our winter break. But man, it always just makes me so antsy to get back into a discussion about books with you.

Kaytee Cobb 01:07

It does, I always end up missing you. But then I'm grateful for the time off. So it's kind of a catch 22.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:14

It is. And this week, we have some really, really fun stuff to talk about. We have literally been waiting all year to have this discussion.

Kaytee Cobb 01:21

Yeah, so we do have some really exciting stuff coming out over the course of this month. Because like we both mentioned, we like making best of lists and 2020, the year that is 500 years, just ended. So we've got all kinds of stuff relating to that. On the day that this episode drops, we will have just dropped a fancy bonus episode for our patrons of All Things Murderful with Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:43

Yes, this is going to be my top 10 scary murderful books of 2020.

Kaytee Cobb 01:50

So if you love murder, you definitely need to be checking that out. Right after this episode airs, on the 14th of January, we are releasing our superlatives for the year. So these are different categories. They're not just the the very tippy top of our list, but things that we had to think through in a little different way. And that, again, is coming out on the 14th. So if you're listening in real time, that's three days from now. And then we will have Kaytee Reads Too Much again a week later. And that one's going to be a big one too. And then we'll have our first COVIDeo of 2020. So we've got our Thursdays booked up in January, we're so excited for the Patreon content that we're releasing this month.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:25

The books superlatives episode will be interesting, because it gives us a chance to throw some focus on books that we really want to talk about or impacted us in different ways, but didn't necessarily make our top 10. So I love that we're kind of doing these two different episodes.

Kaytee Cobb 02:40

It'll be fun. I'm excited because some of these categories are a little spicy, and some are a little bit under the radar. And all of them are great. But I think that's enough teasing for this week. So let's get into our top 10 lists, which as people who have been around for a long time know that we are the type of readers that have to wait until after December 31 to make these lists.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:00

Right, right. We want it. We're completists, we really like to make absolutely sure that a five star top 10 book didn't sneak in right at the very end of the year, because that's happened before.

Kaytee Cobb 03:10

Yeah. And if you're making a top 10 list in November, I'm throwing shade at you. My eyes are shifty.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:16

So my question for you is this, Kaytee: I know you're gonna run us through some kind of overall numbers of your reading for this year. So why don't you kind of give us some totals. But then also, I want to know, how did you decide on your top 10 because it was torturous for me to decide on my top 10 and I read a third of the books that you did for the for the year. So what was your run us through your totals? And then tell me your process? How did you do it?

Kaytee Cobb 03:47

There was weeping and gnashing of teeth. It was very, very upsetting for me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:52

Yeah, it's really, really tough.

Kaytee Cobb 03:55

It's so hard. So you know, we talked about this on a COVIDeo. 2020 was my biggest reading year ever. I really hope that I can reduce those numbers going into 2021. But I finished 316 books in 2020, which is just disgusting. And I've really... I feel like I had a good year though, overall, my rating. Overall, my average rating for the year was pretty high. So even when I went through my book spreadsheet, my tracker that I use, and eliminated everything that wasn't five stars, I still had a pretty big list to choose from. So then I just put all those books into a single document and did kind of a quick and dirty hash out where I just got rid of anything that maybe I really loved it at the time, but it didn't stick with me. Five stars, still. I'm sure you were a great book at the time. You were perfect for what I needed at the time. But I don't care about you that much right now. That got me down to 33 which is a great number and that's still 10% of my books for the year, or like very slightly over 10% of my books for the year. So then, you know because Meredith is bossy I had to get it down to 10 for this episode, and that's when it got really like sweaty and anxious at my house because it was like, how do I choose between? Ugh. So then a lot of that came down to which ones are the ones that you know, I think are going to end up on my press list someday? Which ones are the ones that I want friends to read? Which ones are the ones that I cannot stop thinking about these characters? How did you narrow yours down? What did you end up at for the year?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:25

