



Season 5, Episode 23: Starting the Year Right + Author Completists

Mon, Jan 09, 2023 • 56:50

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've read recently, and as you already know, we won't shy away from having those strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:25

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. Today we'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll visit the fountain.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:35

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I have some thoughts about my 2023 reading.

Kaytee Cobb 00:44

I'm Kaytee Cobb. I'm a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and I am reporting and ready for another year of reading. This is episode number 23 of season five, and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:56

All right, Kaytee, right from the start, I'm just gonna say to you and to all of our listeners, my apologies. About an hour before we recorded, I ate three pieces of fudge, because I made fudge and it's one of my favorite Christmas treats. And there is nothing that gets me more fired up and energetic than chocolate. And fudge is the chocolate easiest thing that you can eat. So it's like the equivalent of a normal person drinking five cups of coffee. I'm very, very energetic.

Kaytee Cobb 01:25

Oh, my. We're all gonna have to buckle up today, folks.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:29

I've got a ton of energy and lots and lots of thoughts. But we will tell you first before we get into all of those thoughts that we are going to talk this week in a deep dive about authors that we either have read everything that they've written, or who we want to read everything that they've written. So the completists, right, those authors. That's what we're going to talk about later. It's an interesting conversation. And before we do that, Kaytee, let's talk about our bookish moments of the week. What's yours?

Kaytee Cobb 02:04

Okay, mine, I'm kind of doubling up a little bit. I'm gonna call it my Christmas miracle bookish moments. So first is the Barnes and Noble half price hardcover sale. Not only did I set up an impromptu meeting with a bookish friend that was not far away, but I went two days in a row, once with my mom, once with both my parents and my two oldest kids. Every single book I purchased was 50% off, and I was just gleeful with how many new hard covers I had in my possession. It felt like a Christmas miracle. And that was compounded by the fact that the real Christmas miracle at my house, as you know, Meredith is that Jason not only started a book right after Christmas, he finished it and started a second book. So I get to thank misters Blake Crouch and Sylvain Neuvel for making my Christmas dreams come true because he can't put these books down. And it's Oh, it's like everything I've ever dreamed.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:01

Right? The thing is, when you sent me that picture of him reading *Sleeping Giants*, that was the moment right, because every once in a while, he'll get caught up in a book, right? So that's interesting, but not earth shattering. But the fact that he picked up another one immediately, that I think really says something interesting.

Kaytee Cobb 03:21

Yes. And so we joked when he finished *Upgrade* by Blake Crouch that that was both his best and worst book of 2022, because there was only the one to choose from. But now, he may actually finish a second one before New Year's Eve, which means he will have two books and he will actually have to choose a best book and a worst book of 2022.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:41

That is going to be a big a big choice for him. And you never know Kaytee, this might be the year that he gets into a rhythm and he reads 10, 12 books. You never know. But again, doesn't matter how many books you read, it's just that we want him to enjoy the experience of course.

Kaytee Cobb 03:58

What's your bookish moment?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:59

All right. Well, as I said in my bite size intro, I have some thoughts about my 2023 reading. And I've really gone back and forth in the last couple of days as to whether or not I want to actually put these thoughts into the universe, because once I say it on the air, I feel like I'm really going to be held to it. But I think that's a good thing in this case. So I have been thinking a lot because I like all the rest of you have been listening to all the end of year best of book episodes, which I love. I love all of them. And we've been seeing everyone's best books of 2022 that they put in all the different places they can put that and I love all of that. So my bookish moment is about loving those things, because they really do help us identify bookish twins, and a book twins, and then also just have a good sense of what everybody loves. But here's the thing, Kaytee I was struck with this feeling that we all read the same 25 books. And you know what I mean? Just this, this, this overwhelm, all of a sudden, I felt totally claustrophobic, shut into a vacuum. Now, this doesn't mean I don't love Bookstagram or, like all the systems I love, and I'm fully embedded in. And I'm going to continue to do that. But I think what I want

to concentrate on a lot, and again, what you measure, you can move. So I am going to add this to my reading tracker, which historically, this is not something I've been tracking, I'm going to add publication date to my reading tracker, my Currently Reading reading tracker, because I want to see if I can do the majority of my reading in backlist books. Now again, how are we defining backlist books, books that did not come out in 2023 right? So that so I don't want to be reading either what is soon to come out, or what's coming out in the year that we're in anything else is fair game, and it's considered backlist, and I might buy it, I might get it from the library, I might read my shelves. What I'm concentrating on is trying not to be reading those same 25 books that everyone else is reading. Not that those books aren't good, but solely so that I can feel like I'm at least contributing to bringing other books to the conversation. What do you think about that, Kaytee? And now I'm not saying that I'm not going to read any new releases in 2023. That's, that is not possible. But if I can even get myself to 70%, backlist 30%, frontlist. I would be really, really happy with that. I feel like I read a lot in the moment in 2022.

