



Season 6, Episode 29: Potty Adventures + Bookish Villains

Mon, Feb 26, 2024 • 59:04

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 know, we won't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

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 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I love me a bookish villain.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb. I'm a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona, and I'm excited to meet some more authors. This is episode number 29 of Season Six. We're so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:50

Well, I'm glad one of us wants to meet more authors. Kaytee, that is that is good to hear. We

Kaytee Cobb 00:55

are the yin and yang of each other, as we've mentioned in the past are this exact waiting in line.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:01

Exactly. All right. Well, we wanted to let you guys know, as you can tell from my bite size intro, we will be talking in our deep dive today, All things villains, we got a great question from a listener who asked us some really specific questions about our thoughts about villains. And it turns out we had some really specific answers. Yes. So excited. All right, excellent. So we're going to do that a little piece of housekeeping that we wanted to talk about. So next week, Kaytee, we're going to be doing something a little bit different, and it will directly affect the listeners. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 01:37

in almost six full seasons now of currently reading, we have never had a big show where at least one of the two of us was not on mic have like a regular full size episode. Next week, we are handing over the reins to our beloved show regulars, Roxanna and Mary are taking control of currently reading for a week so that you and I can go somewhere together, which is very exciting. We have had travels, of course, but not usually at the same time to the same place. So this retreat that we've planned together, we get to hang out, we can dream we get to plan we get to read, of course, I think I'm gonna bring a puzzle for us to work on as well. And I'm just so excited to spend some time together. And we love that we know we have these trusted sure hands at the wheel that we can hand the driving over to for a week as well.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:25

Exactly. So instead of us taking off a week, we can have a big show. And you guys are gonna absolutely love it. I'm super excited about us getting together, Kaytee, we have a lot of things that we want to talk about. We just had the listener survey, which has given us so much fantastic feedback. And we have some really interesting ideas that we are going to be fleshing out so very excited about it,

Kaytee Cobb 02:46

huh, yes. All planned very meticulously in the calendar as well. Exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:51

All right. So let's get on to this week, where we are going to start out with our bookish moments of the week. Kaytee, what have you got? Okay, mine

Kaytee Cobb 02:58

is almost a full year callback. So last year around this time, I was making grand plans for the Santa Fe International Literary Festival. And since then, of course, I've made a big move. My family and I all moved to Arizona. And that means this year I get to attend the Tucson Festival of Books for the first time after admiring it from afar. For many years. It is huge. This festival makes my previous little Santa Fe festival look like a preschool classroom. There are hundreds of authors, hundreds of events over two days taking place all over the University of Arizona campus, which is my alma mater. That's where I went to college. I have multiple degrees from there. So it's gonna be a trip down memory lane, but make it bookish. I'm making a weekend of it traveling down with two of my favorite people in the world, Shad and Katie, and we want to meet Currently Reading listeners. So the Arizona bookish friends are meeting up on Saturday evening, march 9, an RSVP is required and you don't have to be a bookish friend. But I do need to make reservations. So if you want to meet up for a meal, and or some bookish conversation, send us an email at the podcast accounts in the show notes. And I will send details about the meetup to anyone who RSVP is very excited about

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:08

this. That is going to be so much fun. Oh my god, I'm

Kaytee Cobb 04:13

so excited. Even at the little Santa Fe when we had like 10 people at a meal together. We all ate tapas. And I do expect that this one is quite a bit bigger. So I'm a little nervous. But I'm I'm also excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:26

Oh yeah, this will be this will be really, really fun. You'll absolutely love it.

Kaytee Cobb 04:30

So many great authors. It's huge, right? Yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:33

exactly. It is huge. But you'll be able to cherry pick the ones that you're super interested in. Right. And you'll be smart about your scheduling in your planning and how you spend your time and yeah, you'll love it. The weather should be beautiful. Oh, it'll

Kaytee Cobb 04:45

be gorgeous. Absolutely gorgeous. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:47

That's excellent. I'm glad that you're doing that and that you can meet with some listeners. All right, my bookish moment of the week is very different, very singular. One of those things that I want to be able to look back years from now and listen to this episode. So don't be like, Oh, that's right. Now was the time that we were potty training Jeffrey. Oh, Jeffrey just turned two and potty training is on the horizon. And so of course, what's the first thing that we do when we want to tackle anything new? We get a bunch of books. Exactly. And so I realized that from I mean, Jackson's 12, so we haven't used his potty books for a long time. So I didn't have them anymore. And I decided to go looking to see what was new in the world of potty books. And I'm happy to report back from the front lines, that there are plenty of options there are, there's kind of an upsetting amount of options, if I'm honest. I mean, this is a really crowded field. So we have you know, the very popular Institute's has stood the test of time, Everybody Poops, and my personal favorite Leslie Patricelli. simple and elegant Potty. Yep. I love let's let's do it. Leslie Patricelli. Also, dinosaurs are really big in the poop related world.

Kaytee Cobb 06:06

Well, they also make really big poops. So that's helpful. I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:10

mean, yes, sometimes, but sometimes I'm realizing they make little tiny poops a la a toddlers poop, like in poopasaurus or dino potty. There were like 30 examples of this. I don't know what the cross section is of dinosaurs and potty related stuff. But man, it's strong. Okay, it's strong. Then there are optimistic fun titles like P is for Potty and The New Potty by Mercer Mayer. That's actually a really big favorite of mine, too.

Kaytee Cobb 06:40

I'm so excited for Megan to get to link all these. It's gonna be great. That that's true.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:44

Well, you know what? I figured she probably would like to get a little bit of a peek. Start coming for her. Right. There's books for kids who are having an existential crisis, apparently,

Kaytee Cobb 06:54

because they're scary. That's why Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:57

It Hurts When I Poop.

