



Season 6, Episode 38: Talking to Authors + Boss My TBR

Mon, Apr 29, 2024 • 53:36

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 guess I talk to authors now. Yay.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in Arizona. And I love how reading aloud is a gift that keeps on giving. This is episode number 38 of season six. And we're so glad you're here. Meredith. I'm so excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:54

Yes, yes, Kaytee, I talk to authors. Now. It is a huge step forward in my in my growth as a person and as a reader

Kaytee Cobb 01:01

picture you posted. I was like, I'm so proud. My heart is exploding.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:07

All right, well, we're going to talk a little bit about that in our bookish moments of the week for sure. But first, let me tell you that our deep dive today we are going to be bossing some TBRs I know people love it when we do this. Super fun deep dive for us too.

Kaytee Cobb 01:22

It is so fun to get bossy and to hear back from people when when they've been bossed they get very excited.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:29

Exactly. And the two that we're doing today kind of fall into a little bit different categories a little bit. A couple of niches we haven't done before, so I'm looking forward to it. Definitely. Alright, so first, let's get to our bookish moments of the week. Kaytee, what have you got?

Kaytee Cobb 01:45

Okay, Meredith, my bookish moment this week is also a proud mama moment. I don't know if I've mentioned on the show since we moved but when we moved back to Arizona, we plugged back in with the Episcopal church that I grew up in. I was born there baptized there, raised there as a kid, young adult, but it's been nearly 20 years since I was a regular attendee. One of the biggest reasons we go regularly is because Micah my oldest loves youth group, he, he is like, oh, no, I would never skip church, because that's where youth group is he just loves these kids and hanging out with them every week. One of the events that he participates in regularly is a visit to a local memory care facility where he as a middle school kid interacts with elderly patients who are suffering from memory loss, that can be any number of activities. But his favorite thing to do is to read aloud, which is so great. That is so great. I did not know this, the coordinator sent me a photo last week of Micah surrounded by a few elderly women reading them a book about cats, and I just about died of joy. I'm not saying my work here is done. But good. God, it feels like good work. He's going back again, this weekend. I'm hitting local thrift stores to find some of the picture books that we really love. So that he can bring them with them and leave them there. It's just a dream come true that he gets to now read aloud to this older generation. It just makes my mama heart so happy. That is

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:09

wonderful. Micah is so so sweet. And what a great way to see all the work and effort that you've done to make sure that reading is an important part of their lives and not just for school, but for enjoyment to come back around. That's a really great full circle moment.

Kaytee Cobb 03:25

Very full circle. Yes, definitely. What about you? I can't wait. All

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:29

right. Well, obviously my bookish moment of the week is that we just yesterday, Elizabeth Barnhill and I got home from our trip to the East Coast, we was we started out at The Hamptons Whodunit, which was a festival that was just about mysteries, and thrillers. And it was in the Hamptons. And it really was a fantastic book festival book conference. For me to kind of get my feet under me as far as talking to authors because it was really small. I think I could be wrong. But we estimated there were about 100 attendees, like actual people like us. So it was really small. The venues were small, but not too not weirdly small. It was just the right size. But there were all sorts of really amazing authors there. So for how kind of intimate the setting was. We still had these great authors, and of course we were just so excited the entire time. We went to seven one hour sessions on the Friday that we were there and then we went to five of five sessions on Saturday, and we just we got to meet and hear SA Cosby speak more than once. He is absolutely fantastic. I read my first SA Cosby just right before we left for our trip, I read All The Sinners Bleed. Again not going to bring it to the show because nobody needs to hear me say it's a really fantastic I mean it's I just feel like it's been everywhere and it is so good. SA Cosby is an

American treasure that we need to protect at all costs. He is so humble. He is so interesting to listen to. He's funny. And then I did work up the courage to ask him to take a photo with me. And sometimes, you know, sometimes the author's it is kind of really, really easy. And sometimes it's kind of different things are happening. It's a little bit awkward. But I really wanted to get a picture with him. I also got a picture and got to meet Barbara Butcher who wrote *What the Dead Know*, which is a true crime kind of memoir that I brought to the show a few months ago that I loved. She was amazing. We got to meet Yrsa Sigurdardottir, which of course, you've heard me talk about a million times, I could go on and on. And Elizabeth and I are going to be recording this weekend, the next edition of *All Things Murderful*, where we will be deep diving on the conference and talking about who did we love who really surprised us which author was a total snack, but maybe also kind of a hot mess. All of that is going to be going on in all things murderful. But we also got to visit we visited eight bookstores total amazing, including *An Unlikely Story*. And we met book boyfriend Bill and spent a couple of hours with him and took a huge tour and got to walk through the entire store just talking books for three of us. It was amazing. He is even better in person. If you can believe it, then it's in real life. I know.

Kaytee Cobb 06:28

I'm exploding right now. I'm joy everywhere.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 06:30

I also found a new book bookstore that was new to me. Although Elizabeth really knew it, it is going to be an indie press list store. After our time there, I bought 10 books at that store, all hands sold to me by people who really, really really understand what makes discovery really important in an independent bookstore. So I'm not gonna tell you what store that is, because we're going to have it as an indie press list store, but you will hear all kinds of information about that in the coming months. Just a fantastic trip from start to finish. Absolutely fantastic.

