



Season 6, Episode 31: Puzzle Competitions + Kaytee and Meredith's Bookish Retreat

Mon, Mar 11, 2024 • 59:09

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 00:23

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 listening to things that helped me stay scared.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

Stay scared. Oh, no, Meredith. Go with it. Kaytee. I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona. And I am joining all the libraries for more than just books. This is episode number 31 of season six. And we are so glad you're here. Well, that's

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:00

an interesting one, too.

Kaytee Cobb 01:01

Oh, yeah. We got lots of fun stuff to talk about today. It sounds like we do we do, which

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:06

is excellent. Because we just got back from spending three days together. So it's great that we still have lots of things to talk about.

Kaytee Cobb 01:12

It doesn't get Oh, that's amazing. It doesn't.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:15

It doesn't. Alright, so a couple of things right here up front first speaking of those three days together our deep dive today we are going to give you guys a little peek behind the scenes. Kaytee and I just went on our annual Currently Reading retreat, just the two of us to do a little bit of planning spend some time together. So we're going to tell you a little bit about how we spent that time in our deep dive later on. And before then we want to the eagle eyed Eagle eared among you probably realized that last week was the first episode of the month and our lovely show regulars Roxanna Kassam Kara and Mary Heim were so good to sit in for me and Kaytee, for the first time ever, we had a show where neither one of us were there. They did a wonderful job. And you guys had an episode in your podcast players even though Kaytee and I were taking the week off. It was magic. We didn't do a Patreon. And we didn't ask them to do that. Because why should they have to do that? Right, Kaytee?

Kaytee Cobb 02:13

Exactly. Yeah, they made a lot of jokes last week about how they were kind of taking the reins while mom and dad were away while the parents were out of the house. They were throwing a kegger, that kind of thing. So we kind of expected all the chores were not going to get done. Exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:25

They weren't going to pay the electric bill while they were having their book party. So we what we wanted to do this week, instead of really doing an ad for our Patreon would you guys know this show is completely ad free because of our bookish friends, our supporters on Patreon who join us at \$5 a month. Not only do they keep the show ad free, Katie, but this month, we're especially grateful to them. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 02:47

we are so grateful. Because the only reason we were able to have that time away, and y'all were still able to get a regular episode in your ears is because of our bookish friends. They made it possible for us to go away together possible for us to pay our people to man the ship while we were gone, we were able to pay Megan to get those episodes edited and uploaded while we are away. And we were able to survey our community and see what's working best for them all because of our patrons. This show, obviously, six years ago started as a labor of love. And it was a lot of work for both of us requiring a lot of time and energy to make it happen every week. And a lot of stress. When we couldn't make it work for whatever reason from making sure tasks got done to making sure we had someone to have a conversation with if one of us was sick or traveling, it continues to grow and thrive six years in because of the ways we've been able to manage that time and energy requirement and pay people to keep it moving. Even when we can't be here ourselves, which is so special and truly magical. It

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:47

really is. So thank you, thank you to all of you who listen, that's always the most important thing. And then thank you to everyone who supports us. It really makes doing this as fun as it could possibly be. And it is a lot of fun. It really is. Alright, Katie, that's our Mischief Managed for March. So let's go ahead and talk about our bookish moments of the week. What's yours?

Kaytee Cobb 04:12

Okay, Meredith, we love libraries here at currently reading of course. And this week, I realized there's another library that is technically slightly closer to my new home than the one I currently go to. But the win here is that it's part of a separate library system. So it's not part of the Maricopa County Library District, which is the one that I currently go to. That's what it's part of, but it's the Chandler Public Library system. That means it's a new card with different books available for checkout, but I found this out because a friend told me about a local speed puzzling competition. I've got big because you know how exciting they are hosting it at this branch. It's a partner competition to put together a 500 piece puzzle, but I really think I want to try it. So now I'm looking for a partner. This is also slightly related to the fact that one of our bookish friends let us know that aldi put those puzzle boards on sale that y'all love, where it has the drawers underneath it can have a plexiglass piece on top of the puzzle to keep it safe from whomever might be scrolling with your puzzle pieces, whether you have a cat that likes to throw them on the ground, like Meredith or a dog that likes to eat them when they're down there, or a child that is not useful in putting together puzzles. So I got a new puzzle board. And there's a speed puzzling competition nearby. And I feel like the library is just making my dreams come true. I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:28

love it. I love it. Well, you would be very good in a speed puzzling competition. We were doing some puzzles when we were together, and I love it. But fast is not a word that I would use to describe my methodology. But you're very quick.

Kaytee Cobb 05:45

I am very quick and very methodical about it. So my methodology is being methodical. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:50

Every time I would go into the room where the puzzle was, I would be like, how the heck did she get so much?

Kaytee Cobb 05:56

There's another 75 pieces in here. What happened? Right? Yeah, good.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:01

Well, we all wish you the greatest of

Kaytee Cobb 06:03

luck. And now I'll let you know if it happens.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:05

Okay, well, my bookish woman of the week, Kaytee, I told you about a little bit when we were together, but I'm still so excited about it. I found a new bookish podcast and I have gone down a rabbit hole with this. It is a podcast called Talking Scared. The guy who runs it is a British man who is wonderful to listen to, and incredibly smart and talks about books. So amazingly well, his name is Neil McRobert. I mean, could that be any more perfect. And he hosts this podcast, Talking Scared. It is a podcast about horror books. But what I really love about it is his definition of horror is a lot like mine, which means that

it's not just a Oh, hey, books that have a ton of gore, or a ton of violence, or a ton of body horror, those kinds of things. It's books he considers to be horrifying. So sometimes that means like some of the darker thrillers or some of the darker mysteries, and then of course, and then true horror, too. It's so good. I highly recommend if you're interested in I know not everyone is but we do have a lot of a lot of people who love this genre like I do. If you're interested. I started out listening to his episode number 176, which is entitled best horror novels of 2023. This one is the perfect way to start out. You get a sense of his personality. You get a sense of the way that he talks about books. I know a lot of people in our survey told us they love kaytee the fact that we can talk about books enough that you have a sense of them, but not so much that you feel like you read the gosh darn book. Yeah, Neil does the same thing. He is very good at giving you a sense of a book enough to make you want to read it not to make you feel like a cheese. Okay, don't need to read that one. So I highly recommend if you love this genre, give him a listen. The Talking Scared pod I am I'm going back to the beginning. And I just when you find a new podcast, that like is everything you want it to be and it has 176 episodes in the can already. It's the best feeling. And so yes, I am I really honestly, I'm not doing a lot of audiobook listening because I just am listening to a lot of podcasts, including this one. So