Kaytee Cobb 06:59

Oh, no. Wow.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:01

I was like, really? Okay. And then also Bunny's Big Problem. What you can do when it's hard to go poo. Now here's the thing you need to go look at the cover. I have never seen anything sadder. Oh, no, it's a bit traumatized bunny. So apparently there's a subsection of children who are very disturbed about the onset of potty related activities. Speaking of activities, Kaytee I do want to report

Kaytee Cobb 07:26

oh gosh, vs.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:29

There is a touch

Kaytee Cobb 07:31

and feel book. No, that's not sanitary Meredith

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:33

There's a touch and feel book that harkens back to the 90s called Poop. There it is. No. I love it so much. And there's even books for the kid who is a budding productivity expert, my personal favorite and one that I purchased for my my grandson, things you can do while you go poo. If you want to manage your time as a toddler, you've got things to do, and people to see face time. This is exactly your multitasking guide here and things you can do when you go post. So I'm happy that we have so many good choices. I really enjoyed my half hour down this rabbit hole upon any books pun intended. I came up with some some good choices. I think Jeffrey's going to be really, really happy with them. Also, I do want to say that as I was doing this, I realized that the first recorded the note first known recording of Meredith Monday's voice was back in 1975. My dad recorded me I wish I had it. I don't I wish I did. My dad recorded me five minutes of me on the mic at two years old talking about a story that involves a witch and a squirrel. And the fact that the witch Chase the Squirrel all the way down to the lake. So even back then, I was super happy to have an audience and be on the mic. And I was multitasking. So I didn't even need a recording happened while you were also was going poop in the toilet. Exactly. And my dad was like, every time you go to the bathroom, she tells these stories. So I'm gonna get in this is

1975 He probably had to have like some gigantic backpack to mount to make it happen, right. But he got a recording. And again, I don't have it.

Kaytee Cobb 09:20

I hope he was probably on a cassette tape,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:22

I would assume. Exactly, exactly. But that's the first time that my voice was recorded. So you have to send

Kaytee Cobb 09:27

it to legacy box, not a sponsor,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:29

not a sponsor. I love it. So that was my bookish moment of the week.

Kaytee Cobb 09:35

Wow, that was quite the adventure. We just went on. I can't wait to see if people fast forward through that or not. Or if they just listened to that entire listing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 09:43

I don't blame them. I don't blame them. We one of the things that we learned from our surveys, something we already knew, which is that anytime we talk about middle grade or picture books, people, children, people fast forward through that. That's okay. Everyone should listen to what appeals to them. That's why we have a fast forward button right Yep,

Kaytee Cobb 10:00

yep. All right, and timestamps and time we can jump right to where we talked about

Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:04

it. Exactly, exactly. So, Kaytee, I'm excited about my current Reads. Today. Let's hear how you feel about your current reads and give us your first one.

Kaytee Cobb 10:13

I am excited to I actually have two indie press list books today, but they are both from the Wayback Machine. Ooh, I'm excited to talk about that. I love it. The first one is Something Close to Magic by Emma Mills. So this came not so far back from the November Indie Press list from Novel Neighbor in St. Louis. And I enjoyed it so much. I think over the past few years, we've seen a surge in cozy fantasy, right? It wasn't really a thing that we all knew we were craving until a few specific titles came onto the scene, most notably Legends and Lattes by Travis Baldree, of course, but that also means that we get plenty of dribble in the genre as well and like sometimes it's just garbage. Thankfully, this novel by Emma Mills is not that Aurelie is our main character. She's 17 years old when the story starts, but has been working as an apprentice for years trying to keep her head down and stay under the radar. Magic is frowned upon in this world. So even though oh really occasionally uses it. Legend has it the magic

will exact a cost. If she uses it to amend the flavor of her bakes at Basil Bakery, customers will leave twice as hungry instead of being satisfied. All is fine until a stranger comes to town, Ileana she's looking for Aurelie's help. She has figured out that oh really is able to use seeking stones to find a person or an item that you're looking for. And since Ileana is a bounty hunter like Boba Fett, it would be sure useful to have a seeker on her staff when the someone they're looking for turns out to be lost in the dangerous Underwood where people go in and never come out. Aurelie is a little worried that maybe she's been pulled into an adventure and she's kind of not down for that. But then when she discovers that the person being sought is actually the hapless prince named hapless her life starts spinning out of control. Many stories have the adventure start when a stranger comes to town and that's certainly the case here as oh really finds herself on a quest pulled out of her carefully curated life into a world filled with the magic that she has tried hard to ignore this cozy Fantasy has a bit of romance, a lot of adventure and plenty of coziness baked into the story and yes, that is a bakery pun. It has a 17 year old heroine but does not at all feel like YA as you read so please don't let that turn you away and instead it's the perfect story to turn to if you're looking for a little comfort. A dazzling purple cover which you know I love or an adventure for your cozy reading duck. I adored it. I haven't heard anything about it since it was on the IPL and I would love to see more people pick it up. This was *Something Close to Magic* by Emma Mills.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:39

