



Season 5, Episode 22: Our Top Ten Books of 2022

Mon, Jan 2, 2023 • 1:21:57

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:11

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

Kaytee Cobb 00:24

We are light on the chitchat heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. Today, we have a very special episode for you.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:32

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I love me a best of list.

Kaytee Cobb 00:40

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love reveling in a big stack of great books. This is episode number 22 of season five, and we are so glad you're here. It's episode 22. But it's our first one of 2023.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 00:55

Exactly. Happy 2023 Kaytee. I am so glad to be back on the mic talking about books. And this might be our favorite episode of the year to record.

Kaytee Cobb 01:07

It's often our download numbers favorite episode of the year, this usually ends up being our top downloaded episode of any given year, when we recap at the end of the season, because people love a good best of list.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 01:20

Right. So that's what we're going to do today. We are going to tell you guys each of our top 10 books of 2022. Of course, Kaytee, you and I don't only read new releases. So these are ones that we read in 2022, but they could have been published at any time. And we've done something this year that none of us can remember ever having done before, which is that we ranked them 10 to 1. In the past, I don't think we've done that. And it was not easy to do.

Kaytee Cobb 01:47

It was a little fraught. I will say it took me almost four hours to really because I was swapping out I kept being like, oh, what? Oh, what about that one? Where should I put it? So there was there was a lot of angst at my house as I prepared for this episode.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 02:03

Right. Just choosing the top 10 and then forcing yourself to say "Okay, now of this 10, what order?" Right, exactly. So very fraught, but very, very fun. Alright, so we have just a couple of pieces of mischief to manage before we get into all of that yearly recap goodness. The first thing we want to talk about, of course, you guys know, this is the first week of the month, which means we will talk a little bit about becoming a bookish friend, a Patreon subscriber of Currently Reading. We only do that a little bit in the first episode of the month, and the whole rest of the month is completely ad free for everybody. So Kaytee, we were so excited, we were talking last month about how we were driving toward our goal of 2,022 Patreon subscribers in 2022. And I was mulling over the fact in my own mind about how numbers oriented I can be, I can be very focused on a goal almost to the, you know, to the exclusion of anything else. But this last week, as we had so many new subscribers join us I think, you know, in large part because the reading tracker that you get as a Patreon subscriber, so many people were excited about that. We had so many people join us and I loved it when in the bookish friends community, which is our closed Facebook group, which is only for Patreon subscribers, we call them bookish friends, they, some brand new people were brave enough to dive in and make a post and sort of introduce themselves and maybe ask a question or mention their favorite couple of books they read this year. And every single time when they would get like 25, 35, 50 responses immediately from other bookish friends just making them feel totally welcome. Like they have tons of book twins in the group. It makes me so happy and it helps me remember something, Kaytee, that you don't struggle as much to remember, which is that numbers aren't the most important thing. It's the people in the community.

Kaytee Cobb 04:09

It is a vibrant and friendly community. My mom and I were actually just talking about this because I'm at her house for the holidays and we got to go meet up with a bookish friend that I had reached out to on Facebook that I knew lived close to my mom. And she talked about how to a person anytime she's gotten to interact with any of the bookish friends, she's just struck by how welcoming and kind and lovely they are. There's not drama over there. We make sure that every post is well looked after. And it's full of great suggestions and book twins and meetups and just like wonderfulness. It just exudes loveliness, and I'm so glad that that's what our community has become.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 04:51

Absolutely. So you know, there's a lot of reasons to become a subscriber of Patreon to support us. It's just \$5 a month. It keeps us ad free. There's lots of content. We were just talking Kaytee, about the fact that there's three plus years of content available. As soon as you pay that first \$5, you're never going to, you know, run out of Currently Reading content. But also, there is this community. So if you feel sometimes, like the internet doesn't feel like a safe space, go ahead and join if, if not for all those other reasons for that reason, because the Currently Reading Facebook group is really big. It's very active, and it is very, very safe and sweet. And I just, it's such a great place on the internet. So yeah, lovely.

