



Season 5, Episode 12: Spooky Spectacular + Short Books That Pack a Punch

Mon, Oct 17 • 1:00:14

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:11

Hey readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we won't shy away from having spicy opinions, so get ready.

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:34

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and reading in spooky season is definitely my favorite.

Kaytee Cobb 00:43

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico, and I'm not a mood reader, but I'm leaning hard into fall. This is episode number 12 of season five and we are so glad you're here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:54

We are glad to be here. And we have so many good things to talk about today. I'm so excited about the books that I'm bringing today.

Kaytee Cobb 01:01

I am too. I got very excited just choosing my books and I got very excited seeing how fall-y my reading has been lately.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:09

Yes, yes, absolutely. All right. Well, we are going to let you know right up front that our deep dive today is one that several people have asked us to touch on. But weirdly in five seasons, we have it books that are fewer than 200 pages that pack a punch. So short books, novellas if you will. We are going to Yeah, we're gonna talk about books that we think are great that fall into that category. Okay, but first we're going to talk about our favorite things, our bookish moments of the week. Kaytee, what have you got?

Kaytee Cobb 01:41

Okay, I am heading out of town tomorrow for what has become now an annual tradition. My husband does continuing education in Sedona, Arizona. But first we drop off the kids with my parents and get a few nights with just the two of us a few hours away. He's busy every morning with classes. So I overpack on books for sure, making sure that I have a whole butt ton of them to read. This year as I packed I chose books about vampires, werewolves, witches, and a chunky fantasy. I've also got a thriller on my Kindle. Basically, I've leaned so far into into fall that I'm worried that I'm about to break my reading. But these dark and spooky books are just what are calling to me right now. It's my bookish moment because we had that great episode, last season about mood reading versus planned reading. And we know that I am a planned reader. But that doesn't mean I can't have a seasonal plan for my reading. So I'm just like stuffing that bag full of books that I really want to read that happened to really reflect the season. And I'm excited that it almost makes me think about mood reading, but I still no, I'm not a mood reader.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:51

Well, okay, so this brings up a couple of things for me. So absolutely, I would think that as a planned reader, you would go really hard and being like "My plan for October is going to be to read really spooky books". But this is where exactly what you just said rears its ugly head, I worry that you can go so hard with a plan and then be like, Okay, wait, now I've really, really gone to the nth degree with spooky books. And is that too much? And if that happens, Kaytee what? What do you do? Or does it simply never happen?

Kaytee Cobb 03:31

Yeah, it doesn't really happen to me, especially because each of these books that I'm choosing, there's, you know, there's a fantasy, there's some sci fi, there's a thriller, there's all these different genres. So I'm not, I'm not doing like all witchy rom coms, or all you know, so it's still a broad enough range of stuff within my plan, that it doesn't usually throw me into a slumpy right mess, but we'll see. It could happen.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 03:59

Okay, well and so then my second question is on a trip like this where you have a plan for these days and you know that in the mornings, is going to be the best time for you to read when you're on your own. Do you have a like, do you know like, Okay, I'm gonna get up or I'm gonna stay in bed because I like to read in bed and on weekend mornings, right? Like that's some of my best reading but do you feel like I'm gonna stay in bed? I'm gonna read for X number of hours and then I'm like, do you make a plan like that for these kinds of days?

Kaytee Cobb 04:28

I am not a stay in bed reader. I get up super early to work out and then I'm kind of ready to start my day. So I get up early. I work out I grab my coffee. I usually don't need to eat anything and then I'll go like find a place to read and this is like an Airbnb that we've never been to so I don't know if there's gonna be a comfortable couch or poolside chair or something that is a perfect place for me, but it'll be it'll be an exploration.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:56

Okay. All right. Yeah, I definitely during the on the weekends I just do I work out all the, all the weekdays so on the weekends, I just do not want to get up and do anything other than have my coffee brought to me. Hopefully, if my husband's in a good mood and then yes and then not do anything but but read for a while so wouldn't it be awesome if there were Airbnb like an Airbnb category that was like, "great for readers" or "great for reading vacation".

Kaytee Cobb 05:26

Right they should do that. Like a bookish Airbnb.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:30

Yeah, and it doesn't have to be like theme-y or weird. It could just be like, you know, do you have Wi Fi? Yes, you know, perfect for reading? Yes. Meaning that you've created at least two really comfortable well lit spaces to read like you'd have to have like a criteria to get that checkmark but I think that would be really smart.

Kaytee Cobb 05:49

That would be cool. We should let Airbnb know that this is a missing this is a niche that they're missing in the market.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:54

They definitely are. And I should have saved that as a wish for the fountain but whatever there I can't stop, can't stop myself. Okay. All right. Well, my bookish moment week is not that far off, Kaytee in that it is related to satisfying spooky season reading. And I feel like I don't always meet the mark on spooky season reading because I'm always trying to balance reading for the show. And then having but then if I read in spooky season, then those books usually, I'm not sure it's too late. And then I have to like, do I have to do what I've done with one of the books, which is that I read it last year, and then I had to wait a full calendar year before I could bring it at the right time. It takes a lot of thinking so this year, though, I feel like I really have hit the mark with reading books that were meeting my mood. And my mood has been less witchy rom com, and more flat out horror. And I have read some barn burners, one of which I'm going to be bringing today. Really, really great. Flat out spooky season horror, scary season horror. So it's been good, but like one sitting reads, right? Like, yeah, books that just it's a couple hours and it's done. And then you're like, get me to some Agatha Christie because I need to clear my chakras.

Kaytee Cobb 07:22

Does Agatha Christie clear your chakras?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:25

Yes.

Kaytee Cobb 07:26

Okay,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:27

of course

Kaytee Cobb 07:27

Just checking. All right. You and your Poirot. I feel like middle grade clears mine

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:34

Sometimes. And then sometimes I'm like, after I go really hardcore with something super murderful sometimes middle grades too far of a left turn. It feels and it feels silly. Right. So gotcha. I don't know. But I did just get the new Kiersten White, Vampiric Vacation. The new one is called, that looks really good.