Kaytee Cobb 08:26

all right, I like it. I know we're gonna have people being like I heard about you in the Currently Reading podcast and then he'll be like, Who the heck is that? And we'll connect that way. I'm guessing I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:35

would love it. I would love to meet him. He seems delightful. So you're really excited about that. All right, Kaytee, let's get to our current reads. What's your first one this week?

Kaytee Cobb 08:45

Okay. My first one is one that sat on my shelves for more than two years. And then I finally picked it up and it blew me away. This one's called Love in Color by Bolu BABALOLA. So I bought this one, like I said about two years ago. And then this February, I finally asked Katie if she wanted to read it together. And I didn't know what we were getting into, except for the fact that the subtitle is "mythical tales from around the world retold" and that is right up my alley. So this is akin to a short story collection. But each one draws on a myth, some of which are well known and some of which are a little more obscure. There are stories in this collection that pull from Greek mythology like psyche, right, the ones that pull from the legends of the Middle East, like Shahara, Zed and Thursby ancient Egyptian tales like that of Nefertiti, the Chinese tale of Xenu, and many others from the African content, like Naeli. And ya, each one feels like the perfect little snippet of a story and many are brought into modern times, including tales that take place in boardrooms or dorm rooms or parties with DJs. And like loud music and lights like this is not ancient Greece in the maze with the Minotaur type of storytelling. None of them felt repetitive to each other or to the original text. So it wasn't like wow, she put a lot of these in a corporate office building. That's kind of weird, even though that does feel very mythological sometimes, right. She made them all very distinct from each other. And each one left me wondering if I should go reread or even read for the first time the story that it was inspired by, I didn't do so. But I was happy to find a list at the end of this book that includes her sources for inspiration so that it's possible to do a deeper dive of that sort. Even though I didn't have the time or the brain space to do so this month, this collection really feels like it spans time and place. And well, I had read and enjoyed her 2022 release, which is

called Honey and Spice. I was really impressed that this collection is her debut publication, because it felt rich in meaning and content and context. It just It really blew me away. It has exceptionally high ratings on review platforms like story graph, and good reads, especially for a short story collection, which I find usually score lower because of the fact that there's such a broad range of stories. And people will always say some of these were hits for me. Some of them were not. And so they end up writing more toward the middle of the road. This one was a hit from beginning to end. For me though it was so well done. And I keep thinking about these stories and little snippets from each one of them. It's Love in Color, mythical tales from around the world retold by Bolu BABALOLA.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:19

Don't you love it when you find a book on your shelf that has been there for a long time? And then you read it and you're like, Why did I wait too long? That's such a job. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 11:27

Kaytee Yes. Like I was so proud of me for buying us this book, even though it was a couple of years ago. I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:33

love that. All right. I'm bringing a lot of mystery and murder today for a few episodes in a row. I know people have noticed Hey, you know, you're kind of mixing some stuff in great, we love it. Today. I'm coming back to yield wheel house full force. Yeah, full force in with the mystery and murder in my first book. My first book is from a series that has really become a problem for me. And I'll tell you that I'll tell you why. Because very rarely do I read books in a series kind of close together. This series has got like I am forcing myself to put other books in between I'm really loving it. This is the series that starts DI Adam Foley and it's by Cara Hunter who's a British author who had discovered on my trip to the UK in September. This one is called No Way Out. It's book number three. So here's the setup, as always, with this series, and one of my favorite things about the series is that it's set in Oxford, which Betsie and I got a chance to go to to visit Oxford. So now of course I can picture everything. In this story. We start on a cold and rainy Christmas Day and firefighters have pulled two children from their home, which has just burned to the ground. And then we find out that their parents are nowhere to be found. The parents are not in the house. The kids were there alone. Oh no. Why were the kids left in the house alone? Why is neither parent answering their phone where the parents kidnapped, murdered we have all of these questions. Our lead character DI Adam Foley believes strongly from the get go that this is not an accident. This is not this is the scene of a crime. And then new evidence comes to light and confirms Adam and his team's worst suspicions the blaze was arson. So we are left with them to figure out who would have torched a seemingly happy family's home on Christmas Day. It's a great setup. So this as I said, this police procedural series from Cara Hunter is has quickly just eclipsed all other series right now. I feel myself wanting to read the series really click quickly. And normally, I put a lot more space like a year or more space in between when I read from a series. But I bought the first book in the UK, which is I bought recently to the show, it's called Close to Home. And in that same trip, I bought this one No Way Out. Now I didn't realize until I started reading it that this is book three in the series. But I was completely sucked in and I didn't want to stop. So a little animal behavior there. I hope you'll forgive me. But Cara Hunter writes this kind of book, you get into it. And within a couple of pages you are at the crime scene. And in this case, we are viewing a very messy, gory and mysterious crime scene. The