Kaytee Cobb 07:06

It sounds like a dream. Everything about it made me so glad just like the the your first Literary Festival meeting authors in person, all of it, it just makes me so happy. And I love that you had a great time. And from what I could see, at least on this side of things you weren't, you know, overwhelmed wanting to hide under the covers over you were just having a great time. And it was put together well, and the authors were lovely as I knew they would be and that just makes me so happy. Yeah, it was

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:33

the festival was extraordinarily well done. Absolute hat tip to Hamptons Whodunit they this is their second year, they just have put together a really, really fun of it. The other thing, Kaytee, is that I got to meet so many listeners who were so sweet to come find me and introduce themselves. And I just enjoyed talking to them so incredibly much. And it was it was absolutely wonderful. So yeah, what an amazing it was I mean, now I will tell you, I came home and slept 10 hours, right? It by the by the end of the trip of the Elizabeth is very easy to travel with and just super go with the flow. And we traveled very well together. But anything where you're doing that kind of thing for many days in a row, it's a lot for this introvert. So I came home and I was real quiet through the evening and slept 10 hours and woke up today. And I feel totally great. And I'm so grateful for all the memories. So that's a little bit that's a much

longer, bookish moment of the week than normal. If you want to hear much, much more about it. Join us on Patreon and listen to All Things Murderful because we will be getting into the nitty and the gritty.

Kaytee Cobb 08:40

I'm so excited. I can't wait. I can't wait for even more of this bookish goodness.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:45

Yes. Okay. We're also going to talk about some books that we that we just had to buy because we heard about them at the festival. So

Kaytee Cobb 08:53

yeah, literary festivals, even if they are free. They are not cheap. That's what I'm saying here. Exactly.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:58

Absolutely. Okay. All right, Kaytee, let's talk about some of our current reads. What's your first one?

Kaytee Cobb 09:03

Okay, my first one is a nonfiction book. It's called Right at Home by Bobby Berk. So that's the Bobby Berk from Queer Eye. I snagged a copy of this book when it jumped him to my cart at a bargain price because that's what books do. And I can't say no to any of the Queer Eye guys. So I just brought Bobby home with me to teach me all his design lessons, and I got a much deeper book than I was expecting. Right at Home is a design book. Yes. But for Bobby Berk, the now former Interior Design guru on Queer Eye, it's so much more than the way your space looks. He spends the entirety of this book discussing the ways that our mental health is impacted by the spaces we live in. He finds a way to make design accessible and to identify colors and textures and patterns that serve you as the live or in your home. The person who lives there, right, rather than just the user of your home. The subtitle of this one is how good design is good for the mind and I really think Bobby does a good job pulling this off. Even though I was a little dubious at first, the way our homes make us feel matters. We all know this intuitively, because when we're in a space that jilts, our internal compass a bit, we can feel it. It might be that we're less productive, or that we're always tired, or that we feel like we need to always be moving. Like there's always something else to do. It's impossible to keep up with the space like it's getting out of control. After all, Bobby tells us it's our ultimate safe space and needs to be able to host everything from intimate conversations to raucous and memorable celebrations. And that means there's a lot going on in our homes every day. So setting up our homes for comfort and style. And being authentic to ourselves is really essential to not just showing ourselves in our best life, but taking care of ourselves as well, as I read through this book. And yes, I read it like a regular book. Rather than just skipping around. I went cover to cover I thought about the spaces in my home that I gravitate to when I'm in different moods and the ways I could move things around and change things up to make them serve me better and my people better there's a lot of people that live in this house with me, is there a different way to organize a kid's room, could we make a space softer we tore out carpet when we moved in because this used to be a VRBO and a lot of people had used that carpet but I added back in some plush and soft rugs to dampen sound and make it feel cozy in there. I'm also looking forward to playing more with the principles I learned in this book. And I'm so glad I got it for a bargain price because that way I can use that money elsewhere in my home. It went on to my home books keeper shelf alongside

those of my Quilon Smith who I really love where I turn when things are feeling a bit stale, and I need to refresh and in this case to brighten up my mental space as well. So this one is called Right at Home by Bobby Berk and I loved it I

Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:52

love those kinds of books I can I can just sort of browse through those kinds of books for forever I can waste so much time doing that or learn maybe not waste learn so much by by looking through those. I love it. All right, Kaytee, I'm bringing a book that I am really really glad to say I really really liked it. I'm going to talk about Close to Death by Anthony Horowitz

Kaytee Cobb 12:13

Oh good.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:14

This book just came out. Alright, here's the setup in this fantastic take on the locked room mystery we find ourselves in Riverside Close which is a neighborhood in London. The six homes of Riverside Close are tucked far away from the noise of city life, allowing the people who live there to enjoy their gorgeous gardens, their pleasant birdsong and the tranquility. All behind the security of a locked gate. Things are perfect until they're not. That is until the Kentworthy family arrives with their four giant gas guzzling cars and SUVs, their pack of loud ball throwing litter leaving children and their plans for a huge, gaudy swimming pool in their backyard.

