

Season 3, Episode 17: Strong Opinions About a Big Buzz Book + Award Winners

Monday, 11/23/2020 • 50:34

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 especially this week, get ready.

Mindy Brouse 00:27

We are light on the chit chat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler-free, no matter what. We'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we're gonna press books into your hands.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:38

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four, and full-time CEO living in Austin, Texas. And I love it when the metaphorical skies clear and I can read again.

Mindy Brouse 00:49

And I'm Mindy Brouse, a mom of seven reading and hiking in the mountains of New Mexico. And I think hate-reading is a real thing, and I'm here for it. This is Episode 17 of Season 3, and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:01

All right, Mindy, we are so glad to be here. We have a lot to talk about today.

Mindy Brouse 01:06

We do. We've been looking forward to this. I've been. I've been anticipating this chat for a while.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:12

Yes. So let us tell you guys that later on, we're going to do a deep dive into kind of Big Book Awards, and how we feel about the books that are awarded these big Book Awards. So we're going to get into that a little bit later. But for now, let's start the episode the way we always do by talking about our bookish moments of the week. Mindy, what do you have for us this week?

Mindy Brouse 01:36

My bookish moment this week, believe it or not, was reading a book about a child being kidnapped, which doesn't sound like that should be a bookish moment. But because it was during the election week, which lasted, you know, more than a day, like quite a few days, and it was so stressful. I buddy read *What She Knew* with Liz Hein, one of our Currently Reading Bookish Friends. And it was the exact

right book medicine that I needed for the week. Kept me engaged. It took me away. Plus, I get to chit chat with a friend about a book that we were both reading. It was perfect. Because the only thing I love more than that is when someone live messages me about a book that they're reading that I've already read. But buddy reading a really, really good book together. That was the best so that that just was super fun. And I really needed it was great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:26

That is the perfect kind of escapist read. I love that book.

Mindy Brouse 02:31

Oh, it's so great. You guys are great with the presses. So as you know, I'm reading through those. So Liz chose that to do with me and it was a really great yeah.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:40

That's one of those books that I've recommended to so many friends or especially friends who are like, "I haven't read for a really long time. I don't really know what I want to read." That's a really good go-to because it just it's such a page turner.

Mindy Brouse 02:51

Agree. What about you? What was your bookish moment?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:54

Well, as I mentioned in our bite size open, I felt like this week, the metaphorical skies cleared right? So all the election Sturm and Drang got over mostly. And I was finally able to concentrate after more than a week, about eight days of not being able to dig into reading of any kind, not even audio. So I was able to get into a book that was actually pretty complexly plotted. And I know for a fact that a week earlier, I couldn't even have touched gotten through the first page and I absolutely flew through it. So it's just interesting how our brains need to be in a specific place for a certain kind of reading and sometimes for reading at all. So hopefully now and I've read I think four books since then. So now I'm in a good, you know, kind of good reading place. So that's a good thing.

Mindy Brouse 03:47

I'm so glad for you. Because I knew that was hard. That's great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:50

Yeah, it's I mean, it's hard for all of us when were we in a reading slump, right? But it's especially hard when you feel like you know, you're drumming your nails because you're like, I need to be reading for the podcast. I have no time to waste here. Alright, so speaking about what we are currently reading. Let's get into those current reads. What's your first one for us?

Mindy Brouse 04:08

Alright, my first Well, okay. So I'm going to be all over the place today with my current reads Meredith. So, fair warning, you're going to hear me say "what the what?" You're gonna hear me say "what a great one" and you're gonna hear me tell you "what the Holy hell is happening." So there's, um, that's kind of