premise, as you heard is just such a hook. It's very simple, but it's still one that presents several possibilities for where the story can go. That's always where I'm happiest at the beginning of a mystery when I really have no idea what's going on. And Hunter definitely takes us on a ride, but it's a ride that makes a lot of sense. It's a ride that has a clear path and a clear destination. She's not weaving in and out and giving us red herrings and taking us on ridiculous side trips. Everything about this series makes good sense and that's part of the reason that I absolutely love it. When I talked about Close to Home, I said the one thing about that book that I did didn't love was the lead character Adam Foley himself because in that book, I mentioned that he seemed weirdly out of place in his own story. But I had a gut feeling that this is going to change as the series went on. And I was right. In this third installment, we find him securely placed in the center of his story, we find him leading his team. And also he gets lots of backstory into his personal life. And that element of things really took off for me, I wanted to get to the next book, because I knew there would be another great mystery, but also because I wanted to find out what was going to happen in his personal life. I'm really invested in that character. And for me, this is my sweet spot for a police procedural mysteries that keep my interest and and make perfect sense the entire way through each book and an overarching story of the lead character and his team that make me want to find out what's happening in their lives. I think if you really love Deborah Crombie series then Cara Hunter's Adam Foley series is going to be a great fit for you. This is the third book in that series, No Way Out by Cara Hunter.

Kaytee Cobb 13:47

Okay, Meredith, you know, we're all wondering, now, do you amend your feral animal behavior? Or like, are you going back to book two next, or will you go on?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:15

I already did. I already read book two. And currently right now, as in five minutes before we hit record, I was reading book four. Okay. I have I'm, it's a real problem. But this book four, actually, her publisher just sent sent to me. And she had reached out just being happy to hear her first book talks about on the show. And so now I think I'm gonna have to wait a little while while she writes another book. So that almost makes me feel better. But I really have just gotten so stuck on this series.

Kaytee Cobb 16:44

Yeah. She's so she's putting the brakes on for you now. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:47

I mean, I really think it has nothing to do with me personally. But that's the net effect. Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 16:51

Well, yes. Oh, yeah. All right, perfect. Okay, I actually also have a book in series today for my second one. It's Emily Wilde's Map of the Otherlands.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 17:01

I have a good good. I'm wondering what you thought about this. I have some

Kaytee Cobb 17:05

things to say. So this novel is the second in the Emily Wilde series, which captured many of us in early 2023. Especially if you like me, or a lot of people read the galley or picked it up immediately, because you just desperately wanted more wonderful, cozy fantasy. Here's the setup for Book Two without spoiling book one because that makes me crazy. This novel picks up where book one left off in that the adventure that Emily and her co researcher Wendell Bumblebee went on, in that the book has concluded, but it has a lingering consequence that they want to find a solution for Emily has finished her Encyclopedia of fairies from the first novel and it has really put her on the map for scholarships surrounding the capital F Folk in this world. She also has uncovered so many of the secrets around the folk and how to interact with them and research them safely. So now she'd like to continue to contribute to the field with an attempt at mapping the lands that the folk inhabit. That also allows her and Wendell to travel the world and this time it lands them in the Austrian Alps. As a reminder, the first book took place in the Scandinavian region of Norway. It is once again snowy and atmospheric, which means if you're facing a freak snowstorm, a spring attempts to make an appearance, this might still be the perfect time to pick this one up. Wendell and Emily are searching for doors that connect other fairy realms in the Alps with a side quest of keeping Wendell safe from his murderous stepmother. There are deadly attacks to contend with poison and its consequences, and even the occasional flutters of feelings. It leaves a clear setup for book three at the end, but also feels fine to finish and you don't have to die waiting for the next in the series. You don't need to contact Heather Fawcett and say Hello, can I get the galley for the next one right away, please. I want to hold space as I finish the setup for the fact that everybody's allowed to have their own opinions about a book. So I'll say that this one mostly didn't work for me. But it's going to be so great for so many of our listeners. And I know that Mary Heim really loved it. I gave it just three stars, though. And that's because the parts of the story that I'm most loved about the first one, which was the development of the relationship between Emily and Wendell, going from annoyance to grudging acceptance to maybe something more, were some of my favorite parts. It's not a spoiler to say that in this book very early in the book, Wendell is poisoned, and it saps his energy and his otherworldly powers. That means that while he's looking forward to more of that fantastic chemistry between them, Wendell sleeps through more than half of this book, I nearly abandoned it at 50% in but was encouraged to keep going despite my boredom, because what I was hoping for was just around the corner. While technically that was correct, it just didn't deliver for me in the way I had hoped. Of course, I say all this and I can tell you that on story graph, it has a 4.4 average rating, which is higher than the first book Emily Wilde's Encyclopaedia of Faeries. And those numbers hold true on Goodreads as well with the second book being rated markedly higher than the first so if you're a fan of the first novel, I recommend that you pick this one up. But if you're a reader like me and you had very specific things that you loved, I know that I was disappointed in a pretty big way that didn't change throughout the book. That means overall, I'm keeping book one on my keeper shelf my forever loves. But Book Two has gone the way of the magic in this series. For me, it has left the building. This is Emily Wilde's Map of the Otherlands by Heather Fawcett.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:24

Katie, first of all, great setup on this book, that was a really, really well done setup. This is exactly why we continue to bring books even if they were met, or they didn't work for us, because you did a really good job of letting us know what didn't work for you. And then I know, for example, I liked but didn't love the first book one. Encyclopedia fairies liked it quite like very happily. But it wasn't

fantastic for me, right? The parts of it that I didn't love, were the parts that you did really love. So several people had already said to me, including Mary Heim. You know, Meredith, I really think you know, you're kind of three stars on that one. I think this one is really going to be a hit for you. And from what you just said, I know for sure that it will be because the stuff are involving their relationship and the will they want me and all that was really tiresome for me. But the other stuff, the fairy stuff, the other worldly stuff, the magic construct the cozy fantasy of it. All I've heard is really, really strong in this one. And then and that's what you said. So this is exactly why we bring books even if they don't work for us, because now I'm like, Oh, it sucks that it didn't work for you. But I know I need to prioritize it for this reader.