Kaytee Cobb 06:42

All right. Well, knowing from your top 10 List last week that you had multiple books that were not just a year old, but decades old, I feel like that's going to be a really good fit for you. My reading ended up I think I said the stat last week, but it was like 65 ish percent were released before 2022 in the 2022 reading year. And I do feel like that's a better way to find books that have sifted to the top right ones that you still want to read a year later, even if you bought them and put them on your shelves in 2019 or 2016 or 2000. Like who knows when you put it there.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:17

Exactly, exactly. I am going to really try to prioritize books like from before we started the podcast. So that would be middle of 2018. Again, it's not going to be 100%. But I'm putting it out in the universe that this is something I'm going to be trying to do. Because there are just so many great books to be read. And I don't want to be spending as much time as I have concentrating on what's coming up. Now if you are interested in mysteries and thrillers of course, in All Things Murderfull, which is the show that I do with Elizabeth Barnhill in, you know, for our bookish friends or Patreon subscribers, she always every month brings her favorite book mysteries and thrillers that are getting ready to come out. So that's going to continue to be a place to hear about those mysteries and thrillers. So if that's something that you're like, "Oh, Meredith, but you know, I want to know what those books are", That's going to be a good place for you to, for you to concentrate on that. Because that's going to be the hardest thing for me, is to not get sucked into what she's talking about there. Because she always picks really, really good upcoming mysteries and thrillers.

Kaytee Cobb 08:24

Seriously, that's hard for all of us. Even the bookish friends that are like "I don't even like mysteries and thrillers. But then, but then I might like that one."

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:32

I know. It sounds so good. I know. Exactly. All right. So those are bookish moments, lots of big, fun things, and also lots of big goals, which is how we like it. Alright, Kaytee. So let's start talking about current reads. We haven't done current reads for a few episodes now. So you probably got some pent up energy that you want to expend.

Kaytee Cobb 08:53

I had so many to choose from. It was like, it was like looking at a box of chocolates and just feeling like "Well, I'm just going to eat them all. It's fine. I'm sure that won't affect me in any negative way." So maybe I have lots of energy. Yeah, I might. So my first one this week actually, is brand new frontlist. And it's a mystery. So I'm going to tick all those boxes for our listeners. It's called Lavender House by Lev A.C Rosen.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:19

I'm so glad you're talking about this one Kaytee. This one is one that I have heard multiple people rave about. So yes, tell us what it's about.

Kaytee Cobb 09:26

It's very good. I'm very excited to tell you about it. So this is set in 1952. Our detective is named Evander Mills. He goes by Andy. And he was recently fired from the San Francisco Police Department because his fellow officers conducted a raid on a gay bar and found him inside and in 1952, that's a big fat no, no. He's trying to make it as in a secondary career as a PI and fly under the radar. But there's more to be learned at the bottom of a bottle than there is out in the wider world. So when Pearl shows up at his door and he's nursing a hangover, of course with a case for him to solve, he's intrigued. The police have ruled the death of Irene Lamontagne an accident. But Pearl who shows up to talk to Andy has her doubts. And he's even more intrigued when he's introduced to Lavender House, a queer haven for Pearl and Irene, her wife, and the found family they have surrounded themselves with over the years. Each of these people can be themselves despite the fact that the outside world has basically outlawed their existence. The isolated nature of the house makes this novel what feels like a locked room mystery, which is one of my favorite mystery tropes. There's found family here, but maybe one of them killed the matriarch and do we really want to fall in love with any of them? Irene built her fortunes making soap for her company. So perhaps the killer comes from her competition. And he's on the case wrapped into this family in Lavender House like a warm hug that just might happen to be murderously warm. I loved this book, the narrator that they used for the audio was not my favorite thing. I thought his voice didn't fit the tone of the novel. But everything else about the way that this mystery rolled out the way we get to know the characters and of course, Andy himself were just wonderful. It's really a queer topia in this novel, and I want to see more of this safe spaces for people who have any reason to feel unsafe in the world at large. I've finished through this audio in a day and a half. And I've already been digging around trying to figure out when and if more books with Evander Mills as our PI will be coming to the bookshelves. It looks like a sequel is due in October of 2023. And I will be keeping my eyes peeled because I loved this character. And I love the idea of getting to see where he goes from here. This was Lavender House by Lev AC Rosen.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:50

Kaytee, I have several trusted reading sources have gotten to that one before I did and said it was absolutely fantastic. So I think that is a really strong mystery recommendation. Yes. That is a great one. All right. I'm gonna bring another mystery. This is one that I read a couple of weeks ago, and I wanted to space it out from my other Agatha Christie. But I wanted to talk about this one because I read Closed Casket, which is by Sophie Hannah. So this is the second time that I have brought one of the novels

