

Season 5, Episode 47: Many Kinds of Murder + Forcefully and Directly Pressing a Book

Mon, July 23, 2023 • 58:31

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

Kaytee Cobb 00:23

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and with reading, there is a first time for everything.

Kaytee Cobb 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb. I'm a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and I am packing for the next big Cobb adventure. This is episode number 47 of season five and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:54

Okay, Kaytee, you know what I'm realizing all of a sudden, I have no idea what my bite size intro refers to.

Kaytee Cobb 01:01

I wasn't listening.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:03

No, I know. Okay. I know what it refers to.

Kaytee Cobb 01:06

Okay? Like, I don't either? Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:10

No, I didn't think you did. Now I got it. I gotta go. Because we can tell the people that we are going to do a deep dive today. That's why bite size intro alluded to that is something we have never done before. That we're terrified of. And also excited about. I'm not terrified, but you're terrified of it.

Kaytee Cobb 01:28

I was terrified of it. At least for the first four years of the podcast.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:31

Yeah, I'm not terrified. I'm excited about it. So wait and see what that's gonna be you guys. Oh, yes. Okay, so we also have a little bit of business mischief to manage Kaytee, we do. It's the first week of the month.

Kaytee Cobb 01:45

It is Meredith. And this month, I want to remind everyone about one of my favorite pieces of Patreon content. And you may have guessed that it's All Things Murderful with Meredith and Elizabeth. I get to listen to this episode, like a regular listener, usually, almost always, because you and Elizabeth record, and Megan edits it. And then it comes to my Patreon feed just like it does for the rest of our bookish friends. And so I get to sit there and add books to my TBR. Elizabeth is the adult book buyer for fabled bookshop in Waco, Texas. And she brings this fantastic behind the scenes look at Indie bookstores, and how she makes buying decisions for the store, which is one of my favorite parts when she talks about reading for the spring preview on when she talks about going to winter Institute. And she gives us this very cool look at what it's like to work for a bookstore, because a lot of us, many of us do not get to have that experience. So you both bring watch recommendations, books, and it's really focused content on mysteries and thrillers that frankly, a lot of our audience comes here for that content. So if you're someone who gets mad if there aren't at least two murdery books per episode, please consider joining us on Patreon. For five bucks a month, you'll get even more of that murderful goodness, every month with All Things Murderful.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:03

Awe thank you, Kaytee, I appreciate you talking about that. All things Murderful is one of the most fun things I do each month. I look forward to it. Because I don't know what Elizabeth's picks are gonna be. And so I'm literally buying books from Fabled because fabled gives our Patreon subscribers a really good discount to those books. So I'm buying books in real time while we're recording the show. So All Things Murderful is very, very fun. And I think worth \$5 a month. I would agree.

Kaytee Cobb 03:34

Absolutely. There's lots of great content over there. But that's just one of the incredible pieces you get for five bucks a month.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:40

Exactly. All right, Mischief Managed for the month of July. So now the whole rest of the month will be ad free on the big show. Another reason to join us for \$5 a month. And let's talk about our bookish moments of the week. What have you got this week?

Kaytee Cobb 03:54

All right, Meredith, we went to sign up for library summer reading this week. And we are recording things out of order. So this happened early in the summer, even though you're hearing about it listeners

in July. Our library does an online challenge for summer. And when you sign up, every reader gets a reading level appropriate book to take home for free as well and to keep it's not a library book. It's a forever shelves book. So we've gotten some great titles from this program and we love to keep getting them and we love getting to keep them on our shelves. It's no Pizza Hut pizza, but it does last a lot longer. And I don't ever feel sick to my stomach when I'm all done with it. So that's always a good thing.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:32

Yes, absolutely.

Kaytee Cobb 04:34

Yes summer reading program at the library. I just I love getting to sign up. I love how excited the kids get and that they get like free goodies and that they are paying attention to their reading for the summer. Everybody gets excited about it. I love it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:45

That is very exciting. When I was a kid this is one of the things I most look forward to because I was like, hold my baby beer with the summer reading my root beer. Hold my root beer. Yeah, I mean, seriously, I was like, oh, blow all y'all out the water.

Kaytee Cobb 04:59

But yes, absolutely. What's your bookish moment?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:03

All right, my bookish moment of the week is a fun little book that you've probably seen a few times on Instagram. I'm going to hold it up for you, Katie, because I love the I Can you see this? It's Murdle, Volume One of Murdle. And so I like this for a couple of reasons. These are murderful logic puzzles, okay. Okay. Now, it's a super fun book. I love the format of it. It's kind of like an adult workbook in a certain way. But it's a puzzle book. I mean, let's just realize what it is. It's a puzzle book. These are logic puzzles. So it's put forward as being 100 Elementary to impossible mysteries to solve using logic, skill and the power of deduction. What this is, is a big selection of logic puzzles that are very similar one to the other. But we have fun and funny new characters with each puzzle. And they're killing each other in different and interesting ways. But we're not really solving mysteries. And I do think I want to be very clear about that. We're not solving mysteries this if you want that, please avail yourself of Hunt A Killer. You guys have heard me talk about this a million times. That is for solving mysteries. This is logic puzzles that are murderful, and it makes me really happy. It scratches the same itch for me in a more bookish way than doing one Wordle puzzle a day scratches for me, it's about what I do. I do two or three of these in a row. Unlike Wordle, where you can only do one this you can do two or three, they take five to seven minutes to work through and it's just enough to kind of get my brain gears going, or enough to sort of undo my gears at the end of the day. I'm really really liking it. Also Johnny forever, no one knows why, has called me Myrtle. Nobody knows why. I don't even know why. But he only calls me Myrtle. He never calls me Meredith. He doesn't like he calls me Myrtle. I now every time he thinks he calls me Myrtle. I am now spelling it in my mind M U R D L E. I like it. I like it so much. So this is Murdle volume one. It's by G T Karber. And it's available everywhere. It's really fun.