Kaytee Cobb 21:38

Yeah, especially if you get another Austin Cold Snap, where the next day, all of a sudden, it's 30 degrees colder than it was today. That's the time to pick it up. Perfect.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:46

I love it. I love it. Love it. Love it. Okay, well, Kaytee, I am in a little bit of the same situation here with my second book. Now my second book is very different, but a lot of similarities and how we felt about it. So my second book is called A Haunting in the Arctic, and it's by CJ Cooke. Here's the setup. Our story brings us two timelines. In the first one its present day and we're on the remote coast of Iceland. Urban explorer, Dominique is exploring the wreck of a ship called the Orman which has sat in its watery grave on the coast for over 100 years, news has come that the Orman will soon be destroyed and dumped further out to sea. So Dominique has braved the truly forbidding climate, to find what secrets this ship may hold before they're lost forever. The ship has a reputation for being cursed, and several other explorers have met untimely ends when trying to do this exact same thing. So why would Dominique come alone, in the middle of winter to this wreckage, minds with a scintilla of common sense want to know our other timeline is in the year 1901. And our lead character there is the privilege daughter of a rich shipowner. The daughter's name is Nikki one night she's attacked and kidnapped, and she wakes up on board the Orban a whaling ship that has embarked on what will be its last voyage with land weeks away. It's just her, the freezing ocean, and the crew. And they all think that they are owed something by her and her family, including her father, who owns the ship, don't read any blurbs that take you any further. That's all you need to know. All right. I thought a lot some books when I finish, I just know exactly what I'm going to say about them. This book, I really had to think about it because it has a lot going for it. This was my first book by this author, CJ Cooke, who also wrote at least two other books, including The Lighthouse Witches, which was an indie press List choice, which was a huge hit with our group and The Nesting, both of which have been recommended multiple times in the bookish friends group. But when this book was pitched to me as a combination of Yrsa Sigurdardottir's, I Remember you and Mira Grant's Into the Drowning Deep. I couldn't resist it. Plus, I've been all about the Arctic lately. So that's how it was pitch, but hold on to your hats because we're going to talk about that pitch. So all the ingredients that I absolutely love, were there. But for some reason, the pacing of this book was such a struggle for me. There were long periods of time where I just felt like absolutely nothing was happening. And then you'd get a little sprinkle of something interesting, followed by another long period of time where not a lot was happening. I mean, things were happening, but somehow everything just felt so flat and two dimensional. I know that I liked the book more after I finished it than I did when I was in the middle of it. So I'm glad that I finished it. The ending was actually

pretty good, not ground breaking, but it was better than the other parts of the book had been. And then I read the author's note. And I felt like I liked the book five times more, I really, really wish and think that that author's note should come first. Yes, there are some elements that it does give away. But overall, I think that my enjoyment of the book would have been so much higher, having had the context from what her research and intent was from the start. So there's a reason that they put the author's note at the end. So I want to be clear about that. I don't want to spoil anything for you. But for me, if I could go back and do it again, I would start there. I didn't think this book was especially scary. And I didn't think it did the cold of the Arctic as much justice as several other books I have read recently do. And there are several threads in the book that just don't get tied up at all or tied up well. But in the end, you do have a sense of what happened. So if that kind of closure is key to you, you can know that it's there. There are trigger warnings, and massive ones for sexual trauma, and also childbirth and loss of a child. Definitely proceed with caution on both of those, they're some of those scenes were the most impactful. And I think that the number one thing I would say about this book is if you go into it, knowing that it's going to be emotionally darker than it is hauntingly scary, you will be much better served. But if you just want scary Iceland, just go read I remember you. But this book is A Haunting in the Arctic by CJ Cooke.

Kaytee Cobb 21:47

Okay. See, and look, this is exactly right for me. Because as you were describing this, I was like, Okay, this sounds amazing. I want this and then you finished up with your setup. And I knew that this is not in fact, a book for me, which is perfect, because now I can keep it off my TBR Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:59

I mean, again, it has a lot going for it for sure. But you just need to know that it's more of an emotional story than a haunting story. Yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 27:07

definitely. Okay, love that. My third book this week is nonfiction. And it's by my boyfriend, he doesn't know he's my boyfriend. It's I Contain Multitudes by Ed Yong. Oh, right. And I love him. So this one is nonfiction. And my reading it was solely based on the fact that I loved his newer release, which is An Immense World, so very much it was when I top books of the year. So I dove into his back catalogue, which I had been itching to do ever since I heard Ed Yong speak at the Santa Fe Literary Festival last May. He is an experienced and phenomenal science writer of the Atlantic. But this was his first full book, although while researching, I did find out he has an essay collection that was released prior to this, I need it. And it's out of print, and I can't find it anywhere. So if anybody has, it's not exactly rocket science and is willing to sell it for me for an exorbitant fee. I will buy it from you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:00

Didn't you meet Ed Yong? Could you just ask him directly? Well, I

Kaytee Cobb 28:03

met him as like one of the regular people at the festival, not as like an industry insider. So I don't know, maybe I'll try and get in touch.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:11

That'd be fun. You might as well use it for something.

