



# Season 6, Episode 5: Fall Reading + Books That Follow Formulas

Mon, Sep 04, 2023 • 52:37

**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 don't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

**Mary Heim** 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** 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday, Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and reading with my husband is such a delight.

**Mary Heim** 00:42

And I'm Mary Heim, a therapist and working mom of one living in Wisconsin. And I have recently been reminded to never say never about your own literary tastes. This is episode number five of season six. And we are so glad you're here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:55

Oh, Mary, I'm so glad you're here. We haven't gotten a chance to record together for a long time.

**Mary Heim** 01:00

It's been really long. I'm so excited. Meredith, I'm so excited.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:03

I know we have a lot of bookish things to talk about for sure. Okay. So two things that we want to let you guys know about. First of all, we're going to let you know that our deep dive today is going to be about books that follow formulas, formulaic reading, is it a good thing? Is it a bad thing? Is there a place for it? Or is it just stale? So we're going to talk about that in our deep dive, and it's the first episode of the month. So you guys know what that means. And Mary, before you and I were recording today, we were chatting and you were reminding me that two years ago, in October of 2021, there's an episode of the indie press list. Now, the indie press list is our flagship product, that our flagship piece of content that is

a part of being a bookish friend, for currently reading, which is \$5 a month, and you get a lot more than just in the press list. But for a lot of people, it's the IPL that is worth the price of entry. Now you were reminding me that there's an episode from two years ago that you're still thinking about.

**Mary Heim 02:05**

I mean, this episode of the indie press list, truly, it feels like it was made for me. And I know I'm not alone, because I feel like the chatter in the bookish friends group when this episode dropped alone. Like it felt like a holiday. Everyone was so excited. This episode was right, right. In October, it was witchy. It was spooky. It was spooky, which you know that, right? There was something for Fall readers represented for every type of fall reader represented in this list. And I want to say I bought every single one that month, which has happened, but it's rare, a little bit more rare for me that I will get every single book and I bought every single book that month, I think that episode is worth like, you could hold that as a standalone and cost, you know, charge \$100 for it. And I would say it's worth it. That is one of my favorite episodes of all time.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:59**

I love it too. I still think about it all the time. And so I mentioned that because if you become a bookish friend right now, well, anytime if you become a bookish friend, you get access to all the episodes of the indie press list that we've ever done. We don't take those offline you anytime you join us, you get all of them. So it's the beginning of September, a lot of people are thinking about spooky reading and spooky reading. Right now, you could jump in, go listen to all the episodes of the indie press list because they're all really, really good, all supporting independent bookstores. And you can go listen to that October 2021, where our store is the novel neighbor and they give us five amazing picks. The other thing is this coming October, the novel neighbor is coming back for October. Again, we are so excited about that. So now is a perfect time for you to join again. \$5 a month, you get access to indie press list all the other content, our Facebook community, and you keep this show ad free for the entire rest of the month. So it's a good deal all around. All right, Mary. So let's get into the way we love to start the show our bookish moments of the week. What's yours?

**Mary Heim 04:10**

So Meredith about a year ago, I saw one of our favorite booksellers, maybe our favorite bookseller Elizabeth Barnhill a fabled post on Instagram, about a new cozy adjacent murder mystery set in Door County, Wisconsin. If you're not familiar with Door County, it's basically the peninsula part of the state of Wisconsin it is a huge tourist destination. It is essentially Midwestern Nantucket or Cape Cod. It's really fun. My family loves to go. I knew my sister and I were planning a vacation for this coming summer together with our families in Door County. And if you know me my sister is like my number one one of my number one buddy readers. So of course I immediately snag two copies for us to read together on that trip, which now has happened but that book sat on my shelf for a whole year just staring at me. Ready for our vacation this past week. We finally got to read it together and it was so much fun. The book was good. But it was a blast to read it together in Door County, the sense of place was perfection, the bookish anticipation of saving that book for a whole year to get to read together was just the best. I think I'm going to make this a required activity for any future vacations I take with anyone at all, because it was just so much fun. For sure. It was my bookish moment of the whole summer. I loved it.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:25**

That is so so fun. And yes, lots of book reading lately about Door County. And I'm very glad that this one is cozy and wonderful and perfect. And I totally think that the idea of a book waiting for you on it. I mean, books are so patient, right? They're just always there for us exactly when we need them. And I love that so much. My bookish moment of the week is I mentioned I love it that Johnny and I often talk about the books that we're reading. So you guys know Johnny doesn't choose his own books, which I will never get over that part of his personality, I can't understand being like, I need another book and then just having another person handed to me, and that's what I'm going to read. But that's what he does, for better or for worse, and I'm that person to hand it to him. Well, I had been sort of saving this book because I thought it would be a really big hit for him. And it's This Tender Land by William Kent Krueger. And I finally felt like he was in exactly the right mood. And I handed it to him. And he fell headfirst into this book. Now, I haven't actually read it myself, but I'm looking forward to doing that. But he absolutely loved it. And he said he would get up in the morning, make us both coffee, and then come sit down at the chair next to where I still am in bed. And he would sit there and read for like a half hour and he just put the book down and he's like, I could just read and read this book. Now, what's interesting is that my husband is not an effusive man about really any. He doesn't like to say he likes anything. He's an Enneagram Eight. So the best you're gonna get out of him about anything is that was fine. That was me. It was good. Like that. He loved This Tender Land. And he just absolutely, he said he I think it's one of my favorite books of all time. So the moment of joy that is being able to match a reader and a book and have it be really successful is always so wonderful for me. I absolutely love it.