Kaytee Cobb 07:13

And the solutions are a little like clue when it's a logic puzzle, right? Like you're eliminating suspects. You're saying this person killed this person here for this reason with this weapon.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:22

Exactly. But you're you're figuring out who was the killer? What was the weapon that they used? And where did they do it? Okay. All right. And it's a logic puzzle. So you are given clues that help you figure out okay, if this person if I know this person was here, then they can't have been here or here. And then you kind of go You go from there, which is one thing. We're not solving a mystery here, which we're solving a logic puzzle.

Kaytee Cobb 07:46

Okay. Yes, that's make sense. I like that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:48

It's fun. Yeah, it was really fun. All right, Kaytee let's talk about our current reads. What's your first one?

Kaytee Cobb 07:53

Okay, Meredith, all my current reads are pretty new releases this week, but they're ones that I really wanted to talk about before the summer was over, because this is our last regular episode of the season. So I'm kind of like squeezing some in here. Right. So my first one I want to talk about is Yellowface by R.F. Kuang.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:13

Okay, yes, yes. I'm very interested to know what you think about this.

Kaytee Cobb 08:17

All right. I have some thoughts for you. I pre ordered this one. Basically, as soon as I finished Babel because I was like, well, now I'm a raving fan girl and I need everything she ever writes. So I pre ordered it but then I still read it on my Kindle as a galley because I couldn't wait for the actual book to show up at my doorstep after loving Babel last year and naming it my actual favorite book of the year. I was very nervous to dive into more from RF Kuang because nobody can write two books that I love that hard. That's the assumption. Yeah. So I had to be nervous. The good thing is they are very completely separate in my head. These two books like never the twain shall meet, kind of. Here's the setup. June Hayward is a friendly acquaintance with Athena Liu. They attended Yale for the same years. They published their debut novels in the same year. But Athena had her star shoot off into the stratosphere. While June languished on the hardback clearance shelf, Athena continues to succeed. And this novel opens with June being one of the few people that kind of likes this reclusive author, or at least they text each other from time to time, they are together celebrating another success for Athena when a freak accident leaves her dead. And June has just seeing the manuscript for her next novel on the desk in the office, a manuscript that no one else has laid eyes on because Athena's writing process is so secretive. The novel is a historical fiction epic that examines Chinese laborers during World War One, and how they contributed to the war effort, but we're mostly unsung heroes. It's not really June's wheelhouse, but it is really good. So she steals it. She edits it, she makes it her own, and then she

sends it to her agent to publish under her new name. Well, her first name and her middle name. So now she's Juniper Song, which is maybe a little ambiguous as far as heritage and culture goes, but who's to say someone had to tell the story? And June or rather, Juniper has really made it her own. So it's clearly her novel. And the readers agree. It flies off the shelves, it hits the bestseller list. It's a literary darling. But June cannot seem to escape from Athena's shadow. She starts receiving threats, she has people start to question her legitimacy, and the novel really starts to take off from there. This is the novel that most convinced me that I don't need my main protagonist to be likable in order to be interesting, I really enjoy usually rooting for the main character in my stories, which is why I like a serial killer novel, as long as we're following the cop. That's why I like a novel about family drama, but not if we're getting the point of view of the cheating husband. This novel, June's basically the cheating husband, she's horrible. She's an awful human, she spends a lot of time convincing herself and the reader that what she's doing is the right thing. It's correct. It's fine. Okay, like just get over it people. It's written in the first person. So you feel like June is telling you her story directly. And as a white woman reader, confirmed by other women I've discussed with this novel is uncomfortable. It brings up questions that the reader has to grapple with herself whose stories get to be told, whose voice should be prioritized. What's the difference between a white woman writing a story about Chinese laborers versus a Chinese woman writing about a white author, which is what we're reading in this book. It's uncomfortable, like Babel was on number of levels, but it's also gritty and propulsive I wanted to smack multiple characters with a rotten piece of meat just for the pure satisfaction that would have given me. This book is so discussable. And even though the ending left me feeling a little off kilter, I have found myself in DMs with many readers over the past month talking about plot points and nuance in a way that I did not expect. It's one that will get into your head in a way that you don't expect either long after you turn the last page. I enjoyed it, and also disliked it interchangeably. And I was interested all the way through. So this is Yellowface by RF Kuang.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:18

I mean, I haven't read this one yet. I've done some pretty serious skimming of it, but everything that you said about it, that you were interested and also did not necessarily enjoy the experience that really rings true to me. And I think great book club book because RF Kuang is such a good writer. And this is such an imminently discussable book. So to me that feels like the perfect way to either in a big buddy read or in a book club to read this book.

Kaytee Cobb 12:45

Definitely. Yeah, I wish I had people reading along with me. And instead I've had to kind of catch other people in their experience. Like, oh, you're reading that now. Please send me messages. I want to experience this with you. Let's talk about it when you're Yeah, very discussable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:00

All right, good. Okay, my first book is one that just came out last week by the time that you're hearing about this so you can get your hands on it today. And again, as we were talking about the top of the show, if you love All Things Murderful, this book is going to be in your wheelhouse. This is The Girls on Chalk Hill by Alison Belsham. Alright, here's the setup. Detective Lexie Bennett has just started her new job in the police department when she finds two teenage girls lying side by side on the quiet green hillside where she just took a run and each of these girls has had her throat cut. Soon the victims are