the synopsis summaries for each three but my first one reminded me a little bit of the Nickel Boys but not as violent. And a tad with some sweetness, the romance. It's titled The Story of Beautiful Girl by Rachel Simon. It is not titled a story of a beautiful girl that does not it It sounds weird, but it is the story of a beautiful girl. I contacted Amazon so if you look it up, it's titled wrong on the Amazon page. Believe it or not. So our story starts in 1968 with Linnie who is a young white woman who intellectually disabled. And Hohmann, a young black deaf man arriving in a farmhouse during a storm in the middle of the night, asking for help. You can tell something's wrong, right? They're fleeing somewhere. There's agony and pain and some blood and you don't know what's going on. But their love for each other is also very clear. When they knock on the door of Martha who has the farmhouse, they show up that Martha instinctually helped them against her better judgment. She's like, I don't even know these people. They're clearly fleeing something. Then she sees the blood. She's not sure. Then the authorities show up and drag Linnie and hohman forcefully away, Lindy and hohman are taken back to an institution titled which, and this is painful to actually say, The School for the Incurable and the Feeble-Minded. Martha realizes that Linnie and Hohman have secretly left a baby in her attic. So Linny had just delivered a baby, and they hid the baby and gave the baby to Martha on purpose. Martha has to make a decision. Turn the baby in, called authorities back or honor and think about why this couple chose to do this. This story mirana Not only is it beautiful, and about love and sacrifice in the face of huge obstacles, prejudice and racism that was rampant, against Linnie and Hohman, but it's about the difference one person can make in the life of some others. It's about self advocacy and how the intellectually challenged have been treated in our country, as well as the way deaf people have been treated. And how we can be a part of that changes about art and love and hope even when everyone else tells us there's none which you know, is right up my alley, right? My past as a teacher for the Deaf and a foster mom for a deaf son really came flooding back. As I read this book, I felt the grief and the affirmation and how accurately Rachel Simon portrays Hohmans life. She researched very well, it's very clear, Rachel has a sister with intellectual challenges. And that influenced her writing greatly. And she wisely wrote this story very, very well. I think this is a beautiful read. There are hard parts, but is not graphic. It's not anything open door or anything like that. It's a beautiful journey. And you're not sure how it's gonna end. But you want to you want to know so that I thought was a great book. That's The Story of Beautiful Girl by Rachel Simon.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:32

Oh, Mindy, what a perfect recommendation from you that just checks every box that I think our listeners want to get in their books that you recommend. It's hopeful, it touches on difficult topics. But in the end, it feels really good. But you're also learning some really important things as you sort of walk in the shoes of other people. This is exactly why I love that you're on our show because you bring books to us that are just absolutely perfect. And I feel bad. Talking about my next book on the heels of this book. I feel dirty and wrong. I feel if I had another book prepared for this slot, I would slot it in because I feel okay. Just I feel really really bad.

Mindy Brouse 08:17

Bring it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:18

Okay.

Mindy Brouse 08:21

I wish y'all could see her face.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:23

I feel really bad. Okay. My first read this week is *The Roanoke girls* by Amy Engel. I have really, really sort of complex feelings about this book. All right, so let me give you the setup first and then I'll tell you what I thought about it. So our lead character in this book is 15 year old Lane Roanoke, who after her mother commits suicide goes to live with her grandparents and her very troublemaking cousin Allegra on their vast estate this vast farm like tons of hundreds and thousands of acres of farm in rural Kansas. Lane's mother was emotionally unstable and really honestly flat out neglectful. And so at 15 Lane knew very, very little about her mother's family, the family that she goes to live with. But when she gets there, she quickly embraces life as one of the rich and beautiful Roanoke girls who are very well known in this town. But then she discovers the dark truth at the heart of the family and she runs far away. All right, that's the very, very beginning of the book. Our story picks up 11 years later, Lane is down on her luck in LA when she gets a call from her grandfather to say that Allegra, the troublemaking cousin has run away. And so lane needs to figure out did Allegra run away to or did something else happen? And she's unable to kind of not go back to the farm and find out what happened. Okay. This book is a page-turner. Totally yes and Kaytee talked about this on the show. But I want to be really clear that when Kaytee talked about it, she was not saying, Oh, it's the best book of all time. And she also was very, very clear that there was a really big ick factor to the book. Alright, so Kaytee didn't, you know, mislead me in any way she, you know, she let us know what kind of what we could expect. But I wasn't prepared for how very icky this book is. I honestly can't remember the last time a book made me physically nauseous. It's really, really, really icky. I said on Instagram, as I was reading it, I just wanted it to be over. Now, I do want to say that I finished it. So it was it was really, I really wanted to know what was going to happen. But I didn't really like any of the characters. And you guys, there are so many trigger warnings for this book, including suicide, sexual abuse, and a lot of incest. So really, really proceed with major caution. I, I didn't like this book. And yet I really wanted to finish it. So I don't know what does that mean. But it was icky. It was icky, icky, icky, but also engrossing at the same time and it made me want to take a shower. So that's *The Roanoke Girls* by Amy Engel.