**Mary Heim 07:19**

This is like a win win for both of you. Right? He read this life changing book, you got to be the one to put it in his hands at the right time. I love that. I love that so much. Yeah.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:29**

And so I immediately said, Okay, well, you need to read Covenant of Water next because now we're both reading it kind of I'm almost done with it. He's just starting it. So he's gonna do that one and then he's gonna go to Ordinary Grace, which is another one by William Kent Krueger. So we've gotten through his his reading setup until the new Stephen King comes out, which is happening really soon. And that's a big holiday on his bookish calendar for the year. His TBR is stacked yes it's stacked and he loved he loves that feeling too. Okay, let's get into current reads. What's your first

**Mary Heim 07:59**

one? Okay, so Meredith, I figured I'd start us right off with the topic of my bookish moment this week, which is Death in Door County by Annelise Ryan, that was the book that I was referring to just a moment ago. So now that you know the title, a little bit about the backstory for me, let's dig right into the setup. Our main character is Morgan Carter. She is the owner of an oddities bookstore and a cryptozoologist in Door County, Wisconsin. I don't know how many of those are there for real but it really makes the story so she is just kind of minding her own business when one day a local police chief ambles into the store needing her expert opinion to investigate some mysterious deaths around the peninsula bodies have been showing up on the shore with bite marks that can't be traced to any known animal. But if they had to guess they appear to belong to a large aquatic mammal, the likes of which no one has ever seen before think Loch Ness Monster meets the Great Lakes right. Morgan and her

beloved dog Newt are eager to take up the case to hunt for a homicidal monster in the lake. But if they're not careful, they just may be its next victims. Well, I love

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 09:02

it. I love the Great Lakes mixed with Loch Ness Monster so good,

**Mary Heim** 09:07

right? I think this synopsis the setup for this one is so spectacular. So fun. So weird set like unusual. It almost makes me wonder if my hopes were maybe just a little bit too high. Here's what worked for me, buddy reading it with my sister in Door County. Absolutely the best part of this book, I would do that over and over again in a heartbeat. The sense of place was just perfection whether you've been or you haven't. I think anyone looking for a kind of quirky police procedural to read on vacation, especially if you're anywhere near a lake. This is the book for you. I did not expect this but I learned a lot about Wisconsin maritime history that was really unknown to me. It was super fascinating. And also this one kind of gave me like very very gentle Into the Drowning Deep vibes. Like if you took killer mermaid fiction and kind of turned it into a cozy right this like very niche, specific genre, but what didn't work for me is there were just some elements of the plot that ended up feeling very Scooby Doo to me. And I just felt like there were some really unsatisfying pieces of the puzzle that tarnished some of my earlier love for the book. However, I still really had a fun time reading it and that it's kind of the epitome of a three star read for me sometimes I think three Star books get a bad rap, there's plenty of room on my TBR for three star reads right, thoroughly enjoyed the things that maybe felt a little bit off for it for me, wouldn't deter me from recommending it to somebody else, but they just maybe weren't my favorite, or I might have loved to see them done differently. But either way, this is the start of a series. The next one is coming out in December, and it is going to be a Bigfoot mystery set in the North Woods of Wisconsin. So clearly now that's gonna go in my library holds list as well. This was Death in Door County by Annelise Ryan,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 10:56

I think you're right, there is definitely room for three star reads. For me, that usually ends up being like my rating system, like a three and a half star, I would definitely recommend it to somebody else if they were in the mood for that particular thing. But it's not something that's necessarily going to make my top 10 list of the year or even be something that I remember forever. But that's okay. Not every book has to be that ultimate five star read.

**Mary Heim** 11:19

Right? It's kind of exhausting to like when I have that expectation for every single book on my TBR. Right. It's nice to have one that I thoroughly enjoyed. That was the right book at the right time. And it was just fun. And I think a lot of people are really going to enjoy this one.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 11:34

Yeah, that looks really really good. Okay, I want to talk about a five star read for me that I think definitely will be on my top 10 list of the year. And that is Strange Sally Diamond by Liz Nugent. Have you read this yet?

**Mary Heim 11:47**

I haven't. No. I'm really curious to hear your thoughts.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 11:50**