identified as Lucy and Eden Carter and the sisters were triplets. And the third sister Paige is missing. The case suddenly feels frighteningly personal because Lexi detective Lexi Bennett. She was a triplet too, and she and her sisters were abducted as teens. Two of them escaped. But Lexi's dreams are still haunted by the memories of the man who took them. She never saw his face and her sister Rose who she never saw again. So of course, her boss Lexi's boss tries to take her off the case. But Lexi is sure as we all are, that the killer who took her is back with a message that only she can receive. All right, there are a few things that I love more than when I get a bespoke recommendation from a bookish friend. And one of the things I love even more than that is when the book is as good as the recommender says that it is. This recommendation came from bookish friend Malia and I'm so grateful that she reached out. This beginning of a new police procedural series by Alison Belsham is really quite good. And as you heard, it has a great premise. Now Malia the bookish friend who recommended the book to me, let me know right from the start that you do have to do some suspending of disbelief with the whole triplet part of the plot, and I definitely found that to be true, there's a leap that you have to take to believe that something like this could happen from a pure statistics related point of view. But once you do that you are in for a really fun ride. This book is not overly gory or violent, despite what I said at the very beginning. And so I really think that this is becoming a micro micro genre called gentle serial killer books. And this one fits into that. Yes, there's a serial killer. And yes, bad things happen to good people, but they don't necessarily happen on the page. But don't mistake that to mean that this book is not interesting. It's well paced the entire way through with short chapters as you would expect, also, the lead character of DI Lexi Bennett is really well done. She's competent and smart. But you also know her on the other side as a victim who's trying to work out her feelings and the anger for what she was put through. The author does a great job of walking both of those lines with that character. This is a book that took me less than three hours to finish and I would definitely say that if you have been hankering for a well done serial killer police procedural, but you haven't wanted to go as deep and dark as say, Hannibal Lecter this book might be perfect for your summer reading. This is The Girls on Chalk Hill by Alison Belsham.

Kaytee Cobb 16:21

Okay, Meredith, I have a question for you. Okay. You have sometimes in the past expressed an opinion about identical girl twins, do triplets emphasize that opinion in a big way? Because I'm surprised that you're loving this triplet situation.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:38

Yeah, I like it in this particular format. And also, this book does a good job of kind of dealing with some of the things that I historically don't like, So what you're referring to is the fact that I find identical twins that are girls to be creepy, because of The Shining, because of The Shining right. And because there's lots of different places in media where they're creepy. So the children who are a part of you know, identical twin girls, I'm sure are lovely, I'm sure. But in books and media, they tend to be a little bit creepy. So in this case, the book does a really good job of bringing us into these triplet relationships, both sets, and each girl has her own personality and point of view. And that was something that made me really liked this book, and allayed the kind of creepy copy factor that you're that you're talking about. Yeah, that makes sense. And you do have to suspend some disbelief about this. But like I said, Right, okay. Because triplets. Triplets don't happen very often identical. triplet girls really don't happen very often. And this is a small town. But like I said, like Malia said, if you can suspend that, then you'll really

have an enjoyable time here. Interesting. I'll be interested to see how much that one starts sweeping. It sounds like a perfect summer read. Yeah, it definitely is. It's a great like by the pool, because it just doesn't take that long to finish.

Kaytee Cobb 18:01

Yeah, for sure. Okay, my second one. This week is nonfiction. I want to talk about The Life Council by our friend Laura Tremaine. Yes, this is Laura second book. And while I kind of hate to say that it's even better than her first, for this reader, it was exactly what I hoped it would be, and so much more. We've revisited the fact a few times that I'm currently looking for books about friendship and community. And I think it's possible that Laura Tremaine started that, with this new release, when I read this book, I realized that is what I was looking for in my reading. And so I've brought some other ones since I read this one. The subtitle is 10 Friends Every Woman Needs, but let's allay the fear right now that she's telling you that if you don't have 10, friends, you're not doing it right. 10 friends is a lot of friends. Special shout outs to my introverts here, let's talk about what a life counsel actually is. Similar to a boardroom, or a mastermind group or a presidential cabinet. If everyone is exactly the same, you never grow, you never have new ideas you never change. A life council is also what Michelle Obama refers to as her kitchen table. These are friends that fill various roles in your life and are able to advise or push growth or step into your daily life in different ways. Some people might occupy more than one seat, some seats might be empty. And this book may have you evaluating your current friendships in a different way than you expected. As you read. I did this book as a slow but steady read just one chapter a day. It's not a how to book. It's not research heavy. It's part memoir, part personal experience, part question asking an intuition. Laura starts out by showing us that she doesn't have all the friendship answers. She's not a perfect friend. She's not saying I'm the best at friendship and here's everything you're missing, which I think is a concern. When you're looking at a book title like this, you're like, Well, I'm not the best so I don't want Laura to make me feel horrible about myself. Right. She invites us into A vulnerable conversation and situation in her backyard at the height of the pandemic that involves apologies, and a potential friendship breakup. And that's how she starts the book. The next 10 chapters each examine a seat on her life council from the Yes friend who gets you to go on adventures to the fellow obsessive like Meredith and I, who will dive down a rabbit hole with you to the daily duty friend who brings you soup when you're sick and picks up your kids at school when you need to be in two places at once. She leaves room for friendship hurts and empty spaces where someone used to be. And she encourages us to identify the people in our lives that hold those spaces or where you are that person for someone else. I read this book along with Katie, my reading partner, and we had fun and got vulnerable telling stories from high school, sharing, heartbreaks and betrayals, and figuring out where we fit on each other's life councils. This book gave me hope about what's to come in my life and gave me space to grieve what has passed. Way back on episode 24 of season three, Laura joined us as a guest to talk about her first book, which was called Share Your Stuff. I'll Go First and I got a little vulnerable in that conversation and told her I was looking to make new friends. And would that book help with that goal. And she was gracious and kind and wasn't like, well, Kaytee, you're kind of a weirdo. But to me, it felt like this book was the real response to that conversation. I became more grateful for the people that are already part of my life and hopeful for the people that are to come. I loved it from beginning to end and gave it five stripy beautiful stars just like the cover. It's The Life Council: 10 Friends Every Woman Needs by our friend Laura Tremaine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:33