that Sophie Hannah writes in the canon of Agatha Christie, because remember, the estate of Agatha Christie has chosen Sophie Hannah to continue her work. So she's doing this with full permission of the estate. And there's a really, really good reason for that. She's very good at this kind of writing. So here's the setup for Closed Casket. This story includes one of my favorite setup lines in all mystery novels. "What I intend to say to you will come as a shock." What a perfect place to start, that line can go so many places. In our story with these words, Lady Athelinda Playford, who is a world famous and beloved children's author, springs a surprise on the lawyer that she entrusted to make her will. As guests arrive for a party at her Irish mansion, Lady Playford reveals that she has decided to cut two of her children out of her will, leaving them absolutely penniless. And even more she plans to leave her vast fortune to someone else, and invalid who has only weeks to live. What? Just makes no sense. Lady Playford has invited along with her family, two strangers, the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, and inspector Edward Catchpole of Scotland Yard. Neither they nor the family knows why they've been invited to this party until Poirot begins to wonder if Lady Playford is expecting a murder. But why and why, when the crime is committed, despite Poirot having an idea in advance it was going to happen he cannot stop it, why is it that the identity of the victim makes no sense at all? It is such a puzzle. And this is what I love about Agatha Christie and what I love about Sophie Hannah's treatment of these new books so one of the things that Agatha Christie does so well that is delightful to me is that she'll find one or two things in each story to tell sly repeated inside jokes about and it always makes me giggle. The fact that Sophie Hannah is able to do that so well is just one example of why she's been allowed to continue on this work. She just really channels Agatha so well, once again, this expansion of the series was a complete hit for me. It touched on all the right notes The mystery was smart. The cast of characters was large and sparkling. There were people to root for and people to hate. And of course, perot is so himself in Sophie, Hannah's capable hands. That's really a trick and I consistently find it amazing how nerve racking must be to try to write in Agatha's shoes. And that actually made me wonder, do you think she actually has a pair of shoes that she wears while she's writing? I mean, that's totally possible on her on her desk, right? Frank are both an Agatha wig. I mean, she she probably really, really gets into it. Overall, I found myself racing to the conclusion of this mystery excited for those final two chapters. Everyone who reads Agatha Christie knows that in the final two chapters, our detective in this case, perot gathers everyone and shows us step by step, all the clues that there were there the entire time, but that normal humans completely missed. As with Agatha, Sophie, Hannah keeps her chapters short, each ranging from just four to 10 minutes. And the novel itself is not very long. So you never have to make too huge a commitment. This is a series but as with Agatha novels, they don't need to be read in a particular order to enjoy them. I've read The Killings at Kingfisher Hill, and that was actually the fourth in the series. Closed Casket is the second so let's just be animals with this particular thing. Let's lean into it. I love it. This is a delightful locked room mystery called Closed Casket by Sophie Hannah.

Kaytee Cobb 16:37

Wow, that sounds so good. I'm excited about that one. All right. Okay, I'm also excited to tell you about my next one, which is a backlist gem. It's Trail of Lightning by Rebecca Roanhorse, and I would put this in the bookstore in the dystopian fantasy section, which is kind of an interesting mashup. So Rebecca Roanhorse is well known as an Indigenous novelist who wrote Black Sun among many other fantastic titles. In this book, the majority of our world of planet Earth has drowned beneath the rising waters of a climate apocalypse. The Navajo reservation of Northern Arizona and New Mexico has been reborn as

Dinéah with fewer people and resources around life is really hard, and it's made even harder by monsters and heroes, Monster Hunters and gods. Our protagonist is named Maggie Hoskie. She is a Monster Hunter, with the powers of her clan behind her, especially when she's in danger or angry. Like she becomes a killing machine. She will slice off heads and it's a whole little gory, right. There's there's disempowerment happening here. She's the biggest badass you've ever read in print, and certainly on the Dinéah reservation. When a girl goes missing, the small town calls Maggie and for help, but she finds something much scarier than a kidnapping is what's behind this disappearance. She enlist the help of a young man named Kai Arviso. So he's a medicine man, a young 20 something, hot as blazes that grew up in Albuquerque, but came to Dinéah to live with his relatives. Together just like Captain Planet with their powers combined, they travel the Res to find clues, trade favors, enlist the help of gods and hopefully save the whole world. This book is a great starter to a series. There's some time spent world building on this destroyed planet. But Rebecca Roanhorse works that in really, really seamlessly. Toward the end, I had a few issues with the number of times it felt like things were miraculously fixed. Like, wait a minute, I thought we were talking about actual death here, but maybe he was only mostly dead, right? It felt a little overboard. That ends with fantasy, but it felt like it was happening a lot with this one. reader should also know that this sometimes gets shelved as young adult and it looks like a young adult cover. But it is not a young adult novel. These people are adults. They are new adults, maybe early 20s, mid 20s. But it is gory, like I mentioned. And it's not something that I would give to a 13, 14, 15 year old because there's some pretty intense imagery in here. If you want to hand it to your teenager, for sure, make sure you've read it first, even though they will look at that cover and say no, this is probably for me. Right? Be aware of that before you pick it up. I thought this was a fantastic start to a series I really loved getting into this world and I do plan to pick up the next one. This one is called Trail of Lightning by Rebecca Roanhorse.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:43

I like the idea of Cli-fi fantasy. Right so we have Cli-fi but this is now taking it and we have cli-fi dystopian now. This is cli-fi fantasy. I really like it.

Kaytee Cobb 19:53

Right? Yeah, we're putting like 18 genres into this bucket. It's really fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:58

Okay, well, even more fun. Kaytee, the next book I'm going to talk about is just a complete 180. And I love it when we're able to do this stuff, because this is one of those books that I read it and it was exactly right for me. But even as I was reading it, I was like, oh, there are going to be a lot of people that roll their eyes when I bring this to the show. But this is why this show is called currently reading. We actually are going to tell you everything that we read, or I'm going to tell you everything that I read, I read a really great book that I know not everyone is going to want to read called Thornyhold by Mary Stewart. Now, I grew up reading some Mary Stewart

Kaytee Cobb 20:33

I don't like that title. Thornyhold. That title... terrible.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:36