Kaytee Cobb 13:04

Are they American? No, they're British. Just checking.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:09

The Kentworthys do not belong in Riverside Close and they quickly managed to offend every single one of the other people who live there. But when the father Giles Kenworthy is found dead with a crossbow bolt sticking out of his chest. Detective Hawthorne is on the case. All right, I love that premise. I love it's in the middle of London, but it's also a locked room mystery because, right so he said he sets it up perfectly. Alright, this is the fifth in the Hawthorne and Horowitz series by Anthony Horowitz. This is the one where we have Anthony Horowitz, the actual author, the real life author, who has put himself as a character into these books. And he, along with detective, Hawthorne, Daniel Hawthorne, are solving these mysteries. So this is the fifth book, the third and the fourth books I didn't love at all. So I am so happy that I really, really liked this one. So at the end of the fourth book, there was a lot about the dynamic between the two characters that was fraught like they didn't really ever get along. And by the end of the fourth book, they really didn't get along. So I didn't really know how we were any of us going to stand another book where the two of them were trying to solve a case being at odds with each other. The way he found to do that in this book is very, very clever and contributed to the reason that I liked it. Anthony Horowitz changes the format in an interesting way. And at first, I wasn't sure that it was going to work. But as I got into it, I realized I really liked it. As I said, I liked the fact that Horowitz and Hawthorne were not actually together in very much of the book. It's weird, but he doesn't like the character you can tell that the actual author doesn't like the character that he created and Daniel Hawthorne so by keeping them apart it allowed us to still Get the brilliance of Hawthornes insights as a

detective while also not having to deal with them being irritable with each other. This book was serpentine in a lot of ways. And I liked it. The plot was very smartly constructed. Even though there were a few parts that I gave a little bit of side eye to, I enjoyed the fact that I think Horowitz was going into a direction that I thought was kind of cheesy and overly detailed. And then I could see that he'd done that on purpose because he would sort of pull it back and everything would make a whole lot of sense. It was very neat Hat trick Anthony Horowitz is just really clever, and I enjoy his plot machinery. I also really like the way that he writes the mystery itself. These aren't super heavy on character development. But you get enough of both character and setting development to really make things interesting. And the place in this novel was a character of its own. We have, as I said, six houses clustered together in a small almost park like bucolic setting in the centre of London, and the way that all the characters lived so closely, and also their varying levels of relationship with each other, was really fun. It made the reading so interesting. So overall, a huge sigh of relief, I did get the impression that this might be the last in this series. And if it is, I think it will have ended really well. This is Close to Death by Anthony Horowitz. I should also say not overly gory. So again, if you really like the way that he writes, where you have a puzzle filled mystery, but you're you're not worried about lots and lots of violence, this book will be perfect for you. Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 16:41

good to know. I like the punchiness of the title too, for it to be the name of the neighborhood being close and then close to death. That's right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:48

Exactly. Oh, he's very, very clever. All right, what's your next book? My

Kaytee Cobb 16:53

next one is called That Time I Got Drunk and Saved a Demon by Kimberly Lemming.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:58

Oh, good. I saw this in all the bookstores that I was in and I knew that you had read it. Yes. So I'm so happy you're going to talk about it.

Kaytee Cobb 17:05

Okay, let me tell you about it. This book had been floating around on my radar for a while and then a bookish friend shared it as a cozy fantasy by a bipoc author in the bookish friends group, so I decided to pick it up at that time. Here's the setup. Cinnamon is our main character, like the spice Okay, she goes by Cin cin. She is a spice trader part of a family that's doing pretty well for itself. After a festival in her town, she drinks a wee bit too much mead and encounters a demon on the way home. This is bad, of course very bad because demons are notorious for causing havoc and killing humans and we know their story already. But it turns out this demon named Fallon who she accidentally saves from a forest fire dragon has a quest to rid the world of the evil witch enslaving his people. And he needs cinnamons help because she has wily spice trader ways. She's clearly got some gumption that he lacks. So she reluctantly agrees to go along on a quest in order to keep her family safe from demon kind because felons like join me or die kind of thing and which kind because they're clearly not doing anything good in the world. This sounds pretty cozy fantasy ish, but it should be noted that it goes on the romance shelf

first. This is spicy fantasy romance. First, as in the nearly erotic fantasy romance shelf. This is very sexy time heavy, there is a plot. So it's not erotica. But it's also not a lot of a plot. So it's not legends and lattes. It's in the spicy spice trader with the spicy demon category. The other thing to note about this book is we're talking about spice traders and witches and demons and dragons and all that sounds very fantasy like you would say ye and the days of yore right. But it fully embraces Gen Z slang, which may turn away certain readers. Meredith, I'm looking at you. Yes, a fantasy world so they can talk however they want. But for me, it was hilariously weird to have our protagonist using words like yeeted and sus in their regular speech. Oh, no, yes, I know. It's very strange. took me out of myself and reminded me that this is just for fun that this is something that, you know, actually happened 300 years ago. It's just fun. Kimberly Lemming is just having fun here. The spice scenes are extensive. And this is a novel verging on a novella at only 186 pages. Probably a full 20% of this book is sexy. And we're not talking about 15 pages of 300 here which is kind of a more typical romance genre spice level right or number of pages. Sinha Fallon are also great banter errors. So again, if you're not a Meredith reader, if you are a Meredith reader, and you don't love snarky antagonism and banter and quick, spiciness back and forth, verbal spiciness back and forth, this is not going to be a good fit for you. For me, it was fun. That's that's the word for this book, it's not highbrow it's not literary not that I've used any words that would make anybody think of highbrow or literary. It's just spicy fun, but I probably won't read further in the series, which includes titles like That Time I Got Drunk and Yeeted a Love Potion at a Werewolf, as well, that's Book Two in the series. It's ridiculous in all in every single way, it's like a capital R for ridiculous capital F for fun. It's That Time I Got Drunk and Saved a Demon by Kimberly Lemming.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:32

Absolutely, and knowing exactly what you're gonna get, and the kinds of everything that is inside. It's very, very helpful, Katie. So thank you for doing that for us.