Kaytee Cobb 07:56

From the wretched waterpark series?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 07:58

Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 07:58

Nice. Yes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:00

Yes. So that looks good. So, all right, let's then talk about our current reads. What's your first book?

Kaytee Cobb 08:08

Okay, my first book this week is nonfiction. And then other than that, I'm gonna go spooky and perfect for this season. So my first book this week is called This Is Not A Book About Benedict Cumberbatch by Tabitha Carvan.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:23

Oh, I'm glad that you're bringing this because I've seen this multiple places, and I keep going, "What the heck is that book about?"

Kaytee Cobb 08:30

Well, it's about Benedict Cumberbatch really. I mean, it's not but let me tell you about it. So this book gets double points for bookish serendipity for me and that's the best kind of book life right. First, I went to my favorite indie Garcia Street Books here in Santa Fe a few months back and this was on the new release shelf. I knew nothing about it. I was just intrigued by the title. So I picked it up. And then I set it on my TBR shelf, never to be heard from again. But then dear reader, and dear Meredith Meg Tietz over at The Sorta Awesome podcast, set up a buddy read for her superstars. And I was thrilled to see that she chose this book, what fun I don't even have to buy it or hunt down a library copy, right? So still had no idea what it was about. But I cannot resist a buddy read. They call me like sirens from the deep. So I dove right in. Well, it turns out that this book is about falling deeply in love with something that doesn't have to have a purpose, or bring in money, or be productive. It's about women and women

identifying folk that are consistently told that their activities and hobbies and jobs and everything have to serve the good of their families or society as a whole. We must do the things to make things continue to run correctly. This is the messaging we all get regularly. And Tabitha Carvan is Australian, but she receives this messaging as well right? After growing and nursing two babies for multiple years, she fell into an internet rabbit hole, one shaped like Benedict Cumberbatch. She started watching Sherlock and she was ripe for something to become obsessed over because of the way that motherhood broke her open. I think a lot of us can identify with this. Even if we're not moms, there's a moment in your life for whatever reason where you feel a little broken. For me, I read this book, I laughed and cried, and I whooped while I was reading it, I am not obsessed with Benedict Cumberbatch. I know that's probably not surprising to anyone. But if you've been listening for a minute or two, you probably know that I have a few animals that would go in the obsession category. For me, I've had a long term love of elephants, including an elephant tattoo for my entire life. But as of the past few years, octopuses have also fallen into this category for me. And the fun part about this is that so many people know about this obsession that I get lovely strangers sending me videos about octopuses, when, and they're like, "You know what this makes me think of - Kaytee Cobb over at Currently Reading. She loves octopuses, I'm going to make sure she got to see this." It makes me very happy. On that note, if it feels like this book is not going to apply to you, because you're not a mom, I know that my life was primed for obsession with these octopuses when I had surgery three years ago. I had to sit on the couch and could do nothing when I had formed my identity around being productive, and always staying on top of all the things around me. And that's when I picked up *The Soul of an Octopus* by Sy Montgomery. That book used its tentacles to get inside my heart and my head in the best ways and that's what made me feel so seen and heard and understood. When I read *This Is Not A Book About Benedict Cumberbatch*, when Meg gathered together 25 women to talk about this book, we all felt a little bit of that seen and heardness. And it applies here to to this conversation, Meredith because this podcast wouldn't exist or maybe at least not this team of the two of u, if I hadn't been a little broken open by having a fourth baby four and a half years ago, right? Onalee was six weeks old when we recorded our first episode. I didn't know which way was up anymore. It felt like I had no identity outside of controlling my home, trying to raise kids and so getting presented with this idea of "Do you want to do something that's exciting, and passionate, and maybe nobody will ever listen to it and that's okay?" was that entry point for me. So the subtitle of this book is *The Joy of Loving Something, Anything, Like Your Life Depends On It*. And I get to love something that hard, because of you coming to me and saying, "Do you want to try this thing? Let's, let's see where it goes". And then five years later, we're still doing this thing and it has turned into something productive. And it is something that you know, even my family recognizes as like, a good thing. But it started as "Mommy needs to not be mommy for a minute. And I'm gonna go be Kaytee, and I'm going to talk about something I love passionately with my whole heart." And that's what this book is about, finding that thing and saying "It's okay to love something that hard." So that was *This Is Not A Book About Benedict Cumberbatch* by Tabitha Carvan.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:14

So the book is not about Benedict Cumberbatch. I mean, I'm not trying to be obtuse.

Kaytee Cobb 13:19

You learn a lot about Benedict Cumberbatch when you read this book, because she does love him so hard. But it's about more than that.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:27

So it's, it's about that, but it's also really about her learning about or being her journey and sort of caring about that thing and learning about it and devoting certain amount of time and resources to it. And that that's okay.

Kaytee Cobb 13:43

Yeah, yeah. And it's about women being able to say, I don't have to do all the things for everybody else. There can be little pieces of my life that are just for me. Yeah. And, and sometimes that's hard. You know,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 13:57

It is hard. And now I thank you because now I finally understand what that what that book is about. And that makes a lot of sense. I'm, you know, I'm a huge proponent, a gigantic proponent of side hustles for that exact reason. And when I say side hustle, I don't necessarily mean that the way we normally do like a thing that makes additional money. It's not the money element that I'm passionate about. It's just the idea that like for the staff that work for me, for Here Comes the Guide, when they have something that they're really really good at doing, and like helping them figure out a way to do that in a way that makes them feel more like themselves is really the piece that I'm really passionate about. So I I love that. I love, I love that there's a book that is really breaks that open. Okay. All right, Kaytee, well, I said as we were talking earlier that there was a book that I saved for almost a full calendar year. Amazing. We have arrived at this moment. I am so organized in my in my record keeping that I was able to not forget that as we crept closer to November 1. Kaytee, what book did I want to be sure to talk about?