Yes, this one is so so good. Okay, here's the setup, which you've probably definitely heard by now. Our lead character Sally Diamond lives on an isolated farm with her aging father. As he gets closer to death. He kind of knows that that's happening. He jokes with his daughter that when I go just take me out with the trash, so when he dies, our very literal Sally does just that she wraps up dear dad, and she incinerates him or she tries to. But bodies it turns out don't burn like normal trash and neighbors are soon alerting the authorities to a strange smell. And then Sally is as surprised as anyone when she's not only in trouble for what she did. She meant nothing by it. She loved her dad. But now she's the center of attention not only from the hungry media and police detectives, but from someone who's from a past that Sally can't remember, as she begins to discover the horrors of her early childhood. She is forced to step into the world for the first time and a lot of good comes from that. She makes new friends. She makes big decisions. She learns that people don't always mean what they say, which is really kind of tough lesson for our very literal Sally to learn. But those elements from the early childhood that I referred to have become aware of Sally, and they will try to infiltrate her world in ways that no one who loves Sally can imagine. Okay, as I said, a true five star work of crime fiction is few and far between and strange. Sally diamond is that kind of book. I loved this book so much. I think Liz Nugent is such a smart writer. There's a reason that Catherine Ryan Howard named her as one of her favorite Irish crime writers, Nugent's Unraveling Oliver is really really good. I highly recommend that one too. But Strange Sally Diamond takes her work to the next level in every single way. I went into this book totally blind, which has become a theme for me. I purely went in on the emphatic recommendation of Elizabeth Barnhill. I'm so glad I did it this way, because what we find here is excellent, but it is totally its own thing. I fell head over heels in love with our lead character Sally from the start, she is neuro divergent due to the trauma of her past. That is not the whole story of her character. It's a testament to Nugent's great writing that she was able to not only give us a layered, realistic story of a victim's healing, but she did that without ever taking her foot off the gas from the mystery portion of the book. And that is not easy to do. But the net effect is what we would call crime fiction plus, a great mystery to follow along with heart wrenching gut punches of Pitch Perfect emotion. Every review I've seen has raved about this story. So I know I'm not alone. In fact, it currently is sitting at a 4.4 rating on Goodreads if there's one element that will I think potentially divide people it's going to be the ending but to me, Liz Nugent absolutely nailed the perfect way to end such a complex story. Now, I will say that when I came to that complex ending, and it is complex, I sat in silence with it for a minute. And I thought about it that night. But I think the ending was exactly right. This is what I call a literary mystery. It's just working at a level that is far above standard popcorn thriller. It's exactly the kind of novel I love to read. And the kind I love to recommend to all of you. This is Strange Sally Diamond, by Liz Nugent. And I will say too, I was going to wait for a little bit because there's been a lot of hype around this book, but I wanted to bring it this week, because Sarah from Sarah's bookshelves live, is going to be interviewing Liz Nugent on her show in a couple of weeks. And I know that that is going to be a fantastic interview. So I want you to be sure that you read this so that you can go into that interview and hear all of the goodness that we're going to hear from Sarah getting into the deep dark of how Liz Nugent wrote this book. So again, Strange Sally Diamond by Liz Nugent.

**Mary Heim 15:59**

Not only did you totally sell me on this, just by your review alone, Meredith and then to add on one of Sarah's author interviews, which are spectacular, she's truly a top notch interviewer. So very excited to know that and also, this one kind of sounds Now I may be totally off. But it sounds to me like it might be adjacent, sort of maybe to The Maid by Anita prose, which did not work for me at all. I know, I'm an outlier. But I really did not enjoy that book. And for so many of the things, kind of all of the tick marks in my head of the reasons why I didn't enjoy that book. I feel like I heard you make a counterpoint in this review. That makes me think like, oh, wait, I didn't enjoy that. But this one sounds like it has it just over and over again. So I think this may be the, you know, neurodivergent crime fiction with a kind of unlikely heroine that is going to work for me instead of the maid.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:58**

Right. So what I will say about that is I started The Maid and I set it down for all the reasons that I think it didn't work for you, Mary. And because I felt like in that book, The neuro divergent angle of that character was being used in a lot of ways that I didn't feel comfortable with. Yes. And it was being used as a plot device, it was being used to play for humor. That is not what you're finding this book is a whole different ballgame in the way that the character of Sally is being treated. As I said, there's no question that there is a neurodivergent element. But she is as a character made so complete. And that is just one element of her. And I really loved the way that Liz Nugent handled that. And also, you know, if I didn't underscore it enough, there is a really interesting, plot forward mystery that we are trying to figure out. That is deeply crime fiction. This is not like, Ooh, a territory. This is crime fiction, and we just happen to have this really interesting and multi layered lead character. I definitely think it would work for you, Mary, for sure.

**Mary Heim 18:08**

That's going on my fall. TBR for sure. I love it.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:11**

It's a very fast read, too. All right. What's your next one?

**Mary Heim 18:14**

So my next book this week is Seven Year Slip by Ashley Poston. So I am straight up piggybacking off of Kaytee's current read from a few weeks ago of Ashley's first adult novel Dead Romantics. I just had to bring this one to the show today. So seven years slip tells the story of Clementine a 30 something dealing with grief over the loss of her beloved aunt, currently occupying the beautiful magical New York City apartment that she left to Clementine when she passed and listen when I say magical I mean it. Her aunt always told her, this apartment can slip backwards and forwards in time, seven years at random times, something that Clementine never really believed until it was hers. One morning she wakes up in her apartment to a strange man standing in her kitchen. Only he's not actually here. Now he's in her apartment seven years ago, as her aunt often says, Love isn't a matter of time but of timing. And Clementine knows the timing couldn't be worse for her right now. Listen, I thought this was a perfectly enjoyable rom com It was I liked those elements. And I think people who are falling kind of middling on this book, are maybe looking at the rom com Enos of it all and just kind of focusing on that