Kaytee Cobb 05:40

All right, we have one more piece of mischief to manage, though, Meredith.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 05:45

Exactly. So we wanted to let you guys know that. So this week, we're doing a very special episode. Next week, we'll do a just a regular episode. The following week, I am going to be doing a show on Currently Reading with Roxanna, one of our show regulars. You guys know that Roxanna is also my reading partner. We share our reading life together. And so we've gotten a lot of questions about how that works, how we read together, how we buddy read all of those things. And we wanted to open up quest for questions, because we're going to do a deep dive answering those questions. So if you have any questions for me, and Roxanna, how we structure our reading lives, how we make them work together as two moms with, you know, big careers, all of that as readers, given that we weren't really reading twins at all. And so how is that come together? Any of those questions, send them to our email currently reading podcast@gmail.com. And we are going to answer those for you. We will need those questions by January 4. So that is a quick turnaround. But it will just take you a few few seconds to send us an email, let us know what you guys would like to have us answer. Okay, Kaytee, that is our Mischief Managed for the month, let's get into this very special episode.

Kaytee Cobb 07:11

Yes. As we mentioned, it was a fraught process for both of us. I don't know how you start your top 10 list gathering Meredith, if you are way on top of it, and you keep a list throughout the year. I made a first pass just kind of glancing through all my books for the year, and I was very chagrined to find out it had 50 books. I was like, "Well, that's gonna have to be narrowed down a little". Oopsies. Right. But then what I did was the day we were preparing one of our bookish friends posted in the group, Brady Parkin, about how he ranks his books from number one all the way down. So I said, "You know what, it can't get any worse than 50 books on my top 10. I'm gonna try it, I'm gonna see what happens". And I tried it. And it was a really great exercise for me to say, for every single book was this better or worse than the one right before or right after it and put them in an order. And now when I look at that ranked list, I'm really happy with the way it turned out. It was, it was a very fun and challenging exercise for me to accomplish. How do you get started with this?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 08:16

Right. So I simply take my reading tracker, of course, I use the Currently Reading reading tracker, and I just go to the column for my ratings and I rate it a to z, right or so I read it in a what is that sorting order. And then I just look at the ones that I've rated five stars, and I start with how many books did I rate five stars, the best rating that I can give them. And then if... this year, for example, I had twenty 5 star books out of my total for the year, which was 117. So that's 17% of the books that I read ended up being five stars, that's about a normal year. For me, that's not any better or any worse than years past. So I had 20. And I pretty quickly was able to get down to 15. And then from there, that's where it became really fraught and where I spent like a week, going back and forth, back and forth, and just kind of keeping it loose for that week. I would look at it, I kind of had it up in a place where I could look at it. And over the course of the week, it solidified more. So by the time we're recording today, I feel very good about my top 10. And as we said at the top of the show, we decided to rank them. And I feel good about their

ranking, although I do have to say I kind of went back and forth a few times, you know with certain things, but I think I feel like I've landed we just were able to re listen to that episode from 2018 which was five years ago and it was interesting to me that I look at this top 10 And I feel like it's a much stronger list of 10 books that will have more staying power than that list from 2018. I think because I read more books this year, and also because as we've discussed, I feel like I've gotten better at choosing books. I've gotten better at DNFing books. So the other thing that I did Kaytee, as I looked at this list of books, I tried to sort of figure out, not necessarily what was the theme of my year as far as, like my, the books that are on my top 10 are all over the place. So there wasn't like a theme. As far as like, Oh, I was reading a lot about family or a lot about the, you know, there wasn't anything there. But what I did really think a lot about was that this year was a year of me leaning into my different reading, moods and also being okay with the reading ebbs and flows, the ebbs and flows of my reading life. I think more than ever before I this year, stopped white knuckling my way through the ebbs portion, knowing that the flow was going to come back. And so I think before that used to kind of worked me up into a lather, whereas now I'm very, like, you know, "It's okay, if for a week or week and a half, or even for the month of October, the entire month. I don't read that much. It's going to start flowing again". Part of that is that as I really really look at the books I finished this year, which are all I put on my reading tracker, I DNFd, or NRNd, not right now, more than ever before I became much more liberal, I would give a book 30 to 50 pages up to 10%, for example, from reading on Kindle, and then I would let it go. And I feel like I was better at that. So this whole year's theme felt like taking more ownership of my reading life and being okay with all that that means.