Mindy Brouse 11:26

My second read that I'm sharing about today. Oh my gosh. This is quite a book. This is titled *They Never Learn* by Layne Fargo. We had a Currently Reading Bookish Friend, Beth Keim, share about this in the group. And it was so intriguing for me. I picked it up quickly. Oh my gosh. Okay, here we go. So we have two women, Scarlett Clark, a professor at Gorman University, who kills men who quote deserve it. We start off immediately. You know, she's a killer. And she's killing men. No qualms about it. She thinks they deserve it. She's looking for her next. She doesn't even really call him victim, the next person who deserves it. She's been doing this for years. So she's a vigilante serial killer men who get away with sexual crimes against women. You know this immediately. She is wicked smart. And being inside her thought life is terrifying. And also fascinating. Her intense focus on her goals. She's super focused on her academia goals. So this you see this one side of her, the brilliance and then you see her also brilliant side about how successful she is as a killer, and how she's working towards both of those intentionally, plotting, plotting, plotting, she's genius. Then we have Carly Shiller, who's a

freshman at the same university and she's trying to navigate her freshman year. She's left home. She's left a controlling father and a very rigidly controlled family life. She's very naive about the world. And she's trying to figure out what it's like to be at college and to have friends. So not only Meredith, are we watching a serial killer as she hunts her next person, but we are watching a young girl struggle with sexuality and independence and friendship at a much higher level, you know, than high school. There is a ton of sexual tension in this book, as well as nuances of how six different people react, respond, and even rationalize sexual assaults. After Carly's roommate is assaulted, this is on the book jacket. This is not a spoiler. This is a catalyst in the book is that Curley's roommate is assaulted. And Carly sees it happen. She starts obsessing on it. And she tries to take action. So we have that going on on top of Scarlet who is looking for the next person who needs to die. I could not put this book down I could not. I did keep thinking though. What the holy hell is happening, what the heck, there are a lot of great jaw dropping moments, holy crap moments, all of it. This book is pretty mildly open door. Like I mentioned, there's a lot of sexual tension in the book. LGBTQ sexual tension, and otherwise, there's a lot but there is one sex scene towards the end that was really jarring to me. Super open door, open window, open door. All the things were open Meredith, all of them. Okay. The thing that besides you guys know, that's not my cup of tea. But besides that, it really didn't feel like it fit with the book like it came across to me as a shock and awe scene. And I am just not a fan of that when an author does that. But I will tell you, that scene does not negate this book. This book is so fascinating. I really loved it. It's done so well. It's truly riveting. This is a dark psychological thriller, Meredith and I'm, I know, you know, I know now that I'm not supposed to tell you what to read, so I would never say you should read this because then you wouldn't do that. But if I did know someone a whole lot like you, who did allow people to say they should read this, this would be like your jam all the way. So again, this is a killer read. They Never Learn by Layne Fargo.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:32

It sounds really really good. It's kind of got that Dexter like a twist on the Dexter concept, right? A vigilante serial killer, but but a woman and I like that even better. So it's a that's a really, gosh, you are on a roll.

Mindy Brouse 15:44

I don't know what it... Meredith, I don't know what it says about me that I was like, Yes, they do need to die.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:50

Alright, so this is totally par for the course for my reading. So we talked about Ronaoke Girls, which I said was like level 10 icky, right. So what do I do when I get done with that? I literally thought to myself, I need to grab the book on my shelf that is the polar opposite of this book. So of course I went children's literature. Yeah, right children's literature, and written in the 1800s. I had a Puffin classic that I have been saving for a long time, called The Princess and the Goblin by George MacDonald. Have you read this one? Do you know the story?

Mindy Brouse 16:28

Yeah, I do.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:29

I had never read this one before and I'm, I love fairy tales. And so I'm always looking to kind of add to my fairytale knowledge, my fairy tale cannon. This was a really, really sweet one. So here's our setup. Princess Irene lives in a castle in a wild and really lonely, very mountainous region. And one day, she discovers a steep and winding stairway that leads to a really big tangle of hallways, and closed doors. And then at the end of that, she sort of walks all around, she finds a further stairway that leads sharply up. So the question in the book becomes what lies at the top of that stairway, who potentially lies at the top of that stairway? And can what she finds there protect her and her family, against the menace of the goblins who live under the mountains, and who are bent on destroying their kingdom. So this was the perfect thing to pick up. It did exactly what I wanted it to do. It made me feel calm and clean again, it made me feel that there was good in the world. This was so so sweet. And again, it's a Puffin Classic I love the way that Puffin does there, I just love Puffin classics, I think they're so well done as far as just the way they put the book together. I also love that they do a historical note or note about the book, at the beginning to really kind of help you know more about it before you get started. As I said, this was written in 1872. And apparently CS Lewis was very, very inspired by all the work of George MacDonald. And he said that in many, many interviews, and I can see that in the magical elements in this story, it was just a classic fairy tale, it is written in a much more formal style. So I would find it a little more difficult, at least my kids would have found it a little more difficult as a read aloud, that doesn't mean that other children wouldn't love it as a read aloud. My kids just would have found the voice a little bit too formal. And also, I thought it was about a third too long. It's slowed down a little more than I wanted it to. So it's not the most perfect fairytale I've ever read. But it was absolutely perfect. And what I needed it to be and so that's The Princess and the Goblin by George MacDonald.