So I ended up at 116 books for the year, which was 16%, more than I read the year before, and certainly my biggest year ever too, for sure. And the other thing that was interesting about my reading is that only eight of those 116 were nonfiction, which is by far my lowest percentage of nonfiction to fiction that I've that I've ever ever read, I usually get through a lot more nonfiction. So clearly in 2020, I needed much more escape. The other thing is that I realized that my ratings when I when I did kind of what you did, where I went through and chose my five star reads, I had 18 five star reads. And so then I had to cull 18, down to 10. Those 18, though were very, very, very much five star reads. So it was there was maybe just one that I kind of immediately was able to go oh, you didn't stick with me the way I thought you would. But those other ones, it was really difficult to knock off the list. So I realized with my ratings, I had, you know, good number of five stars, I had a lot of four and four and a half star reads. And then I had just a couple of one and two star reads and very few three star reads. So it was like I either DNF books, right, or I finished them and they really worked for me. And it's not 100% obviously, there's a there's a mix in there. But more than ever before, I feel like it was those two extremes, I either just could not get into the book at all, and I set it down. Or I really, really liked it. So I don't know if that means I chose better. Or if I was just, if I could finally get into a book, it worked for me, I don't really know yet exactly what that means about my reading, I did realize that of my 116 books, 18 of those were middle grade. So middle grade represented a really large number. And I also was swinging wildly back and forth between hardcore horror, and then some very, very, very gentle middle grade. So that probably is the thing I'm going to remember most about 2020.

Kaytee Cobb 07:36

I also read less nonfiction in 2020 than I did in years past, not always, you know, 50% nonfiction, but this year, it was less than 20%. And I'm okay with that, I was fine with it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:50

I definitely realized that my sources, I'm getting a lot better at trusting certain sources. And that tracking of sources has become really, really key. And so I actually, for my top 10 that I created, I'm going to tell you what the source was for each of those. And you can see that some patterns begin to form. So you know, but you know, it's not easy choosing your top 10. We were so grateful we asked our bookish friends our Patreon supporters to to fill out a form for us in sort of weigh in. Tell us who were your top 10 favorite books. And then we asked Who were your top 10 and who are your least favorite 10 books. And we got so much response to both of those, proving that this was the year that people felt really strongly about their reading. So we're putting together some interesting stuff related to that data that we got the top 10 books of 2020 and the least favorite books of 2020. And Kaytee, there are some books that appear on both lists. And that's fascinating.

Kaytee Cobb 08:51

That's my fave.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:52

Yeah, yes. All right, so I think we should get into these books that we worked so hard to to choose Kaytee, are you ranking these top 10? Are you just going in? Are you going 10 to one? How did you do it?

Kaytee Cobb 09:08

I am going 10 to one. Once I hit those top 10 once I had solidified that list, and I sat there and I thought well Am I going to put these alphabetically I'm going to put them you know based on when I read them? How am I going to and as I started looking at them, it was relatively easy for me to pick the very top and bottom and work my way toward the middle and end up with a ranked 10 to one. So what about you?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:34

I'm doing mine chronologically, but I am going to save my favorite one for last. So my number one is actually my number one, my true favorite book of the year. And but the rest of them I will just run through chronologically.

Kaytee Cobb 09:48

Alright, that sounds good. I'm excited to get into it. I'm I don't think that we're gonna have any matchups this year though. Last year, I was sure that we were going to have a matchup so let's let's get started.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:58

This book happened to be the first book I read in 2020. And there is no question from the moment that I read it. There's no question it had to be in my top 10 list I've known since then it would be on my top 10 list. And that's El Deafo by Cece Bell. This is a graphic novel. We've talked about it many times on the show. Our kids, Micah and Jackson have both talked about El Deafo. They absolutely love it. We love it. I don't read, really, honestly, I don't read any graphic novels, this is just not something that I'm interested in. I'm not a visual person. So that medium doesn't work for me. But this book is so great on every level. I have gifted this book to so many people, kids and adults, everybody has loved it. And so for that reason, and also, you know, I think about this book all the time, my husband and son and I will

mention it during the year multiple times. You can Oh right. Remember that one part in El Deafo. We all three read it and so for that reason, it just stuck with me. It's beautiful. I absolutely love it. So El Deafo by Cece Bell.