Kaytee Cobb 12:02

Yes, I love that. I have found similarly, the same thing, I DNFd, or I made a record of more DNFs this year than I ever have before, which was only it was still maybe 15 to 20 books. But when I've had years where I DNFd nothing or DNF, two books, that felt like a big jump for me. And I also found that as I made that ranked list, it took me a long time to get to numbers, where I was looking at books that I really didn't like very much. Those were very few books of my reading year and that makes me feel like my, my picker has gotten a lot better. I understand what's gonna work for me, the ones that I pushed through that I ended up hating, I know exactly why that happened. So I have like a better feel for what happened in my reading life this year and why it works so well for me, which I like both of those outcomes.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 12:57

Right. And to go back to the episode that we had a couple of weeks ago about tracking our reading, to me, that is one of the biggest arguments for tracking your reading, is to help you answer the question, "Why did this book work for me? Why did it not?" Because I feel like if we're not doing that in some way, whether it's a very detailed way or something very quick, then I then it's difficult for us to hone in on those things and to have our picker really become attuned for us. So that to me is the biggest reason to track your reading.

Kaytee Cobb 13:36

Yes, I would agree completely. Let's get into some of that goodness that we get from tracking our reading. So we both have more robust stats this year than we've had in the past. We're going to kind of go through them a little bit quicker. And just talk about some things that stuck out for us in stats on our

reading here. So you already mentioned that you finished 117 in 2022 and 17% you said we're five star books. That's excellent.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:03

Yes. Now interestingly, I now have three years in a row where my totals were very, very, very similar to each other. So in 2020, I had 116 books. In 2021, I had 120. This year I have 117. So I've definitely found my sweet spot in total number of books. Now remember, that's the step that means the least to me, because I am not working toward a certain number except that want to read enough to keep up with the show and really read enough good books to be able to have a robust top 10 Right and so that's a reason to read about this number of books. So I clearly have found the sweet spot in the total that works in with my life. So Kaytee, how did you end, because your totals have been have had big swings? Where did you end up this year?

Kaytee Cobb 14:56

They have had big swings this year. I will And, uh, right around 310 books, which is a lot. And mostly the last few years, my goal has been to read fewer books, and to make sure that they write better books, and that they were good fits for me. So I didn't do that. Last year I read 298 by the end of the year, and this year was a little more than that. But I do feel like I had a year full of buddy reads, a year full of learning, a year full of books that I wanted to hug at the end. And those are great markers for me have a full reading life. So I am very happy with the way my reading your played out this year and what I learned about myself as a reader, which that's my goal, like as an overarching look at what we what I've read throughout the year.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 15:48

Okay, so then it's a lot of books, but do you find that at around 300, or 310? Because that's what I was gonna guess for you. I was gonna guess that you were right at about 300. Do you feel like you have hit the right sweet spot in total, but in a total number, again, you don't drive toward you're not driving toward a specific number. You're not trying to read as many as you can. Right? But are you reading the right amount for your life in the season it's in right now?

Kaytee Cobb 16:16

Yeah, the only thing that ever makes me itchy about my reading life is when I get into a space where I feel like I don't like anything I'm reading. So as long as I can keep a regular rhythm to my days, that always includes some kind of reading, that's when I feel good about my reading, no matter how many books that ends up being. And this year, I did have that I had a few times where I went into that little lull slumpiness, where I was like, I feel a little itchy. I can't find an audiobook. I like DNF three things in a row. But mostly, the year felt like good waves in and out, have a great rhythm. So yeah, it was it was satisfying. I like a satisfying reading year. Just satisfy me please books.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 16:59

That's well, I mean, that's, that's what we're all hoping for. Right? Is that a reading year that at the end of it feels satisfying. I would say that that's how I would characterize this reading year for me too. I definitely felt like it was a satisfying reading year. Now let's talk a little bit about genres. And how our year broke down along those lines. So when you looked at your reading tracker, again, use the same

one that I do, what were the data points that stuck out to you having to do with genre, fiction, nonfiction, all of that good stuff?