It's not great. It's not great. The cover is also not great. This book was written in 1988. So it's a moment like it's a it's a it's a moment in time, this is back backlist. But again, stay with me. Because sometimes you get into a mood that you need this kind of book. This is emotional support territory. I was having a rough early Christmas season. I was I was really struggling with my emotions and I needed something very gentle. So we went with Thornyhold. Now, let me tell you what Thornyhold is about. So our story is set in 1940s England. You're looking at the covers, aren't you? I can see your face. Yeah, all of them there and there's a lot of them because Mary Stewart is very prolific and so she gets re released and re released. And they're each one worse than the next. I know. I read it, okay, I read it on Kindle. Just get it on Kindle. Okay, our story is set in 1940s England and it features Gilly Ramsay, a young woman who has had a V tough life. But in this favorite kind of swing up novel, Gilly inherits her favorite aunt Geillis's country house which is named Thornyhold, it's a bad name. When she moves in Gilly meets the curious and really very sus Agnes Trap her aunt's former housekeeper who happens to dabble in potions and spells. Gilly suspects that Mrs. Trap is maybe up to no good spoiler alert. She's right. Good old Agnes is looking for something that does not belong to her, something that Agnes believes is still in Thornyhold. As Gilly discovers the beautiful and strange things about Thornyhold and the people who live nearby she meets kindly and hot, hot, hot hot neighbor, Christopher John and his son William, who's just a sweet little bit so sweet. And they help her get her feet under her and finally give Agnes the what for. There's some light romance that may ensue. Really a lot of concentration on the word light there and trust me, you will be rooting for it. Okay, again, comfort read backlist comfort read, if you grew up when I did, which is in the 70s and early 80s. You may have read Mary Stewart and you'll know why it is that she is a comfort read. She was really big back then. There's just something so bucolic and sweet about the way that she writes without being overly tricky. And there are definitely all the fairy tale vibes in this story. I love the idea of a young girl having a very difficult life. Like she's really mistreated by lots of people. And then, though she has that her life is watched over by a sort of fairy godmother like aunt, and that's who ends up giving her this house. And it just feeds all of my little girl fantasies. Like when I was a small child, I did not have a rough life, but I thought I did and I really felt like I needed a fairy godmother. So I love the swing parts of the story, right? So she gets to Thornyhold, and it's all like abandoned and grown over. And so there's this swing up element with the house too, which is something I very much like in stories. I love it when a house goes from like abandoned to warm and cozy and fire in the fireplace and tea on the aga, you know what I mean? All of that. And you've got that in spades in the story. It's just the cleaning and tidying and everything you need for a fresh start. And there are lots of little mysteries that are also included in the story. Like were there witches in the forest outside Thornyhold? We have reason to think maybe there were. Is the house haunted? Or is it something else? Are there bad guys in the village? Who should we believe? All of these things get perfectly resolved, and I was there for it the entire way. And then of course, there's the gentle love story that I talked about earlier. It's really probably my favorite kind of love story. If I'm honest, that sweet falling in love element is a lot more appealing to me than straight up open door romance. At the end of the day. I just want people to find the kind of love that makes them want to stay together forever. And we definitely have that here. So it occurred to me as I was reading that I have long had memories of long days inside, pretending to be sick during the summers in the middle of California where if you weren't sick my mom made me go outside. So I would pretend to be sick so I could stay in and read all day in the air conditioning. And I have these memories of reading about King Arthur, which I had always attributed to The Once and Future King. But you know what it was not. It was the Mary Stewart series,

which starts with The Crystal Cave. And it's so like soapy King Arthur and I loved it when I was a child. So Thornyhold took me back to all of those kinds of vibes it's not set in the same time period. But the writing kind of puts you in that same suite. This is why I fell in love with reading kind of mode. So if you want to comfort read and you want to be in a beautiful setting, definitely pick up Thornyhold. It will bless your tired after holiday overstimulated heart too. This is Thornyhold by Mary Stewart.

Kaytee Cobb 25:48

I liked all the rest of the things you said about it. Even though I don't like the title or the cover.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:53

Yes, it's very, like mid 80s kind of cover treatment on it. But it was, you know, again, I got it on my Kindle. And so I didn't need to worry about it.

Kaytee Cobb 26:02

Yeah. Because you can't just leave that laying around everywhere. It ruins the aesthetic of the Schwartz household.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:09

Absolutely. And that it's it's so important. That it Yeah, I know. Right on. Yes. All right. What's your third book?

Kaytee Cobb 26:16

Okay, my third one this week is a five star nonfiction pick. And it's been a little everywhere, but I loved it. So I have to talk about it. It's Solito by Javier Zamora. So this book is unbelievable. It's the kind of memoir where you have to remind yourself, you're reading a book written by this human who clearly survived the ordeal. So even though you feel like he's not gonna make it, he does, because he wrote a book and it's in your hands. Okay, so Javier Zamora was only eight years old when his parents and grandparents started using the word "trip" to describe the adventure he would go on to be reunited with his parents in the United States. They had left more than four years before due to the Salvadoran Civil War, so he had not hugged his mother and father for more than four years, and only had occasional phone calls with them and had been living with his grandparents. In the meantime, they miss him, they want their baby boy with them. The adventure they're talking about turns out to be a 3,000 mile journey from El Salvador to the US border to cross to go live with his parents in California. So along we go for the trip of a lifetime. Javier is told at the outset that his journey will take about two weeks, and then he will get to run into the waiting arms of his parents for that long awaited embrace. Instead, it takes more than two months to cross many borders from El Salvador all the way up through Mexico into the United States, including boat rides, coyotes hired for the job. It includes a group of strangers that become like family to this nine year old boy who is traveling alone. He has no one with him. It includes a parched desert landscape and his young life flashing before his eyes as he looks down the barrel of a border patrol gun. And over and over again, we remind ourselves he made it he wrote this story, he doesn't die and it feels impossible. Solito is the story of one nine year old boy who doesn't even know how to tie his shoes when the book begins traveling. Solito, which in Spanish means alone, and also small, he's tiny, and alone, for more than 3000 miles. It's a book that fills me with grief and compassion. We are able to stand apart from a lot of stories about the border and about people trying to cross and for whatever