piece of the story. But where it really and truly saying For me it was in the writing of the love between Clementine and her aunt and the grief that she is living with in the wake of that loss. I'm sure it comes as no surprise to anyone that I am really resonating with grief that is well represented in my fiction right now. And this one knocks that representation out of the park. In fact, there is a chapter near the end of the story that had me absolutely weeping in my living room as I read it. I found it to be one of the most beautifully accurate and profound reflections on loss that I have ever read while the last one When time experienced is different from my own post in writes this plotline so well that I just couldn't help it feel so seen. In fact, for anyone who picks this up, I highly recommend making time to read the author's note at the end, which gives even more beautiful context to how her own losses informed this story. But I want to be very clear far from being just a bummer grief story. This one was so hopeful, just heart bursting ly beautiful. It fell right into my very favorite makeup genre, which is books that make me feel something about being human. And boy did this one ever. That is Seven Year Slip by Ashley Poston.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 20:35

I love your made up genres. I think we all need to have our own made up don't because it's like reader know thyself. Yeah, right. You need you know, I love books that involve children hanging from trees. That's a it's a micro genre for me. You know, and I will I will immediately get a book that we need to know ourselves. Mary, you do and I love that. Okay.

**Mary Heim** 20:55

And love it. And might I say I think we are three for three on recommendations from Elizabeth Barnhill because this one came from her as well. So if you're not following @wacoreads on Instagram, what are you doing?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 21:06

What are you doing you, won't we you and I wouldn't have anything to read at all. Okay. Well, I'm going to dig a little bit because I'm going to bring nonfiction which when I look at my numbers from this year is in just an embarrassingly small, I continue to not read a lot of nonfiction. For a long time, I read a lot more. But this one is a big chunker. And I really enjoyed it. And it's actually spurred me to quite a bit of action in my real life. So I wanted to bring it. This is Outlive by Dr. Peter Attia And Bill Gifford. There's not much setup here. The tagline of the book is the science and art of longevity. And well this book is about living longer. It's really actually a lot more about living better in outlive Dr. Peter Attia goes over all the latest science to teach us about the difference between lifespan and health span. That period of time when your body is healthy enough, mobile enough painfree enough to allow you to enjoy your longer life. So in this book, just a few of the things that we'll find is why the cholesterol test at your annual physical does not tell you enough about your actual risk of dying from a heart attack. This was huge for me why exercise is the most important thing that you can do. Why you should forget about diets and focus instead on nutritional biochemistry, and why paying attention to our emotional health long term is much, much more important than standard medicine has led us to believe Mary, I'm sure I'm not going to need to convince you on that part.

**Mary Heim** 22:38

I'm already ready to put this one on my list. This sounds Yes. So great. So okay,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:43**

you guys know I have been loud and proud about my love for Oprah. I love Oprah. I love her with all of my heart. And when she recommends something really highly and starts to live it in her own life, I am likely to be not very far behind. And that is what happened without live she had Peter Attia on and I'm a daily an open daily member. So we all got to see this like 45 minute talk. It was really amazing. And so I got the book immediately because I was coming up toward my 50th birthday. And the idea of not just living longer, but living well has been at the forefront of my mind. And there's no question that Dr. Peter Attia along with his co writer Bill Gifford has put forth a singular work on this topic. This book is smart and it is exhaustively researched. And one of its great strengths is Dr. Attia spends time not just spouting facts, but telling us why these things matter. He puts them into context with stories from his own life and the lives of his patients. He focuses on what he sees as medicine 3.0 that is moving beyond curing disease, and concentrating on preventing them. And we need to do that now. He describes the Four Horsemen of slow death and one of these is likely to get all of us cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and other metabolic diseases and neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia. He then spends the majority of the book walking us through the things we can do to stave off the four horsemen, top of the list of the things that you would expect exercise nutrition, controlling our blood sugar and cholesterol. He walks us through how to make positive impacts on all of these fronts. And I also appreciate that Dr. Tia puts a new focus on the importance of our mental health and walks through the impacts that poor mental health can have on that long term health span. There's so much to like in this book. The ideas are grounded in data and they ring true from a common sense perspective. There's no out there theory or fad diet to be found here. It's really quality stuff. But and this is a big but this book is long, and it is so dense. And I know that's because the topics are nuanced and if he did give us data and detail, he wouldn't be doing its job. But for the normal lay reader, it's going to be hard to charge through all of it. Even dipping into chapters that are especially of interest is difficult. And that's mostly because it's hard to tease out the executable steps from all of the data tells me what foods I should eat and what exercise they should do. But he's telling me about bioavailable protein efficiency, I kept wishing that he'd have a checklist or a to Do section at the end of every chapter, not because I didn't want to read the entire thing. But because I wanted to be sure that I had a handle on what to do next, or what to apply to my life. It's just a lot. I'm so glad I bought it. And I know that I'll continue to pull it off my shelf over and over again to read deeper on certain topics. And his extensive index will help me to do that. But if you want a really useful overview, one that will get you off your couch, moving your body and eating that lean protein, then I would recommend finding that Oprah talk, which I will link to and watching it. He also did a two and a half hour podcast episode with Tim Ferriss, and we'll link to that too. We need books like this, and I'm glad I read it even if I think I will get more out of it over time. This is Outlive by Dr. Peter Atea. And Bill Gifford.