Kaytee Cobb 17:32

Yeah, I stayed about even at where I like to be, which is my reading year this year was 21.5% nonfiction. I like it to be about one in five books that are nonfiction for me. So 20% ish is perfect. I was at 72% adult fiction and then the other 28% was split between middle grade, YA and new adult. And for my backlist versus frontlist reading, I read 63% of my books were published before 2022 So they were 2021 or older. And I like that balance as well. I don't want to be one of those readers that's on the very forefront because like you talked about with Net Galley sometimes that means you're reading your is not as quality as you would like it to be because you don't know if your book twins love that book or not. Because nobody's talked about it yet.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:20

Right. And I'm glad that you brought that up specifically Kaytee, because that was a data point, backlist versus new that I opted at the beginning, when I started to use the reading tracker, I opted not to track that because I kind of felt like I'm trying to keep it as simple as possible. But starting in 2023, I am going to be tracking that piece because as I was looking at the year as I've done more NetGalley. For all of those reasons I've been wanting to to get a sense of how much am I reading backlist versus, you know, what's new this particular year. For sure. And what, and then more importantly, what does that mean for the ratings? Is that leading to a more satisfying reading a year or not? So that's a data point that in 2023 I will be able to have. I was interested in noting that I only read 15 books that were nonfiction out of my 117 this year, which is really low for me. For the second year in a row very low on nonfiction. In the season I'm in right now, I just am realizing, first of all that that's completely okay. There's no part of me that's like, oh, I need to read more nonfiction. I don't feel that that's a need. But it is interesting to see that different years, I'm pulled towards different things. I've had years where I read as much as 30% nonfiction, and that's just not the space I'm in right now. So this was one of my lowest my lowest years. Not surprisingly, I read right at 49 and a half percent of my books were either mysteries or thrillers and that is exactly right for me and my reading, and half of the books on my top 10 are mysteries or thrillers. So again, that that tells me that I'm reading a lot of what I like. And I'm choosing ones that aren't just for immediate satisfaction, they also are many of them bubbling up to the top. So quality within that genre is something that I'm looking forward to. So that's why I kind of track those two things together. Interestingly, this year, like last year, only 3% of my reading was in middle grade. In 2019, I read 15% of my books were middle grade. So really big fall off in middle grade for me over the course of the last couple of years. I can't really explain it, except for the fact that I read a couple that I really liked. But again, I just haven't been drawn that direction. And that feels really okay to me, it because maybe, at some point in the future, we'll come back when, as Geoffrey starts to get more into that chapter book read aloud season, I would imagine that that will come back for me. But there'll be a lot of rereads of favorite ones of which I have many. So that was an interesting thing to see how how much my middle grade has fallen off.

Kaytee Cobb 21:20

Okay, I also have because of the reading tracker and the way that I was able to pull out recommendation sources this year, I can tell you that my highest source for recommendations was

actually the Indie Press List. 38 of my books this year, came from either the 2022, or the 2021 Indie Press List. My second highest was my reading partner, Katie Proctor. But my highest rated recommendation sources were Roxanna and my Heather, they both had more than one book recommended to me and overall, their star rating average was the highest of all my different recommendation sources. So I thought that was really interesting as well. It's one of my favorite things about the tracker that it can keep all those pieces of data separate and give you a rating overall.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 22:04