I'm so glad that you brought this one, Kaytee. I have a couple of thoughts that I would love to add to this too, because I loved this book, too. My first thought is that I really just want to, and I've done this privately, but I want to encourage you publicly too, and everyone in the knowledge that I'm almost 50 years old now. And I just now feel like I am kind of filling up my life council. So I really think and Laura and I have had this discussion too. And she's kind of in between our ages you and right. And she definitely has also said that it really just is in the last couple of years for her. So I just really want to encourage you to know that although right now might not be the time in your life where you're like, oh, you know, I have all the friends that I want to have. And I mean, like different kinds of friends, not numbers of friends, because neither of us are ones to number our friendships. But you don't even know right now who you might meet when you're 47 years old, right? Who is going to completely change your life and be a reading partner or a life partner. You know what I mean? So I feel like women tend to come, which is not to say that women don't have great friends all their lives. But a lot of women I know and my own personal experience has said that I have many more deep, deep relationships now that I couldn't even have imagined when I was getting ready to turn 40. So I just really want to encourage you to know that the the season you're in, in your friendships right now isn't the way it's always going to be. And the other thing is that this book is so so useful and the Patreon content that Laura has done in holding up this book, or rounding out this book has been really fantastic, where she does different pieces of audio and different interviews with people who are on her life Council. And they really dig deep into it. There's just a lot of content around this book that she's done. If you if you're reading it, and you're like I'm really wanting more. She's done so much more with this book. And I just really love what she's done around this book. Yes. And the other thing is, if I didn't know, Laura, I think one of the things I would be concerned about in reading this book, especially at different seasons of my life, would be that she would be coming at it from a point of view of someone who kind of has always had the friendship thing on lock. Like she lives in Hollywood. She knows famous people. She's very likable as a person, Laura would be the first person to say that she has not always had friendship on lock. And she has been through a lot of really lonely points in her life. I would have been afraid going into this book that she was going to make me feel less than because like, Okay, I mean, like it's one thing for this to be aspirational, but it kind of just makes me feel bad to read about someone who's talking about all the friends that they have. She really does a great job and to your point, she's not telling you that you're doing friendship wrong, and she knows how to do it right. She's walked all parts of this. And so when I read this book, I felt very seen in every season I've been in in my friendships. Yeah, from ones that felt really lonely, and ones that feel really full. So I just if that's kind of the fear that you have when you're thinking about reading a book like this, she does a really good job with it. I really, really love this book. She does I also loved it. I'm so glad so so glad that you brought that Kaytee. Okay. All right, I'm going to bring another Murderful book. And this one is especially for you. If when I talked about logic puzzles and Murdle at the beginning of the show you were like, Ooh, that sounds interesting to me. I'm going to bring the classic of all classics, Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie, Now, I'm bringing this to the show because I bring all the books that I read, so buckle up, buttercup, and also because you guys have seen that I'm working my way through all the Agatha Christie's all the Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christies I'm not promising anything else. And I had never read Murder on the Orient Express. So I read it a few weeks ago, and I really, really enjoyed it.

Kaytee Cobb 25:41

Okay, I am shocked. I know my jaw is on the desk. I can't wait.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:46

I had always said I really want to keep reading the Hercules that are not the big famous one. And I kind of wanted to like know him better and better before I dove into this one. I'm actually really glad I did it that way. Okay. This book has one of the simplest and most classic setups in all murder full history. And this setup has been the same since its publication in 1934. So I'm gonna give it to you unchanged. It is this just after midnight the famous Orient Express is stopped in its tracks by a snowdrift by morning, The Millionaire Samuel Edward ratchet lies dead in his compartment, stabbed a dozen times his door locked from the inside. without a shred of doubt one of his fellow passengers is the murderer, isolated by the storm detective, Hercule Poirot must find the killer among a dozen of the dead man's enemies, before the murderer decides to strike again. All right. So I think part of the reason that I decided early on was that this book was so famous, and it must be so good that all of the rest of the books would pale in comparison. So that is why I wanted to get to know him better. But I also didn't want to kind of start at the top and then have the rest of them be not as good, right? I am both happy and sad that I was wrong. Now, where I wasn't wrong is that this is a very, very good book. This was easily a five star mystery, as I would rate my regular books. But as we know, this is not a regular book. This is canon in the mystery genre. So I had really high expectations going into it, and I liked it a lot. I of course, did this on audio. And Dan Stevens narration is superb. He does his different voices so incredibly well, that sometimes as I'm listening, I will literally forget that it is just one man doing them all. There is no question that there were many times as I was driving that I got so involved in what was happening, that I forgot where I was driving, I almost brought it as a bookish moment of the week, one week that I had driven, like 10 miles off course because of this book. And so my notes I say, I will admit to having had to turn around a couple of times, I definitely did that. What I found surprising is that in this particular story, there is not a lot of action, it's actually very think-y. It's almost all the reader and Hercule trying to use our little gray cells to figure out the resolution of this very tricky, locked railcar mystery. I will admit also that I was thinking very hard the entire time, I was making timelines and going over what people had said in my head. I was trying to be very smart as I listened because I know that Agatha puts the resolution right on to the pages. And if you're smart enough, you can see it. Alas, this reader is not smart enough. The master got me again. And I had no idea of the resolution until we were right there at the very end with her kewl giving us the everything we should have seen and didn't talk I was surprised to by how violent the crime at the center of this mystery is. And I'm not talking about the stabbing. It was by several notches more horrible than any other Agatha Christie book I've read. That is something and I will remember that about this book. I'm not disappointed in this book in any way. I guess I'm confounded. I think there's a part of me that is surprised that so many people over the ages have been so patient with the level of exposition in this book, so many chapters of just listening to people describe the same event from different perspectives. That's all it is. I loved it. I just wonder if modern readers are as patient as the ones who were reading her book contemporaneously. And thank God that was the case because that's the way this book became canon. And it should be this is Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie.