**Mary Heim 22:57**

That sounds so great, Meredith and obviously you know that I am over here cheerleading every time you're talking about the emphasis on mental and emotional health and well being I love, love love seeing that across the board. We're seeing it much more a part of the conversation. But I love seeing it in such a well researched evidence based science backed understanding of our kind of complete and whole total wellness. I love that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 26:45

Yeah, no, it's really, really good. And it like I said, it's got me doing set moving forward with several things that I you know, just hadn't found time to do. I've been moving forward with that. So I feel good about that. All right, what's your third read?

**Mary Heim** 26:57

All right, well, if you think I'm gonna say go straight back into fiction territory. Okay, good. And I'm fully okay with that. My third book is Dead Eleven by Jimmy Julliano.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 27:08

Yes.

**Mary Heim** 27:09

I'm so excited to talk with you specifically about this book. Meredith. Obviously, I would have loved to talk to kaytee about it too. But when I knew that we were recording together. I was like, Absolutely. I'm bringing this book this week. So if you follow me on Instagram, you have already seen me shout from the rooftops how much I love to this book. Just in case you missed it, though. Here is our setup. on a tiny island off of Door County Peninsula. Can you tell where I've been reading this summer? It is 1994. Or rather, it's 2023. But everyone is mysteriously stuck in 1994 or so it seems reliving the same day day in and day out watching the OJ Simpson car chase every night, wearing the same clothes and teaching the same math homework they have been for the last 30 years. A few hours away. Willow stone is grieving the tragic loss of her son, when she finds mysterious words painted across his bedroom floor that lead her straight to Clifford Island to try and figure out what his death might have to do with this isolated place seemingly stuck in the past. She's not there very long when she begins to realize that something here is very, very wrong. When she begins to try and look for answers. She's met with only more questions and the sinking feeling that there is something much more sinister and perhaps maybe even supernatural at play. I loved this story. I just loved this one so much. Like I said, clearly, I was in a themed mood with all of my Door County reading before this trip. But even more than that, I think I loved this one so much just because of how much it surprised me. I have said in the past, you know, I'm an HSP reader and I don't read a lot of horror. I am learning about myself that I don't think that's true. I think as a therapist, and previously a therapist in community mental health, working with some really tough stuff. I don't love reading scary hard detailed things that like very much could happen in real life. If you're to hand me something a little bit ridiculous that is kind of spooky, scary etc. I'm all in I'm like this is probably none of my clients are gonna tell me that they are stuck in 1994 County, and we have to process it together. I'm here for this instead, I read this book in like two days. I handed it to my husband immediately he read it even quicker. This is a book that you are going to fly through. Like I said, you know, I really only very rarely read horror and I tend to shy away from anything super scary. But I was convinced by my friend Amy at what Amy reads that I could handle this one and she was super right it is not slasher gory, violent, but it is campy and creepy and spooky. Frankly, I read the night gardener last fall which is middle grade and I was more scared of that book than I was in this one. I felt like I was in a world where Stranger Things and 11/22/63 had a baby and that baby was this book But I absolutely just could not put down from the get if you are looking for the perfect summer blockbuster esque read to transition into spooky fall reading. This is it. I've heard it's been optioned for the screen. And frankly, I

feel like it's still kind of flying under the radar a little bit. So get your library holds. Get your reeds in before you start seeing this one everywhere that is Dead Eleven by Jimmy Juliano.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:23**

Oh, man, I, I picked this book up on your recommendation. And I loved it. I told you at the time, I said, I'm not gonna be bringing this show because you need to bring it. But I'm so glad that you are bringing it that we are able to talk about it because that book was not like any other book that I've read. It was really different. It was complex enough to give your mind a lot to chew on, but then really threaded the needle at the ending, which I was like, how is this gonna happen? But did it and it is it sort of campy but then also, there were many WTF moments like it was very, very interesting and talk about a lot it said at the beginning. I was glad that you brought a cozy Door County book because this book is not cozy,

**Mary Heim 31:11**

not so cozy now. Other end of the spectrum.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:15**

Yeah, for sure. I just enjoyed the heck out of it. 1994 was a big year for me. I got pregnant with my daughter in 1994. I was in my senior year of college. So all the things we harken back to the you know, I was like, Oh my gosh, it is truly 1994 Again, I absolutely loved it. So good. This Yes. If you want a page turner that perfectly transitions you into fall. You said it perfectly. This Dead Eleven is the one to pick up.

**Mary Heim 31:44**

Oh, I'm so thrilled you loved it. Meredith. I was like Mary, don't be upset if she didn't like it. Don't take it. I'm so glad I love that I cannot wait to hear. I hope our bookish friends. I hope everybody picks it up. And then feel free to just you know, pepper, my DMs with all your thoughts. I would love to hear what everybody thinks so much fun.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:03**

Yeah, this is one of those under the radar ones that I really do feel like why isn't everybody recommending this book? It's so so good. All right. So yes, I am going as far away from nonfiction medical tome as possible because I am back in a formula that works for me over and over again. And that is I read The Governess Game by Tessa Dare. So we're in historical romance here. Steamy Open Door historical romance. Here's the setup. And I will say the marketing blurb on this particular book is one of the worst I've ever seen. It sets this book up to be so much pornea than it actually it actually is. It's the blurb is truly terrible. So I'm going to tell you that our lead is Alexandra Mountbatten. She is smart and independent and making her way in Regency England as a timekeeper to know what a timekeeper is Mary. And no,