Yeah, that is very, very interesting to me. My number one I looked at read at recommendation sources. Over 30% of my books were from an author or in a series that I had read before and that that was the main reason that I picked up the book was because of the my knowledge of the author. But Elizabeth Barnhill comes in at over 10% of my overall reads. So my number one person recommendation source and of those 10% of my reads that were recommended by Elizabeth Barnhill, they averaged 4.4 stars. So she is a very, very good, the numbers bear out the feeling that I have that she's a really good recommendation source for me. Roxanna also is a great recommendation source for me. 5% of my books were recommended by Roxanna. And several of those ended up on my top 10 this year. So she actually averages five stars in the recommendations. There's fewer books, but also, I think anytime someone is literally sharing at you're, you're talking with them about every single book that you're reading, as you're reading it, they get a very deep level of knowledge about what you like and don't like in a book.

Kaytee Cobb 23:21

Definitely. I have one more stat that as you know is very close to my heart. The one thing that I really am intentional about in my reading and care about every single time I pick up a book is how much Own Voices I'm reading. And when I started tracking that in 2017, with my first reading spreadsheet, it was 7% Own Voices reads. And I knew at that time that it was important to me to change it. So for 2022, I ended at 69.2% Own Voices books for the year, which was like I said, intentional. I would set some things aside in order to make sure that my next book was more diverse than the last one I picked up. And it played out in my reading life in a really big way. And I'm really happy with that number that seven out of 10 books that I picked up did not reflect the majority experience in one way or another and that was very important to me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 24:15

Right. I know how important that is to you. And I you know again, what we measure we can move. So anything that it's that is important to you is another reason to track that in your reading. Something that's really important to me is that I really gravitate towards books by women and women's voices of all kinds. And I was at 73% books by female authors this year. And that is something that yes, I'm intentional about. Yes, I'm naturally pulled that direction. But always interesting to see that that is something that whether it's women of color, or no matter what, I'm going to gravitate that way because women's stories are very much what interests me, you know, That's, that's a lens that I love to look at. As far as format goes, Kaytee, I'm very interested to know how your formats broke out. I will tell you that this was a fairly common year for me. I was at 60% print, 27% digital and 13% audio. The piece that is grown for me is that 27% digital since I got my Kindle Oasis. I am reading more and more and more on digital. I'm finding myself if I liking something in print, oftentimes, I will go ahead and get it in a

digital format because I just want to be able to read it in bed at night or first thing in the morning and the Kindle Oasis Kindles in general just make that so easy. So that piece is moving for me but only 13% audio for me. How did your format year break out?

Kaytee Cobb 25:48

So I was at 59% audio, only 10% digital, so one in 10 books and almost exclusively those are galley proofs are things that I'm reading ahead of a release date, 24% print, that does not add up to 100 because I also have a tag for multiple formats. I love a tandem read where I have the print and the audio. At the same time, this is not a switching back and forth like I will read until I get to a chapter break and then go to the grocery store. And listen, this is where oftentimes with nonfiction, I want the words in front of me I will sometimes be highlighting or taking notes. And I want the author telling me their own story. So that was 6% of my reading this year. And I love the level of plays out. So I love to get into audio that way.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 26:35

That's a really good example Kaytee of, of what we were just talking about, if that kind of experience that tandem read where you're listening, and you have it in front of you, if you continually feel like that is your best reading experience, for whatever reason, then what you can do by tracking your reading, you can then say like, "Okay, I want that number to be at 10% this next year. So I'm going to be more intentional." So that's just a great example of how what matters to each person is completely different. But tracking that thing will help you move that number in the direction that you want it to go.

Kaytee Cobb 27:12

Yes, absolutely.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 27:14

My favorite kind of, I don't even know if this is a tandem read. But my favorite read reading experience of that same I think this year was the advent for me of what I call book dart books. And that basically is a book that I have in print that I am book darting, highlighting, writing in, I think just interacting more with my books, my works of fiction. In the past, I've really only felt I could do that with nonfiction, productivity books, you know, those kinds of things. This year, I definitely dove in headfirst with interacting with my books that I was reading just for pleasure. And it deepened my experience to the point where now I kind of always have my book darts and a pen with me all the time. And they just traveled with me, you know, throughout the day as I bring my pile of all of my reading stuff as I go from you know where I'm working or reading to where I'm working and reading.