I loved that one that first scene with it with Ileana Oh, I love the Eliana character. She's so badass. She's so good, but with the heart of gold. My favorite kind of badass I yeah, I love that book. That's such a yes. Okay, my book. I'm excited about my books today because two of the three of them are very, not what I normally read, but they're still really interesting and really good. The third one is right in my wheelhouse. Okay, so this first one is sci fi, like serious sci fi, which we get asked for all the time. But you and I don't read a ton of it. But it's called *The Terraformers*, and it's by AnnaLee Newitz. Here's the setup. Our story is set 59,000 years in the future. Like how cool is that? Yes, our lead character is Ranger Destry, whose life is dedicated to terraforming a planet called SASK-E, which is like an early Earth like planet as part of the environmental rescue team. She cares for the planet and its newly created newly developing ecosystems, just as her parents and their parents before her dead. So she's from this, like many generations of these environmental rescue team members, but the future that they're building comes under threat. When Destry discovers a city full of people that should not exist that should not be there because they're hidden inside a massive volcano. Like they're supposed to be really nobody on this planet except for kind of the scientists who are making it grow. There's a whole mess of people in this volcano, as she uncovers more about their past, which has also been scrubbed clean. That's true. He begins to question the mission, the mission that she and these generations of her family have devoted their lives to and needs to make a choice. And that choice will reverberate through future generations to come on this planet. Okay, Kaytee, have you ever read a book where as soon as you finish it, you feel two things both completely and simultaneously? One that you really really liked the book. It was a very enjoyable reading experience. And to that you have no idea why you enjoyed it as much Did you did, and maybe a little bit of a third thing, you don't know exactly who might also have the exact same experience. This is when I'm glad we have a podcast because we go out to enough people that I think we're gonna it's gonna find its audience here because I really love this book. Every once in awhile, I do run into a book like that. And the *Terraformers* was that exactly. I purchased it on a trip actually, exactly a year ago to The Nowhere Bookshop in San Antonio, Texas. And I bought it because they had had a shelf talker about it that caught my eye, I'm really glad I picked it up, because it

was the exact kind of spritzzy, carbonated new something that I really needed in my reading life right at this moment and actually read it this week. So this is really fresh for me, this book, let me be super clear, is very heavily science fiction. And I'm saying heavily because I realized that other books that I call sci fi, are sort of maybe sci fi adjacent, like sci fi dystopian or sci fi mystery. This is sci fi pure and not very simple. I loved the setting, which is in an Earth like planet, as I said, and is super far into the future, which was really interesting. For me, I just haven't read very many books that take that kind of leap. But in the genre, it's very common. I love the characters, both our lead characters that we start with, and then all the other amazing characters that populate this universe. In the three segments of the book, as we travel further and further away in time, we meet all kinds of different creatures, and characters. Some are sentient, some are not so much. And the entire third section is narrated by a train. Exactly. But it's very, very cool. This is something really different. But the author does a great job of bringing you into the space and making you feel like she's what she's doing here is new and different. But it's not so new, and different that you can't get into the groove, I did find in the first couple of chapters, there was quite a bit of world building in the way that we normally define that you literally have to figure out what kind of world you're in. But after that, I just kind of settled in, and I was enjoying the fizzy experience of all the different visuals that were going on in my mind. And this book is visual. And that is part of what I loved about it. It's no mistake that is blurbed by John Scalzi, of The Kaiju Preservation Society and Starter Villain. And this book is visual in the same way that Kaiju is visual. This also is has an interesting dichotomy in it in that in some ways, this world that we're reading about is very optimistic and utopian in its tone, and its belief system, like in ways that really make your heart sing. But then, in that way, the books of Martha Wells could play really well with this one. But we also find that wherever you go, there you are. And when you're human, there's no question that some of the things that make today's world difficult, like rampant greed, capitalism, climate destruction, these things follow us wherever we go, even when we have the technology, and the know better. To keep it from happening. I would definitely say that this book is not an easy read, because it's got a lot going on in it. And as I said, it covers 2000 years of time, if you love science fiction that explores identity and sentience, and what makes us valuable, whether we're human or not, and also lots of different kinds of creatures. You will love this book. Come for all of that. And stay for the naked mole rat scientists. I loved it. This is the Terraformers by AnnaLee Newitz

Kaytee Cobb 18:57

okay. Meredith, this is super interesting, because about a week ago, I put their other book, which is nonfiction onto my TBR. It's called Four Lost Cities. And it sounds like this is kind of where they did the research. In order to turn it into this book. I did look up the release dates for both of them while you were talking. So Four Lost Cities came out in 2021 in February, and then the Terraformers came out in January of 2023. So they went through this entire research process talking about these cities that have existed all over the world that have been lost completely to time and are now kind of dead archaeological sites was and talked about, you know how we can learn from that to avoid becoming our own lost civilization. And now, they've turned it into this science fiction world where they're building a new civilization on a new planet. Like I just, I have chills. I love so cool.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:49

I had no idea that they had written. I just hadn't looked into their back catalogue, but I really wanted to. They've won a lot of awards for their writing, and I definitely see why there's a Very sure hand at play here just at the sentence level for this prose, but that's very interesting. I would read more by this author for sure,

Kaytee Cobb 20:08

definitely. Okay. I love that. Now I feel like I have two books on my TBR from the same author. Great. Okay, my second one this week is middle grade. It's historical fiction, and it's a mystery. So I think I'm gonna hit on some genres that people like with this one. It's called My Friend the Octopus, by Lindsay Galvin. And I bet you can guess why I picked it up at least. So this is historical fiction middle grade mystery with an octopus at its core, so of course, it has a lot to love. In it, we meet our heroine whose name is Vinny Fife, as she is left with her aunt Betts as her milliner Mother heads to Paris to seek out business prospects. She wants to grow her milliner business in London and has to head to Paris to get some new ribbons, some new fabrics, etc. It's 1893 Her aunt owns a tea shop on the English coast at Brighton. Just below the tea shop is the Brighton aquarium, where they have just acquired a giant octopus and the owner Mr. Lee knows he's just sure that it will save the aquariums fortunes and draw the crowds he needs to keep it afloat. Vinny makes friends with Mr. Lee's nephew Charlie as soon as he arrives in town, as well as the young companion of one of the tea shop patrons whose name is Tim Matteo. And that way these three young people form a sort of found family drawing pictures and writing advertising copy for the aquarium in order to promote this octopus. The drawing gives Vinny time to fall for the giant creature starts to kind of communicate in you know, a middle grade way there's not actual talking octopus in this book. In the meantime, though, her mother fails to answer her letters. So she's been writing to her mom in Paris and getting no response. And then she reads in the paper that their Milliner shop in London has been broken into While both of them are gone. Where's her mom? What happened to the shop and are those two mysteries connected? Vinnie and her new friends start to unravel the mystery, all while surrounded by tea shop treats the Brighton shore and a wise and feisty octopus, who does things that we know octopuses do in real life like squirt people that it doesn't like from its tank. It's so fun. It's a true middle grade delight. I adored it. The The Adoration I felt is aided by the absolutely gorgeous nature of this novel. It has French flaps with illustrations inside and that's probably because I have a UK copy of this book. Each of the chapter headings has the page illustrated and there are newspaper article clippings printed into the text throughout the book as well. Basically, they took the time to make this into a gorgeous book. And it was worth it for the story inside. I read this one last year, and I really adored it. I think it's great for mystery lovers, middle grade lovers and octopus lovers. And thankfully, I'm all three of those things. So I'm gonna show you this cover because it's so pretty yo pretty and five.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:52