**Mary Heim 32:56**

I have no idea. Oh, is this like before we had alarm clocks? Uh huh.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:00**

Yes. So timekeeper, they had to have this sort of expensive instrument called a chronometer, and then they go around and set everybody's clocks. So they like have clients that they went to their houses, and some of these houses would have like 20 clocks, so they don't want them chiming at different times. So this was a really important job. So Alexandria is the timekeeper when our book starts, but then a really unfortunate circumstance has her losing her chronometer, and it takes away her ability to continue her business. And so she is faced with really only one good option and that is to take on an impossible post nanny of two orphaned girls who are now the ward of the soon to be Duke Chase Ray node. The girls have been through 15 nannies and the Duke is desperate for someone to take them on, and turn them into proper young ladies. And we all know that Alexandra is up to the task chase for his part is an admitted rake. He lives by one rule, no attachments. He likes his freedom and his romantic exploits. And he's sure that he is beyond redemption. And he kind of is okay with that. But Alex refuses, of course, to see him as a lost cause, or the girls for that matter. And so soon, all their walls are crumbling in many different ways. All right, this book is the second in the four book book Girl Meets Duke series. And you guys know I love me some Tessa Dare. This is a series that I'm going to tell you, you do not need to read in order. Something I love about romance series. We have four really good friends. Each book deals with their kind of ridiculous romance. And it's ridiculous because they each have this amazing romance with a Duke that's amazing. What are the chances? Yeah, what are the chances but it's fine. We're all just gonna ignore that piece of it. I love Tessa Dare's series even though it can be described as formulaic. I love her female characters that are small and independent, still totally capable of falling helplessly in love. I also really love the friendship between the four girls in the series. You don't have to read them in order as I said, but it's fun because you if you do read them in order because then you can meet them in each book and you kind of hear about what's going on in their lives. While you're concentrated on this one story. I love that and I always love Tessa Dare's Dukes. They are each unlovable or difficult in some way. In this case, poor Chase, as I mentioned, is a rake. But of course we find out his backstory, and we understand why he's that way. And we hope that he will become a reformed rake. Now hear me say he's not a jerk. So for a lot of people, you know, I like the jerky guy who with a heart of gold, that's my vibe. That's not Chase. So you're not getting that a lot of people are like, I don't love that trope. That's not what you're getting here. He is a really sweet guy. He just really likes the ladies. But trust me when I say he is not, Chase is not going to be completely reformed. Remember that. Another thing you will find in these books is a lot of steamy sex scenes. This is definitely at least a four out of five on the spicy scale, it may be even a five out of five if I'm honest, there are named parts and those named parts are doing lots of named things. Not something I want to listen to in my ears. But I'm an e reader, I am totally fine with it. I also loved in this book, the side plot of the two girls that Alexandria becomes governess to there's just a really sweet found family element. That of course is completely predictable, but it warmed my heart. And that's the thing with these books, right. That's the thing that we'll talk about today. In our deep dive. There are some books that are formulaic. And I don't want to read those books all the time. But sometimes if you know yourself as a reader, and you know the author's formula, then you can match your perfect mood with the perfect formula and have a wonderful reading experience. And that's what I had here. This is The Governess Game by the inimitable Tessa Dare. Have you ever read anything by her?

### **Mary Heim 37:05**

I haven't. But you know what, Meredith, as you were talking, I thought, I think our bookish friend Candace recommended this series to me. And she told me to start with this book. I confirmed that on

Goodreads as you were talking and took a little peek at the synopsis here, right? It's not great, but and I was like, okay, maybe I don't read a ton of historical romance. But now I think with both of your sign off this kind of bringing it back to my attention. This sounds like a fun one to get lost into. Not again, not in not in my ears. But on my Kindle is just fine.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:38**

Exactly. And so, so fast. I mean, these books are just not long, and they are they just go really, really fast. So a little palate cleanser. I just I know exactly when I'm in that mood. And I love that I can go straight to Tessa Dare, which is part of the reason, Mary that we wanted to talk about nor we wanted to have this little mini deep dive today about formulaic books. We've been thinking about it a lot. And it the idea came for this conversation back when I brought the latest Riley Sager and we were talking I was talking about how that one felt formulaic to me and it felt more than being formulaic. It felt like he hadn't tried very hard. And I feel like that's the distinction for me. Because Kaytee said at the time, like okay, but sometimes we like formulate books, right? So when does that not work? So that's when we put this episode on the calendar. And I think what I've arrived at is that there's a big distinction for me between an author having a formula and an author phoning in his or her new book.