Kaytee Cobb 27:29

Even just you describing it. I was transported immediately back to listening to Dan Stevens, tell me the story in my ear. And that experience and how much I loved it and I don't even remember what the end

is because it's probably been three or four years at least since I listened to it but I loved the experience of this book so much yes so I'm glad that it met and didn't and exceeded expectations in different ways for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:20

Yes, it fit in perfectly with all of my Agatha Christie reading. All right, what's your final book?

Kaytee Cobb 30:25

Alright, I wrote holy crap in my notes for this one I'm so good but this is Chain Gang All Stars by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah? Yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:34

Yes, I'm so glad you're talking about this.

Kaytee Cobb 30:37

This book is everything. I love it so much. Here's the setup. In this too close to our current world dystopia. The private for profit prison system of America has leveled up to a for entertainment prison system, inmates who have long sentences or life sentences can swap them out for a three year term in the criminal action, penal entertainment or CAPE program, which manages a gladiator type wrestling to the death program stars and the Chain Gang All Stars fight to the death against other inmates, starting with a tiny weapon like a corkscrew, but they are able to earn points and take their opponent's weapons if they beat them, which means kill them. The stars we follow in this book are Loretta Thurwar and Hamara Stacker. Thurwar and Staxxx are both teammates and lovers, and absolutely fan favorites. They bring whole stadiums of people to their feet and rapture at their violent exploits. As Thurwar approaches the end of her term in the chain gang program, she knows she will be free to leave after just a few more matches. As they travel the country. They do so with their links because there are links in a chain, a collection of inmates that all have their own histories and backstories to contend with. Each one is fighting for the ultimate goal of freedom, but they could lose their humanity in the process. Alongside these action heroes, we follow a protest movement that insists that monetizing the lives of inmates is indeed very wrong, as well as the employees and executives that manage the CAPE program and have made it into the monetary juggernaut that it is. It's a multifaceted story that pulls you in from every angle. This is so fun. When I met Nana Kwame at the Santa Fe Literary Festival, I told him the setup for this book sounded like what a young Black man who read the Hunger Games and learned about abolition would put together as an excellent writer. I hadn't read it yet at that time, but after finishing it, I can confirm if the Hunger Games captured you on any level when you first read it. This is how you turn the page to adulthood and push your reading to new heights. This book was unputdownable. It is propulsive and incredible. It makes you think it makes you care about these characters that have murder in their pasts. It makes you reconsider the ways that we dole out punishment and the ways we attempt reform in this country. It's exciting and page turning but much deeper than just reading along with a gladiator deathmatch book. I really enjoyed Adjei-Brenyah's first book, which is called Friday Black, it was a selection of speculative fiction short stories. This one feels more mature, deeper, and I loved it even more. This book went onto my keeper shelf. And I think after about six months, I'll be able to say whether it's on my favorite books of all time shelf, but it's a serious

contender. Like gladiator level contender. It is everything I want in my reading. I loved it. It's amazing. It's Chain Gang All Stars by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:39

Oh, man, I'm so glad that you brought that. I just got it. You guys. Normally Kaytee and I try not to read the same books and bring them to the show. But season six you're gonna hear me talk about it because I absolutely have to read it. I have heard only good things about it from a wide swath of readers that don't normally agree one with the other and I loved Friday Black. I mean, I feel like his writing is like that super sexy guy who's so sexy that you're like, I kind of need to stay away from you because you're so sexy.

Kaytee Cobb 34:10

Just FYI. He is real sexy.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:13

Oh, is he okay, I had no idea but I do know that he gives me that same feeling of like, I just need to step backwards or I'm gonna do something to embarrass myself. That's how his writing makes me feel. Yeah, exactly. So oh, I can't wait to read it. I cannot. This is on my summer. TBR for sure. Love it. Good. Okay, well, I'm also bringing one that I just read that I absolutely loved. And I think is I'm bringing today because it's our last regular episode and it's perfect for summer reading. So we got to get it onto into people's hands. This one is My Murder by Katie Williams. Alright, here's the setup. Our lead character is Louise and she is known in this book, as Lou. Lou is a happily married mother of a super sweet toddler girl and she's also the victim of a local serial killer. Lou was recently brought back to life and has been returned to her family by a government project... two books about government projects. Lou spends her time readapting to her old routines and bonding with the other female victims of the same serial killer in a support group. That's just for them. But soon, Lou realizes that there are some big questions about the events that preceded her death. And she's left wondering how much she can really trust those around her. All right, this was recommended to me and to all of us on All Things Murderful by my number one recommendation source Elizabeth Barnhill, she texted me about this months ago, when she got this into her hot little hands, she knew that this book was going to be absolutely fantastic. And it is it's also a surprise on several levels. I kind of thought, you know that I was getting into a slightly dystopian serial killer book. And I was, but this book is a lot more, this book not only has a super engaging mystery at its core, and characters you really care about, and a few very satisfying, very gasp inducing twists that I had to immediately text Elizabeth about, there was a lot of cussing in those texts. But it also asks deeper questions about self, and about the choices that we make. And about second chances. You should know it also dives deeply into issues around motherhood and what it means to feel like you're a good mother. It was a very fast read, it comes in at under 300 pages. But it still felt substantial. I feel like I'm going to be thinking about this book a lot. And more than anything, I found myself thinking as I finished that this book was what I wanted Notes On An Execution by Danya Kukafka. It's what I wanted that book to be, this book truly did give the perspective of the victims and the killers family. This book truly did center those people and their experiences in a way that the other book just didn't land for me as much. My Murder is very powerful. And I don't just mean in its impact. I mean, it was powerful, just in the way that it took its position in the library of serial killer books like it

stood there and said, I can be more and you can expect more from serial killer books. And we can. This is My Murder by Katie Williams.

Kaytee Cobb 37:33

Well, I was a little interested in that book. And now I'm very interested. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:37

this would be such a fast read for you, Kaytee, and I do think you would find a lot that was I mean, it just wouldn't take a lot of your time. But there's a lot of and elements to this book for sure. And again, a lot of WTF texting throughout.