Mindy Brouse 18:49

Very nice, very nice. Okay, so, Meredith, we've done some quite different books. And now it's time to bring the salt. So you've got salt ready?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:01

You're bringing salt to the table with this one?

Mindy Brouse 19:03

I am. So we've been waiting for this. This is why we've been waiting for for a month.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:08

Why? Because we read this one together. And so we knew we wanted to we wanted to save it to talk about together.

Mindy Brouse 19:14

Yes. And a lot of people have been asking when is this going to be talked about? Right now. Here it is. Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam. Meredith. Yep. All right. Okay, let's do this. This book is all over all the places, all those places, all the places most of you like, most of you have likely heard of it. But let me give a little synopsis here. So this story finds a family of four in a rental house, in a remote area of Long Island for the week for a vacation. But late on the second night. A couple shows up on the door, whose claims to be the owners of the house that this family has rented. Quote something has

happened in New York nobody's cell phones work. There's no signals, no energy It, no TV signal nothing. So they don't have a way to find out if this couple is telling the truth or not. No way to verify, do they let them in? Do they not? And then what happens from there? So that's, that's what that's what we have. Meredith, what is up? What the what is up with this book, this story is so tense, you don't know what's going on.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 20:27

You definitely don't know what's going on, and especially the first... So, so what a lot of people found, and again, we're not going to give any spoilers away in this discussion. So we are, we're committed to not giving spoilers away, we're just going to talk about our, you know, what, how we felt about it in general. And then as we get to the end of this, we're gonna offer you guys the ability to maybe explore it a little bit further in a different in a different way. But I definitely found and heard a lot of other people say, Well, first of all, so he his first book I really loved. It's That Kind of Mother. I was expecting something similar. In at least the writing style, I knew the concept was really different. But I was expecting something similar in the writing style. And when I first got it, I was so excited. And I immediately jumped into it. And I mentioned on a Covideo that I read the first page or two, and the first what the what is what's going on with his writing style, because it's incredibly dense. It almost feels like it's purposefully obtuse. The vocabulary is, I mean, I don't often run across a word. And I'm sure you either, Mindy, where you're like, I've literally never heard that word before. And I don't have enough context clues. I'm literally having to look words up in the dictionary over and over again, right, like you're tripping on them.

Mindy Brouse 21:52

I circled them. I circled them this time. I looked at him again, before we talked today. Yeah, six words in the first four pages. I was like, Did he make that up? Is that a Is that a real word? What the hell?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:03

Right, exactly. So the writing style is, I believe now having read it purposely, purposefully obtuse. He's purposefully throwing kind of roadblocks up. You're not, You're not getting into an easy read here. And he lets you know that from the beginning.

Mindy Brouse 22:23

Yes, I agree. And a lot of people I think find that intriguing and great. I am not that person. I felt like it came across as pretentious. I felt like it came across condescending. Yep. Very, very quickly. I was like, you're setting some kind of tone. And you're pissing me off from the get-go. And I and I'm pretty sure he did that on purpose. That's not an enjoyable read for me. But I kept going, because we were buddy reading. And I was like, I can do this. And thankfully, you had given me that heads up and

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:54

Right, I had told you that the first the first few pages, I think it to me, it was about the first 10 pages that felt that way. Like it was very purposefully difficult. And then it relaxes as the story tenses up. Yes. That's one of the things that's very interesting, the writing relaxes as the story tenses.

Mindy Brouse 23:16

Right, which you don't know is going to happen, right? So if in the beginning, if you're reading that and you're like, this is really annoying. And you think it's going to be the whole book, you're like, ah, but you're right, it doesn't do that he set something up pretty quickly. And he's making a point. The thing for me, though, Meredith, is that the condescension did not ever stop. So the language changed and the vocabulary change. But I really felt like this came across as really condescending to the reader, and very self righteous. And was not honoring me. And I just felt like it was very interesting. And I don't mean had to honor me like who I am, but it came across as no one in the book is good enough. I feel like Alam really was saying none of these people are good. Okay, so maybe we had six really terrible humans. Okay. Well, I guess that's totally possible, right. But I wanted to throw it against the wall. That's the kind of this became a hate-read for me, because I wanted to finish it with you. And you know how a hate read is. It's like, essentially, you're so far into they're like, well, now I'm gonna finish this thing book because I'm gonna say all the things.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:26

Well, and it's not a gigantic book. And it also I mean, I, did you ever find it to be boring?