I mean, that is really so basically what we're saying is Megan, please link to the Blackwell's edition of this book. Yes, that is to be I am such a sucker for a French flap.

Kaytee Cobb 23:04

It's so gorgeous. I love it. Okay, so this is My Friend the Octopus. You must buy the UK edition from Blackwell's by Lindsay Galvin. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 23:13

that sounds really good. And it's very beautiful. So good. Okay, well, my next book actually plays really well with the book that you just brought Kaytee. So it's a book called The Magic All Around by Jennifer Moorman. I just finished this one on audio. Here's the setup. And actually, I'm gonna let you guys know, we're just gonna let this roll. I realized that I actually forgot to do the setup in advance. I just found a hole in my script, Kaytee. So I read it really recently. So I'm just going to do this on the fly. Okay. So here's the setup, we have a story that's about the Russell women, this family of women, multiple generations of them, okay. And they have always, their home has always been this very particular house on this very particular land. And the house is magical. And it's a house of requirement, if you will, it is the kind of house that protects the family. It also has like the pantry will rearrange itself so that the ingredients for exactly what you need to what you're truly craving will be front and center. It has like a phone that only rings when super important things are happening but no one knows the phone number to it. So no one knows how anyone gets the number but they do when they absolutely need it. It is just all the magical things right? Kind of gives the family a push to do things that they really need to do to so it's kind of quirky personality. So they come from this house and our lead characters Maddie and she is about 21, 22 years old, and her mom is Lilith Russell and Lilith, she was the exception. Most of the other Russells have stayed close to home. Close to this house of theirs and each other, but Lilith, for reasons no one can explain went off on her own when she had Maddie and they have been traveling for like 21 years, only staying for about two years in each city constantly on the move. But Lilith always had an idea about where they should go. And she always made fantastic friends and everything was fine. Until at the beginning of our story, Lilith dies very suddenly. And Maddie now is on her own for the first time in her life. And she has to figure out what she wants to do next. Well, lo and behold, there is a will. And she has to go home to the Russell homestead with her family that she had that she knows but hasn't spent a ton of time with. And the will, is going to give her several things that she has to do before she can get the money that her mother has left for her. So she has no other choice. She has to stay for a significant period of time in the Russell home with her family. And she has to do these particular things which involve things like take a pizza making class at the local pizzeria, et cetera. There's several things on this list. Okay, you can imagine that shenanigans ensue. This book could not be any more different than the book that I was just talking about the Terraformers. This book is light and sweet and easy in almost every way, in the same way that I sometimes need a book like the Terraformers to be something completely different and very new. Sometimes I find that I get in a really specific mood. And I'll bet you guys do too, where I need a book that is safe and sweet and feels like a warm hug. And that certainly is what we find in the magic all around. I found this through Libro.FM and their ALC program and I hit play, honestly, without really knowing what it was about. That was good in a lot of ways. And I'll circle back and tell you a way that was not good. As I said, what you need to know about this book is that is sweet and light. This is not a cozy mystery, but this is more like Jenny Colgan, and very much like what would happen if Jenny Colgan and Sarah Addison Allen got together for a long girls weekend, and wrote a book together. That is this. And it was absolutely perfect for me. I needed the sweet romance. And it is very sweet. This is not a spicy book, I needed the story about not only found family, but in this book, the story is about what happens when your family needs to be found by you. We very much have that happening here. And I was rooting for it all the way through. There's a like I said, super smart house, if you like that in your books, you will love it in this book, The House in this book has a lot of opinions, and is really fairly sure that it knows exactly what needs to be given to the people who live in it. As I said, it gives them a push when they need it. There's some Halloween magic

stuff going on. There's a Sweet Christmas scene. It's all very Hallmark movie. But not this is not as sweet as a Hallmark movie. But I feel like it is for the same kind of mood when I was feeling a little bit sad. Just a few minutes spent in this world would make me feel better. But also sometimes because the characters were sad. And they were going through some hard things including, as they said the death of a parent. And sometimes they just need to feel understood. And I did with this book. It's got some great characters, and a grandmother character that I wanted to both have as my own grandmother and also be exactly like, her name is Sophia and I loved her. What I did find is that while this book was a perfect fit for me and the mood I was in I realized that I don't love this kind of book on audio. I'm still trying to figure out my audio rhythm. I keep starting books and then getting stuck behind them because they just don't feel right. But I know for a fact that I would have finished this one really fast if I had done it in print. I don't know, reader, know thyself and keep trying to know thyself. Speaking to that, I do want to say that you need to know your moods before you pick up this book. If you want what it offers, it will be perfect. If you don't it will be a treachery and annoying. And don't ask me about it. I really liked this book. This is *The Magic All Around* by Jennifer Moorman, which is m o o r m a n Interesting.

Kaytee Cobb 29:30

Yeah, like Nevermoor. Yeah, exactly. Right, right? Yes, I do. Like over the years. I think our long term listeners have learned that sometimes Meredith needs a book like this in her reading rotation, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:41

I love a sweet book with a little bit of magic Sarah Addison Allen. It's one of my favorite like that kind of like sweet magical realism.