Kaytee Cobb 37:51

Fair. I'll keep that in mind. I'll make somebody else read it too.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 37:56

Yes, exactly. All right. We are going to do a deep dive that you said in the open that you were terrified about. Alright, me nervous, nervous. Okay. Now, why are we nervous? One of the things that is true, Kaytee, of both you and me, we don't like to be told what we have to read.

Kaytee Cobb 38:13

Correct.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:14

This is just something very early on in our relationship that we bonded over. Right. Yeah. So we're always very careful to we in fact, made the entire show around us not having to read for the show specific books, right, like, right. There's a lot of ways we could have created a podcast that would have meant we had to read kind of in very specific ways. And we didn't do that because of this very thing.

Kaytee Cobb 38:39

Even on Episode One, we had a little segment where we said, okay, what are you going to pick up next? Yeah. And then we realized we never read those books next, because we were like, well, now I'm never reading that book. I told myself I was gonna and we were telling our own self. Exactly. Right. We were that obstinate about it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:59

We took that out like episode two. That's funny. Yes. So because I remember having that conversation after we recorded like, yeah, that's not gonna work. No, we're never doing. So. Okay. So then, when I came to you with this idea, you were like, Why do you do this to me, Meredith? But I said, Kaytee it's been

Kaytee Cobb 39:16

Why do you hate me?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:17

Right. It's been five seasons. We've never said to each other. I want I really want you to read this book that I know that you haven't read. And I just want you to read it. And I want to know what you think about it. And there's a lot of ways we could go about doing this. Right. It's, so you agreed,

Kaytee Cobb 39:33

I don't know why

Meredith Monday Schwartz 39:34

I got you at a weak moment. I think so I think that's what happened. And you said really smartly. Let's do this in the last regular episode of the season, and give ourselves summer break to fit that book in when we want to fit in.

Kaytee Cobb 39:47

Right, right. It doesn't have to be read by the following week. That's what I was really nervous about was like, you will now have to follow up on this next Friday when we record again. Yeah, I couldn't. I was like, There's no way I'm not gonna be able to do it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:00

Yeah, exactly, it just wouldn't be fun. So this way, we have many weeks. And so what we're going to do is we have agreed we're just doing one book. And we've agreed that we will read the other person's book No matter how we feel about it. And then we will in the first episode, where we always talk about what we did our summer vacation, we will talk to each other about the books that we read, and we will give our strong opinions.

Kaytee Cobb 40:22

Yes, we will, and as like a caveat to that we are 250 episodes in almost 250 episodes, into the big show. I'm like I checked and on Patreon, we have another 154 pieces of audio content. Oh my god. So that's 400 different things that we have made talking about books with each other. Yeah. And despite that fact, when somebody else comes to me and says, Kaytee, I know you, I've listened to you 400 times over five years. I'm still like, I don't know you like, what, who are you? I don't, I don't know you. So I'm very difficult to convince by somebody that I am not in relationship with with regard to books. However, Meredith with you, with our other regulars. And of course, with my very closest reading friends, if they tell me I'm gonna love a book, I can believe them. I know that is to be true, right? Each of you knows me. And sometimes even more importantly, knows what's happening. Not on mic, behind the scenes, what's going on in my home, with my kids, with my marriage, with my house, with my parents, any of that ancillary stuff, all plays into my reading life in a way that, you know, the outside world doesn't get to see very often, right? So there are people that I trust, and that, like you convinced me all the time to pick up books, and usually I buy them, or I hold them, and then it comes up later. And I'm like, great. I'm so glad that Meredith talked about his book, and I can pick it up. But to be told, now you have a deadline, you have to read it by this amount of time. That's the part that makes me like, squirm and like fidget a little bit. Yep.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:04

Yep. No, I know. I know. It's kind of a little bit like being back in school. So yeah. So like I said, there are a lot of different ways that we could go about making this choice. Now. I think I had the harder job.

Kaytee Cobb 42:18

Really?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:19

Definitely. For sure. There's only one reason for that. That is only because you have read so many books, right?

Kaytee Cobb 42:27

And I am willing to read a lot of books, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:30

You read a lot of books you read across a lot. So it's not like I can say like, Oh, I'm gonna pick x genre. And I know she won't read anything. So I can pick the best thing, like you read really widely. You read deeply, you read a lot. So it took a surprisingly long amount of time for me to land on a book that I felt really good about, and also that you hadn't read. Because like I've said, now three times, there are different ways we could go about making this choice. I could choose something for you that I knew that you would hate and can delight in you having to read it because I told you like, you know what I mean? Like kind of in a funny way.

Kaytee Cobb 43:06

Yes. The meanest, most nefarious option, you have gone that route?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:09

I did. I did not do that. I did not do that. But I'm very interested, Kaytee, in how you made your choice. How did you go about thinking about this?

Kaytee Cobb 43:19

Okay, I did consider the same thing. I said, Should I give Meredith something that's like very literary and feely? That for sure is gonna make her cry and manipulate her into like, melting down? Right? Right. Cause she will be so mad at me if I do.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:34

Right, right. But I wouldn't read it. And who knows, maybe I really enjoy it.

Kaytee Cobb 43:37

And it could end up on your best books of the year. But I didn't want to do that. So then, I considered some other options books that I've talked about in the past and even maybe have said to you, I think you would really like this book. But because we are both hesitant to say like, and you should read it right now. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 43:55

And we also don't like to bring the same books to the show and you know, And you know that if you say that, then I have to bring it or it's wasted book. Because Because I bring all the books that I read.