Kaytee Cobb 20:40

Exactly. You don't want to pick this up. If you're looking for something so cerebral. It's just fluffy milkshake. Put it down. Go away. Read something else afterward.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:49

All right, well, I will take a left turn that will take us into a little bit more cerebral.

Kaytee Cobb 20:55

Pretty much everything is from exactly right.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:57

But we have some almost fairy tale bits. In this next one. This is The Fox Wife by Yangsze. Choo.

Kaytee Cobb 21:05

Yeah. Have

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:06

you seen this one? Did you read this one?

Kaytee Cobb 21:08

I haven't yet because she was at the Tucson festival books. And I got to hear her speak. And so I will be doing the audio book on this one. And I'm waiting a long time to get it even though I have the paper book. So this is going to be a tandem read for me. I love her voice. It's very lovely. So I'm looking forward to her telling me the story. Excellent. Well,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:27

and the cover is very, very beautiful, too. So all right. Here's the setup. We are in Manchuria in northern China in 1908. And as the story opens, a courtesan is found frozen in a doorway. Her death is clouded by the fact that there have been a lot of rumors around about foxes, which at this time are believed to lower people by transforming themselves into very beautiful women and handsome men, very clever, charismatic, charming men and women. One of our characters is Bao, a detective with a distinctly Poirot like ability to sniff out the truth in many, many different situations. And here he's hired to uncover the dead woman's identity. Meanwhile, a family who owns a famous Chinese medicine shop can cure all sorts of ills, but they have had a curse on their family that has afflicted them for generations, their eldest sons die before their 24th birthdays. So when a beautiful servant named Snow enters their household, the family's luck may be about to change, or will it so I love this like dual setup, right? There is so much to like in this beautiful book, even though it didn't 100% work for me. I have always had a weird affinity for foxes. And that has just increased since my trip to the UK. With my friend Betsie, we had a very strange and eventually very gory meeting with a fox that has taken on mythic proportions. So I found myself drawn to them in art, and in stories. So of course, when this book came out, I was so happy to get my hands on it. And it is a beautiful book. I loved being so far north in China in the story, I had never read that before. It has a strong sense of place, and also a sense of being a fairy tale. I loved learning about the Chinese myths around foxes and seeing those play out in the story. I also really enjoyed that. It's told in two timelines, two points of view. I was interested in both of them and I enjoyed the way the story and I enjoyed the way that snow's storyline was told in the first person. And the Bao storyline was told in third person, I think that juxtaposition made for seamless storytelling. But even though it has a great premise, and a fantastic first 20%. As I got deeper into the story, things got a little bit too tedious. And for about 60% of the middle, just very little happened. And I think that was the intention of the author. This is not supposed to be a book filled with a ton of action. But for this reader, though, I was loving the characters and the storytelling itself and the setting. I kept feeling like for every one page I read three more were being added to the end. So by the time I got to the ending, I just felt a little bit tired. The ending was very well done, though, and it did make me smile. But overall, the story was just too long and slightly too slow for this reader. But I will say that I read this a couple of weeks ago and it is one of those books that has stayed with me. So even though it wasn't a huge, perfect hit. It is one I'm very very glad that I read. This is The Fox Wife by Yangsze Choo

Kaytee Cobb 25:00

excellent, I feel like that was such a great way to let us know what to expect going into this one because she totally as an author, she captured this reader's heart. But it's important to know that you're not going to go into this book expecting that you have to flip the next page to hurry up and figure out what happened. Right, right. So that's

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:20

not what it is. That's not what she's trying to do. I think two audio would be a great way to take this book in, or a tandem read, because it does have that immersive feeling to it. Yes. So I made all of these notes. It's interesting, because this happens a lot. I made these notes right on the heels of me haven't finished it. I finished it a couple of weeks ago. This is one of those stories that the further I get from it, the more I like it. So definitely worth picking up in the right mood, where you can settle in, and, and just let the story fall over you. That's what you need to be able to do. I like