Kaytee Cobb 11:05

That is a recurring theme in my list of 10. As I was writing notes about each one, I was like, this is another one I just could not stop thinking about. So that's what we're gonna end up with it's 10 books Kayteecould not stop thinking about. So my 10th one is Saving Ruby King by Catherine Adel West, which I had a really hard time narrowing this 10th spot because I loved Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi. And then I loved Saving Ruby King by Catherine Adel West. Really what this came down to is that I feel like Saving Ruby King is a little more under the radar. And I want to give it a little bit extra boost. Everybody and their mom has heard of Transcendent kingdom, right? It's not a surprise pick for anyone. So I went with this one even they have similar themes about church and family. This one's much more mystery, much more thrillery. And it had, I don't know if you remember me talking about this, but it had the church as a character in the book as a point of view, which I just thought was so interesting, so novel, that I could not stop thinking about it. And now here it is, eight months later, I still can't stop thinking about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:15

All right. My next one is a book that I read all the way back in, I think it was May. But man I think about it all the time. And that is The Library at Mount Char by Scott Hawkins. This, this I can't, to this day tell you exactly what this book is about. I couldn't at the time. I struggled giving any sort of setup for The Library at Mount Char. What I will remind you guys is this is a book that sounds like it's a book about books. That is not what it is. So this is horror. This is an incredible, it's so inventive. I don't know how to describe this book. But I think about it all the time. It's a debut novel, which blows my mind. He hasn't written anything else. People are banging down his door to have him write something else. And he literally has a website that is just like no, there's no follow up to The Library at Mount Char. The thing that I love about this book, too, is that it's one of two books on my list my top 10 list that I got through what I call library bookish serendipity, which is something I mentioned a show or two ago that I miss so much. They're just books that I put into my bag really not knowing much about at all. Sometimes I haven't really even fully read the front, like the inside flap. I'm just interested for some reason. And because it's the library, we can take books out with reckless abandon. And we don't have to have this thought process like do I really need to own this book? Should I spend this money on it? And so for that reason, I can get home and do a book flight and read a chapter and just with The Library at Mount Char. I got sucked in from the very beginning. And it is not just on my top 10 books of this year. It's on my top 10 books of all time. So library bookish serendipity is really important. And I know we're all going to look forward to getting that back again in 2021.

Kaytee Cobb 14:11

Preach that. I did read this one after you recommended it and it is totally mind blowingly indescribable. It's NSFW or J or I mean, what how many things can we put on there?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:28

Yeah, it's not safe. Yeah. There's a lot of reasons we can't talk about it. And part of that's because there's a lot of stuff in there that we really, you know, can't talk about on the show, but, but it's not like a sexy book. It's just impossible to describe. It's not for every reader, that's for sure. Kaytee, that's another thing about my list is I'm realizing that a lot of books on my list, I would say are not books that I would describe as being real crowd-pleasers. The books that I that really made an impact on me this year were ones that I felt made an impact on me as an individual, but for a lot of other readers that just wouldn't be their cup of tea. Right? Okay, my

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:05

Okay, my next book is also YA and this was one that there's no question was a bookstagram made me do it. And that was A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson. Now interestingly, on my list, I only have a couple sort of mysteries or, or horror books on my list. I read a lot of that kind of book this year that I really, really loved. But as far as the like the best of the best of the best that were just a couple that fit that category. And A Good Girl's Guide to Murder was just to me it was it was so excellent in every way. This is the book that focuses on our lead character is Pip. And there was this murder that took place in her town. She's a high schooler and she decides that the guy who was convicted of the crime, she knows him and she decides that she just does not think it's possible that he committed this crime. And so she goes about reinvestigating it under the guise of doing her senior project kind of on this particular crime. So it's got major cereal, podcast vibes, but it's done really, really well. It's it's why a but you just wouldn't know it. It's just a really excellently done mystery. So that is A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson, this one that one was just so much fun.

Kaytee Cobb 15:05

Okay, my number nine book is With the Fire on High by Elizabeth Acevedo. This is YA. I don't usually love a ton of YA. But I did end up with two on my list. It deals with all kinds of tough topics, but it also has the most incredible food in it. And I like salivate when I think about this book. It's so tasty. I loved the whole arc of the story. This is Acevedo's only novel thus far that isn't written in verse. So all her other books are verse novels where it's like that kind of short poetry on the page. And I did binge her entire catalog this year. So I can say that pretty definitively. Her verse novels are wonderful, but Emoni, the main character in this novel is the one that just kept sticking with me and I kept thinking about her. She's a teen mom, which is kind of the setup for our story. And then it goes from there. And the food you just can't not love the food in this book. So that was With the Fire on High by Elizabeth Acevedo.