Mindy Brouse 24:34

No, I did not. That's true. No, and I did want to know what happened. But not in the sense that I cared. What happened. It was more of a curiosity, but I could have left it and walked away and been like, well, I'm gonna leave that book behind is what's going to happen here? Because I don't care enough to know. I felt like there was some sex scenes that were just weird and there's a lot of weird scenes in this book that I felt like. But at the same time, he was definitely creating suspense.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 25:07

Suspense, yes. But I think what he was really creating was this massive level of tension. Yeah. And I think that a lot of what we all were kind of rebelling against is there was not a single page in the book where you could feel comfortable. To your point, there's not a single character that you can kind of relax into. Or that you can feel you fully trust what's going on. And, and so I think what he was doing is he was holding up a mirror to all six of these characters in a way that makes us really uncomfortable. Because all of these characters are people we either know in our real lives, or we are in our real lives. So let me ask you, just a couple of questions. What did you we of course, we're spoiler free here. So we're not going to in any way, shape or form give away the ending. But there's been plenty on social media and in in the reviews of this book that make it clear that the ending is controversial. Let's at least say that as far as what people think of it, how did you feel about the ending?

Mindy Brouse 26:15

It seemed abrupt, to me, it seems like he has drawn this out and really created a good level of tension for the whole book. And then and then he leaves it, he's just a little drop. It's not this big flourish. It's not a big moment where you're like, oh, aha, you know, there's, there's none of that it was just like, and... the end, which I found disappointing. After that much level of tension. I was like, if you're gonna have me that anxious about what the hell is happening, you better, you better make it good. And he didn't, I feel like we came to a screeching halt. And then we got out of the car. And I was like, What? Okay, we're off that ride.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:59

You weren't ready for the ride to end. Kaytee and I talked about this, you know, really recently this issue of endings, and how do endings make you feel about a book and this book is a really, really good example of one that is going to make it really clear to each reader how endings affect you because? Well, okay, so I'll just say in general, yeah, Mindy, we did read this book at the same time. And I had really kind of negative feelings about the book that in the first few pages, but then as it started to move forward, I actually really ended up loving this book. It was very uncomfortable in all the ways that you I mean, you're spot on, in that it is very tense, it's very uncomfortable all the way through. But the way that he portrayed these characters, the way that he used the prose to show you who they were, but then also who they think they are, and how they're trying to present themselves to the world, and then how family groups make judgments about other families, and how we make judgments about other people, and how we decide if we're going to like or not like other people, or how we're going to sort of other other people and make people feel, you know, we automatically assume people are other, whether it's because of how much money we think they have, or what color their skin is, or maybe none of those things, or all of those things. I just thought it was so incredibly well done. I thought it was so smart. And I am a reader that loves an unresolved ending or an ending where you can kind of decide what happens next. So that feeling of being kind of left. I texted you right afterwards, because yeah, it did. It did feel very abrupt. But the more you and I talked about it, and then the more I read, like the last third again, I found new things that kind of came to me as I did that reread. I think this book would be an amazing book club book.

Mindy Brouse 29:02

Heck yes, agree

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:03

I think would be the perfect book club book, because it's not long. It is not boring. If everyone knows that thing about the first 10 pages, if you if you brief everybody, they're going to finish the book, and the amount of conversation that can take place here. I mean, there's there's one section in early in the book where a woman goes shopping, and he spends paragraphs, delineating exactly what he bought, and there were what she bought. And there were so many people who were who were who hated who were so riled up about that. And yet I read that and thought, see exactly what he's doing here? What she's buying at the store tells you everything you need to know about this woman. I know this woman, so no, I I am her. I live amongst her. I despise her. I know her so deeply and his writing puts you right in that and will just take you by the throat and will not let you let your feet he's like hanging us one inch above the ground, the entire book, and he will not let us relax. I thought it was brilliant. And yet, gosh, so much controversy over this book so,

Mindy Brouse 30:24

so much, you know, so I do think it really will. I think that one of the things that frustrated me it was definitely a message to upper-middle class about race and about privilege. And that that's fine. I feel like we have a lot of that though. So I'm like, can we? I wanted, I wanted other people in there too, I think but the way he had it set up there couldn't really be anyone else in there.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:57

But it was such an indictment, he was in that place of saying, Look at you, and your expectations and the and the things you think about and what you prioritize. And look what happens when the kind of foundation that you've built under you. Yeah, isn't there. Like it was such an indictment of that upper middle class that I thought was just really, really brilliant. I thought he was standing in the place of the character that you're saying you wish I felt the author was saying, I am going to be that for you. And I'm going to hold this mirror and this garish light up to these characters. And you're going to have to look in, in this mirror in this bad lighting for these people who normally can always escape the bad lighting. And I'm not going to let them do that. Yeah, yeah. I thought it was really really smart.