Kaytee Cobb 44:05

Right, exactly. So like taking all of that into account, I considered a number of books that have come up on my favorites list over years past that were new releases at the time that I've never heard you bring to the show. That was how I was trying to figure out what could I forced you to do without it being like, well, Katie, I already read that. And I still may have shot myself in the foot a little bit with my choice. Are we ready to reveal these?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:32

Yes. Okay. Well, so I will reveal mine. I mean, like I said, this was actually a really fun project because I got very, very deep into like, all my oneness came out. I needed this choice to be right for you. You know, because I do love you so much. And I really I want you to have a book that is going to be memorable because when you read so many books, I want it to be a book that it's going to stand out. Now, this is a book that is I feel fairly sure or is going to stand out either in a really good way or in a throw it against the wall way, but I do not think you're going to not remember it or be like, meh. Okay. And also, I think you have, how do I say this with I have struggled with how to say this without it sounding really condescending? I think you're ready for this book in a way that you weren't five years ago. And I say that okay, all of us have matured in the last five, you know, I mean, I would not have pressed this into your hand five years ago. And I really think you're going to be reading it at a very different level. And I'm very interested to see what you think. And also, I don't think you've ever been anything by this author. I don't think from what from my research. I don't think you have.

Kaytee Cobb 45:51

without agreeing that, but it was not condescending at all. Because I agree that I am a different human and a different reader than I was five years ago, when we started this podcast meeting. All of us go through transitions in our reading, but these have been some big five years for me as a person. So Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:11

Exactly. All right. So I'm going to tell you that it is an author. That is one of my favorites of all time. Okay. It is a woman. Okay,

Kaytee Cobb 46:20

I'm narrowing down.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:21

I love everything that she's written. Okay. But not everybody else does.

Kaytee Cobb 46:27

Am I supposed to guess?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:29

I mean, okay. Yeah. So guess the author.

Kaytee Cobb 46:32

I'm gonna guess Lauren Groff?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:34

It is Lauren Groff. Okay, yes.

Kaytee Cobb 46:36

I feel like I get a gold star.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:38

Yes, you do. It is Lauren Groff. The book I am pressing into your hands is Fates and Furies. Okay. You have not read it, right?

Kaytee Cobb 46:46

I don't... no.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:47

And you didn't read Matrix?

Kaytee Cobb 46:49

No, I did not read Matrix

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:50

and you haven't read Florida, and

Kaytee Cobb 46:52

Definitely not Florida. Okay. Is that all three of hers?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:55

No, she has. She has a couple earlier ones, but I don't remember them off the top.

Kaytee Cobb 46:58

Like there's a possibility. There's an older one of hers that I've read, but I'm not totally sure. Okay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:03

Fates and Furies is your book now. Okay. Now, okay. I know, as I say that I can hear I hear all of you that the I can very I hear you. There are people who really don't like this book, there are people who really don't like Lauren Groff's writing. But I think, Kaytee, that you are in a place in your life right now, where the nuance the themes in this book are going to resonate strongly in one way or another. Okay, I'm not promising that you're going to love it at all. But I do think that you will have an a memorable experience reading it. And of course, I hope that you love it as much as I do. I love it.

Kaytee Cobb 47:40

That's the end of my press into your hands, too. I hope you love it as much as I do. Right? I want you to right? Okay, well, I'm excited to pick it up. And what I will promise even though this is even scary for me, is that I will read it in paper, because as you know, I love to read on audio, I've got a lot of stuff coming up. So a lot of my reading is going to be on audio here soon. But I do think that that gives me a different experience of books that have either interesting writing interesting style or a deeper level to absorb than reading it on audio. So I will commit to that as well. Okay.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:15

The other thing that's completely up to you in whatever way you want to take it in, it's totally fine. But I hear what you're saying. The other thing that I really want to ask and I would ask this of anybody who hasn't read it, I really would ask that you not go and read, go like go into it blind. Okay. Because every setup, and every review you read about and again, it's hugely divisive. I have no idea no idea what the rating is. I'm sure that it's not got great ratings on on Good Reads just because of the kind of book it is. And it's because it's so divisive, but don't read anything about what it's about because they always give away pieces that would be so much better revealed as you're reading.

Kaytee Cobb 48:54

Okay. All right. Yeah, I will resist. That's actually that might be harder for me to agree to but I will resist. Yeah,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:00

I mean, I think it will add to the reading experience if you there's a couple key things that I think will add if you don't know.

Kaytee Cobb 49:06

Okay, so I considered bringing Razorblade Tears by S.A. Cosby as my book this month, or this week, because I wanted something that it's summer break. I wanted it to be propulsive, that I'm something that I'm excited to hear you specifically talk about. Yeah. I also considered giving you John Marrs because I know that sometimes, like The One has some thematic elements that you're a little concerned about reading which has made you stay away from it. Yeah. And and I think you would really like it, but then I was like, I don't want to waste it. You're right. The reason that I gushed and set up Chain Gang All Stars, the way that I did today is because I need you to read that and tell me about it as soon as possible

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:53

Is that my book?

Kaytee Cobb 49:54

That is your book. Now you're like, well, I already bought it and I can't wait to read it. And I was like, well Dang it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:01

No, I'm so glad because literally I was like, whatever she's gonna give me, I'm gonna read next, or I'm gonna, you know, prioritize. But I really want to get so excited to read that book that is really, right. And going into it, you might not necessarily I can see how you might not necessarily know that I was as excited about as I was, right? It's not in my normal. Yeah, genre or author set or whatever. So I could see how you'd be like, you might not read this, but I want to make sure you do.

Kaytee Cobb 50:30

But I want you to,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:31

I am super excited to read it. I'm so excited

Kaytee Cobb 50:34

that Oh, good. Oh, good. Okay, it's definitely going to be on my favorites of the year list, and possibly my favorites fall timeless, but I just, I really want to know what it's like for you. And I want to like follow up about it. So I had to talk about it today. And I had to make you read it. Okay,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:50

I love it. Now, we haven't done this before, we might do it again, if we really enjoy doing this as a season end. But my question to you is, and I'm asking you live on mic, we haven't talked about this, we have two ways that we can do this. We can read it and not say anything to each other until we come back or we could live tweet it to each other and then just the audience will know what we think about it. What do you have a preference there?