**Mary Heim 38:46**

Yes, I hear you so strongly on this because I also think that there is a way to do formulaic reading that doesn't feel stale to me, right. Like I was kind of reflecting on what genres do we see a formulaic read in a lot, right? I think we see it a lot in romance, we see it a lot in mystery. We see it a lot in holiday books. Something that jumped out for me is I was like, I love a holiday like a Halloweeny or a Christmas wintry season. Those books, I could probably write for you the outline of every single one that I am going to read right now without even looking at the Synopsys right, but I am that's what I'm seeking. There's enjoyment. I'm going into this one, almost kind of as we've discussed before, about you know, what's great about romance novels is you know that generally right the main characters, particularly a lot of times it's women are going to get like a happily ever after you're going to get a happy ending. You're going into this book, knowing that good things are going to happen and there is such a place for that in my reading life. Now. By the end of October, am I like get all of the Halloween books away from me. I don't want to read any more of this right? Yes, probably because I have kind of binged through that I have bent all of those coins have that interest in formulaic reads, but it's something especially when I go into expecting seeking it out to fill a specific purpose, as opposed to when I am unsure of what I'm expecting going into a book going into Riley Sagers newest book and hoping for something who knows what's gonna come? And then I think I've read this before I've read this book before. That is really disappointing to me.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:25**

Right? And I feel like exactly. So the difference is, if you're, let's say, a Tessa Dare, or the books of Debbie Macomber fall into this category, or, I mean, how many cozy mystery authors could we name that fall into this category? There's a formula, you know what you can expect? And I think that that's a good thing. But they also as authors, they realize that's what I'm writing. That's, that's what people expect from me. And they're probably not going to top the best seller list because of the fact that they they're writing in this way. Again, upsides and downsides. I feel like with Riley Sager, as you said, there's this expectation is what is he going to do next? Then when it feels formulaic? It feels phoned in.

Because he's like, hitting for the rafters, right? He's aiming for the rafters. He's not just saying, Hey, this is my, this is what I'm doing. If you love it, go ahead and buy my books. If you don't, you know, he's saying, Hey, I'm going to top the best seller lists. And I feel like you don't get to do that. If you're writing formulaically, or you're just phoning in what you're doing. And again, there's a really, really big difference. Even in the space of a formulaic book, I was thinking about, like the Jenny Colgan books, another author who's definitely follows the formula. And so yes, you're going to get those key parts, the outline, you're going to be hitting those high points with all of her books, but I'm there because I know what to expect. And it's what I need in my reading life. Right? So there's that. But then also, it's kind of like there's the scaffolding, but then there's all the other stuff that she's built on the scaffolding. And I'm interested in the cute so every one of her characters lives in a totally cute cottage that she's found herself in for whatever reason, right? But I'm interested in this particular cottage because it's different than the last books cottage, or yeah, there's going to be the hero, but I'm interested in this particular like, how is she built this particular hero? Same thing with tested air, it's like I, I'm okay, with the scaffolding being pretty similar, because they're gonna have built other interesting things around it that I want to see exactly what we're here, we're gonna get this time.

**Mary Heim 42:34**

And you know, you speak to a point, Meredith, that I think is really important to acknowledge when we're talking about a formula is I am often seeking out a formulaic book, because I need that consistency. Because I need that expectation in my reading life, right? I think about early pandemic, early postpartum, right after my dad passed these times where my life was, like, thrown upside down. And I'm like, I've got no expectation of what is happening in my life, every day is uncertainty. And who knows, right? That it is really grounding and comforting to come to a book where you know what to expect. And I think that that serves a really important purpose. And again, it's such a difference. I think this is really coming together for me when I'm seeking it out. Versus when I am surprised, and like, unpleasantly surprised by the formula that feels like a big one for me of is this when I am looking for some certainty and consistency and to kind of fall into this world where I can enjoy it and like the writing is right, it's well done. I think Jenny Colgan can paint a beautiful cozy picture. I'm not rolling my eyes, maybe some folks are, but I'm not. And I'm enjoying those stories. But also nothing is totally knocking me on my butt and taking me by surprise, it is giving me that comfort and consistency. And I have purposefully sought it out as opposed to coming to a book and being like, what's next? What is this one going to have for me? And then having the disappointment of I've read this a million times?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:06**

Exactly. And I think all of this goes back to read her Know thyself, you need to know where you are in your reading life. I read for 10 years that first 10 years after Devon was born, I read almost exclusively cozy mysteries. For serious now I was only reading like 20 books a year but because I was going through, you know, a divorce, I had a baby I was going through divorce, I remarried all these things were happening in my outside life. And I needed to know in my reading that I could just know what I was going to expect. So reader know thyself. And so what I want us to do is to both know what to go for when you're in a particular mood. So as you're reading, like even we could talk about Sarah J. Maas or you know, those kinds of books like yes, there's some formula there. What I do there is I put lots of room in between my reads of books in that series. Just so that every time I go back, it feels fresh to me again. Now, I could read them back to back. But I have just found that they won't have the same impact

on me as they do if I put some time between them. Same thing with Tessa Dare I hadn't read a Tessa Dare in a really long time. And so all of a sudden, it sounded good to me again. So put space in between them. If you need to use your book journal, use your spreadsheet. Another reason for you to keep track of your reading is so that you can write some of these things down. So you can say the next time and I'm in the X kind of mood, go for y kind of book. And you can match that up for yourself, which was like books can be therapy books can be comfort, and when you know that you can apply the right poultice to the wound that you currently have. Right. And I think that that's really important. The other thing I will say is I think we have to accept that there are formulas in books of all kinds in every genre. And it really bothers me when people read one of those books, and then are super disparaging about what they're finding there, when in reality, what else did you think you were gonna find? Like, you know what I mean? And so I just sort of feel like reader know thyself, and don't take away anyone else's pleasure if that's what it is. That's bringing them readerly joy. That's my little rant about the issue of formulaic books.