Kaytee Cobb 28:17

I love that. And I also I just have multiple tins of book darts. They're just all over my house.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:23

Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, so we're about to dive into our favorite books of the year. But before we do that, one other thing that we actually decided to take a look at where our two lowest rated books of the year

Kaytee Cobb 28:43

We're going to throw some spices in here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 28:46

I didn't have a lot of really low rated books because an Ikea you probably have the same thing. I don't finish a lot of books that I'm really really hating. But I had two that stuck out to me one of one of which I talked about at length in the podcast, which was Murder at Black Oaks by Phillip Margolin. This was the one that I just wanted to throw against the wall. I wanted to scream at the publisher. I just I ranted and railed about this book. And then the other one was The Harbor by Katrine Engberg, which I both of those I gave two stars to. Katrine Engberg, it is a writing, that's a third in a series. The Harbor is the third in a series that I love the first two books and highly recommend the first two books. The third one was just really, really boring and repetitive. So it didn't kind of get me railing the way that Murder at Black Oaks did. But I was I kind of gave it a disappointment rating. So those were my only two star rated books.

Kaytee Cobb 29:42

That's excellent. My lowest rated books were mostly two star books because again, by the time I hit one star, like I'm not going to read that anymore. The exception there was with the short story sisters, I read a short story every day and we read one called Children of the New World by Andrew Weinstein, which is horrendous. I actually threw the book in the trash. I did not even list it on Pango because I don't want it going to someone else's house and having them associated with me in their head. Even if it's somebody I've never met before, I just, I thought it was so bad, all of us hated it. And there was there was one story basically, that had captured the person that submitted it to the short story sisters for this year. And that story was excellent. And then everything else was garbage. And I was just so mad that I read it. And then the second one is a middle grade book, which I don't think I've ever been so mad at a middle grade book before. It was The Turtle of Oman by Naomi Shihab Nye. And it's ostensibly a book about a boy from Oman, moving to Michigan, and having to deal with packing up his life to leave it behind. And I read it aloud to the kids, which is why I did not DNF it, it was so boring. He never actually packs, he never actually leaves. And he just is throwing a temper tantrum about having to leave home for three years. And I was annoyed every time I picked it up. And but the great thing that came out of this book is, as I mentioned, I am having my kids write a review together, like a current read setup for every book that we read aloud as a family in our homeschool. And so they got to learn how to write a critical review and talk about you know, how to word something that you did not like, and how to present that well in a paper. So that was a great learning experience. But we did not like it.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:32

Right? That is always, especially when you're having to get it up to read it out loud. And you feel like you have to finish it that can just make a book experiencing really, really long. So hopefully, I'm sure that you did talk with them about like, hey, let's talk about this experience. Like, did they dislike it as much as you did?

Kaytee Cobb 31:53

It was interesting because when we sit down to start our review, I say, Okay, on a scale of one to five, what would you rate this book? And they were like, um, maybe four. And I was like, great. So I'm giving it a two, and here's why. And then at the end of my explanation of why I did not appreciate it. They said, Oh, right, like you can go, we can say there were things we don't like about a book. And that's okay.

And I said, Yes, that's part of the learning experience. So by the end, our cumulative rating was like 2.8, between everyone because they realized that they could say three, and it didn't mean that they don't like books at all, it just means this one was not a hit for them. So it was great.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:40

Which is such a great thing for them to be learning as readers that it's okay for them to have their own opinion, even if everyone else loved the book. That's a really great thing for them to be learning.

Kaytee Cobb 32:50

Yes, important homeschool lessons.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 32:52

Alright, Kaytee, do you think we are ready to start actually getting into our top 10 books of the year? Do you want to go first or do you want to go second?