Kaytee Cobb 17:25

Okay, my next book for 2020 was Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram X. Kendi. And this one is a little bit like the a little bit prideful. And I'm recognizing that in myself, because this is the honkin book, right? This is when everybody was buying anti-racism books in June, this one sold out immediately. And it's like 650 pages. So I do wonder how many people actually read it after they sold it out of bookstores. Because it's either this or the YA remix, which is called Stamped: Racism, Anti-Racism and You by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X Kendi. And I think both are fantastic. Both are absolutely worth reading. They both have their merits. This one though, this is the 650 page honker you feel very much like you accomplished something when you finished it. And also, like you got your brains exploded out of your ears on both sides, and you're kind of mad at the entire world. So just know that going in. It's

impeccably researched, he's a professor, so you know that going in. It's incredibly illuminating. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I know, it's starting to sound like a broken record at this point. Level one, if you're going to pick up one of these two books is Stamped. If that's your that's your like, nice little gentle introduction, the YA version. It's again, kind of written in verse so it flows really great. Level two, if you're ready to step it up to the next level is Stamped From the Beginning and it is absolutely worth reading. But maybe take it as a slow and steady if you're going to pick this one up because it's worth it. It's worth reading. It's difficult. So be gentle with yourself reader. If you want to pick this one up. It's worth it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:03

Okay, my next book is another book, Kaytee, they're just gonna be this should be a drinking game drink every time we say it, I cannot stop thinking about it. It's Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes. This is another book that I read with Jackson, this is middle grade. This is the book that is about a young boy who has been killed by a police officer at the very beginning. And it is from his point of view, it's from multiple points of view. But one of the points of view is from this, this boy who's been killed after he is dead. And the the points of view go back and forth between you know his point of view and then the daughter of the policeman who shot him and we also see what his family is going through. This book is so incredible as far as being incredibly written but the story is amazing. This book is a book that had me crying, but mostly because of the impact that it had on my nine year old son, and the watching Jackson, and we read it together, which I think was really important, but watching him take in everything that this story offers, all the truth and the reality that the story offers, that he really, because of the life that he lives doesn't have any concept of it made me say I said at the time this is why we read, because we need to see the world through other people's eyes. And this book does that incredibly well. I just, this is a book that I think should be taught in all classrooms. At the fourth and fifth grade level. In my opinion, it just there's just no question. It's that good. So this is Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes.

Kaytee Cobb 20:48

I love that I'm so happy that that's on your list. That makes me so happy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:53

So good. So, so so good.

Kaytee Cobb 20:57

Okay, my next one is also middle grade. It is my only middle grade on the list. And I had a hard time narrowing it down. But it's The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise by Dan Gemeinhart. I read some really incredible middle grade this year. But this one, I could not stop thinking about it. Gosh, here's the thing. When I finished this book, I was shopping at the grocery store the day before the country shut down. And we knew that there was a shutdown coming. And I finished this book and I'm listening to it in my earbuds. And I'm trying to like, plan well. And I'm crying in the grocery store aisles. You guys know I love a crying book. This is a great cry. So this is the story of Coyote Sunrise. And she is traveling across the country with her dad, Rodeo. They have weird names. Just go with it. It'll get explained eventually. But it has a very solid found family trope in it. And I have realized over the course of 2020 that found family is absolutely one of my very favorite things to find in a book that people coming together and becoming a tribe for one another is so wonderful to me. And this book, they're on

a bus, they're traveling cross country and they meet the most incredible people. I loved it so much. I love the cover. I love the characters. It was March. Nine months later cannot stop thinking about Coyote, I love her. And I want everybody to read this. It's The Remarkable Journey of Coyote Sunrise by Dan Gemeinhart.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:33

All right, this next one of mine is squarely in my wheelhouse. And this is one of my favorite mysteries of the entire year. And interestingly a second in a series. It's pretty amazing for you know, a series book to make it into my top 10. So this is Moonflower Murders by Anthony Horowitz. This is a big honkin book for sure. I can't remember how many pages it is, but it's a brick. It is such an excellently done kind of closed door murder. It's done. The This is the follow up to Magpie Murders. And each one of those books has a book within the book, which is part of the reason why they're big long, bricks of books. And I love that I actually always loved the book within the book even more than I love the kind of like story that's on the outside. I love the Atticus Pundt character and so he's very like Hercule Poirot, who I absolutely am in love with. And these are just smart, well drawn mysteries that let you play along the entire time. They're perfect if you love an Agatha Christie if you love who done it, if you love that very classic structure in your mystery, something that's well written the plot the plot flows really well the entire time it doesn't get mired down in the middle, which a lot of these books sometimes do. And I absolutely loved it. I love Anthony Horowitz. I love almost everything he's ever written. And this one I was nervous about, but it absolutely lived up to my expectations. It was excellent. So this is Moonflower Murders by Anthony Horowitz.