**Mary Heim 46:19**

I will hop up on that soapbox with you because really, you know, it is this reminder. And this continues to come up for me again and again. Right, the reminder that your reading is there to serve you and not the other way around. And I came into a little bit of a formulaic book snafu I read like a big blockbuster summer hit from last summer and followed it up immediately with a summer a brand new, Buzzy summer release. And Meredith they were nearly identical. That wasn't even the same author. But I was like, oh, no, I couldn't even tell you what differentiated the two. Afterwards I was in a huge slump I like didn't even really thoroughly enjoy as much the second book, right? Because I felt like I had just read the same one. And that is a time where I wish I would have stepped back and said, okay, my reading is here to serve me. I can tell I am reading the same book that I just read. And right now I need something different. Maybe in another time, it would have been like I loved that I want more of it. Let's just keep rolling down this hill. But I could tell it was making me feel slumpy. And sure enough, it did. And I wish I would have listened to that to say what I need right now is the opposite of a formula. My fall reading, right I am about to jump all in on many of my favorite formulaic reads. That was not it for me, though, back then. And I wish I would have listened to myself a little bit better to say, now's the time to take a hard left and read something completely different. So as to try and avoid a slump. And it's, I'm always learning right? I am always learning what's going to work for me and what's not. And constantly kind of reinforcing this understanding of like, I can trust and listen to myself. I know when a formula is gonna work for me when I need something totally different. And that's okay. There's nothing wrong with that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:06**

Absolutely. No, and I love how you said you're our reading is there to serve us. Every time someone asks in the bookish friends group, I'm reading X book, it's not interesting to me, should I put it down I just want to scream at the top of my lungs. Your reading is there to serve you set it down, you know, but all of this goes to know yourself as reader. Be okay with what it is that you need. And if a formulaic book is of any kind is going to get you exactly what you need, then go ahead and pick that up. For sure.

**Mary Heim 48:38**

Amen.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:39**

Amen Alright, so let's talk a little bit then about the wishes that we want to make at the fountain What's your wish this

**Mary Heim 48:46**

week? All right, Meredith, I wish that I could gently encourage everyone to let themselves find what brings them joy in their bookish lives and be extra about it just be so extra if you again follow me on Instagram or longtime listener you know that I love fall reading this is my time of year I get a lot of joy from crafting my TBR making my yearly spooky reading guide on Instagram all of it is so much fun for me this year. I wasn't sure if I was gonna have the Mojo for it after losing my dad. But recently the inspiration hit for me and I just let myself go all in I made fun graphics. I'm working on a few extra surprise projects related to my guide this year. It has brought me a ton of I'm putting this in air quotes non essential happiness this year and what I mean by this is I don't have to do this my reading will be fine. Without it if I didn't have the capacity for it this year. Nothing would be lost. But seeking this out and putting my creative energy towards it has brought so much additional extra joy and fun into my life and who doesn't need more of that be extra plan a virtual or real life buddy reading retreat makeup paper to count down to your favorite author's next book, make a themed beverage for your book club, right there is only joy to be gained when we are extra about what we love. And I'm here to remind you that it is especially special when it has to do with our reading lives. So do it. Ping, splash.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:16**

I love it. Well, it's interesting that this was your wish, Mary because my wish was going to be that everyone follow you at Maryreadsandsips because I have a feeling we are going to be getting some great fall reading recommendations you do. Nobody does spooky better than you do. Of course, if you haven't been with us forever when we say spooky it's like a mixture of spooky and cozy, so spooky with a little bit less scary. And Mary is the ultimate specialist in this genre that you created. Marian, all of your content is fantastic. I've found so many books that I've bought and read to my grandson from following you. And there's just You're a great bookish follow. And this time of year is the perfect time to do that. So that is also my wish. I love that and you being extra about what you love in your reading brings all of us so much joy.

**Mary Heim 51:08**

Wow, that just fills my cup straight up. Thank you friend. I hope I hope I can live up to it this year. I'm very excited for what I'm cooking up. So that will be coming very soon. It may already be here by the time this episode drops. So yes, Instagram is the place to find it. Thank you friend

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:24**

and love it. All right, so that is it for this week. As reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @MeredithMondaySchwartz on Instagram.

**Mary Heim 51:33**

And you can find me at @Maryreadsandsips on Instagram

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 51:37

Kaytee is at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps. So you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found on our website at [currentlyreadingpodcast.com](http://currentlyreadingpodcast.com).

**Mary Heim** 51:50

You can also follow the show at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram or email us at [currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com).

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 51:57

And if you really want to help us you can rate and review us on Apple podcasts. You can shout us out on social media you of course can also become a bookish friend and keep the show completely ad free for the low low price of just \$5 a month. All of those things make a huge difference in our finding our perfect audience.

**Mary Heim** 52:17

But guest friends are truly truly the best friends thank you for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 52:22

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

**Mary Heim** 52:25

and your book be unputdownable.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 52:27

Happy reading Mary.

**Mary Heim** 52:28

Happy reading Meredith