Kaytee Cobb 25:54

that. Okay. My third one this week is an author we really love Meredith. It's a book called Game Changer by Neal Schusterman. Oh, yes, of course, wrote Scythe, which we very much love. It's another one that I think I picked up from a thrift store. But I did not make a note at the time. It was just already in my reading log as TBR from before this year started, so I bought it sometime from somewhere, at least a year ago. But it's a mystery. This is a sci fi novel from 2021. And it's why I definitely why. And it was very unexpected for me. And I'm not sure why I hadn't heard about it anywhere after loving Scythe so much. It seems like somebody should have been serving me because you love Scythe. Have you tried this one? I'm Neal Shusterman. Right? Nobody did. It was a happenstance. Here's the setup. Ash is our main character. He is a football star, a defensive lineman. He's making his way through high school when he takes a hard hit on the field. It's a concussion, but not a regular one. He gets a bit woozy and feels kind of a sliding sensation, but rallies quickly and is able to finish the game. On his way home that night. He realizes something has changed. He blows right through a stop sign because it's blue. Not red, like it's always been. But when he points it out to his passenger, they look at him like he's losing it stop signs have always been blue. Obviously Ash red causes anger and the US government wants drivers to be calm. So are you sure you're feeling okay? Maybe that head on the head was a little harder than you thought. He starts to question how hard he was actually hit as the week progresses and things just don't add up. Some of his very close friends can tell something's off. But mostly they're just worried that he's not doing okay, the game next week, because it's a high school football game. So we got another one next Friday results in a second hit a second sliding sensation as he comes to this time, the world has changed a bit more. And Ash is no longer attending his diverse and integrated High School where his best friend is black. He's named Leo. He's in a world where Brown versus Board of Education failed. And schools are still segregated, which means his best friend Leo is not even at his school anymore, and doesn't recognize him when he sees him on the street. As he starts to piece this mystery together. Ash comes to realize that he has some agency over the way the world changes when he experiences this sliding sensation. But if it changes too much, you might never get it back to the way it was before. And in fact, his universe and his life may disappear entirely. This book has a bit of an ensemble cast because you care about Ash you care about Leo, you care about these skateboarding twins that we meet in the beginning of the book that he names Edie and Edie and Edward, because there's a lot of them. You care about his buddy's girlfriend, Katie, because obviously her name is Katie. But really, we're following Ash on his journey. It's not a spoiler to say we've got a few elements of 11/22/63 in here, but it's not time travel. We've also got some Wrinkle in Time feels in here that I enjoyed. But I did read a few very disappointed reviews on this book, because I couldn't figure out why I hadn't heard about it. And many of them mentioned that Ash starts the book as a straight cis white male. So lots of privilege in our society, right. And since he's the center of the story, it means he's got the driving narrative here. It's a straight cis white male story. Now Ash has various changes in his

identity throughout this book, he's not always the person we meet at the beginning. But the critique is that he gets to try on other identities, but his core never changes. I understand this as a reader as a reviewer and as someone who's done a lot of work and reading about social justice over the years because I'm a straight straight, white sis female, right? Like I've had to do a lot of work as well. I also really enjoyed this book. Despite those criticisms, I think especially for a teen audience, which is who this is written for. It's ya for sure. Especially for this teen audience of cis white straight males, it's useful to think about how to get into a story and see how a world changes as your identity changes. Mary and I talked last week about how books are He's kind of like trying on other shoes and experiences for a little while. And that's why the two of us love memoir. This is not a memoir. But it is an easy entry point for a teen or a young adult to try on some different ways of thinking. Some ways of considering how our society has been manufactured to make a certain way of life really easy. For some people, there's a bit of a kitchen sink feel as we jump through ashes experiences, but that means we're never heavily in one experience. It's not staying on my forever keeper shelf. But I did tell my teenager that I think he might enjoy the audiobook, I hope he reads it and talks to me about it. And we can pull it apart in some different ways. Because I think it's a great way to get into those discussions about race and class and sexism and social privilege, and a propulsive novel setting. I'm glad I read it. I'm glad past Kaytee put it on my shelves, even if I don't remember how or why that happened. This was a really good book, and it has a lot to unpack and discuss in it, even though it's also just a propulsive fun novel. So this is Game Changer by Neal Shusterman.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:04

That's very interesting. And for me, as a mother of a 12 year old, middle school football player, yeah, I could not get past the fact that you had a concussion and went back into a game or played two weeks in a row. These are all things that would never happen, at least here in Texas. So that would be my issue. And therefore I'm out. Like, I can't you know, head injuries are so important that we handle them properly, that I just I couldn't have that be the driving narrative of the story.

Kaytee Cobb 31:34

Right? I don't know if he's ever diagnosed with a concussion. As somebody sitting on the outside of the story. It feels like Well, obviously, he got to hit too hard, and that is concussion, but he doesn't black out. He just has this weird sliding sensation. And then he's fine. And he gets up and he continues playing like it's this weird. I get what you're saying. I absolutely do. I don't think anybody ever says oh my gosh, he's concussed like Hurry get like, let's check his pupils that kind of thing. Yeah. But see, they should have they like play with it a bit. So I get what you're saying. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:03

So lots for people to unpack in that story. Excellent. Okay. All right. My third book is one that I absolutely loved. This is Reef Road by Deborah Goodrich, Royce. Here's our setup. Our story starts in 2020. With the discovery of an a you know, I love books to start out like this a severed human hand that washes up in Palm Beach, Florida. From that intriguing starting point, the novel splits into two storylines one from the point of view of what we who the person we know as the wife. Both these characters end up getting names by the way, they're not unnamed all the way through. The other one is the writer, the writer lives a very lonely life there on the beach in Florida writing, walking her dog and watching the comings and goings of our neighbors very closely. And the tourists who come to this wealthy enclave of