Kaytee Cobb 15:04

Is it The Scorpio Races?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:06

It is The Scorpio Races by Maggie Stiefvater. I know, because I haven't told you that I read it because I wanted to talk about it on the show. But I was like, it makes no sense to talk about it in like June. So we're at the 17th of October, I wanted to give you guys a little bit of time, if you had been thinking it would be really, really cool to read that wonderful first line, which I will not read... I will not say to you, because I want you to actually read it, but it will be very cool for you to do that on the first of November. So if you've been thinking, I want to read The Scorpio Races, definitely get a copy of it now so that you're ready. Mark it on your calendar. Okay, here's the setup. You've probably heard this, so I'm going to keep it very, very short. As you'll remember, in the beginning of November, we have The Scorpio Races. Riders in the Scorpio Races attempt to keep hold of their water horses long enough to make it to the finish line. And these races y'all are brutal, brutal with a capital B. Some riders live, several riders die every year. At age 19, our lead character, Sean Kendrick is race favorite. He is the returning champion. In fact, he's a man of few words. And although he does have fears, he does not let anyone know about them. And then we have Puck Connolly. She was never meant to ride in the Scorpio Races. But circumstances have not given her much of a choice. So she entered the competition and she's the first girl to do it. And poor Puck is in no way prepared for what is about to happen. And really, as a reader, I know that I was not prepared. I had heard about this book multiple times, and kind of again,

like the book that you just talked about was never exactly sure what it was about. And I kind of think that's awesome. Because when I picked it up, this ended up being a four and a half star book for me. I liked it a lot. I did start it on the first of November. I think it's so much fun to do that. And there were two major things that I wasn't prepared for the first thing is the gruesome nature of the water horses described in this book. They are a combination, shark and horse. And it is a truly frightening being. And some of the scenes have stayed with me for the entire year since I read them. They are very, very cinematic scenes. And the second thing I wasn't prepared for I think it was sort of prepared for that first part, right. But the second thing I wasn't prepared for is the romance that is in the book itself. I don't know why, but I didn't think that that was going to be a part of the story. And I really, really loved it. So this book has like just a lot of sweet and salty, like it's very two parts of the spectrum. But I love how they came together. There's a super satisfying cast of characters and a plot that gallops along I had to say it that way. And I can totally see why this has been multiple listener favorites. In fact, that's how it came to my attention for the very first time. It said it was a listener, press on the listener press episode. So do yourself a favor, put a reminder in your calendar, put your hold on at the library, or place your order from your indie bookstore and get a copy of *The Scorpio Races* by Maggie Stiefvater.

Kaytee Cobb 18:42

So good. I definitely, like have it very much in my head. I read it at the beginning of November of 2020. So even almost two years later, I'm still I'm like, Oh, those race scenes and then even the stuff that happens on land, like it's very much in the water, right? There's so much cool stuff that happens on land.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:03

I know, right? Like I read it a year ago, and I feel like I could we won't because we don't want to spoil anything, but I feel like I could start talking to you about five different scenes and we could have like a whole conversation. It's a very cinematic book,

Kaytee Cobb 19:14

For sure. Why is this not a movie yet?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 19:17

Exactly, exactly. But we're getting another *Top Gun*, but we can't get *Yeah*, exactly. Why can't we get things like this? Alright, what's your next book?

Kaytee Cobb 19:25

Okay, my next one, I messaged you while I was reading it, Meredith. This one is *Spirit Hunters* by Ellen Oh. This is kind of a follow up from Episode Six because I made a wish at the fountain that every book series would put the number on the spine of their books so that you know that you're picking them up in order because we're not animals. I had not picked up book two in the series, but I knew I wanted to grab book one. So now I get to tell you about it. This is billed as in quotes "high stakes middle grade mystery", but I didn't read that before I went in. This book scared the jeepers out of me. It is a middle grade that I was like, "Turn on all the lights. Nobody breathe weird." It's creepy. I love it. So, Harper is our main character and she's a new seventh grader in town and she doesn't trust her new house from the moment that she walks inside. Of course, that's not helped by the rumors that the house is haunted.

Harper is sure that that's a bunch of hogwash until her younger brother Michael starts acting really strangely. He has an imaginary friend from the moment they move into this home, and things start ratcheting up really quickly. Compound this oddness with the fact that before they moved, Harper was part of a situation at her old school, where a fire burned down a building and she was gravely injured. The problem is that Harper is sure she wouldn't have set a fire, but she doesn't remember how it happened. And the amnesia is spurring a sense of déjà vu as she delves deeper into Michael's own imaginary friendship. The stakes get higher. The book gets creepier. If you were a fan of Jonathan Stroud's, *The Screaming Staircase*, or if you have a murderful middle grader that loves to be terrified by books, this is the one that I'm recommending this fall. Harper has this fantastic grandmother that makes an appearance in the story and I sincerely hope that she is part of all the other books in the series. There are now three out and she is just a fantastic character. I love her grandma's so much. Ellen Oh is the founder of We Need Diverse Books. She has quite a few books under her belt herself. But this is the first of hers that I picked up. I really enjoyed it. I plan to continue with this series. So again, if you want a spooky, turn on all the lights book for your middle grader or for yourself, I cannot recommend *Spirit Hunters* by Ellen Oh, highly enough. It was fantastic.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 21:58

It sounds really great. And now I kind of wish that we had a podcast that was called *Murder for Middle Graders*. But then that sounds like not what it's about. That sounds like it would be true crime about child murder murder. Yeah. And that's not what it is. Right? So we would have to rethink that title. Okay. All right. Now, I don't know why for this episode, I got it in my head that I needed to plan everybody's November reading. But of course we all know that the other thing that's happening in November is nonfiction November. So we all want to plan the best nonfiction possible and I have a wallop for you. Are you ready for this? Yeah. Okay. This book is called *The Tiger: A Story of Vengeance and Survival* by John Vaillant. Kaytee, have you ever heard about this one?