Kaytee Cobb 28:13

I love him. Katie had to keep me from approaching him directly after the festival was over. Because I was like, Oh my gosh, it's Ed Young. And she's like, Kaytee, he's like a regular human. You can't just go up to him. We see we have this exact conversation. Yes, no matter. Let's talk about the fascinating world of the microbiome. Every animal whether human squid or wasp is home to millions of bacteria and other microbes. In this book, I contain multitudes Ed Yong prompts us to look at ourselves and our animal companions in a new light, less as individuals and more as the interconnected, interdependent species that we are. It said that the microbe eye view of the world is the most significant scientific research happening in the world right now. We truly had no idea up until a few years ago how much the microbiome of each human being can so profoundly impact the trajectory of their lives had really illuminates the idea here, that research into microbes and bacteria is the wave of the future, and will help us better care for ourselves, the animals of the world and the planet as a whole. For instance, there's well documented evidence that newborn babies get a huge number of their original microbes from their moms, as there's so much overlap in touches shared food consumed, air breathed between the two of them, but those initial bacteria communities can determine how likely it is that that person that the baby becomes will get cavities, or the effort needed for them to maintain a certain weight and even the way they digest their food and the nutrients they receive from those calories. And this is true throughout the plant and animal kingdom and gets into the idea of symbiotic relationships on the cellular level, in a way that's really fascinating. However, I did spend quite a bit of time in this book feeling like I'm glad I allowed myself to fall in love with him before I read it. It is much more Scientific and almost feels inaccessible at times, compared to An Immense World. Of course, he's not necessarily writing it for me for the Average Joe Schmo to be able to understand every single concept perfectly. But I was able to grok just about everything, including the often hilarious footnotes in a man's world. And in this one, I found myself regularly feeling like it was going over my head, the footnotes, thankfully, were at the end of the book, and I was grateful to be able to skip them entirely, because just the actual text was already a lot for my brain to handle and try to understand. So while I really enjoyed this, I would more highly recommend an immense world, especially if you're getting started with Ed Yong and want a way to fall in love with him like I did. An immense world is also narrated by him as an author on the audiobook. So while I had the paper book in front of me, and took notes and read footnotes, having his voice in my ears was also really special for that one. And this one is not narrated by him. I did love it, though. And I still think about this stuff all the time, like the fact that there's more microbes in a tablespoon, than there are stars in the sky. That's how tiny microbes are, wow, need them to survive. If you are in a totally sterile environment, then you end up with stuff like the fact that people need transplants after they take really intense antibiotics, because their bit bacteria has been so wiped out that their gut no longer functions correctly. It's just amazing to me that we have gone through these entire periods of human history where we're like, what would be better is to get rid of all germs. And it turns out, we would die, all of us would die if we actually got rid of all germs, and getting to understand that research more and understand how impactful they are to our lives was really cool. So I did really like it. I just loved an immense world more. This one is I Contain Multitudes by Ed Yang.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:52

Very interesting. That's a really, really good one. And I wonder who he was writing that for if he had this big success with the immense world. And it seems like he really did I mean, I, we talked about it a lot here, we saw a lot of people reading it, I've seen it at most bookstores kind of phased out. So it felt like it wasn't a niche title,

Kaytee Cobb 32:14

right. But this one came out first. So I think he was making his way toward that idea of being able to talk to the more common human about science, because he also is a science writer for The Atlantic. So he's really like, honed his writing chops there and during COVID really figured out how to make science understandable for the regular human that was also reading these articles, right? So he kind of went I contain multitudes and trying to figure out how to write it into a book and then the Atlantic and figure out how to talk to the common person and then gave us an immense world which combine those two things really beautifully.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:50

Yeah, okay, good. Excellent. Well, I'm glad that I'm glad that you learned a ton from it. And it'll you probably think about it a lot

Kaytee Cobb 32:56

day to day. And all the time. I'm like, Jason, did you know and he's like, Yeah, Kaytee. I'm a doctor. I know.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:02

Well, I didn't know that thing about the tablespoon. Exactly. See,

Kaytee Cobb 33:05

some people want to know, I do. Okay, Okay, I have to ask because you've convinced me that this one is a step above The Appeal, which I have on my shelf, still have not yet picked it up. Do you need to read one before the other? Are they totally unrelated?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:07

speaking about things that people are gonna want to know. I think that this next book is one of those books that it's been on my shelf for a year change. I don't even know how long and when I read it. I was like, Why did I wait too long to read it? Because it was such a five star read for me. I loved this book so much. This is The Mysterious Case of the Alpertons by Janice Hallett. Here's the setup. The story of the Alpertons is famous. Absolutely. Everyone knows about the cult who brainwashed a teenage girl into believing that her baby her newborn baby was the Antichrist. When the girl came to her senses and called the police. The angels committed suicide and mother and baby disappeared. Now, True Crime author Amanda Bailey is looking to revive her career by right well, she's really looking to write her next big book. And she's chosen this case to focus on the Alpertons baby has just turned 18 You see. And if Amanda can find the baby now grown and get an interview with this person, her new book will absolutely be a resounding success. But rival author Oliver Menges is just as smart, better connected, and also on the baby's trail. As Amanda and Oliver are forced to collaborate, they realize