Kaytee Cobb 33:01

I'm gonna go second. Do you think that this is going to be our longest episode ever? So I feel like that's what we're aiming for.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 33:10

Right? That's true. We are trying to keep the chitchat to minimum. But there's just a lot to talk about when you're talking about looking at your entire reading year. And for a lot of us, I think we really do take this kind of examination seriously. And I know not just you and I are doing this readers all throughout our community are doing this to say what went right. What didn't go right, what were my very favorites. Again, publish those list of favorites. If you choose your top 10 to the year, put it on books, you can put it in the bookish friends community, that is a really good way to find out who your book twins are, and who you might want to become special book buddies with. So don't keep your books under a bushel. Okay, I will go first then. And I will tell you that my 10 my number 10 in my top 10 books of 2022 was *Death in the Family* by Tessa Wegert. This book was a locked room slash locked island mystery, and was emblematic of my favorite kinds of mysteries this year. It was well written. It was extraordinarily well plotted. It just moved all the way through. But it wasn't a thriller that relied on plot twist. It just was a smart piece of mystery with a lot of puzzle and you had to really pay attention. And that is something that was a theme. I guess I'm going to talk about themes of my year. That was the theme of this year. So I really like Tessa Wegert writing. I love the main character in that story. And I'm going to be reading further into that series, because it just is my perfect kind of very evocative mystery reading experience.

Kaytee Cobb 34:57

Yes, I love that. I think that's a great option for your top 10. My 10th book in my top 10 is *Kaikeyi* by Vaishnavi Patel. This is my top mythology of the year depending on how you categorize things. I love getting into the story of the Ramayana and Kaikeyi who is the mother of Rama in Hindu mythology. This is written in an epic format so it's perfect for fans of *Circe* or *Hamnet* or *The Book of Longings*, which are all stories that tell male centered stories but pivoting to a female viewpoint, and that is canon for me. I love approaching an old story from a new feminist angle. And when I finished it, I wanted to start

all over again. And that's a mark of a fabulous book for me because I reread like maybe one book a year, and this one was one that I wanted to just devour right from start all over again.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 35:51

That is one that I very much have wanted to read one and to put a little bit of space in between you reading it and me reading it because I knew that it was one of your favorite favorite ones. But that is one that is beckoning from my to be read shelf for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 36:05

Yes, what's your number nine?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 36:07

But my number nine book is *The Keeper of Lost Causes* by Jussi Adler-Olson. This is like *Death in the Family*. This one was also recommended to me by Elizabeth Barnhill, this was a five star piece of Nordic Noir. And this one is one that I did on audio. And I really really liked it that way. It is a fantastic story again, just sucks you in from the very beginning. It's got a great curmudgeonly lead character. There are lots of trigger warnings in this book, especially for torture that features prominently in this book. I feel like whenever I talk about it, I need to at least say that. It is a great example of Nordic Noir and that is something that I'm reading a lot more of now than ever before, partly because Elizabeth reads reads a lot of right and she's bringing the best of the best to us. So this one again, the beginning of a series, one that I will continue reading about and I will definitely be doing it on on audio for sure. *The Keeper of Lost Causes*. That's a good one.

Kaytee Cobb 37:17

It's a great title too. Okay, my ninth one is *World of Wonders* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil. This is a short book, easy to read in one day. But of course, I do not recommend it that way. Because it is a collection of essays written through the lens of the natural world. Each essay is titled with an animal or a plant or natural wonder. And that piece plays a role in the observations she makes about her life within this collection. We get to examine the way she grew up the way she parents the way she interacts with the world at large. And I loved looking at a life this way. It was beautifully written. Aimee is a poet, and really accessible. And it felt like a wonderful way to wonder at the world through the eyes of another I loved it. It's *World of Wonders* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:02

When did you see that Kaytee as a as one of your themes for this year, it seems to me that you were more focused on animals and the natural world in 2022 than you had been before.