reason, that's all filtered through the media. This is a very personal story, and he was only able to write it after years of therapy. He's 32 years old now. He's an acclaimed poet, who uses words to change both worldviews and hearts. But reading this story it feels impossible to not have your heart grow three sizes like the Grinch when he steals Christmas. If you've got a child of any age, but especially a nine year old boy, I cannot even tell you how many times I pulled Levi into my arms as I read this story, my nine year old boy. This book will break you open in the best of ways. It was incredible. It has been everywhere. It deserves the praise that it's getting. His story, his writing. It's powerful. It's incredible. It's worth picking up and reading and cracking your heart open a little bit more for this one. It's *Solito* by Javier Zamora.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:41

Yeah, Kaytee, this is one of those books that everyone should read. Because you're right, we can distance ourselves from these kinds of experiences and I think if we all put ourselves in the middle of that "trip", that adventure, as you said, with air quotes around it, we would realize that there's an awful lot that's being risked. All right, okay. Well, I'm going to talk about a book that is getting ready to come out in a little over a week from the day that this episode drops, but I've been saving it for a long time. And now is the time you can get your hands on it really, really soon. I want to talk about *How to Sell a Haunted House* by one of our favorites, Grady Hendrix.

Kaytee Cobb 30:17

Perfect. I want to hear about the fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:18

All right, this one comes out on January 17. So we're very, very close. So here's the setup. When Louise, our main character finds out that both her parents have died, she is definitely not interested in the idea of going back home. She's got a lot of stuff going on in her own life, and she does not want to deal with the family home which is she knows stuffed to the rafters with remnants of her father's career. He was a professor and her mother's lifelong obsession with puppets and dolls. I'm just going to insert a pregnant silence... dolls. And also Louise is dealing with the sudden and very strange way that her parents died. I'm going to insert another pregnant silence. But Tip Top very most of all she does not want, she is, poor woman, she does not want to deal with her brother, Mark, who none of us wants to deal with. Honestly, he still lives in their hometown and he's just a real challenge. He's a layabout. It's the nicest way to describe him. He keeps getting fired from one job after another and on top of all of that he has issues. He has issues with Louise, kind of having her act together and being successful. These two do not get along, they do not in any way shape or form in their regular lives interact at this point. Unfortunately, Louise needs Mark's help to get the house ready to sell because they have to sell the house, and the house itself, her parents have been living there forever. It needs a lot of work. And there's also so much stuff in there that she doesn't feel like she can just load into garbage, you know, containers, she feels like she has to make sure he doesn't want any of it. So there's no getting around it. She's gonna have to be involved with Mark with this scenario. So get in, empty the house, fix it up a little bit, sell it, go back to not speaking to each other. Again, this is Louise's plan. But as we all know, and if anyone's read Grady Hendrix, this will not surprise you to find out that some houses do not want to be sold. And their home has plans for Louise and Mark. Pregnant silence. This book is a wild ride, y'all. It's a wild ride. Now. I loved Southern Book Club's *Guide to Slaying Vampires*. I can never say that.

It's like I can't say those words in the proper order. I think I just did. I loved that book. I did not like Final Girl's Support Group. In fact, I DNF'd it. But in this book, Grady Hendrix is back to his horror loving best. This book includes all the things about Grady Hendrix's writing that I love. His ability to do real character development, his ability to tell the story of a family on several levels and make you feel like you know, the family dynamics, like you've experienced those, this is a familiar territory for you and his ability to make you understand a town and its dynamics, all of those things are here in spades in this book. The other thing I really like about Grady Hendrix's writing is that he is not afraid to go there as a horror writer. There are jumpscare and freak out moments and full on I do not need to ever see that in my mind's eye again, moments, just like in Southern Book Club. If you know, you know, you're gonna get that some of that same stuff here. Johnny is reading it right now as we speak. And he said one word to me when he got about 25% in and I was like, "Oh my gosh, just don't even say that word in our house. Like don't say that word in our house." And so now of course, he chases me around the house saying that word in a creepy voice. Oh my gosh, all right. Scenes you can't forget no question. In these two ways. I think Grady Hendrix is our generation's Stephen King. I really think there are a lot of things that are similar about their writing. This book, however, is much heavier on the themes of families and the secrets that families keep and most interestingly, in the different ways that siblings from the same parent can have completely different perspectives and memories of their childhood. That was really interesting to me. I have a brother and a sister. We all grew up with the same parents in the same house. We remember things completely differently. We processed them completely differently. I loved those parts of this book it was really, really well done and the interplay between sister and brother Louise and Mark was interesting from beginning to end no matter what they went through. And these two go through a lot. This book is definitely free of any of those uncomfortable issues of race and white saviorism that we had to deal with in Southern Book Club. So we can all just sit back, relax and enjoy a horror filled romp with a ton of heart. Now, of course, I have to say this book is not for everyone. It is a scary book, and it had several things in it that had me staying up at night, and literally wanting to put my Kindle in the freezer. And more than a month after I read it makes me run from my husband, even though I'm a full grown woman, because he's saying one word from the book. So clearly, it's stuck. It's stuck with me. Not a lot makes me run fast, but this particular word. So I do also want to say what we're all thinking, which is why the Haymami did this book not released in October. Because I actually think I got it on my Kindle, I got the arc of it in October. And I was like, why this is the perfect October book. So it comes out on January 17. If you have the patience and the wherewithal and the organization structure, I'm going to recommend that you get it and then tuck it away until October 2023. You will be in for the maybe in the freezer, you will be in for the most enjoyable fright of your life. This is *How to Sell a Haunted House* by Grady Hendrix.