Kaytee Cobb 22:48

No, I have no idea what this is.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:49

Yeah, I'll bet you most people haven't heard about this. This is so good. Okay, here's the setup. Outside a remote village in Russia's Far East, so we're talking way out in the middle of nowhere, a man eating tiger is on the prowl. The Tiger isn't just killing people. It's murdering them as if it has a vendetta against murdering specific people. A team of trackers is sent to hunt down the tiger before it strikes again. They know the creature is cunning, injured and starving, making it of course even more dangerous. As John Vaillant recreates these extraordinary events, the events of this hunt, he gives us a work of narrative nonfiction, that combines an absolutely stunning portrait of a bleak, unforgiving and mysterious region, and its survivor hearted people. And he combines that with the natural history of nature's most deadly predator. Alright, Kaytee when I finished this book, the only I just kept saying, Whoa, whoa, whoa, this book, I read this book in a day. It is narrative nonfiction that absolutely reads like fiction. Okay, so Ryan Holiday is one of my favorite followers on the internet. He's really big in the stoic world. And I think I've talked about him a couple a couple of different times, but he also owns *The Painted Porch* bookshop here in Texas. And what's cool about his bookshop, just you know, is that he only sells books that he has read and loved. So he only stocks like 600 books in the entire store. So it's really kind of a very

ballsy way to run a bookstore. But I love Ryan Holiday. This is a book that he has been recommending forever. For some reason. I was kind of having a hard time getting my hands on it, for some reason I couldn't get my hands on it on any of my normal places. I had to wait like two months to get it. But I finally got my hands on it. I tore through it. But I just checked today on several different major markets, and it's available. So that's the good news. The wait was totally worth it because other than Jon Krakauer, I have not read nonfiction that is this propulsive. This book is, it's hard to fully explain its scope. It's only 300 pages, it's not super long and yet within these pages, you learn so much about Russian history, Russian forests, Far East Russia, which very frankly, I didn't even really know what that was and it's its own beast altogether, and you learn about tigers, Tiger poaching, Tiger conservation. I learned about all the ways that humans and tigers have coexisted over millennia and the ways that the tiger featured in this story has evolved in this area to be a most exceptional predator. Because when you find out like you think about tigers living in certain environments, and this is a completely different environment, this particular kind of tiger has literally evolved to be the most efficient predator where it lives. It's terrifying. It's terrifying. This book does an amazing job of making you feel absolutely terrified of these tigers and also feel incredible admiration and empathy for them. And that is a trick. I will also say that there are scenes in this book that had that were written in a way that they had me as scared as any seen in a serial killer book I have ever read. Now, I will say that for some weird reason, probably a death in a past life, I have always been weirdly afraid of tigers. Like at the zoo, I oftentimes have to stay really far away from the tiger enclosure because I literally start to get a panicky feeling if I catch eyes with a tiger. This this book though, here's the thing. This book explains why I might have that feeling. It's apparently not that out of the ordinary for anyone who has come face to face with a tiger. Apparently part of their evolution is that tigers actually have more than just these incredible physical abilities. Yes, they're huge and powerful. And I'm talking 14 feet long. These tigers in this particular area are as big as cars, and they are as fast as cars when they really get going. But they're also quieter than any beast on the planet. I am so frigging afraid of tigers after reading this book. You can't even... but I also kind of love them and wish I could have one as a pet, but I never ever would. But I wish I could. Does that make sense? Okay, yep. So not only do they have these physical abilities, they are so intelligent. They also, no joke, I'm not even kidding you. They have some sort of psychic power in them to communicate their presence, whilst also being completely hidden from you. They say that a tiger will see you 100 times before you see it once. And when you see it that one time it will be the last thing that you see. There are all sorts of reports that people have been within some proximity to a tiger and every part of their skin, like their hair was standing up. Their skin was gooseflesh. Like these are psychic predators, they cause like a feeling in the brush around them. This book does an amazing job bringing that level of predatory prowess to life and I was enthralled. John Vaillant is an amazing author. His prose is delightful to read, I was stopping to reread sentences and underline them solely because they were incredibly evocative. Again, this is as good as any narrative nonfiction I have ever read. Now, this book is not an easy read, because it does include a lot of history and backstory of entire countries. And in the characters that were following these men that are trying to track down the tiger, you learn a lot about their backstory. And if you go in thinking all we're there for is tiger murder, tigers murdering if that's all you're there for, you're, it's probably going to be a little bit annoying, but if you lean into what the story that he's telling you the full breadth of it, you will be richly rewarded. It is one of the most memorable books that you will ever ever read. And I really wish that I could own a tiger but I can't but I wish I could. This is Tiger by John Vaillant.

Kaytee Cobb 29:39

Sounds terrifying. Did you have bad tiger dreams after I'm like creeped out just listening.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:45

I have had recurring dreams about tigers my whole life which is why I do think in a past life I was killed by a tiger.

Kaytee Cobb 29:51

That is that's...what's the statistics on that. Like how ... like

Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:55

I don't, I don't know. I don't know but I mean living in the middle of Austin, Texas living in the middle of New Mexico, unlikely, but I don't know where I lived in a past life. Yeah, I don't know. Maybe I lived in Siberia.

Kaytee Cobb 30:08

Maybe? Siberian tiger.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:10

I don't know. But they scare the cuckoo stuff out of me. You wouldn't even believe it. Oh my gosh, this book is so good.

Kaytee Cobb 30:17

Cuckoo stuff. Okay, I have not scary books next. Yay. Mine's not scary at all. We've already poked fun twice at witchy rom coms today, but that's okay, because I brought one to share with everybody. You're welcome.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:33

We love a witchy rom com if we're in the right mood.