Palm Beach, and the wife seems to have one of those ubiquitous, perfect lives. Only we quickly know that things in fact are not perfect. Her husband is controlling, her kids are a lot. And then the husband and the kids go missing. The story is told in alternate points of view. And we want to know more about each of these stories because there are things like little breadcrumbs where you're like, that doesn't seem right. Maybe even more, we want to know how these two women are connected. All right, Elizabeth Barnhill who just went on my trip with told us for nearly all of 2023 that this was one of her favorite books of the year, and I cannot for the life of me figure out why I didn't buy it and read it except for the fact that oftentimes things set in Florida don't interest me. So maybe that was the reason. I don't know. But as we know, one of the most fun things for a reader is to grab a book off of your shelf, love it, and then ask yourself, why did I allow it to languish for so long? So that's what's that's what happened here. I think what's going to stick with me about this fantastic work of crime fiction is that it feels very of the moment. This is one of the best books I've read that features the COVID-19 locked down as a part of the plot. I think the only book that does that better is 56 Days by Catherine Ryan Howard. In Reef Road, the COVID 19 virus is not really the issue. Of course, just like in 56 Days, it's the lockdown that we're interested in. It's the timeline where we know the virus is coming and we know the effect that it's going to have on the story. You can kind of see it coming down the road. It's fantastic. Also, it feels very of the moment that we have a fourth wall breaking narrator which is something that we're seeing quite a bit in 2023 and 2024. And I like that construct. We also see that in Close to Death, the first book that I brought, I can see it getting over done, but right now it feels very fresh. I also really loved the way that Royce plays with the timeline here. This is one of those books that I was glad to have in print, because I found myself referring back over and over again to make sure that I was keeping the different timelines straight. And I will say that there is a lot to keep straight in this book, especially in the first half. But I don't mind a book that insists that I play close attention. In fact, I really like that this book is smart. And it assumed I was too and I really loved the way that it came together in the end for a very specific reason. This book was so good. I can't believe I hadn't read it sooner. This is Reef Road by Deborah Goodrich Royce. Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 35:37

okay. So I will tell you the cause I remember hearing Elizabeth tell us, this book is so good and seeing images of it. And for me, it was the birds of paradise on the cover those those exotic flowers that we see on the cover, it felt like it was going to be that kind of book, the time that would have birds of paradise on the cover, literary and dark. And so I was like, Oh, that looks so great for other people.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:03

Sure. Right. And remembering, of course, that there's nothing bad with literary but having to do with expectations going in. Exactly. I don't know why it hadn't broken through the noise. But once I got into it, it's one of those books that the second year, just a couple pages in it is really, really really propulsive, I really didn't understand it, and but you have to pay really close attention. And I like that too. So if you like smart crime fiction, and if you like the works of Catherine Ryan Howard, I definitely think that this is one that you want to pick up. And also the author, Deborah Goodrich Royce is from the Newport area, and she owns the Ocean House, which is a place where we stayed one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen in my entire life. It was absolutely incredible. It's the place where we could see Taylor Swift house, from where we were having dinner. So I loved reading her book, loving it, and then getting a chance to to, you know, kind of know her a little bit better through staying at her place. So it was

wonderful. I love that. Very cool. All right, Kaytee, so those are our current reads. So now we are going to boss some TBRs. Alright, so you remember the way that we do this, we usually put out in our Facebook group for our Patreon subscribers, hey, let us know five books that are kind of high up on your TBR list. And our bookish friends will post those, maybe they tell us a little bit about what these books have in common, maybe they don't. And then we choose three each we choose, we choose three of the five and we try to decide the order in which we think they should read them, Kaytee, but this time, we picked a couple that are niched in a little bit different way. So you want to get started on the first one. Right?

Kaytee Cobb 37:50

There's also some historical context today, because as we're recording, it's April 19. And a lot of these comments were about how this person was staying up late or getting up early to listen to said Taylor Swift's brand new album, right? That dropped today. So it's like tortured Poets Society day, department day. And there were there was a lot of angst in these comments about their TBRs like, how am I ever gonna listen to anything other than Taylor Swift singing? Right? It really is a moment in time where there was a lot going on. Okay, do you want me to start with the one that I picked? Yes. So our first victim this time is named Becca Kiefer. And she says this yay, love these episodes. So I have a problem of not reading the sequel slash into a series, not because I don't want to but because I get in my head about whether I should reread the first one. I get indecisive and they languish on my shelf. If you could help direct me which book to pick up knowing I've read and loved the first. And let me know if I need to reread the first one. If it's been over a year since I read it, I would appreciate it. So this is a two part recommendation situation. All of these books that she gave us are second in the series, and we're supposed to let her know. Can you just dive right in? Or do you need to really have the details of the first one fresh in your head before you get into the second one, which is a fun request. So first on this list is Thunderhead we already talked about Neil Schusterman today, but this is second in the Sythe series. Second on the list is Iron Flame. Second in the Empyrean series that starts with Fourth Wing by Rebecca Yarros. Third is Us Against You, which is the Beartown second in a series by Frederik Backman. Fourth is Children of Virtue and Vengeance which is second in the Legacy of Orisha series by Tomi Adeyemi and fifth is The Heir Affair which is The Royal We number two by Heather Cox and Jessica Morgan. This is a lot have you read the first of any of these all of these murder? So