Kaytee Cobb 36:41

I'm excited. Even the cover of that one has been like give me give me give me give me

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:44

Oh my gosh, yes, it's good. I'm so glad that it was good because I really like him. Okay. All right, Kaytee. So speaking of an author that we really like and who I actually would be totally delighted to be a Grady Hendrix completist. Let's talk about some authors that we either have purposely read everything that they've written or some that are very much we are intentionally working our way through their backlist. So who is the first author that popped into your mind?

Kaytee Cobb 37:17

First one I thought of was Ann Patchett. I have loved Ann Patchett for a very long time. And I only have two of her books that are currently out in the world somewhere that I haven't read yet. And that's quite a few novels and a number of essay collections and nonfiction pieces and memoir. Like she isn't she's a prolific writer, and I love her turns of phrase, I love her character she builds I love her plotlines. And I just continue to be in love with her as a writer. So she was the first one that came to mind for me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:53

Yes, that's a good one to be a completist of.

Kaytee Cobb 37:57

Yeah, the one that I have left, the novel that I have left is called Taft, and it's her lowest rated book. And that's the only reason I haven't picked it up. I don't want it to sully my other experiences with all her other books, so.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:08

Right, absolutely. Okay. Well, obviously read all of Louise Penny. That's not interesting to talk about that. This year...

Kaytee Cobb 38:15

I wanted to ask about that. Because she has novellas. Have you read her novellas? Because I'm a completist without novellas for her.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:22

Well, I've read The Hangman. And I I don't know of any other novella that she has other than The Hangman.

Kaytee Cobb 38:28

Maybe it's just the one.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:29

Yeah. So yeah, I've read everything. Yeah. And then I've read State of Terror outside of her. So yeah, I've read. I've read everything that she but that's not interesting. This year, I made a point of being a completist of Catherine Ryan Howard. So this year, as of this year, I've read every book, I went just systematically worked in every single one of Catherine Ryan Howard's mysteries and liked or loved all of them. Liar's Girl is I think the weakest but still a really, really good mystery. And yeah, so I've worked my way through those, but I really don't have a lot of authors, except authors who have only come out with one or two books sort of recently, right? And I don't really, I don't I haven't intentionally worked through enough back list of authors that I love, which is another reason why I want to really concentrate on backlist this year, because I have several that fall into that category. First on that list is I want to read more deeply into the back list of Rumer Godden, who wrote In This House of Brede, which was on my top 10 list for the year. So that was like the very, very first one that came into my mind. I have a couple

of her novels on my shelf and I'm going to concentrate, I think Roxanna and I are really going to concentrate on reading through her.

Kaytee Cobb 39:49

Okay, I like that. I like that. I have a few romance novelists that are my my favorite ones, which is Emily Henry and Abby Jimenez and I have read nearly everything that each of them has put out. Everything that Emily Henry has released. And all but one for Abby Jimenez so far. And then Fredrik Backman is one that when I read A Man Called Ove, I then went back and read everything he had written before or everything that was already out because he had released additional novels before I read A Man Called Ove and then I have kept up with him as he's released new novels so I am intentionally a Fredrik Backman completist and then my my creepy one here is that I love S.A Cosby. I love Razorblade Tears. I went back and read Blacktop Wasteland. He now has a new release. That's actually an old release and a forthcoming one. So I have both of those on my radar, plan to pick them up soon. I love his gritty, dynamic characters and his really stick in your mind scenes that you can't erase from your brains no matter how hard you try.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:59

Right. Absolutely. I am going to concentrate on I want to read everything that Lauren Groff has written. I think I only have a short story collection that I still need to read to make sure that I've read everything that Lauren Groff has written. And then, of course, Alix E. Harrow. So there are I think Once and Future Witches is the only other one that I haven't read yet of hers. Well, no, she has this little novellas, right, which are Fairytale one month and I haven't read I haven't read the next one there. So little bit of backlist there, but definitely one that I want to be a completist on.

Kaytee Cobb 41:35

Okay, I also, I mentioned Ed Young is one of my favorite books of last year, he has one other nonfiction title that is high on my TBR for this year, and then I will be an Ed Young completist it's that's pretty easy with authors that only have two books, like I'm sure there's plenty of authors that only have two books that I've read both of them, right. The one that I would like to actually strive for is Jason Reynolds. I've read quite a few of his books, but he is also like Ann Patchett, downright prolific. I haven't read further into the ghost, the track series that starts with Ghost. There's a few little other pieces that I haven't read of his and that is a goal for me, I really want to make sure that I've read his entire canon.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:14

And so I was thinking that I want to read all of I mean eventually what I like to read all of Agatha Christie, yes, but I definitely want to read everything that she's written that stars Hercule because, yes, he's my favorite. There's something about Miss Marple that just I'm not crazy about that character, and also the way that she does the stories when Miss Marples in them. They just don't have the same kind of like movement to them. So I'm not committing to all of Agatha Christie, but I am saying I want to read everything that stars Hercule for sure. I've recently have been introduced to a new author, Jussi Adler Olson, who I very, very much want to read more into his backlist. And because there's a lot there. And I was just about to talk about another author that is also Nordic Noir. And I realized, Wait, I don't want to talk about that yet. But I will have a lot of words about another author very, very soon, who is definitely on my list of I will be a completist because there's a lot of good stuff here.