Mindy Brouse 31:51

And that was Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:55

All right. Okay, so my last book is my five star book for this episode. I loved this book, partly because it totally took me by surprise. Okay, I'm going to give you so little setup because I knew nothing. When I opened up this book, I didn't even read the jacket copy. And I am highly recommending you guys do the same thing. This book is Midnight at the Bright Ideas Bookstore by Matthew Sullivan. All you guys who love All Things Murderful with Meredith, get ready, because you're going to want to get this book, okay? When a bookshop patron commit suicide in the bookshop, his favorite store clerk has to unravel the puzzle that he left behind for her. That's all I'm gonna give you. Because that's all you need to get into this book. I went into this book, having no idea what it was about, like I said, and I kind of thought it was one of those books about books, maybe kind of like a sweet something about I don't know what I thought that I didn't think it was this. It's a hardcore murder mystery. It's a deeply layered puzzle at its center. Murder Mystery. That was it was it's not fun, because the content is not fun. But the puzzle was so well done, that it was really, really enjoyable to read. So I do want to say that there are a lot of triggers in this book for violence. There's a lot of triggers around adoption, adultery, and homelessness. So I do want to say that I need to let you guys know that especially around issues of adoption be tread really carefully. But each of these things I felt was dealt with really, really well. I enjoyed every single word of this book, from the way that those issues were dealt with. The characters, I cared so much about what happened to this entire cast of characters in this bookshop, and in the people in the lives of the patron who kills himself in the bookshop, the way that the mystery unfolded was masterful. Again, it was sort of puzzle related. And I like mysteries like that. This is definitely not a thriller. This is definitely, I would say more of a literary mystery. It's not a book about. I mean, I guess it sort of is a book about books, but it's really a literary mystery more than anything. And I did not see the ending coming. And that's pretty rare for me. So this one is just start to finish a mystery that I would recommend. And that's Midnight at the Bright Ideas Bookstore by Matthew Sullivan. so so good.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:35

Okay. All right. So those were our current reads. That's a real mixed bag. I think we have something for everyone in this particular week. I love that. Okay. So we wanted to do just a little bit of a deep dive into kind of just getting a sense of each other's reading when it comes to Book Awards. So how much if at all Mindy, do you Pay attention to or think about the Big Book Awards. I'm thinking like, especially the National Book Awards, of course, there's the Pulitzer awards for fiction, these kind of big important

awards. Do you pay attention to them at all? Or if you if or if you don't, which I really don't? If you hear that something is nominated, for example, for a National Book Award, like Leave the World Behind? Does that make you want to read it more? Or does it does it make you want to read it less?

Mindy Brouse 35:31

Well, I don't pay attention to awards at all. So I, I didn't even know that that was an award for that. I didn't even know Leave the World Behind has been nominated for that. I know, I don't really care. But I will tell you that I looked at all of them up to say, Oh, well, okay, in preparation for this deep dive. Meredith since 1950, those awards started in 1950. Okay, I have read only 15. Since 1950. In each year, there's between three and five categories that win. And then there are about five or more that make it on to the shortlist or the longlists. There's a ton of books out of the 15. Two of them are adult books, all the rest. The only thing I've read in the National Book Awards that I actually love have been the children's literature. And believe it or not, one of the books was my very first press on the show The Chosen. So that was fun to see. But no, I don't care. And I'm going to go ahead and say now that I've looked up the winners and the National Book Award, I'm a little more likely that if it's been nominated, or won, I'm probably not going to read it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:44

Right. Usually that's the case for me, I usually will be sort of maybe tangentially aware, I certainly don't seek out knowing either for the Pulitzer or the National Book Award, I don't seek it out. But if I do hear about it, in fact, when I was looking forward to Leave the World Behind, and then I heard that it was nominated. And I was like, Uh huh. Because just often for my reading taste, which really runs to escape more than anything, I always blame it on my English degree, like I read so much "important literature" that now since then, I've just felt like, I just want to read something that's going to be interesting, and not necessarily easy, but at least interesting. Just so many of these National Book Award winners, I feel like are written to be like, they feel like they go out the gate trying to be important.