Kaytee Cobb 24:12

Second in a series. I love it when those deliver. Okay, my next one is my first memoir on the list. There's one more that I would probably put in this category. It's Know My Name by Chanel Miller. This book was on a lot of people's best of 2019 lists, which is how it ended up on my 2020 reading list. And I had heard that the audio was excellent because Chanel Miller reads it herself. So that's the way that I went here. This is her memoir of the Stanford rape case, Brock Turner his trial. And Chanel Miller is the victim in that case, but throughout the entire proceedings, she is anonymous. So her friends do not know that it's her. That's the main, you know, complainant in this case. And so this memoir really tracks between kind of her inner turmoil and heartbreak and damage from what happened to her, and then what's happening external to her, and how the people outside of her are processing everything that they're seeing on the news, or hearing about or reading in the papers or whatever. And the way she does, it is impossible to believe that this girl is like 23 years old when she's writing this book. She is incredible. It gave me goosebumps multiple times. She, you can hear the the emotion in her voice as she reads and it's absolutely vital to listen to her read it, even if you have a paper book in front of you, having her read it to you is just really an incredible experience. And I think this is one of those books that you close the last page and you say, we can do better. We we can do this better, we can reach higher than we have before. And I those books always stick with me. So that's Know My Name by Chanel Miller.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:59

Okay, my next book is the only nonfiction on my list. And it is the book that has the distinction of the first time I think, ever on the show, we had a book that went straight to our press list. So this is The Lazy

Genius Way by Kendra Adachi. You guys are probably familiar with the Lazy Genius podcast, which I love. This book is just the perfect distillation of the most useful things that Kendra Adachi sort of teaches in her lazy genius way of doing things it's all about doing instead of working harder, working smarter, and really letting go of the things that aren't important to us, knowing what's important to us, letting go of the things that aren't important. And that's different for each person. And then figuring out how to really make sure that the places in your life that mean a lot to you that you do important tasks and things related to you know, to those things in your everyday life. So in the kitchen, with your children, in your work, all of those things, The Lazy Genius Way is so executable, it's just so perfectly written, where you you hear her voice, and she is leading you through all these things. And it's funny, and I laughed out loud multiple times. And then she also is making it really easy to take these ideas and do something with them. And that is my favorite kind of kind of life hack productivity book. She does it really, really well. I will definitely be giving this book to a lot of people. So that is The Lazy Genius Way by Kendra Adachi.

Kaytee Cobb 27:41

It's so good. I love that book too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:44

Yeah, she crushed it with this book.

Kaytee Cobb 27:48

Definitely. Okay, my fifth book. Fifth from the top, What number are we on? Book five is The Girl with the Louding Voice by Abi Dare. This is one of the very first books that I read in 2020. And one that I loved so much that before the end of the year, I have pressed it into our listeners hands. This is an amazing story of Adunni who's a young girl living in Nigeria, she's basically sold into marriage to pay off her family's debts. By the end of this story you love Adunni with the fire of 1000 suns, you just want to hug her and you want all the best things for her, so wrapped up in her story that you can't let her go. Getting to talk to Abi Dare at the beginning of the year for minisode was absolutely a highlight of 2020. For me, I loved this book so much. It has a stunning graphic cover of character you can't forget, a sense of place that takes you straight there. The whole thing's just wonderful. So it's The Girl with the Louding Voice by Abi Dare.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:48

Well, so speaking of books within series that make my top 10 I think everybody knew that on my top 10 list was going to be All the Devils Are Here by Louise Penny. This is the 16th book in the Inspector Gamache series. Let me say that again. This is the 16th book in the series. You guys this was arguably the best book she has done yet. I think this may be the best book in the series. And the fact that it's book number 16 blows my mind this woman is is so incredible to me that she still can write not only at this level of quality, but this level of story and keep things so fresh. Now what was interesting about this book is of course, we were all really concerned as we heard what the book was about because it's not set in Three Pines. And so automatically all of us were like, Wait, what? We only like it when we're in Three Pines, or we mostly only like it when we're in Three Pines. We're in Paris in this book, and she does it so well. I honestly didn't even miss Three Pines when I was reading this book, that's how good the story is. The mystery itself in this book is incredible. The execution is amazing. It's heart-pounding

in several places. And we get to know a side of his family that we sort of knew a little bit about. But she really, really blows the doors open in ways that are really, she just does family relationships so well, and there are some gut punch moments. And if you're a parent, and if you're a child, and obviously we're all one of those things, we know that these relationships are complex. And she does this really, really well. So no question of my top 10 reading experiences. It had to be on the list that's All the Devils Are Here by Louise Penny.