Kaytee Cobb 30:36

Perfect. Exactly. This one is called Witch Please by Ann Aguirre. And it was so much fun. Okay, so this is Halloween witchy rom com. And it is open door once they get going. So red flag red alert. Open Door. Danica is our main character. She is a modern witch with a technical bent. She and her cousin own a little shop in a small town like a Hallmark movie small town. It's called The Fix-It Witches where they use their witchy prowess to fix everything from computers to blenders for a nominal fee. They're kind of hiding in plain sight. Nobody knows that they're witches. They just go under that name. Because it's like so obvious that nobody will figure it out kind of thing. Right? Right. All they need to accomplish this task of fixing things is to send the owner off to get an owner's manual or look it up online, and then a little nose wiggles that set things right. And the owner comes back and they're like, "Wait, what did you do?" And they're like, "Sometimes it just takes turning it on again," or whatever, right? Like but every time they just fix things. That's how they make their living. It's really cute. Most mornings, they pick up baked goods from Sugar Daddy's bakery down the street, where Titus is the hot as blazes cinnamon roll baker behind the scenes. Literally the town flocks to the bakery at lunchtime when his

sister's on break so that all the ladies can fawn over him and he can't figure out why there's always a rush at lunch. He's like, "This is so weird. We just had normal business all day. And then every day at noon, I don't know what happens." He's like a big dumb himbo. It's really cute. Titus is also bisexual and he's convinced he's cursed because all his relationships end in very strange ways, especially when it seems things are going pretty well. For that reason, he's still holding on to his virginity well past when he would have liked to lose it. Titus and Danica meet when the oven in the bakery goes on the fritz and he needs her help to get it up and running again. That's not a pun, but it's but it does work. To keep up with said daily lunch rush, sparks immediately fly and more in more ways than one. And for him, he's sure that she's the one for her. He's a wrench in her plans, the perfect balm to set off the family war. The problem here is that Danica knows about her own family curse. She cannot fall for a mundane, which is a non witchy person in this world, or a person with no magic, because hers will then disappear. So of course, it'll probably be fine if she just wants to no strings attached relationship, right? Like it's not going to derail their entire lives. I'm sure it'll be fine. My review of this one lets everyone know that once these people get into bed, they do it like rabbits. It's like constant. They're just they're like you know what would be fun? We should go to bed again. That would be great. And of course Titus has like a lot of pent up energy in that area. Every frickin few pages they're getting it on. The family of witches in this book is meddling and fun. The coven that Danica and her cousin belong to is filled with diversity, and each of the characters stands on her own. I am hopeful that additional books in the series either tackle the cousin or the other members of the coven because I think there's a lot of really great characters to pull from here. Even though I love a grumpy hero more than a cinnamon roll hero with a gooey center I did adore Titus. I thought the story was just delightful. It made me smile from ear to ear. This was Witch Please number one in the Fix-It Witches series by Ann Aguirre.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:04

I have to say when you started talking about that, especially from the title, I was like, Man, I'm not interested but I can't but I'm kind of interested now. There's some little elements of it that I think are really fun.

Kaytee Cobb 34:14

Yeah, there's there's a lot of fun in this book and even like all of her titles play on words like that one. It's fun.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 34:22

All right, well, I am going to take us squarely back into the scared cuckoo with the cuckoo stuff hanging out of us. Here we go. I don't even know what kooky stuff is. And I don't know where it would be hanging out of. So just it's metaphorical. It's metaphorical. So okay, who but I'm so glad to talk about this one. Because y'all, Josh Malerman, who wrote Bird Box and then several other books that I did not like, he is back. He is back with a fantastic new book and I could not be any happier about it. I love Bird Box so much, but then he just kept putting up book after book right I was like, Oh no, I kept reading them but they just I didn't like him at all. But Daphne, his latest release is really, really good. Okay, here's the setup. The main players of our story, are high school senior girls and they are members of their high school girls basketball team. Our focus is on the baller extraordinaire Kit Lamb, who as our story starts is riding high. It's her last summer before she goes off to college. It's the last summer with her team, and the last summer with Dana, her best friend. But the night before their big game, one of

the basketball players, the girl on the girls team tells an unsettling story about Daphne, a girl who went to their school many years ago and died under mysterious circumstances. Some people say that she was murdered, some people say that she killed herself. And some people say that Daphne was actually a murderer herself. They also say that Daphne is still out there, obsessed with revenge, and will reappear to kill anytime, and this is key, anytime that someone thinks about her.