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:55

yes, so I've read Scythe I've read Fourth Wing, I've read Beartown. And I read The Royal We Yes. So yeah, so um, almost all of them, but I do have, you know, I do think there are some clear winners here. But Kaytee, what order with three did you decide on and what order did you think she should put them in? Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 40:17

so I did put Us Against You first. Because if you remember back, this is one of the very few times that I put a book on the press list that was the second in a series rather than the first in a series because I adored us against you so much. At the time, we did not yet have the third in the series, which is called The Winners. I love the second book and I feel like Beartown is great, and you have to kind of get through it and understand what Backman is doing in order to get to Us Against You, which is phenomenal. Second one I put on there was Children of Virtue and Vengeance although to be true. It

has been a long time since I read the two in the series. And now there's a third. I do think that one would call for a reread if you're getting into this series again. And third, I put Thunderhead by Neal Shusterman, which is second in the Scythe series. However, I have not read fourth one yet as we know I'm only basing my not putting that on this list on comments. I've heard from other readers. Exactly

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:18

right. So I ended up picking the same three books Kaytee. And for a lot of the same reasons. I definitely left Iron Flame out with prejudice. I have not read the second book yet, but countless countless countless Countless people have said that Fourth Wing, of course, it's fantastic. And I recommend it to everyone that Iron Flame is simply not you know, and again, there there are people who disagree, but because of the vast number of people who were disappointed by the second one, it's not on my list. So my order was Thunderhead. Okay, I always think, at least for me, because I try to put space in between my series reads partly so that the world is fresh. That's especially true with Scythe, I really like to put some time in between or anything fantasy, I like to put some time in between. And so because I put time in between, I always think it's useful to at least go if I if I own a hard copy of the first book, I like to read the last couple of chapters just to be fresh. Or if I don't have it, then I will just quickly look up a, you know, a summary and pretty much every book, you can find a quick plot summary to again, put you back into that world. So I always think it's a good idea to freshen yourself up. So I would say Thunderhead, that is a fantastic series. And I think everyone should read it should read that series completely. I like you Kaytee, I've read Beartown. I didn't read further in the series. And I wouldn't because it is not a series that is necessarily for me. But I've heard so many people say that Us Against You was in fact, their favorite of the entire series. So that really seems like a series if you loved Beartown, keep going. Because it sounds like you'll be richly rewarded. And then the Children of Virtue and Vengeance has really great ratings. And then the next the third book is coming out just in about two months. So and that third one has remarkably good early reviews. So this also seems like a series that would be worth your time all the way through. So right so we chose the same ones. Alright, so hopefully for Becca that will be helpful. The second one is one that I chose and this is from bookish friend Rachel McClelland and she wants us to boss her Kindle graveyard TBR. So probably some books that have been sitting in there for a while. Here's the five that she chose, number one Coming Home by Rosamund Pilcher. Number two, the thriller Look Closer by David Ellis, number three, The Seven and a Half Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton, number four, The Friend Zone, by Abby Jimenez, and number five, The Book of Cold Cases by Simone St. James. So what I love about these is all you know, there's a lot of murderful on here. There's a lot of plot, but also plot mixed with character in some cases. So I think she's got a pretty good list going here. The three I chose in the order that I chose were I definitely think that she should read The Book of Cold Cases by Simone St. James. That book is just really, really, really good. It's one of my favorite by Simone St. James. Definitely worth your time. If you like crime fiction, especially if you like your crime fiction with a little bit of paranormal a little bit of ghostly newness. If you really like that book, then I think she should go to Coming Home by Rosamunde Pilcher that will be a great palate cleanser to take her to a totally different place after getting the creep scared out of her by Simone St. James. Also, that one has a 4.4 average rating Goodreads with over 23,000 ratings. So that's really high and one that is on my TBR. I tried to read one Rosamunde Pilcher a year. This one will definitely make my list soon. And then I went back and forth between the David Ellis and The seven and a half deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton, which is not a perfect book. But it is one of those Evelyn Hardcastle is one of those books that I think is worth reading,

especially if you consider yourself to be a real mystery reader. It's got a construction that really, really broke out and kind of changed some things in the mystery thriller genre. So you have to be in the mood for it. You have to have the mental bandwidth for it, but I think it is worth your time. So that's my third pick. What about you? What three did you think?

Kaytee Cobb 45:49

Well, I was smiling a little bit like an idiot because I had chosen exactly the same first two for exactly the same reasons. I would love for Rachel to start with *The Book of Cold Cases*. We both really loved that one. I thought it was so excellent. Yes. And then I loved that big swing. I looked up Rosamunde Pilcher that one came out in 1995. It's 977 pages. Yes, it's you know, it's a big chunk of a character driven novel. And that's going to be a fantastic change of plate pace for her. And I think the reason she hasn't picked it up is because it's a big one be like kind of based on what else is going on on this list. But good thing, it's on her Kindle, so she's not going to break her wrist holding it. This is gonna be the perfect time to pick that up. Right. And Rosamunde

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:32

Pilcher, all of her books tend to be really big like that. And they do not feel that length. They go down so easy. So I am constantly surprised that I can pick up a seven or 800 page book by Rosamunde Pilcher and be like, Wow, I read that as fast as I read some 300