Mindy Brouse 37:33

Oh, yes, that's exactly what I have written down. To me. They're presses by academia. And this says something really important. And you should be as smart as us and know this. And they're, I don't know, no, Meredith like, I'm a mood reader. And so I want to feel good. I want to learn. I mean, I want to learn and grow, right? I'm not I read nonfiction and really good, heady things. But some of these just came across as full of themselves. Right? Yeah, thank you, I'm good.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:08

It's kind of like Oscar movies that you immediately know that they're made solely for Oscar bait. Like, I just know that that's not going to be I don't want to watch a three hour Martin Scorsese, whatever. It's just not my bag. So yes, those words. However, I will say that there are there's one set of awards that I that I feel in the same way that I will almost, that I almost look at in the opposite way as in, if a book wins it, I know for sure that it is too. It's on the opposite end of the spectrum. And those are the Goodreads Awards. We've talked about this on the show, the Goodreads Awards are at the opposite end of the spectrum. And I feel like they are way too, most of the time, the winners are way too popcorn or mass market. And so I sort of used that on the opposite end. But there are two awards that I pay a lot of attention to. And every year I make sure that I am reading books from their nominees lists. One

I've been doing this forever, and one is completely new to me. So the Edgar awards for mystery, mystery writing, I pay attention to those like crazy I have for many, many years. And it is a trusted source for fantastic mystery. So Best Novel, that the novel that wins Best Novel for Edgar Awards is always something that I'm going to read nine times out of 10 I'm going to completely agree that it's fantastic. And then also best new novel I've read many, many, many of those. So Edgar Awards are my go to I highly recommend if you like mystery, writing that that is something that you pay attention to and then the newest one that we found about found out about not very long ago that has become such a winner for me, is the Awesome Book Awards. And these are for middle grade fiction. And there it's a British organization that gives out these awards and Pippa, our listener and bookish friend talks about it on the Covideo when she came on with us. And I started going through the 2020 Award winners and nominees and then I ended up going through all the way from the beginning, I think there's been four or five years there. So they're relatively new. I've read many, many of those books and and since she told us about them, they've all been fantastic reads. So if you like middle grade, I would definitely recommend paying attention to the Awesome Awards, because those are really quality middle grade fiction.

Mindy Brouse 40:49

And you've really brought some good ones you shared on Instagram. I read Malamander after you shared about it. And that's that's the kind of list that I'm interested in. But my The only award I I don't seek it out necessarily. I had a goal at once of doing it, but I just have too many other books I want to read, I will say is the Newbery, I if a book is a children's book that has won the Newbery award, or been a Newbery Honor book. I am I'm definitely interested in reading it. But again, it's very fascinating because like in 1953, the book that one was A Secret of the Andes, which I love. I've read it. It's beautiful. But the honor book was Charlotte's Web. Charlotte's Web did it win, which which of those books has been more long lasting and far reaching? Definitely Charlotte's Web. is secret of the Indies beautiful and wonderful. Yeah, I'm really glad I've read it. And I probably wouldn't have heard of it without that award. But yeah, I know, Meredith. You know what list I really love the press list by Currently Reading. That's the kind of list I'm interested in. Because those are friends, people that we know. They're clear about, why it's a press, we know what you're doing. There's no alternative motives. There's no ulterior motives behind the list. It's just Hey, this is really good. You should read it. And I'm like, Okay, thanks. Let's do that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:15

Right. Right. Yes, that's one of my favorite things that we've been amassing, as we've done so many episodes of the show now, and it's fun. I mean, I know that you have made a point of reading all the way through the press list, and we have so many other people that are doing the same thing. So we are really happy about that. Okay, so speaking of the press list, let's add some books to the press list. Mindy, what do you have for us this week?

Mindy Brouse 42:37

Let's do it. Oh, my gosh, I am pressing an entire series today. Yes, Meredith said I could Yes. I am pressing the Eddie Flynn series by Steve Kavanaugh. You've heard about it from Thirteen, which we've talked about. I'm completely hooked on this series. Each one brings the awesome I talked about Thirteen as a current read on Season 2, Episode 31. But that was also the spicy takes episode