Kaytee Cobb 29:49

Yeah, it feels as you described it, I was like, okay, yes, this is exactly the type of Sarah Addison Allen adjacent book that Meredith needs. Every once in a while. It's perfect

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:59

and it's Always when I'm having a really hard time in some other part of my life

Kaytee Cobb 30:04

fair, that's fair. Yeah. Okay, my third one. I feel like I'm this is very strange, but I'm the first one bringing the murder this time. And I'm going to talk about another indie press this book but this one's way back Sisters of the Lost Nation by Nick Medina. So this one comes from July of 2023. From Capital Books on K in Sacramento, California. They brought us this dark indigenous murder mystery. I couldn't put it down. Anna horn is our main character. She's a little paranoid, but that's to be expected. She has been bullied in the past. She works at the casino on reservation lands and they're often entitled visitors there who can't keep their opinions or their hands to themselves. And she's also been tormented by a tribal myth come to life, a disembodied head that rolls through the forest, ready to devour anything in its past.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:57

I hate it can't be real, I was wondering if you were going to talk about Stephen Graham Jones vibes because that's definitely at

Kaytee Cobb 30:58

right? That's that's not real, right? Is it? Anyway. As she starts to notice a pattern of reservation girls going missing, Anna is a little freaked out. But when her little sister disappears, it becomes personal. She'll do anything to bring Grace home, Nick Medina weaves together a thriller with a horror story as he unwraps mysteries around the Casino Hotel, which has a seedy underbelly of sex and drugs and wraps in tribal mythology. So we have a horror story, based around tribal myth and legend. While he had contributed to horror and native fiction anthologies before, this is Nick's debut novel, and it's the perfect amount of dark and twisty. For me, I listened to this one on a long drive in the middle of the broad daylight, but still felt totally creeped out anytime there were trees on either side of the road, like is there a head in that forest that's just rolling around, and if I break down, it might devour me. That's how I felt. This has a little bit of Dragon Tattoo vibes, Girl with the Dragon Tattoo vibes, which I don't hear a lot of comps for anymore. But we have this dark heroine we have some really dark stuff happening behind it. It's not quite as gory or sexual as some of the vibes in Girl with the Dragon Tattoo. So I don't want that to turn away anyone who would be scared to pick up something to that level. But when I pulled it up for this episode, I also found out that he has a new novel coming out April 16 of this year, and I've already added that one to TBR and requested a galley of it. It's called Indian Burial Ground and also tackles mythological horror and thrills and chills. So if you like Stephen Graham Jones, or some of those other authors writing in this genre, this is going to be a great fit for you. I can't wait for this master storyteller to creep me out again. This was Sisters of the Lost Nation by Nick Medina. Yeah, play here. Yes, that horror with mythology. mashup. That's like a total sweet spot for me. Yeah. I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:01

love that. And really, really well written to Yes, definitely. I love it. All right. Well, I am bringing the thrills and chills afterwards for this next one. This is a book that I've seen a few places but I have to bring to the big show because it was absolutely a gigantic hit for me. This is All Her Fault by Andrea Mara is an Irish author. All right, here's the setup. Our lead character is Marisa Irvine working mom very busy. End of the day, she arrives at a certain address 14 Tutor Grove, expecting to pick up her young son Milo from his first playdate with a boy had his new school. Marissa had been super happy that they had this playdate planned because her son had had a little bit this young he's only five and had had a little bit of a hard time sort of connecting up and making some friends. So she was really excited that this mom reached out to her and that they were able to get together. So she arrives at 14 tutor Grove all excited to hear about his new bestie but the woman who answers the door isn't a mother from the school. She isn't a nanny, and she doesn't have my low and so begins every parent's worst nightmare. It's such a good premise. It is such a banger.

Kaytee Cobb 34:17

No, I hate it. It's such terrifies me so much. Okay,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:22

this is a fantastic work of crime fiction that I will never ever remember the title of going forward but I will always remember the experience of reading it. It's got this fantastic premise there is nothing like this opening scene it puts a chill in every mother's heart. I will say that listeners to All Things Murderful which is part of our Patreon content have known about this one for a long time because Elizabeth Barnhill my co host on that show and the book buyer at Fabled, she told us about this book and we

were we've all been madly we were madly pre ordering it. It just came out so you are going to be able to get it too She knew that we were all going to absolutely love it. The way that this story spins out at the beginning was really smart. And it had me so interested at every point in what was going to happen next. And then as the story goes further and further, usually I would find, especially in books, where you're trying to answer one particular question that has like a lot of heart pounding dread behind it. Sometimes I get a little bit impatient with books like this. But this book does not have a mushy middle. Andrea Mara really keeps the tension going all the way through, but also keeps you reading the revolving points of view, were very interesting because you got pieces of the puzzle, you didn't have everything until near the end. If I do have a quibble with the book, I will say that the end felt fairly tidy to me, but I like a tidy ending. I just want I know that there are some people who don't I just kind of want to put that out there. But I, I loved it. For that reason. I am giving this book 4.25 heart pounding stars. I liked it a ton. I do want to say, as we always try to when we talk about books that are about a child kidnapping, that this is one that mamas will be able to handle. I don't want to give anything away, but I do feel there are probably a lot of people like you, Kaytee, who are saying, Oh, this book sounds so interesting, but I can't deal with gruesome child murder or abuse, something like that. This is not what we have here. This is just heart pounding tension. But you're going to be okay. This is all her fault. But Andrea Mara, it's great on audio. Irish voices, like you can't even believe it's so good on audio. Love Yes. This is a really, this is one of those like, don't I have another little laundry to fold kind of books? For sure. I loved it. Elizabeth always brings us the best books for sure. Alright, Kaytee, we are going to go into our deep dive which today we are going to talk about all things villains. We got a very well thought out email from bookish friend Mari Chapman who says, Hey, Kaytee and Meredith, I have a deep dive idea. Villains. Do you like to cheer for the villains? She asks, Do you prefer to hate or empathize with them? And what are the best and worst villains you've read? I would love to see maybe a top five list. She says Does the villain ever make or break the story? All things about antagonists? Maria, you put together a perfect deep dive topic for us. Seriously, we really appreciate it.