Kaytee Cobb 36:10

Oh no.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:11

After Kit hears the story, her teammates start being murdered one by one in the most the most gruesome ways, the most gruesome ways. I mean, one, it's gruesome people. And Kit begins to worry that the stories about Daphne might actually be real and she's fearing that it's her own obsession with Daphne that is making these things happen. Now it's a race against time for Kit. To search for truth behind the legend, how much of it is actually true, and learn to face her own fears before the best summer of her life becomes the last summer of her life. Y'all This is horror done right. And it is the perfect book to read at this time of year. I read it in the single setting. I literally ordered DoorDash with one hand while I kept reading with half my eyeballs because I just was like not cooking tonight. I am going to see what happens. So what's funny is I had this book on my Kindle for a few weeks, I got an early NetGalley of it. But then book boyfriend Bill from An Unlikely Story, you guys have to follow them on Instagram, because he does "One Minute With Bill" where he talks about one book that he thinks he really liked. And he was featuring this book. And of course immediately I'm like, "Oh, well, if Bill says it's good, then it must be good." So it definitely lived up to his recommendation. It is not exactly what I was expecting, though. But then I didn't really know enough about it to know what I was expecting. It does kind of have some strong Stephen King vibes to it. It has that same kind of gruesome horror. But it's also like Stephen King often does mixed with emotional depth, which is my favorite kind of horror, if I'm being honest. It has elements to that I wasn't expecting, I wasn't expecting to care about women's basketball. I really, really don't in real life. But the characters in this book are so well drawn that I just loved them. And I was really sad when they kept being murdered in these horrible ways. I mean, some of them got her arm ripped off, and she was beaten to death with it. It's really horrible. Okay, I feel bad for these. I felt bad for these girls. I did. So this book totally though, surprised me by having a level of depth around the subject of living with an anxiety disorder that I just did not expect. I didn't expect it to be touched on at all. And I certainly didn't expect to be so clearly written by someone who has lived with an anxiety disorder. As I was reading it, I said to myself, "Wow, Josh Malerman has an anxiety disorder." As someone who's lived with one since I was six, I know it when I read it. And in the acknowledgments, he does a lovely job of making that piece clear and describing why he wanted to write this book in that way. Now don't fret. This is also just a straight up scary premise. And it has some really frightening scenes and it delivers on the legend the promise all of that. So don't fret. This is not a book of horror. That's not a book for it is what it promises to be. It's just horror and horror plus. And that made it a really satisfying read. Of course, definite triggers for body horror and trauma, including repressed memory. All of this is done in a really interesting way. And I was clicking the buttons on my Kindle Oasis, like a little tiny hamster. In fact, again, read it in a single afternoon. I inhaled it. I'm so glad that I liked this book. Josh is back. I'm calling him by his first name, because you know, we share this. We're just we're deep friends now after reading this book, definitely, he's back on my auto buy list. This

is such a great book for for spooky season if you like a book that is going to have your eyes wide and your spine tingling, and you double checking that both your arms are still connected to your shoulders. This is the book for you. This is Daphne by Josh Malerman.

Kaytee Cobb 40:21

This almost sounds like YA... Is this like horror YA?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:25

I mean... It's it. It is I guess, if you use the definition of our main characters are seniors in high school. Okay, but nothing else about it right there. I mean, except that you're in the head. I mean, right? No. And you know, I'm so sensitive to that. I'm so sensitive to any of that, like teenage drama. I guess when you throw in people being beaten to death with their own arm, I'm okay with anything. It was just, it was really, really well done. I'm telling you not only was the horror part well done, and I really wanted to know what the heck was going on with this Daphne chick. Wait till you read with this, what this woman looks like, but also the way that he wrote about day to day life, even when your friends aren't being murdered, of living with an anxiety disorder is one of the most realistic and helpful explorations of that in fiction that I've ever read. And I'm always looking for that in my fiction, so like, horror, and any just like high fives Josh, great job.

Kaytee Cobb 41:27

Nice job, Josh. Way to go, man. All right, that was quite the gamut that we just ran there.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:33

We did. We absolutely did. All right. Those are all of our current reads. So let's talk a little bit Kaytee, about our deep dive, which is books of 200 pages or fewer, that pack a punch, or that are really, really, really worth your time. How do you feel about tiny short books in now we're not talking about short stories, but short books, short books. How do you feel about them in general? Do you gravitate toward them or gravitate away or you don't care?

Kaytee Cobb 42:01

I don't really care. But they can either really make me fall in love with them are really disappoint me where I'm like, "Why? Why wouldn't you just take that extra 100 pages, you had plenty of room, and like, give us the rest of the story." Because sometimes that really bothers me to get to the end of a 200 page book and be like, "You could have finished it," like or "You could have developed that middle, at least a little more". These books today, though, are not that story. These are the ones that did it in the 200 pages or less.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:30

Right. And that's the thing, right? And people always say it's so much harder to write with brevity than it is to write and just, you know, explore at length. But I do think that if something feels incomplete, right, then it hasn't, it hasn't met the mark that we're trying to meet here. But the books that we're going to talk about today, really do. I don't know why it is that I tend to shy away from shorter books, or novellas or whatever you want to however you want to define that be and I tend, I find myself looking at page counts before I press buy on a book. And like if it's under 300 pages, I'm always like, "Do I really wanna

buy that? I don't know. Is that worth it?" But then longer books are often just annoyingly too long. So it's a very stupid metric for me to be considering at all, as these books prove to us. So Kaytee, what was the first book that you thought about when we started talking about this deep dive?

Kaytee Cobb 43:26

Well, well, partially, I proposed this deep dive because we just had a number of shorter books on the October Indie Press List. So those ones were very top of mind. But then when I went to my bookshelf, and I was like, which ones would I say, you know, really packed a punch within the 200 pages. I'm actually going to possibly steal one from you, Meredith and the first one I want to talk about is Love and Saffron by Kim Fay, which is only 179 pages and feels like it tells a whole life in that end, like a whole friendship in this very concise letter format. Oh, my gosh, that book. I love it so much.

Kaytee Cobb 43:46

You know, it's funny that you say that, Kaytee, because yes, it's a book that I absolutely loved. I didn't remember it. That was not on my list, because I didn't remember it being that short.

Kaytee Cobb 44:16

Yeah. Well, I only it was because I was looking at my bookshelf. And I was like, that was really tiny. Weird. And I realized that it was actually I mean, and I know that I read it in a single afternoon. I couldn't stop reading. Oh my gosh, I loved that book so much.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 44:30

Yes. And that's the thing about I mean, that's the thing that the October Indie Press List really proved. I guess to me that there were we did have a couple of really excellent, shorter books that made me go oh, man, there's something really nice about just diving in and knowing it's not going to be a problem to finish this in one sitting. I'm not going to have to DoorDash dinner, I'm going to be okay. And I get it's this feeling of like this nice little complete moment that you've had if they've done what they set out to do. Well, the first book that I thought about, I actually woke up in the middle of the night thinking about it last night is The Grown-Up by Gillian Flynn. Did you ever read this one?