that the truth about the angels is much, much darker and stranger and scarier very frankly, than anyone ever imagined. And by trying to find out the truth, they put themselves in a load of danger. Okay, there is a reason that the introduction to our Patreon show that I do with Elizabeth Barnhill called all things murder full says that that is for people who love mysteries, thrillers and books with puzzles at their center. I love a book with a puzzle at its center. And Janice Hallett writes the best of these. I absolutely loved her book *The Appeal*. And it was on my top 10 books Book list, the year that I read it, which I think was 2022, if I remember correctly, but I can say for sure that I loved this book even more. This, as I said, was a five star read for me. I became obsessive about it. I wanted to read it every single moment. I had it on my Kindle. I had it in print, I was walking around my house, getting my steps in while reading it. And by the way, I do want to say here, I had it on my Kindle, I had it in print. I did not have it on audio, because this is not a book that you should read on audio. There's so much mixed media format. That's what she does, right? That's Janice Hallett's thing, that this would, I think be incredibly kludgy on audio, so print and Kindle. I like this one more, because it seems to me that Janice Hallett got even better in this format than she was. And she was already better than anyone else. As you know, as I said, Her books are completely in mixed media. There's literally no regular prose. It's all text messages, transcriptions of conversations, articles, pieces of novels, newspapers, even bits of screenplay, whatever comes into play. In the case itself. She's gotten very good at maintaining the flow of the story within the bounds of this particular construction. And that is not easy to do. She's playing at a really high level here. I think also that I liked this one more because the stakes were a lot higher in the appeal, there was a crime and there was even a murder. But there was nothing that was as affecting, as in this book. In the *Alpertons Angels* case we touch on brutal murder. Brutal gory. Gorily described murder, kidnapping, quote, psychology, all kinds of things that are very high stakes, and it's handled with a deft and show your hand here. Part of that is because our main character, Amanda Bailey is a smart and responsible journalist. She sets out to find the truth and she is dogged about getting there. She's not silly, or stupid. She makes good decisions that make sense. Most of the time, one piece of this book that I didn't expect to find this fascinating. Well, there were two things that really surprised me. The first is, I found it fascinating to see how Amanda was really how she started, like, she knew she wanted to concentrate on this case. But we really get a sense of how she started digging into things and making something kind of out of a bunch of nothing at the start. There's just not a lot to grab onto. But as she goes on, she grabs the smallest thread and pretty soon, you see things growing and growing and they start to unravel. By the way this so long book, it's well over, I think 420 450 pages, but it flew by the other thing that surprised me is, and this is hard to do for me in the genre. I was fully creeped out in so many places in this book, the whole angels thing. I wasn't prepared for how creeped out. I was, I was gonna be like, I was literally like, goosebumps. And that doesn't happen to me very often at all. And it was just it was very surprising. Janice, how it lets you play along. And even if you've listened to the show for any amount of time, you know that that's one of my favorite things. There are a lot of people who are using the great Dame Agatha Christie as their inspiration for novels that they write in the 2020s. I honestly believe that of all of those Agatha Christie's very favorite new author would be Janice Hallett. I know she's mine. This is *The Mysterious Case of the Alpertons Angels*, by Janice Hallett. They're 100% unrelated, the only thing that relates them is a similar the formally mixed media construction. But they're two very different moods. Like *Alpertons Angels* is a lot more crime fiction.

Kaytee Cobb 36:21

Right? Right. Appeal is more legal thriller right

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:24

now. It's not it's not at all a legal thriller. It sounds like it because the title, right? It's not. So it's a it's about a theater troupe that's just a local community theater troupe and they're putting on a play and then things start to happen. The people who leave the theater troupe, their daughter gets cancer, and they put out an appeal to raise funds and so then things To go from there, but that's the appeal that I know it's confusing for us in America because

Kaytee Cobb 40:05

we thought it was a court case. Yeah, it's

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:07

not it's not a but it's very, very, very good. It's just for me, I have different kinds of moods for my mysteries or puzzle books. They just fit into two totally different kinds of modes if you want like, you love the idea of like listening in on your neighbor's conversations, kind of the juicy who doesn't like who who's talking about who that kind of juicy, more domestic stuff? The Appeal is if you want something that's gonna scare the bejesus out of you. Then I was really freaked out by by the Alperon Angels. It doesn't go into demon stuff, though. I don't like but is it? It's a little bit salty. It's very cold. Okay, about a cold. Yeah, so but it's anything like, right, but it's not. It's not demons, demon possession. It's not that kind of stuff. I don't like that storyline. But it's like about this quote, believes in angels. And there's some rule that freaked me out. Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 41:04

Sounds really good. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:06

it was really good. All right, those are our current reads, Kaytee. So those are some really, really good ones. I think I'm really happy with the continued mix that we bring, which is great. So let's talk a little bit about our reading retreats are currently reading kind of focused time that we are really trying to do once a year. So let's talk a little bit about the why behind it. And then we can talk about where and then we can talk about what we actually did. Do you want to start with the why? Yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 41:37

for sure. So we have pretty regularly throughout the entire history of the podcast, tried to have a meeting sometime during our winter break, and set some goals and intentions for the coming year. And we did make a goal this year to try and get together one on one and do some business talk strategic planning, and continuing to build our person to person relationship, because we know that that reflects on mic, we've heard many times that that's a big part of why people listen, they can hear that we have a friendship or respect for each other, like for each other. That's different than Yeah, I don't know. It's a person I met on the internet. And we can talk books together. Right? So that comes through on mic and we want to be able to grow that maintain it. And also continue to build this baby into a business, which we've been working hard on for a long time now. Yeah. And

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:25

there's no question, you know, I do a lot of different kinds of retreats, from mastermind retreats to leadership retreats for here comes the guide, and then the thing that we do, and there's it's always surprising to me, even though it shouldn't be how when you give yourself that focus time to talk just about that thing. You really, really like the ideas just build on each other. And so I feel like overall, the time that we spent together was so impactful. And we came away from it with several things that you're going to be seeing and hearing, especially if you're a Patreon subscriber new, especially as we go through the year, and we start season seven in August. So it was really, really useful for the business as well as for time together. So we went to Salt Lake City, Kaytee, why did we decide on Salt Lake City is that random?

Kaytee Cobb 43:16

We did, it was not totally random. There was a desire to be around snow or mountains or wintertime, both of us are now in very warm, either humid or desert, but warm climates and don't get a lot of that winter feel in our day to day lives. And then from there, having that desire at the core. I used Google Maps basically to look for places that we could both fly direct that was really important to me, too, that if we were going to only have a very short period of time together, that we weren't both going to spend eight hours getting there. And that we could be able to find somewhere. That was an easy flight for both of us to make it within a reasonable amount of time. So Salt Lake City worked out great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:00

It did. I'm so glad we went to Salt Lake City. I had never been to Utah never been anywhere close. I'd never seen the Rocky Mountains.