Kaytee Cobb 30:50

Happy sigh about that book. I love that book. Okay, my next one is Lobizona by Romina Garber Russell, this was my YA fantasy pick of the year, which I didn't know if I was going to end up having one. But here it is. It came from my Bookshelf Thomasville subscription, hit out of the park from then I opened this package and I knew I was in for a treat because of the gorgeous cover and the maps on it on the inside flaps. But I didn't know just how much I was going to love it until I picked it up a few months later. This story mixes the moon with werewolves with immigration. And YA you know coming of age and magical sports, hello, amazing. It has everything I want in a book and didn't even know I needed. It presents it in just the most wonderful package. I loved it so much. And every time that somebody tags me and says, "Kaytee, I read this and I loved it. And it's all because of you." My heart grows three sizes. I love this book. It is so fantastic. I want everybody to read it. It's Lobizona by Romina Garber Russell.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:51

Well, and that's the thing I was gonna say about this book, Kaytee. is that of all of the books that we've recommended. This one is right up there on the feedback that we get, whether it's through our email, or through DMs, with people telling you like Kaytee, I just never would have read this book, except that you recommended it. And it's so so so good. So this one has been a real hit for a lot of readers.

Kaytee Cobb 32:13

Yeah. And so many people, because it was late in the year it was, you know, November ish when I talked about it on the show. And so people are reading it. And this is why we make best of lists at the end of the year, because some people read it like December 30. They were like, "top of the year for sure." So it was worth it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:31

Yes, yes. So Well, speaking of another book that we have gotten a lot of feedback on as far as after we talked about it, a lot of people reading it and loving it. My next book is The Midnight Library by Matt Haig. This is one that all of us podcast hosts have read, and we have all recommended it to so many people. I absolutely loved this book. I read it late in the year. But I'm so grateful that I did this is a book that imagine this is kind of a book about books in a way because it's a book about a library, and it imagines that there is a library, where every book on the shelf represents a different kind of path that the lead character's life could have taken. And so through a different set of circumstances, our lead character who at the beginning of the book is going through a very, very hard time, definite trigger warnings for suicide on this book, and mental health. And so know that going in, please do some research on that if those topics are ones that you're sensitive about, because you really should going into this book, know those things are there. But when we meet our lead character at the very beginning,

she's going through a desperately difficult time in her life. And she gets to visit this midnight library where she gets to open up, take some books off the shelves, and jump into her life at a different point if she had made some different choices, and she gets to sort of see how her life might have played out differently. And so there's just a lot of questions about choice and redemption and what constitutes a good happy life. Because that can look a lot of different ways. This book is full of hope and full of redemption. It's really, really very, very happy book at the end. So I you know, I want you to know that because it begins so difficult. You know, it's such a difficult place. But this is a book that I do I thought about many, many times and I've pressed it into the hands of a lot of my friends and they've all really loved it. So that's The Midnight Library by Matt Haig.

Kaytee Cobb 34:32

That's another happy sigh book for sure. I love that one. Okay, third from the top. Here we are. I am going with Caste by Isabel Wilkerson. This book this is my second social justice book on this list. And you guys know I've like that's kind of my thing, right? There's I only read 20% nonfiction last year in 2020. But four of my top 10 happened to be nonfiction books. So there you go. Caste is the second book by Isabel Wilkerson. And I already loved her. So I knew I had to get it as soon as it came out. This book looks at American racism as part of a caste system, like the ones we see in India. And in Nazi Germany. It is very uncomfortable to look at our society in that way. It is, however, it is so approachable, and combines information that I've gotten from many social justice reads across the board. I'm telling you about books that I have pressed over and over again on the show. But it's a super palatable package. And instead of having to read all 20 of those other books, if you're just getting started, this one is a great entry point, because you're getting that information pulled in from all these different sources. So you're not, it doesn't, it's not easy. But you're not going to be sitting there scratching your head saying, "Why did she make this sentence so complicated? My brain hurts." So it's that kind of accessible and digestible. It has officially moved to the very top of my recommendation list for people who come to me and say, "Kaytee, I'm just barely getting started. I want a primer. What do I read?" This is it. It's Caste by Isabel Wilkerson.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:07