Kaytee Cobb 45:10

Yes. That is a freebie I got from Book of the Month where they like threw it in.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:15

That's how I got it too. And it is one that... so Gillian Flynn wrote Gone Girl writes this, this novella, The Grown-Up, I think about this book all the time. It is a little piece of mystery, crime fiction thriller confection. It is so good. It's got three really memorable characters. It's got some incredibly memorable scenes. It's just this perfect little bit of crime. fictiony goodness, I love that. I love that book.

Kaytee Cobb 45:49

That's a good one. I didn't even think of that one either.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:52

Well, it's great. It's great for this time of year too, it's like creepy. Is it the house? What is going on? What's happening? Am I gonna like it's just, it's it's perfect for spooky season? Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 46:05

Oh, that's a good one Meredith. I like it. Okay, my next one that I wanted to toss out there, I have a few little like Novella series, one I just brought, which was A Psalm for the Wild Built. And then the next one, which is A Prayer for the Crown Shy by Becky Chambers. Those ones are, let's say 160 Pages for A Psalm for the Wild Built, very similar for A Prayer for the Crown Shy. And then the other one is one that Mindy will be very bereft if we do not mention Murderbot, which starts with All Systems Red by Martha Wells, that one is 144 pages. Each of these, especially on audio is like two to three hours. Like even if you're a normal audiobook listener and you don't speed it up, you can run errands and knock out a whole book in an afternoon really easily right and really well done audio narration. But I love that even in a series of novellas like that one as well as the one, the fractured fables ones by Alix Harrow, A Spindle Splintered and A Mirror Mended. You get this series of novellas so you're dipping in with this character over and over again. But each one stands as its own little complete piece of chocolate, like in that box of chocolates that we're talking about your little perfect treat of the grown up. But this one's like, Oh, now I can pluck out the lemon filled one. And I can get this whole complete story in that little bite. I love that feeling of not having to be in a whole world, you know, right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:27

Well. And so with these books, not only do you have that feeling of you can dip in and have that completeness, but then you can dip in again and again and again. Right. What I want to add to that particular category of short books is one of my absolute favorites by Seanan McGuire is a series that starts with Every Heart a Doorway. That is an amazing book, an amazing series that follows the different children that you meet in that first book. They've all got great titles, they're all just expertly written. So those are three series that I think you could really enjoy dipping into, you know, over and over again.

Kaytee Cobb 48:07

Yeah, a whole bunch of them for sure. There's also lots of great classics, I feel like there wasn't, it was a different type of pressure in classics, to have that complete story, but not to have to like we've got Dickens writing 800 page novels, we've got The Little Prince by Antoine Saint Exupery at 106. And ever, like who doesn't love Little Prince, or The Great Gatsby by F Scott Fitzgerald is only 123 pages. There's so much in that book. Even if you don't love it, there's so much to unpack and to pull apart in that book. 84, Charing Cross Road, again, 106 pages, and that one came out 20, 30 years ago and like you can read it over and over again. It's so good.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 48:52

Well, 1984, or Animal Farm are ones that that occurred to me like Animal Farm is a very short book. But you know, one of those that you if you have on your on your list, like I really, I want to read a classic year or I want to kind of revisit some of the books that I read in high school when I just was not a reader who could be trusted with any of these great works. Those are easy ones to dip into. That just won't take a ton of your time.

Kaytee Cobb 49:18

Yeah, yeah, exactly. If you want to diversify your classics, you could also go with *Passing* by Nella Larsen, which is only 141 pages now has Netflix adaptation. So if you'd like to pair you're watching with your reading, that would be a great way to get a small little bite of confection as well and then get to watch this treat afterwards. And honestly, it'll probably take you longer to watch the adaptation than to read the novella that it came from, because it's that it's that short.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 49:46

Right? Well, I have a couple of novellas that fall into the category of deliciously weird, okay, and the first one that I that I want to talk about is *The Governesses* by Anne Serre. Have you ever heard of this book? This book is so weird. It is so weird, but it's real. It's very, it's V French. It's really, really good. I just this afternoon picked it up. I actually have it on my bookshelf after having read in a long time ago, I picked it up and reread it. And I just was like, horny governesses, and what is happening. And it is really strange, but beautiful. And it's just, it's just weird. It's weird, but it's great. And then *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* by Shirley Jackson also weird, but that's the way I like my weird is in very short bursts. I don't want to read 800 pages of *Fever Dream*, but I can stick with it for 150 pages. And then one other one that isn't necessarily what I would call weird, but it's kind of like seven up for your mind is *Elevation* by Stephen King. This is a book that Johnny and I both read and then we read it again together because there's just it's not weird and it's not Stephen King gruesome. It's actually really kind of wonderful. And like zippy and effervescent, and poignant. And it's Stephen King at one of the things he does really, really well. So if you're if you've long wanted to like understand why he's a great writer, but you don't want any part of it and *The Stand* and *Needful Things* and all of that, *Elevation* is a really great little taste of Stephen King.

Kaytee Cobb 51:31

I totally agree. I loved that story.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:33

See there's so many, there's so many where it's like, we didn't even know if we were going to have that many to fill up a deep dive. But there's so many where it's like, oh, look at this, like tiny little diamond that this person cut for me and and how well they did making it into this beautiful thing. I love it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:33

Well, and one more that I want to mention, just because my friend Roxana would be so upset if I didn't I she asked me to read *A Dead Djinn In Cairo* by P. Djeli Clark. And I absolutely loved it, steampunk bizarre fiction that I never ever, ever would have thought that I liked. And I liked it so much. And that is the perfect example of writing where you're like, how did you create so much world in such a small number of pages? I loved *A Dead Djinn in Cairo*.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:22

Right? So so so good. I love it. Okay, all right. Kaytee, do you want to make a wish at the fountain?