Kaytee Cobb 36:49

that. Yeah. Okay. I've been feeling I'm feeling like when I let you go As I let You Go, plus Fierce Kingdom. Plus, you know, like, I'm picturing all these like motherhood based psychological thrillers that again, I was okay for most of them. And like trying to mash them all together. Yes. We need more curated questions like this. Like this was like, Oh, perfect. I know exactly what I'm doing today.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:10

Oh my gosh, I loved it. I loved it so much. Okay, Kaytee. So do you like to cheer for the villain? How do you feel about villains in your books?

Kaytee Cobb 38:18

I love villains. I have the biggest problem with villains that feel flat on the page. Like I need a dimensional villain. I love a villain I can cheer for but I also love one that's really really immensely hateable. Like, as long as they're on some end of the spectrum and not like well, this is the bad guy. Right? That's it. You know, like, I just I can't with that. Yeah. So I actually thought of people that kind of fill in each of these different archetypes for me for villains, which I'm excited about, about you. I'm sure you you love a villain.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:53

I love a villain. It's been a subject of a lot of therapy for me, that I since I was really, really young. I mean, we've talked about the fact that when I was four or five years old, I watched Wizard of Oz. And I was both scared of and very attracted to from like an interest perspective, the Wicked Witch of the West. And I think I probably told my mom that and I just have to think that she was she was given a little bit of pause at that moment, like, man, if that's not the character you're supposed to be rooting for in that book in that movie. So that's something that I've always been like, why am I so interested in villains and as I've grown and and watched a lot of movies and knew and read a lot of books, I realized like you I don't like flat villain who's interested in that. But a really bad villain or really complicated villain, or a villain who seems like a villain but in fact is not. Oh, that's my favorite.

Kaytee Cobb 39:51

Or a good guy who actually has a little villain in him. I kind of like that too,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:56

but only like for really good reason. Right? So yes, absolutely. I love villain. I love a misunderstood person who is villainized. But when you actually know the full story, you realize that the person you thought was good is actually the villain and the person you thought was bad is actually the hero. That's another favorite.

Kaytee Cobb 40:19

Yes, I will add my other caveat to villain worship. It actually harkens back to your final book All Her Fault by Andrea Mara. I don't ever want to have complex or nuanced feelings about a villain that hurts children, or is a pedophile. Like, I want to Yes, so achingly clear that like this is a bad person, and you're allowed to root for them to die a painful death. Yeah, that needs to be Yeah, that's like my caveat around villains. There's no gray area around that for me,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:46

right? We can just make that like a core value of currently reading. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 40:50

I love that. Yeah, definitely for sure. But luckily fiction

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:53

gives us a lot of different ways to have villains that we can love to hate and hate to love without going to that particular place. Right. So yeah. All right. So I think what we're saying is in answered your question, I'm a complete us so I have to actually go through the questions. Yes. We are capable of empathizing with them. I am very capable of empathizing with a villain.

Kaytee Cobb 41:14

But do you prefer to hate or empathize with them?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:18

I would prefer to empathize by far okay. Yeah, by far, by far, that is some of my most favorite experiences are really going like, oh, that's what made that person that way.

Kaytee Cobb 41:33

Yes. You know, I do love that for sure. Alright, so

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:36

let's go over your archetypes and then I have put together my seven favorite villains. Okay. I couldn't live up to five.

Kaytee Cobb 41:44

I don't know how many I have here. I didn't. I didn't take the five. Very seriously. So I probably have maybe around five. Okay. It's close. Okay, I'm going to start with the the villains. I love to hate. And I think this might be on your list, Meredith because you're the one who introduced me to her. It's Kathy in East of Eden by John Steinbeck. Yes. The worst. She's layered. She's nuanced. And she's horrendous. Yes, she's on my top seven her with my entire heart. Like it's it can be fully dedicated to hating her. And I love that

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:17

right. A huge reason to read East of Eden, which, by the way, very readable, classic, very readable, classic. If you're wanting to tackle a classic. I think what I love about Kathy is that you don't see her coming. Yeah. And that, I think is something that I really like in a I mean, like there's I love that in a villain. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 42:37

I love that too. When you just get introduced to this character, and you're like, okay, somebody else to keep track of and then it turns out, they're diabolical. I love that. Yeah, sure. Yeah, yeah. Okay, another one that I really loved to hate. And it falls into this. Like, I don't have any nuance around people who hurt children. I read recently and brought to the show The Reformatory by Tananarive Due. There's a warden for the Home for Boys in that book. And he's just thoroughly horrifying in every way. He's the kind of uncomplicated villain not in that he's not fully drawn, but that you want bad things to happen to him. And that's what you're rooting for. By the end of the book. You're like, just like, I don't know, a fire a bad dog. Like something has to happen to this guy. And you're, you want it with your whole heart. And I love when that happens in my books, too. Yeah, for sure.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:37

Maybe I'll go back and forth with a couple of these because I think you know what I mean, we're kinda Yeah, same thing. Okay. All right. So the first one that I thought of was also Kathy from East of Eden, then I think we have to talk about without talking about we have to just put out there Rhys from Acotar from Acotar series. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 43:45

I was wondering if he would show up on this list. One

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:48

of my favorites, just one of my absolute he's so

Kaytee Cobb 43:51

dark and delicious in that way.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:54

Oh, just so good. The writing of that character, the arc of that character. He's so bad. He's so scary. He's so scary.