Kaytee Cobb 44:09

Yeah. That was big. That was big for Meredith. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:12

I was like, I really, really loved it. I loved the city. We got a chance to you know, I learned separately you came armed with quite a bit more knowledge about falling city than I expected. And it was so great. Like I was like, Oh, I didn't know it was ringed with mountains. And that's why when you fly in you have a pretty sharp you know,

Kaytee Cobb 44:33

nosedive into nosedive and

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:34

then when you fly out, I was ready for our quick up. So but yeah, and it was just a lovely city, and we got to go to just a bookstore that just has a really special place in my heart.

Kaytee Cobb 44:47

Yes, that was also very special. And so that was also part of the planning is that we knew we wanted a lot of time to talk to each other but also want a time to read and of course as any bookworm would do. So I had pre mapped out potential indie bookstores that we could visit and kind of threw that out there

as a gentle lob across the net. Would you want to go to a bookstore tomorrow? Meredith, is that something you're interested in and kind of gently talked you into it? And you were like, I don't know. I'm not gonna like look fancy, right? Sure.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:18

Because we had said, it's a hot 48 hours, we're going to just be in the Airbnb, we're not going to go to dinner, we're not going to so I had brought my not so sexy. Like, I was not looking my best. So that morning, I was like, we can go to the bookstore. I'm totally into that. I just know that I don't want to meet anybody because I have no makeup on. And I'm wearing sweats,

Kaytee Cobb 45:41

right? And we didn't plan any kind of bookish friends get together, we let everybody know like, at this time, you can come meet us for coffee or whatever. We just were to regular humans shopping at a bookstore.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:54

Right? We did not. And we never will do that. If I am there. Kaytee would have done that. Correct. So just just to be clear to all of you who work who were kind of put out that you found out we were in Salt Lake City and like we didn't have any sort of that was all me Do not blame Kaytee for that as me that was me. But we went to The King's bookshop, the King's English in The King's English bookshop. I bought way too many books for one reason. And one reason only, I mean, first of all, because they shipped him home for me, which is always the first question you got to ask when you go into a bookstore when you're traveling, most of them will do that. And secondly, this bookstore, which is in an old house, right, they've

Kaytee Cobb 46:31

had a number of old businesses that they ended up linking together. So there was like a mechanic shop, a hair salon, and they like slowly bought the other chunks of them over time, right. So

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:43

it's very, I want to say it's Higgledy Piggledy, but in the most cohesive, streamlined kind of way. So it's not Higgledy Piggledy, like, you don't have any idea of what you're getting, or there's no sense of things. It's more that with every turn in these kinds of small spaces, you're like, oh, my gosh, a whole section on true crime. Oh, my gosh, a whole section on not just white, a fancy a whole section on what do they call it on the edge

Kaytee Cobb 47:10

on the edge? Yes. Right. Like their new adult bridging adult to why a that was so cool. They had a whole

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:17

section. And I think I bought three books just from that one section. They had a murder mystery menu, in the mystery section, which I put in my stories I absolutely loved. It's like, you know, if you're in the mood for this, then these are your authors. If you're it's just so well done. Their section was so well

curated, everyone who worked there was so helpful, and they didn't know who like they weren't helpful because we were anything. They were just lovely humans. They're lovely humans who love to read. And that's why these people work at this bookstore. They love to read, and they want to press books into your hands. I just could have stayed there for another two hours. It was so so lovely. We did end up meeting a book friend. We did, despite my best efforts. Although I'm I'm so glad that we did because Brady Perkins, who we met was absolutely wonderful. And I'm really, really glad. And I really don't think he cared that look terrible.

Kaytee Cobb 48:18

Oh, yeah, no, I don't think so either. I think he was just really excited that we were at the store, he works and was trying to be very quiet and under the radar to make sure he wasn't impeding our weekend. But

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:31

and he really was we I mean, I had no idea he had any idea who we were. So we were just looking at books for the babies at the time when we met him. And all of a sudden, we were like, Oh, he knows who we are. It was super fun. So as it comes to the work parts of things, one of the things that I that we did that I think worked really well that gave a lot of shape to our discussions for Currently Reading was that we did a survey, sometimes we do a survey to everybody, every like the big show. And sometimes we do a survey justify our Patreon content. And this was one of those years. So we sent a survey out to our 2600 Patreon subscribers, or paid supporters. And we asked a lot of questions about what was working and what they'd love more of and all of that good stuff. And do you know, Katie, you do know that almost 1300, almost 50% of them filled out this fairly lengthy survey and gave us fantastic responses. Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 49:29

And was that really surprised me we've definitely had times in years past whether it was to everyone or just to patrons, where we got a 10% response rate, a 25% response rate on a really good year. But getting up to 50% really gives us a broad range of responses and tells us what people are actually hoping for wanting loving, what's working, what needs tweaking, and that was really important to us to really be able to shape what we're doing and put our efforts in the right place. Right, exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:59

So We walked away from that with I would say four really big kind of actionable things that we are working on, including we're not going to tell you any specifics yet, but we are working on a new tentpole piece of content for our patrons. And I think listeners, so many of you are going to absolutely love this new piece of content that we're going to be introducing in August of this year. So and then there's three other things that kind of add on to or make even better some of the stuff we're existing we're doing right now. And so you know, we spent a lot of hours really going through it, but we came away from it really filled with purpose and excitement that we're going to be able to do things that you guys really want and that we're really interested in doing. And that's the sweet spot, right. And then we just collapsed on the couch and watched the SAG AFTRA awards and talked about people's dresses,

Kaytee Cobb 50:56

and did some puzzling, you did some puzzling and ordered some meals in. Yeah, so that was the other thing that I kind of wanted to touch on is the way that we executed this is we both landed pretty close to each other timewise, grabbed our car, went over to the Airbnb, and then got groceries to get us through those days that we knew we were going to be spending a lot of time together, I printed and bound the survey results so that they were in this kind of more digestible format. And we could highlight or markup or make little dog ears on the pages and really, like physically play with them in a different way than if they're on the screen. And then we spent, you know, a couple hours one night, a couple hours, the next morning, we also had time for some really good reading on the couch. We had time for reading by ourselves separate from each other, just going to bed early, getting up whenever we wanted to, which is also really good and restorative for Yeah, women that work hard for our people and our families. Right, yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:54

Right to wake up and have absolutely no one who needs you to get up immediately. Do you know, any particular thing right then is really nice.