All right. Well, I'm swinging my choices from a book that I feel most people who read it, love it to a book that is one of the most polarizing books of the year, but it has landed just with a thud on my top 10 lists, there was no way that I could not include it. And that is Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam. This is a book that was actually recommended to me before it came out by my good friend Roxana Kassam-Kara, who said, ooh, this one sounds right up your alley, Meredith. And she was absolutely right. But I don't think anyone expected this book to be what it ended up being. And I, you know, we've all of you, listeners, we've all seen this book everywhere. It feels like most people have read it. Because it's such a small, it's a very short novel. And it moves really, really quickly. I think a lot of people just went ahead and picked it up, and were reading it at the same time. It was incredibly polarizing. People either love this book a lot like I did, or they hate this book and wanted to throw it against the wall. I really can't think of anybody who fell in the center with this book. So just to quickly remind you, this is the book that is about a family that that is that a AirBnB on a long planned-for vacation. And all of a sudden, there's a knock at the door. And it's the two it's the the man woman who own the home. That is the AirBnB that they're staying in. And they're saying, something has happened in New York City. The house is outside of New York City, something's happened in New York City, we don't know what it is all communication

has been lost. Their phones aren't working, the internet's not working. They're, you know, they have absolutely no way of knowing what's happening. And this man and woman say we need to come in and stay here. This is, you know, our home. And we we need to stay here, you know, with you guys. And it's about what happens from that period of time. And it's not the book that you think it is. It's better than I ever thought that it could be. I've read it actually two times all the way through, I read it back to back two times all the way through. It's a very short book, you guys, this is really not a big deal. But I felt like I needed to read it. We had a fantastic discussion. Mindy led a really, really great discussion on this book and my thoughts about it, you know, we're even deepened by that discussion. This is a book that should be read by bookclubs all across the country simply because man, love it or hate it, you're gonna have a fantastic discussion. I thought it was incredibly well written incredibly well executed. Rumaan Alam knew exactly what he was doing. And he doesn't give a flying fig what you or me or anyone thinks of it. And he's been handsomely rewarded with a lot of critical awards for what he's done. And so that is *Leave the World Behind* by Rumaan Alam.

Kaytee Cobb 39:08

Yes, that one. I mean, I read it late in the year. It didn't even come out till November. I want to say October maybe. And I yeah, six weeks later, I'm still every once in a while. I'll have a scene from that book pop into my head. It's so memorable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:27

Yes, and it is just again, the ultimate book club book because it's short, and so everyone can get into it and it's really it's propulsive, so everyone is gonna want to finish it. And man, you guys are going to have some great discussion about it.

Kaytee Cobb 39:40

Yes, definitely. Okay, my second book for the year is *Here For It* by R. Eric Thomas. And so now that both of us have gotten through nine, I can say definitively that this is the funniest book on this list. It is exactly the cackling laughter that I needed and that 2020 needed. This collection of essays made me laugh harder than anything else I read this year, last year, I guess. And then it would just punch me in the gut. And I love that so much. R. Eric Thomas tells us his story in a wonderful and compelling way. I want to read everything that he ever writes. And I would give this book to almost anyone. It is wonderful from the pig auction in Tuscaloosa, to the church Easter egg hunt, and everywhere in between. It's growing up gay and black in the American church. And there's something to love in here for everyone. I loved it so much. It's hysterically funny. It's absolutely wonderful. It's *Here For It* by R. Eric Thomas.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:34