infamously known as the Ratatouille episode. So there was a lot of hilarity and kind of out shouted Thirteen. But then you shared about as a current read in Episode 33, which I was glad that it got some more attention. So what do we have in this series? We have Eddie Flynn. He was a former con man, gone lawyer. He says and believe it's not much of a change, same skills involved. We have supporting characters who are clever and smart, which I don't bring me flimsy, pansy. supporting characters with a strong central character. I'm not interested in that. We have man and women of color, white, all of it. They're also snarky as held. They're snarky as hell, which I really really liked. snarkiness in it and a character. Mm hmm. And they're all flawed. So I love a good real character Eddie Flynn is flawed, but god you love him. These are courtroom thrillers, which for me are their very best kinds of thrillers. Every book brings a plotline that is hot and majorly page turning y'all you are guessing all the way to the end every time I pick up one. And I haven't read them in order. It's a series but you do. He writes him as stand-alones. I have not read them in order because I have no patience. And I just went with the very next one I could get. Every time I pick it up like Ah, this one will probably disappoint me. And Nope. Every time I'm like, oh my God this is so good. So I can't put a picture of every single one of this series on so I chose The Liar, which is Book Three. Basically, this book we start with, a teenage girl has gone. A teenage girl has been kidnapped her father's the head of a security system. Hires Eddie brings him on and says I'm about to break the law. I'm going to do something I need you to be my lawyer. And so and we roll from there. Again, Steve Cavanaugh is genius. You do not know what's going on until the end and he does it so, so well. For those of you who have read Thirteen, it's time, it's time to read the whole series guys, you will not be disappointed. I have a we had a book train going on for Fifty-Fifty. It's being mailed around from different bookish friends and now the liar is getting sent out. So that's going to be super fun. I have a little group, we named ourselves the hashtag Eddie Flynn forever. Y'all go get these books, you will not be disappointed. You will love it. So that's what I'm pressing. The representative will be The Liar by Steve Kavanaugh, which is number three, but again, doesn't matter. You can read them in any order. But I'm pressing the Eddie Flynn series by Steve Cavanaugh.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:37

I think that's a fantastic press. We have heard from so many people who've heard about Thirteen when you were on and then I read it because you you know introduce it in a way that was so interesting. And people who have gone on to read so much in that series and say that it really is as good as the John Grisham books and that's saying a lot. I mean that the courtroom thriller is back in a major way. And Steve Cavanaugh is a major reason for that. I love love that series. Great press.

Mindy Brouse 46:07

And Nelson de Mille gives him a thumbs up to so when I heard that John Grisham and Nelson Demille were like this guy's the man I was like, Oh, yes, he is.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 46:14

Okay, so I'm going to press a book that I've wanted to press for a really long time and I wanted to press it today because it was the 2018 Edgar award winner for Best Novel of the year. And that is Bluebird Bluebird by Attica Locke. I love this book. I love Attica Locke's writing even more now that I live in Texas, what a sense of place. Okay, here's what we've got. As I said, Our setting is East Texas. And the setting is majorly a character in this novel. It is it is just so deeply rooted in place. Our lead character, who I love is Darren Matthews, and he's a black Texas Ranger. So this is a guy who knows

all too well, that this place plays by its own rules, okay. So he struggled growing up black, in this very rural part of Texas. And he was the first in his family to leave. He wanted to get away from this part of Texas as fast as he could. And he did until duty called him home. So he becomes a Texas Ranger. When our story starts Darren's ambivalence about this place and the people who live in it, and his outsider status, have put his job in jeopardy, so he is not in a good place. When our story starts. He travels up highway 59 to the small town of Lark, where two murders, a black lawyer from Chicago and a local white woman have stirred up a ton of racial tension. Darren is faced with solving the crimes before these racial fault lines, destroy the entire community, and potentially mean more murder happens. So you guys, this book grabbed me within the first two pages, and it never let go. This is not necessarily the kind of thing I normally read. Because it's Noir, which I don't read a lot of Noir, it's also very gritty, and it's rural. So yes, this is rural Noir. And that's really hard to say. But Attica Locke is so, so good. She explains the place and the characters really quickly so that you are immediately aware of what you're dealing with and completely wrapped up in the story. I loved the Darren Matthews character. And I really want to read the next one that that came out. It sounds like it's it's equally amazing. So this one ended with a slight cliffhanger, although the main mystery is resolved. So you can absolutely read it completely on its own and feel, you know, very complete. But I, you know, again, if you like a series, it does lead you into the next one in a satisfying way. I loved the East Texas setting. And I loved learning about the dynamics and the racial tensions there because it's a part of the state that I'm not familiar with. And I absolutely am better for having read this book. So this is Bluebird Bluebird by Attica Locke and I just want to press this into everyone's hands.

Mindy Brouse 49:16

Yeah, that sounds great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:18

So so good. All right. That is it for this week. As reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @meredith.reads on Instagram. And you can find Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Mindy Brouse 49:31

And you can find me Mindy at @gratefulforgrace on Instagram.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:35

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 at our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com.

Mindy Brouse 49:46

You can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram, or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:54

Yes, let us know what you thought about Leave the World Behind, right and if you really want to help us rate Review us on Apple podcasts. But even more than that, you guys shout us out on social media. That single thing is the biggest difference maker in us finding a larger and perfect audience.

Mindy Brouse 50:13

Yes, the recommendation from you to your bookish friend is the best way to pass along your love of the podcast to others and help us grow. Thanks for doing that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:21

Alright, until next week. Happy reading Mindy.

Mindy Brouse 50:24

Happy reading Meredith.