Kaytee Cobb 43:23

Because you'd like to be terrified.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:25

Because that's absolutely am Yes, yes. Yes. Yes, please.

Kaytee Cobb 43:31

Okay, so here's a question for you. Meredith. Would you rather read a debut by someone who after you read it, you're like, I just want to read everything that they come out with in the future? Or would you rather find a backlist gem let's say from said Nordic noir author and know that they have 15 other books already and that you could strive to be a completist in their catalogue?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:57

Oh, very this is is very, very clear. For me, I actually don't really understand why people get really like, they will structure their reading around reading a lot of debuts because a lot of debuts are it's going to be the best book that that person ever wrote. Like, they might never write another decent book. So I'm not big into debuts at all. I would much rather find Yes, find a really great book and then find out oh my gosh, they've written nine other books before and be able to dig into it for sure. Susanna Clarke's another example of this, I read Piranesi and then I read Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell and very, very different books. There's only one other book that I believe is short stories that I need to read to be a completist with her. Bellman and Black I think is the...

Kaytee Cobb 44:44

I didn't know she had short story.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:45

Yes. And so I could be wrong about that. So don't quote me on that. But there's just one other one other piece of something that I need to read to be because she just hasn't put out that much. But yes, to answer your question, how do you feel about it? Would you do you feel like debuts would be more of your focus?

Kaytee Cobb 45:01

I definitely, I love finding a debut. And it doesn't always lead me to, "And now whenever this author writes another book, I will absolutely pick it up" like, like I loved Remarkably Bright Creatures last year. Do I feel like I now need to follow Shelby Van Pelt wherever she goes to see if she's thinking about another book? No, because I liked that book plenty. And I don't need any thing else to make her good in my head. Whereas there are, I definitely love the experience of like this Rebecca Roanhorse series that I just talking about that first one released in 2018. So I already know there's multiple other ones and she's proven herself to me with other books by her. So I know she's a great author outside of the series as well. And that is very exciting to me to say like, oh, well, if I wanted to, if I weren't a host on a podcast, where I want to have a variety of reads, I could go deep into Rebecca Roanhorse's writing and that could serve me for a whole month and read only her books. I would never do that I would never do. But I definitely wouldn't do it on the podcast,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:02

You wouldn't do it just even in your own normal life?

Kaytee Cobb 46:05

No, no, I can't imagine reading only one author for a whole month. I would be I would be bored.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:11

Yeah, I used to. I mean, looking back, I've been doing some work on my old book journals recently. And really, you know, again, I would just read, I would read five or six books in a row by the same author was really, it was a very, it was a different time. Right? It was a different time in my reading life, for sure. But I do think your point is a good one, Kaytee because when I when we were getting ready for this deep dive, I was looking through, started with my reading from 2022 and then was looking back even further. And really quickly, I could identify, no, I don't need to read anymore. You know, that book was great. I liked that particular book. But I think there is something to be said for authors that you really would say to yourself, I want to read more from them. It's not just any author who wrote a book that you that you liked, it's got to be more than that. Now, there are some books, you know, debuts that come out that I'm like, Oh, my gosh, I absolutely want to read the next thing that they've written, but it's not all the time. And it just occurred to me I want to be an Amor Towles completist. So I will be reading The Lincoln Highway and then I and then I will be in an Amor Towles completist.

Kaytee Cobb 47:18

Okay, I've got one more is that John Marrs writes two different types of books. And I want to be and will continue to be a completist in his near future sci fi books. His more traditional murder family books, I occasionally pick up there, and they're good. They're just not as much of a hit for me as this near future sci fi thriller insanity that he does that really picks me up and like throws me into the book. So that section of his writing, I will continue to pick up every single one he puts out.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:50

All right, that definitely makes sense to me. And I will add then, Riley Sager, because there is a certain kind of mood that I get in... Well, first of all, I just want to say that I've read everything, you know, I just want to be a complete list and Riley Sager and it just doesn't take a lot to read those books. So it's not like it's a big, you know, something that you have to spend a lot of time on. But there's a certain mood that I get in that only a Riley Sager novel will do. And so I have two more his, very first one Final Girls. And then The Last Time I Lied. And so those are the only two that I haven't read, and he's hit or miss for me. He's crazy, wacky wild, you don't know what you're gonna get. But you're always gonna get something that is going to make you turn the pages. And so for me a lot of the time, that's, you know, that's enough to make me want to have read everything in someone's canon, for sure. Alright, good. So that is an interesting, it's an interesting thought exercise. And I think every listener should think about, you know, how do you normally work your way through authors in this way where you felt weak, because we know that there are some people who do this, they find an author, and then they just say, I'm going to work my way through and I don't care if it takes me an entire year. So do you do that? What authors have you done that with? And then are there authors that are writing right now that you're kind

of working both backwards and forwards and like we were talking about, we would love we would love to know? Alright, Kaytee, let's do some wishes at the fountain.