Kaytee Cobb 44:07

Yes. And that is hot.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:09

So good. I would say that Rhys is worth the price of entry for that entire 1000s of pages here. So definitely, definitely. Along those lines. Let me just insert also insert The Darkling from Shadow and Bone start the Grishaverse series by Leigh Bardugo. It starts with Shadow and Bone. The darkling is also a little snack.

Kaytee Cobb 44:40

But I watched the whole first season of that show. Yeah, I can't complain about who they cast. Yeah. I'll tell you that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:47

I didn't watch it. But I saw who they cast and I was like, okay, yeah, that looks right. Yeah, delicious.

Kaytee Cobb 44:51

Okay, in the middle, I put kind of, I think I would think I would call these like the villains that made me love villains. Maybe. And it's their kind of the classics that you might draw upon. So it's going to be Voldemort from Harry Potter and Sauron from Lord of the Rings. Yeah. And like these very classical, really bad dudes that make the pivots in the story happen. So these two I feel like have to be recognized on this list. Well,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:21

can I also slide in there the White Witch from Narnia? Oh, perfect, right, like, kind of children's classics. You know, those are fairy tales, but like the big bad, evil, yes. Right. And as a kid, I was like, some of my earliest like, literary nibbling things were like, Look, she's the White Witch, but then she's really evil. Because you think witches will be wearing black but she's wearing what and I was just like, very like liquid I figured out I'm like,

Kaytee Cobb 45:53

autiful instead of like wrinkly and sporty and Right, right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:57

Pretty people can be evil to. Exactly. So yeah, that's a that's a definite, a definite archetype for sure. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 46:08

Okay. So along with Voldemort, though I do want to talk a little bit about Draco because he's a little bit of a more complex bone. And with the rise of drum miny fanfic, like Jamie mentioned, when we talked to Knox and Jamie, I think we're getting a little more or a lot more nuanced portrayal of him. That's less of like, he's just a high school bully. That is like, his only thing is being an antagonist to Harry. He's only a mirror. And I realized that fanfic obviously takes place outside of the cannon, but to give him this depth and well roundedness outside of what was originally portrayed for him, I think is so cool. And I like the idea of focusing in on a villain that wasn't very interesting in order to give him depth and nuance and interest in a new way.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:57

Yeah. Oh, for sure. Absolutely. That's one of my absolute favorite things. And right along those lines, I'm going to join you right there in the Harry Potter universe. And I've told you Kaytee, to me, one of the most terrifying villains in all of literature is Dolores Umbridge. Yes. And she is an Enneagram one she is my inner critic. That is who is inside me telling me that I am wrong and bad all the time. And so I mean, that character is so terrifying. Yeah, because you don't see her coming cuz she's so cute with her little twin set pink. Yeah, with her litter. Cats.

Kaytee Cobb 47:34

Cats are evil. That's my other thing though.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:37

Cats are not evil. But

Kaytee Cobb 47:39

Cats are evil to me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:40

They but yes, certainly, you know, familiars can you know can be

Kaytee Cobb 47:46

no I actually I love a familiar Yeah, just don't like it's the doors Umbridge type of cat like, Oh, my cute little kitties on the wall. And it's actually hiding like something sick. Yeah, and twisted. Oh,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:57

God, Dolores Umbridge is absolutely a terrifying, a terrifying villain that we that we love to hate. I'm going to throw a weird one in here, but my list would not be complete. And there's only gonna be like a few 1000 of you that are like, yes. In the fourth book of the three pine series, A Rule Against Murder. Peter Morrow's mom. She is one of the most villainous mothers, one of the most toxic, villainous, truly damaging villains that you could ever find that I've ever read. And she's in the middle of this village, quote unquote, village mystery which we all know that's not what it is. But I just love that Louise Penny

has created she's created a lot of great villains. Mrs. Morrow is one of the absolute best. So she was one of the first ones that popped into my head. Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 48:46

yes, I love that. Okay, I only have one more on my list. But it had to be kind of a bookend for me because you introduced me to Kathy. And also, I'm gonna see what you think about me putting this on the villain list, the Count of Monte Cristo, who is the hero of the story, of course. But his whole story is revenge on someone who did him dirty. So I love like a hero villain and, and die hero but not that is genuinely out to ruin someone's life. Like destroy someone's life. And you get to root for them the whole way. So he's he is the other end of the spectrum in that he's like a villain with a heart of gold. Like we want good things for him. We want him to thrive and survive and also successfully destroy someone. And I love rooting for that vengeful, central nature to him so much. So that's why I put him on one of my favorite villains list.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:50

Yeah, it wouldn't have occurred to me to put him on the villains list. But I mean, I think you're absolutely right in what you say he is both the hero and the antihero of that book and Probably is exactly like if I had to narrow down to a single reason. That's probably why it's my favorite book of all time. Right. Right. Although, I think that if you are righteously vengeful, then there are other villains that you are simply vanquishing in your vengeance, which is

Kaytee Cobb 50:18

exactly yeah. Which is what he's doing. Of course, yes. And like Butcher and Blackbird that I talked about last week. Like they're serial killers, and they're killing bad people. And I love that, like, yes, tear out his eyeballs. Thank you so much, because he was the person because he was a horrible person. Yeah, exactly. So it's like, They're the heroes of the story. And also, they're really bad serial killers, right? They're excellent serial killers.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:42

Well, one of my I'm just gonna give you two more that lean into my favorite genre the the mystery and thriller genre, the which of course, we find a lot of bad guys and evil people and not a lot of not always really memorable villains in that genre. But I think we have to say Hannibal Lecter from Silence of the Lambs, which of course, was a fantastic book way before it was a movie. Certainly, Sir Anthony Hopkins does a fantastic job of playing that character. I read the book back when I had just had Devin. I read it aloud to her as I was nursing her. Oh, excellent. She was newborn, she's fine. She's fine. But I think that that character is is both wholly evil. And yet as you're reading it, you feel yourself being kind of magnetically drawn to him. And so very interesting, then, now this last one of mine is very controversial. I mean, Brady Hartsfield from Mr. Mercedes.