Okay, Kaytee, does this mean that I'm at my number one book of the year? I think it does. Alright, my favorite book of the year, and the book that has landed on my top 10 books of all time. And I actually own multiple copies of it so that I can hand it out to people who I actually live near this is how much I love this book is *Greenwood* by Michael Christie. This novel is incredible. This novel is everything that I love about reading because it is it's so it's a sweeping family saga, which I love, in that we start out in 2038, with a member of Greenwood family, and then the book in the most amazing way, travels, like the rings of a tree back through time tracing the stories of this family back into the early part of the 1900s. And then you travel forward again, with all the knowledge that you've just gained. This book is

that intersection of story and plot. So there and there's a there's a several, actually three really strong kind of, I'm going to call them mysteries in that they're things that you really want to know what is happening, right. So they're the plot moves really well. Each character is incredibly developed. It's that intersection between those two things of character-driven and plot-driven, that I think make the very, very best stories. And it's it written in a way that you just forget that you're reading, it was incredibly cinematic. I was just carried through this story from start to finish. I've again passed it on to so many different people, my husband read it, absolutely loved it. And he's not always super keen on books, like this particular thing. But he really loved it. He has been recommending it and pressing it into people's hands. So this is one of those books that I think is just a can't miss. With almost any reader. It's that good. So this is Greenwood by Canadian author, Michael Christie.

Kaytee Cobb 42:40

And get the Canadian copy. It's the prettiest one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:44

Yes, it's really, really beautiful. And I should say that this was the other book on my list that I found through library bookish serendipity. I literally was checking out my books happened to be three feet from a shelf where some new releases were being shelved. I saw the cover of this book and was like, Huh, literally knew nothing about it other than that Greenwood and it had a pretty cover, put it in my bag, and it's my top book of 2020. So you You just have to love that kind of bookish serendipity.

Kaytee Cobb 43:16

That's what happens if you're willing to trust the book gods and what they put into your hands. Okay, my top book of 2020 is one that I have been talking about since I read it in February and hinting that it would probably make it onto my favorites of the year list. It's Pride by Ibi Zoboi, here it is, you guys. It's a Pride and Prejudice retelling why a set in New York City in a neighborhood that is being gentrified. We've got black teens as our protagonists, but the threads from the original story from Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen are so strong that you are smiling the whole way through as these references go in. And you see the way that she modernized the story. I love this book. I cannot talk about it without a smile on my face. It's delightful from beginning to end. I get hearts in my eyes when I think about it. It really has stuck with me. I love the characters. I love the neighborhood that she put us into. And I love the update on the original, even though I'm a pretty diehard original fan girl as well. So this is Pride by Ibi Zoboi 10 months later, I'm still in love with it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:22

Well, didn't you say I think you said in that episode that you are willing to say that you like pride more than you like Pride and Prejudice. Do you still stand by that?

Kaytee Cobb 44:30

It feels so sacrilege to say that but I just love it so much. And it's just so much. I mean, it's just so much more fun to be set into modern times and to have all those other dynamics that you could hand it to a teen now and they would get it much more than like why are they always sitting around sewing, I don't understand. Why is Mrs. Bennett so annoying and Mr. Bennett just rolls his eyes? Like you see it because it's so brought to life on the page. Oh, I love it so much.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:59

This was one I can tell listeners, I can tell you how much she loves this book, because every time that she's talked about it, she absolutely lights up. So this is one that I feel is perfect to be at the top of your list. Kaytee, that is really, really fun. Again, as a reminder, for our patrons, I'm going to be doing a top 10 rundown of my top 10 scary murder fuel books of 2020 most of which I haven't talked about today. And Katie, you will be doing... And then you and I will be doing a book superlatives episode where we are able to do some other kind of fun categories, talk about other books, in addition to the ones we just talked about, that we loved. But also talk about some spicier takes on some books that maybe we didn't love so much. So that bookish superlatives episode will be dropping in just a couple of days. And that will go to our Patreon supporters. So if you want to become a bookish friend, if you want to get all of this extra content, and be involved in the currently reading bookish friends Facebook group, which is really, really, really probably the most fun thing that we do. It's such a great community of almost 800 people who love talking about books. It's a really fantastic community and we have so much fun there, then now's the time to join us. So for \$5 a month, you can get all of that content, and be a part of that group and support the show, which we really, really appreciate.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:26

All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's how you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 46:34

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram. You can check out my Lego bookstore tour. It's the best.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:41

It is it is very, very cool. Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found at our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 46:57

You can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram, or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:04

And if you really want to help us rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media, this is such a huge help to us finding our exact right audience.

Kaytee Cobb 47:14

Yes, your recommendation to your bookish best friend is the best way to pass along your love of Currently Reading and help us grow. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:23

Alright, until next week. Happy reading, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 47:25
Happy reading, Meredith.