Kaytee Cobb 52:02

Yeah. So all of that came together in a way that I felt like we've spent a really balanced amount of time on both just resting, relaxing restoration hanging out, and focused attention on our business. And I think that's what made it kind of the perfect mesh of time for our retreat. Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:20

So we will be teasing the heck out of you guys probably over the next few months. But do know that as we get to summertime, we're going to give you more and more details on these things that are coming. And I think you're really really, really going to like them. So that's a that's a good thing. And I think it was a very successful retreat, for sure. Definitely. All right, good. So let's do although there was one person on the survey, Kaytee, there was one person out of the 1300 who said that the fountain is hokey.

Kaytee Cobb 52:50

It's true, and we invite you to fast forward. Oh, I've made me feel sad. We have some really great fountain wishes and great presses. They still show up. It's worth tuning in.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:59

I really liked the fountain. I feel I feel bad for that one person. Okay, if you are not that person and you think the fountains hokey, please don't DM us. Okay, what's your wish? Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 53:09

my wish, you may think it's tangentially related to our deep dive. But I wish we could visit every IPL bookstore in person, or even potential IPL bookstore. That's the indie press list. Of course, I would like to plan trips all over the place. I'm a total travel bug, even though I'm also whiny about sleeping away from my bed, and I like my pillow. And I like my bed and I like my room. And I like being home. But I love to travel. However, I would put all that love from my bed aside in order to go to New bookstores in person, even if I've heard about them seeing their Instagram shop their online store. None of it compares to walking the actual shelves, talking to booksellers in person. So if I had unlimited time and

money, really, that's my fountain wish for unlimited time and money, I would plan a trip every single month to a different locale. And in order to always be able to visit local bookstores once we'd like to work with once we worked with in the past, meet them in person. And of course, as Meredith always already mentioned, I'm the Social Butterfly of this team. And I would totally plan bookish meetups for our patrons. But yes, this is my dream to get to visit all these little like metropolitan or semi urban locales all over the country or the world. Honestly, I wouldn't say no to going overseas again, and get to meet these booksellers see their spaces, see how they curate and make a dream about working together. So that's my wish at the fountain this week. Ping splash. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:35

I mean it we talked about this, it really does seem like it would just be such a dream to be able to do that. I mean, our it would just be such an amazing way to see different places you've never been before always having kind of an anchor activity that you're going to do there just wouldn't be wonderful. That's a great wish. All right. Well, my wish is a wish that I'm not sure I've ever wished for anything harder, but when I heard this one of our Bookish friends mentioned it i wish i remember I should have remembered who said this. One of our bookish friends said, Here's wish a movie theater, but make it silent reading and snacks. And then she said I would pay for this. I don't know that I've ever wanted something more than a movie theater were at a specific date and time like a show time, right? Like there's like at 210. I'm going to the to 10 showing of Colorado cabin ASMR on the screen, with low level perfectly mixed sound right, so not too heavy on the Plink plops of the raindrops, not too heavy on the wind, just like perfectly mixed sound. That's what's on the screen, the rule and it is obsessively adhered to stone set in stone. There is silence. And also, it's like one of those movie theaters like we have, like we have everywhere, but that I love so much about here in Austin because we have so many of these movie theaters that serve meals and snacks. And so you're just reading silently, no one is talking to anyone in the theater, you're reading, and you've got your ASMR in front of you. And you maybe have like a reading light that can come maybe you've brought your own reading light, or maybe it's just a little bit dark. So you know everyone can kind of feel cocooned in. You've got your snacks, you can order a tray of cookies and a coffee. You can order a Diet Coke and some popcorn. But most importantly, you can say to your people at home, I'm going to the to 10 showing of the Colorado cabin. And this one unfortunately, it's three hours long. It's three it's a three hour long showing, so I'll be home after that. And you can't have your cell phone on because that's one of the rules too, so you can't be worried about anything. I've never wished

Kaytee Cobb 56:53

a wish harder so you have to bring a blanket Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 56:56

I cannot tell you how much I wish this okay, I looked it up while you were talking

Kaytee Cobb 57:00

so we can give credit it was Julie Myers that wished for this. Thank you. Yes, I was like Abso-freaking-lutely, ma'am.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:07

Thank you, Julie Myers, you are a genius. That was a fantastic which I cannot stop thinking about it since you posted in the group. And I don't know how to make it happen. But you can rent out a theater. I know that. I know. You can rent out a theater and I'm assuming if you ran out the theater, you can also have people come get snacks. Can you also put an ace, like maybe this is actually something that we could do. And this is a meet up, I could get behind. If the rule is nobody can talk. I will sit in a room with all of y'all. That'd be great. And we just read for three hours. And then we just get up and we go outside and whoever wants to stay in chat about the books that they're reading or whatever can and whoever wants to just head straight to their car can do that too. It's heaven. I love it. That's That's what heaven is. When we die you know where to find us. Exactly. Exactly. Ping splash,

Kaytee Cobb 58:00

okay, and splash coastline cosign. Alright, that is it for

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:03

this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 58:09

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:13

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 58:22

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:29

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Kaytee Cobb 58:48

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:54

our goals. Alright, until next week may or coffee be hot and your

Kaytee Cobb 58:57

book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:58

Happy reading Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 58:59

happy reading Meredith