Kaytee Cobb 51:39

Okay, I haven't read this one. All right. Well, people who have this

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:43

is the Mr. Mercedes, like the very beginning, we know kind of, we very quickly find out who it is. It's a guy who runs over a bunch of people in a car. But the book itself Mr. Mercedes, by Stephen King, is this cat and mouse where we're, we know Brady Hartsfield from the beginning, we know who he is, we're getting his point of view. And also the point of view of the cop chasing him. So as we're going through the book, we're ping-pong back and forth, and we're learning all of these things about what made this horrible, awful evil killer. The don't get me wrong. I'm not saying there's anything good about that character. But as far as the writing of a memorable villain, who is fully realized in a 360 way, Stephen King is masterful at that across many, many, many of his books, but in Mr. Mercedes, it's an unforgettable villain who by the end of it, you for better or for worse, understand you don't agree with or route for. But you understand and I think that saying a lot to write a villain, like that is not easily done. So he's a very memorable villain to me. Okay.

Kaytee Cobb 52:51

I like it. I think there. You're right. There are a lot of Stephen King books where we can see, you know, like the the fan in misery that kidnaps the author. Oh, yes. Uh huh. whose name I can't pull out of my head right now. But fantastic. Absolutely. Yes. Okay. I thought of one more, and I just have to add it. And I'll just be brief. Hench by Natalie Zine Walschots. Yeah. Because she's working for supervillains. Right? Yes. And so you're like, Well, we know who the villains are. Yeah. But then are they the villain? Are they? Right? Are the super heroes, the heroes, right? Because I like having to question that as well. And I think that one's a really great option for this. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:32

Hench is a great example of a book that up ins those notions of hero and anti hero. Yeah, but in a really fun way. Like it. Yeah, that's a good, that's a good one. Because I love the villain in that in that book. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 53:45

He's so good. And she's coming out with a sequel of bookish friends have told us we're very excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:50

So excited about that. All right, good. So hopefully Mari, we have answered your question about how we feel about villains. We will put something up on social and of course, we as always, we want to know who are your favorite villains? Or are you the kind of reader that you're like, if someone's bad? I don't want any part of it. We want to know about that too, for sure. All right, Kaytee, let's visit the fountain What's your wish this week?

Kaytee Cobb 54:14

Okay, this week I'm going old school currently reading and I'm going to press a book into our listeners hands. So I wish to press How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith. And to our listeners hands. I read this book two and a half years ago, and I love it so much. But I had to manually search through my previous show outlines to make sure I had not already pressed it into our hands because I was really worried that like kaytee there's no way you just love this book. But I think the timing was just right for me. I'm not ever get to do it. Yeah. So my only words on my online review were absolute perfection. And I still stand by that. Clint Smith here takes us on a field trip through American history and the US

landscape to explore both historical and current events. And that is astonishing and proposed Have enough. But Clint Smith is also an first a poet. His words are expertly penned, chosen with care. He examines the history of America, especially through the lens of Black Americans and Africans from 1619 Onward. And each of the locations he visits plays a special role in the history he unpacks. During that chapter, I was Googling place names in order to better understand the geography and to be able to see what he was describing with my own eyes. So this book was very multisensory. For me. It's nonfiction, but its narrative and propulsive and interesting the whole way through, I own it in multiple formats. And I press it into the hands of readers I talk to in real life regularly, which is why Finally, I'm pressing it into all of your hands. I hope if you haven't read it, you'll pick it up. It's How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith. Well,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:46

that is a wonderful press. And we're going to go from the highest of the highs to a very, very practical matter in my my wish, my wish is super simple. I wish that I could convince every single person who is a patron of our show, or any show on Patreon to stop using the Patreon app, correct to listen to this content. One of the most upsetting things maybe the only upsetting thing that came out of this listener survey was how many people are availing themselves of our content through the Patreon app? Or only through the emails? Exactly. It's just a kludgy listening experience. And so what's much better is to because you obviously by definition, your people who use your podcast player, that's how you're listening to this show, right? Now, we'll imagine if all of your favorite Patreon content again, whether you're a patron of ours, or anybody else, would automatically automatically without you having to do anything else after one very simple piece of setup flow into your podcast app of choice. And it's just there waiting for you the second that you are ready for it. So what we're gonna do we have a fantastic listener, Elizabeth marnik, who created a very simple and very short like, nine second Yeah, like 12 second video, yeah, right, like a video that literally walks you through, Do this, do this, do this. And then all of this problem will be solved for all of you. And it just is such an easy problem. To solve it, I need to wish it at the film that people would solve it, please do it right. We

Kaytee Cobb 57:21

will also share that video directly into your Patreon feed. So it will get emailed to you if you are a Patreon subscriber. I'm currently reading this morning with this episode to make sure that the 50% of you who are not using your own podcast app to listen can go do that. Your lives will be better for it. I think this is a great

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:39

way it's the right way to listen to Patreon content. So from your

Kaytee Cobb 57:43

resident type one she was telling you it's the right way. It's the right

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:46

way. Please take my advice. I would really really love it. That's my wish pink splash pink splash. Alright, 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 @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 58:00

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram full show

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:04

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 in our show notes and on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 58:14

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us especially if you want to come to the Tucson Festival of Books at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com. And

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:24

if you want to become a patron subscriber, you can do that it's \$5 a month and you get access to a ton of great content that can go directly into your podcast feed. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All three of those things make a huge difference in our finding our perfect audience. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 58:44

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:49

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 58:52

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:54

Happy reading Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 58:55

Happy reading Meredith