Kaytee Cobb 52:29

I do, I want to make a wish at the fountain I just because I am a buddy reading addict, I just jumped into another buddy read that's gonna start on Monday and it already came up in here. And I knew exactly what my wish was going to be. So I wish for a buddy reading app that allows for staggered reading. So here's my vision. You ready? Here we go. Okay, before all The StoryGraph readers come at me about this. I know that StoryGraph has a buddy reading feature. It's kind of part of where this idea came from. But I just want to explode it into something bigger. So I want an independent app where you don't have to be on Facebook or Instagram messenger or on Discord, or whatever these other apps are that people use to buddy read, where you can say, I'm reading, let's say We've Always Lived in the Castle, because that's one of the books that we just talked about. And on page 45, here's what I was thinking was going to happen. And then anybody else can go on and be your buddy reader at any time. It can be well after you finish the book, and they can say I'm reading this version of We've Always Lived in the Castle, and it'll sync you up. So when you put in, I've now hit when Meredith was at page 45 of We've Always Lived in the Castle. And it'll say, Here's what she was thinking at that time. Here's what she thought was going on with that story. And it like reveals it as you hit each of those points. But you don't have to be even friends with that person. But they can see like, oh, oh, this was her theory. And it will not spoil it because it will not reveal it to you until after you've hit that point in your own reading. I think this would be so cool. I would love to even have been able to provide this for people who are reading Comfort Me with Apples after you and I both read it where we they could see you know, like our messages to each other about it because they wouldn't be able to like clock in on this buddy reading app. I think it would be so fun. So it's like a locked Facebook update feed that reveals itself as you make your way through a book and allows for that buddy reading experience without the overwhelm of being like now I have to message 14 people and tell them what I thought of chapter six. Nobody wants to do that. Right.

Kaytee Cobb 52:29

Right. I think this is a great idea. I think it's really I mean, because then right, it opens up a whole social element of like, okay, so I really, really, really loved the things that this person was thinking so I'm gonna potentially read other books that they've read, so that I can kind of follow them through. I mean, that's very, that's very interesting. That could be Really fun.

Kaytee Cobb 55:00

I think it would be so cool. I mean, I mean, there's smart people out there, either somebody has already found this app, maybe somebody already invented it, or there's smart people out there listening. And they're like, I know how to make this happen. And if so, let me know. I want it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:16

I love it. I love it so much. Okay. All right, well, I saved I definitely am glad to be talking about this at the end of the show, because I want to let everybody know, every once in a while, we get an email from people. And it just it doesn't bother me, it's just kind of funny to me who's like, "You know sometimes you guys talk about like, your kids, your grandkids, or middle grade or whatever. And I'm really not interested in that." And so that's totally okay, that's completely okay. So what I want to say is, I'm about to share a wish that has to do with my grandson who's only eight months old. So it's gonna be like baby and book talk. So feel free to bounce, if that is not of interest to you. But for the people for whom it is

interesting, I really wanted to share this because it was a whole lot of fun. So I just got a chance to spend four straight days with the love of my life, my grandson, Jeffrey. And because his parents have made such an effort to read him, so consistently, he is really, really great at paying attention to books when you're reading to him, but also being interested in books as objects and kind of talking, things that we can talk about and almost play with, right? Well, he's now getting to the point where he's crawling. So I had him for a full day, the other day, and it was just the two of us. And so I was like, let's go in your room. And let's set up a book circle. So I put I made a huge circle, like a big 10 foot circle. And I put board books of all different kinds at like every two feet around the circle. And then I put Jeffery, in the middle of the circle. And I kind of had the board books propped up and open on the carpet, so it was easy to do. So the board books are like open, so he can see a full, you know, layout of the pages. And so then he would crawl up to a book. And I'm not trying to read these books to him, right, we're just sort of talking about what is on that particular page. And if he's interested, we'll talk about it longer. And if he moves immediately to another book, or he just wants to sit and chew that book for a little while. That's okay, like he's leading this entire experience. But we ended up being in there for 40 minutes, with him just crawling around. And every once awhile I would, I would change the page that's open, like when he's looking at one, I would go change another one. And so then, as he's looking around, they're changing all the time. And so it was just so much fun and it was a way to explore books in a different way than what we normally do, which is like, hey, let's choose a book and you sit on my lap and we'll read it. It was more a way to just explore books as objects or talking points. If that makes sense. It was just super, super fun. So I wanted to share that.

Kaytee Cobb 57:54

So what's your wish?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:56

My wish that more people would do this with their, their babies. Because you're right, Kaytee, thank you for helping me land that plane. I think that two - I don't think it just has to be crawlers. I think you can very, very easily do this, you know, with kids as they get older and just sort of put out books for them to like, run to and then you know, talk about them. So anyway, that's the book circle with me, me and Jeffrey. Okay, I wish that everyone who has the opportunity to do it would try it out. Let me know what you think.

Kaytee Cobb 58:24

All the memories that you share with Jeffrey and all the ways that you get to play with him and instill your love of reading in him make me very excited for a day, many years in the future decades in the future in which I get to like then use some of these tools and techniques with a new generation of readers.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:42

It's very, very fun. Having a grandchild is so much more fun than I even thought it was going to be and I was already pretty much looking forward to it.

Kaytee Cobb 58:50

Totally stoked. Love it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 58:52

Alright, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @Meredith.reads on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 59:00

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 59:04

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 59:14

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 59:20

And if you really love this content and you want more of it, we have got it for you go ahead and join us on Patreon. For \$5 a month you will get All Things Murderful, Trope Thursday, and of course the Indie Press List. We just have so much fun together over there. So join us there. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts nice reviews only. Please please please and shout us out on social media. All of those things help in us finding our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 59:50

Bookish friends are the best friends and five star reviews are the best reviews. Thank you for helping us grow and get closer to our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 59:57

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot

Kaytee Cobb 1:00:00

And your book be unputdownable

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:00:02

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 1:00:03

Happy reading Meredith.