Kaytee Cobb 51:13

Well, I for sure want you to live with tweet me. Okay. So I'm, I'm good with agreeing to the opposite, if you are interested in my thoughts all the way through. And I don't think like even having occasionally read the same books one right after another and done that before we brought them to the show. I don't think it necessarily ruins it when we bring it to the show. Like I don't think we necessarily spent all our words, right. It's fun to be like, do you remember when I sent you that message and I had the head exploding emojis because I couldn't believe such and such was happening. So because live

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:46

tweeting is about stuff that we by definition wouldn't talk about on the show, because we're not going to talk about specific plot points and all of that. So okay, so we'll open that that door to each other good. Well, good. I think this is really, really fun. I'm looking forward to seeing how this goes.

Kaytee Cobb 52:00

Yeah, I'm excited to and I will be interested to hear from our listeners to see if they think that you know, that was a huge missed opportunity. You should have done blah, blah, or why in the world would you choose that for that other person? Like I think there might be some strong opinions about either one of these. So I'm looking forward to that too,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:17

right? No, I already know my texts are going to be full from several people I know who absolutely do not like Lauren Groff and they're going to be like, Why did you do this to poor Kaytee, but I love it. I love it. And I think you might too, so Okay, excellent. Okay, so let us visit the fountain. Kaytee, what have you got for us. What's your wish?

Kaytee Cobb 52:35

Okay, Meredith usually I make a wish for like the reading life as a whole or for like this great idea I have or for readers in general. And this week, my wish is, I wouldn't say selfish. But it's getting there. I wish to have a successful and fruitful upcoming move for my family from New Mexico to Arizona, I will be driving the moving truck away in 12 days before this episode even airs. This is the last regular season the episode I get to record in my studio in Santa Fe. And we have a lot of really big life changes coming up for our family as a whole for my husband and his career. But we're moving to Arizona, where I grew up, he grew up and our entire family is there. And I'm somewhat worried about how that's going to affect my reading life. Because I'm going to be around people I really love that I love spending time with and what if being lonely is what made me such a big reader. Like this is a crisis I'm having. But I am wishing that by the time we return in season six, I'll be in a new place making new friends and chasing new dreams and finding new bookish community and a new home. So my wish is that you all wish me luck. Ping splash.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 53:53

Well, we do. We do wish you luck. I think this is going to be fantastic for you. I know your family is over the moon, that this is happening. And I can tell you having had my daughter and her husband and my grandchild move close to us, it does, to a certain extent affect your reading life because you are spending more time with people that you love. But man, I would make that choice every day of the week and twice on Sunday. So and you will too.

Kaytee Cobb 54:17

Yes, yes. I'm excited and nervous and hopeful and thrilled and terrified and all the things.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:24

Right, exactly. I think it's going to be great. Although I will miss the studio that you so lovingly created there in your house.

Kaytee Cobb 54:30

Oh, I'll make something. Yes. It'll be good. Yes, yes,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 54:33

you definitely well. Alright, my wish piggybacks a little bit to what something that we were just talking about when I was telling you about your book and I asked that you would not read a lot about it before it like just go in blind. My wish is that I myself and more people would go in blind to books. I think that one of the things that we are doing as a group of readers now is getting too many points of input before where we go into a book, and I think that is shaping our expectations, I think it's shaping a lot about what we bring to a book before we start it. I'm reading a book right now, that is a mystery that two really

trusted sources recommended. I literally had no idea what I have not read any of an ark. So I don't have any jacket, copy, I don't have any anything. It's an e book, I've got nothing. And I just was like, I trust these two people. I'm gonna go in and I'm gonna start reading it. And I'm really enjoying the process. And it changes the book, when you literally have no idea what it's about the book reveals itself differently, do you whether it's a mystery, or literary fiction, like Fates and Furies, or whatever it is, the book reveals itself differently. And I was remembering a moment with my grandmother, who was one of my major reading influences. When it was really young, I would look at the books in her library and she had one of those very old fashioned libraries where it was mostly leather bound books, right. So all you could see was like the title and the author until you opened it up. And then you were right there starting the book. And I would say to Riri, but I don't understand how am I supposed to know what it's about? And she was like, you start reading and you let the book tell you what it's about. I don't think we're doing that enough. I think it's hard to do that in this day and age, right? So my wish is that where you can go into a book blind, because somebody you trusted recommended, or the library said, this is a great new book, or whatever input source makes you say, I'm going to pick this up, and I'm just going to let the book tell me what it's about. That's what I wish we would do more of. Ping Splash,

Kaytee Cobb 54:36

Ping Splash. I like that. I think we're so into not just judging a book by its cover, but by its blurb by its Bookstagram. By its booktok, we do have so many pieces of input that help us make those decisions, which sometimes leads to a great reading life and sometimes leads to us missing out on something that could have been pivotal for exactly any number of reasons.

Kaytee Cobb 56:40

Exactly. It's great to know yourself as reader. But sometimes, you need to take that skill out for a walk by saying I'm just going to begin this book and I'm going to see if it's a good fit for me. If it's not, you can always put it down.

Kaytee Cobb 57:14

Yes. Right. Unless Meredith forced you to read it on the final episode of season five.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:19

This is true. This is true. Kaytee You're right. That's the one exception. All right. That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 57:31

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:34

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

Kaytee Cobb 57:44

You can also follow the show along with 16,000 other bookish friends on Instagram at @currentlyreadingpodcast or email us at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:53

And as we mentioned at the top of the show, if you want more of this kind of content, you can join us as a bookish friend. It's only \$5 a month. You can do that on patreon.com. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. All of those things help us to build our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 58:11

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:17

Until next week. May your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 58:19

and your book be unputdownable.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:21

Happy reading Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 58:22

happy reading Meredith.