Kaytee Cobb 49:20

Okay, mine is a little nerdy, but that's very on brand for me. So this week, I wish to make a record keeper for my kids series books. So this is a very easy thing. I'm making this wish because I want it out in the universe, because then I'm more likely to actually do it. And I can't do it right now for two reasons. One, I'm at my parents house. I'm not at home. So I can't do it immediately where I can go down to their bookshelves and actually make this thing that I want to make. And I'm making this wish because maybe somebody else has this issue. So what I plan to do is add a sheet or a tab to my reading log of the series that my kids regularly read and the ones they own of those series. And that could be Wimpy Kid. It could be Baby Sitters Club graphic novels, it could be the Wings of Fire books. But some of them, you know, they got a boxset of one through six. And then they picked up nine and 10 at the thrift store, and they don't have the middle ones, especially for my older two kids. This is gonna be really useful for me, because then I still have two additional kids and knowing that I have complete sets of these books that get read and read and read and read by my kids, that means that they'll be ready to pass down to the kids after that, and then I can cull them and decide which ones will stay in my house when those kids are done reading them. So I just want to be able to access it very easily from my phone so that at a used bookstore, or a garage sale or a thrift store, I know which ones we already have. And I don't need to pick those ones up. And I can look for the ones that were missing. That's my wish this week. Ping splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:53

You know, the I used to have this exact thing back in the day to revisit again, my my reading history when I was reading all, like for 10 years that I read all cozy mysteries. So there was this, there was this book that you could buy in the bookstore that actually like murder by her hand or something. And it actually was just a book of series with little checklists next to it. And so you could check the ones that you have, and the ones that you've set had like two columns, like ones that you have ones that you've read. And so whenever I would happen upon a used bookstore, or a books, library book sale, I wouldn't be able it was very useful for that kind of thing. So I think it'd be useful for you to Kaytee.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:53

My mom prints one, and she keeps it in her wallet. And it's it's in like five point text. But that way she can pull it out at the bookstore rather than her phone, which I like, because it's automatically updated. And, and she can say, Oh, I have Janet Yovanovitch, you know, one through 15. And I don't have 16 yet, so she knows which one to buy next.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:55

Exactly, exactly. If someone out there probably has a really good tool or something that will help you do this very, very quickly. Okay. All right. My wish is first of all to tell all of you guys, especially my All Things Murderful fans, I have to tell you, movie you have to see and I promise I'm gonna make this book related. Johnny and I a couple of weeks ago went to see an adult movie. And I don't mean an adult movie. I mean, a movie that's not for children. You know what I mean? Like that you go to see in a regular movie theater. We saw The Menu. Oh, yeah, it is a dark psychological thriller. It is not horror,

okay. It is a dark psychological thriller. It is so good. So it's like an hour, it's like an hour and 40 minutes. So it's not this gigantic three hour long thing that so many movies are these days. It was the perfect little evening date night thing. So it's come, by the time this show airs, it will have already come out on HBO max on January 3. So if you have HBO Max, you can get it right now. And you can watch it. And this is just a really great if you like murderful books, if you like that kind of you know, like A Gone Girl, or Tana French or any of those kinds of books, you're gonna love The Menu. When you watch it, you're going to know why my true wish, what I walked out of the movie theater saying is I wish someone would write a book not necessarily about this particular thing, but using some of the big ideas. Because The Menu is about a group of people who there's this very famous, very famous chef, and he runs a restaurant that is on an island that you have to take a ferry to get to the island. Okay, so it's like \$1,600 for a one person for a dinner. So dinner is \$1,600 and he makes whatever he feels like making it's like one of those Thomas Keller you know, French Laundry kind of situations. Super famous. And it's a very much like this, like showy, it's kind of like owning a Lamborghini or something. Like if you've eaten dinner at this particular island, it's very like a feather in your cap. And so these people, we meet them when they're getting on the ferry, 10 of them in total. And they come in like these little groups and then they get on the ferry and they go out to the island and then everything happens. I just felt myself saying it is the I would love a book that is like this in some of the big ways. You know, something that's very famous that only super rich people can do. And then mayhem occurs. And because you get to have all this backstory that although this movie did a great job of filling in the why and who and everything. You could have so much more with the book, right? So I found myself saying I loved the menu, the movie, and I really wish there was a similar I feel a book that I could dig into because it was so so good. So that's my wish that somebody would watch them in you and be very inspired. Like Catherine Ryan Howard. This would be perfect. She would be perfect for this.

Kaytee Cobb 55:15

You should let her know.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:17

No, because then she'll never do it. Because like, what's she gonna say? Oh, I got this idea from this dumb podcaster. Like, I can't give her any ideas because it would mean she definitely couldn't use it. But maybe she watched The Menu and she's going to be inspired. I would love it. That is my wish. Pink splash. All right. All right. That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 55:43

You can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:46

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 on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 55:56

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:03

And if you want more of this content, you can join us as a bookish friend for just \$5 a month you can join us on Patreon. And you get All Things Murderful and Indie Press List, Trope Thursday and all of the great bookish community. You can also help us by rating and reviewing us on Apple podcasts and shouting us out on social media. Every one of those things makes a huge difference toward us finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 56:29

Yes, bookish friends are the best friends. Thank you all for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:35

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 56:37

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:40

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 56:41

Happy reading Meredith.