Kaytee Cobb 46:53

pages. Exactly. Yeah, so yeah, definitely. And then my third one, I swung to your left. I went with *Look Closer* by David Ellis. I haven't read this one. But the description of it. This sounds super propulsive. So again, we're going to switch over from Rosamunde Pilcher *Coming Home* that more sweeping epic novel, I ended up putting it on my own TBR it sounds really excellent. Kind of dark mystery thriller. Yeah, I liked the cover. This one came out in 2022. And I don't remember hearing about it at the time. I may have. But it sounded really good to me. So this one was purely selfish. I just put it on my TBR for that reason.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:32

I love it. Well, yes. And so I think there's not a lot of ways to go really wrong. Have you read the Abby Jimenez? It's on this list.

Kaytee Cobb 47:40

I have I also much like with *Iron Flame* for you. I skipped that one with prejudice. Okay, I can I like Abby Jimenez, but I, there were issues with that book for me that I did not appreciate. Okay. All right. So

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:53

maybe check content warnings check. Yeah, exactly what it's about. And she can decide for herself if she wants to read that one later. Okay. All right. Good. So yes, we love to boss TBRs we also love it if the people who we boster TBR if you will let us know either what you think after you've read the books or just what you thought about the books that we recommended in the order. We love to hear from you on that so Excellent. All right, Kaytee let's wrap it up by making a wish at the fountain What's your wish?

Kaytee Cobb 48:25

Let's do my wish at the fountain this week is a press I am going to wish to press The Guncle into our listeners hands. It's possible that I've pressed this before. But we're coming right up on May it is just the perfect time to pick up this summer delight of a book. This is The Guncle by Steven Rowley and the sequel finally years later is coming out it's called The Guncle Abroad. So here's the setup for The Guncle follows Patrick as He grieves the loss of his sister after a prolonged illness. And that has already happened off the page. She leaves behind a grieving husband and two precocious kiddos at her funeral and those first few pages her husband lets Patrick know that he is checking himself into rehab after spending much of his wife's illness taking advantage of the pain pills she was readily prescribed. That means the kids Maisie and Grant are coming to Palm Springs to live with gay uncle Patrick for the summer. Hopefully they'll all be able to heal with this change of scenery and circumstance. This book released in the summer of 2021. It made it onto my top 10 list that year and it came out my birthday weekend and it felt like it was perfectly packaged birthday present to me. It was perfect for me. I loved it so much beginning to end. Sensitive readers can probably tell from the setup. It might be good to check out trigger warnings with this on. But if you're looking for heartwarming, funny, but not saccharine sweet faces up to all kinds of life's curveballs. This one is going to be perfect for you just in time to pick up the sequel for now. Grab The Guncle by Steven Rowley

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:59

I agree perfect summer book that has all the early summer vibes. Yes. All right, good. Well, my wish is that kind of like how we were talking about the book fairy, I keep thinking about that deep dive and different things that I would want the book fairy to do. When we were in our trip to to the East Coast, one of the things we did was we went to Newport, Rhode Island, where we toured the breakers, which is the summer cottage, the summer home of the Vanderbilts. It's these part of these Newport mansions that sit right there on the coast with these amazing views. And these houses have been purchased and kept safe and restored by the Newport Preservation Society. You can tour them and what I love is that when you tour them, you really get to get close to all the things they don't keep you way back, you are close, you can really feel like you almost feel like one of the Vanderbilt children has just ran out of the room. Right? Like it's really intimate. Even though the home is absolutely palatial and gorgeous. I loved it so much. I love touring it. And it would it got me to think is I love I wish that the book fairy would allow me when I read books about homes like this, or haunted mansions or any of these big huge homes. I wish the book fairy would stop time. And let me go in and just look around. What's the wallpaper on the walls?

Kaytee Cobb 51:29

How does it smell?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:29

Yeah, how does it smell? What What does their crockery look like? However, it's how big are their closets? What did the debates on the beds look like? What are the views from the windows? Where are the you know, blood spatter on the walls, all of those things. Of course, the breakers doesn't have anything like that. And it is just absolutely beautiful. But just the whole time I was in there, I was like, why can't I step into every one of the books that I read that are about that have a great sense of house place. I want to be able to go in and tour it. So that's my completely irrational wish pink splash.

Kaytee Cobb 52:05

I love it. This fountain segment could turn into just a book fairy segment, and I'd be fine with it already have a new one based on something you were talking about earlier. So we're gonna have to revisit the book fairy in future years. Because yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:17

because it's so fun to think about. If you could just wave a magic wand having something to do with your reading, what would you do? It just has given me endless pleasure. So I'm so glad that we did that. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 52:36

And you can find me Im Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram. Full show notes

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:40

with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps to see you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found in our show notes and on our website currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Kaytee Cobb 52:51

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

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you want to become a bookish friend and you want more of this content, you can join us on Patreon for just \$5 a month, you get more content that you will know what to do with. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All three of those things help us to find our perfect audience. Yes,

Kaytee Cobb 53:16

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:21

Right until next week. May your coffee be hot,

Kaytee Cobb 53:24

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:26

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 53:27

Happy reading Meredith