Kaytee Cobb 38:15

Definitely, I definitely see that. And that actually comes up again, in my top 10 list. So it's not, it's not unlikely that you will hear more about that later.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 38:25

We'll see it more there. Okay. All right. Well, again, following things that will not be, you know, super shocking to people. The next book, my eighth book of 2022 is *The Appeal* by Janice Hallett. Again

theme of the year. This book was such a puzzler. I love the feeling of having puzzle pieces laid out for me, and being trusted that I'm smart enough to put them together. And Janice Hallett did that so perfectly in *The Appeal*. This is a book that is about, about a small community theatre group. And it's about some things that take place within this theater group. But what's interesting about *The Appeal* is that it is done in a completely interesting construct where you are reading the emails, of the people involved in everything that happened within this theater group. You're sort of sitting on the shoulder of the attorneys who are doing this deep level investigation into what happened and yes, there's crime and there's lots of interesting things happening and so it's very fun to play detective and in *The Appeal* you absolutely get to do that. It's as close as you're gonna get in novel form to like playing a game like *Hunt The Killer* when you're you're really trying to figure it out on your own. I loved this book. It was so much fun. So that's *The Appeal* by Janice Hallett

Kaytee Cobb 39:59

and this is a book that is a pen kind of book right where you get into it that way as well?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 40:04

Right. Well, actually, it's interesting that you say that Kaytee because I read this fairly early in 2022. Before I was really doing that. And so so I didn't do that. If I were to reread it right now, I would absolutely interact with the book in a completely different way. And I think it would be more enjoyable because I know that this is a book that Betsie Ikenberry who I talk about with books a lot. She did that with this book, and really was kind of one of the reasons why I started doing that in mysteries especially. And it helps you figure things out when you're making notes along the way.

Kaytee Cobb 40:38

Okay. Okay. I like it. I like it. Okay, my eighth book of 2022 is the only YA or middle grade on my top 10 list this year, which surprised me because I don't read a ton of it, but it was still nearly 30% of my reading, and only one made it to my top of my list and it's *Breathe and Count Back from Ten* by Natalia Sylvester. So I talked about this not that long ago on episode 14. Vero, Veronica is our main character. She's from Peru. She has hip dysplasia that requires regular surgery and physical therapy and the only place she feels at home is in the water. So there's a mermaid attraction down the road where humans swim underwater and pretend to be mermaids and she really wants to work at Mermaid Cove. There's some YA you know relationship drama and lying to parents in this one. But it felt so much like genuine pain and heartbreak from an author who also has hip dysplasia who is also from another country, and really getting to put her personal story on the page and her personal stamp on the plot. And for that reason, I just loved it. *Breathe and Count Back from Ten* by Natalia Sylvester.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 41:50

This is one that really stuck out to me when you brought it to the show. Kaytee, you've sold it so well, or you told us about it so clearly so that I could identify that I think this is one that I'd be very interested in. So this is on my list for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 42:04

I would be very interested to see if you actually like it, because I know YA is a scary place for you. It is a scary place for me to put a beloved spot.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 42:13

Right, exactly. But sometimes it just hits it out of the ballpark and just really matters how the author portrays the lead character. Right? Sometimes, it just will tank a book, and sometimes I'm like, I don't care if you're 17 and angsty, I'm in it with you, sister. Like, you know what I mean? You just don't know. Yeah. Okay, my seventh book, and Kaytee, I know you'll let me know if I miss counting. My seventh book of 2022 is *The Shell Seekers* by Rosamund Pilcher. Now this is one that traveled up and down my top 10 list everywhere from seven down to three because this was one of the books that just surprised me. One of the things we talked about Kaytee is the book that surprised us the most from the year. This is that book for me. Roxanna recommended it to me. Over the summer, I was in one of those ebbs of my ebb and flow. I was ebbing. I couldn't find a book that fit. And she had mentioned *The Shell Seekers* and I was like "What, like the book our moms were reading in 1985 with that horrible cover?", and she's like, yes, but it's one of my favorite books of all time. And I was like, say more words about that. Because nothing you're not this is not making sense. As she started talking about what *The Shell Seekers* was about which spoiler I had no idea what it was actually about. I just knew that it was like, felt very at ease to me. I was like, Wait, that sounds excellent. And I read it. And every single chapter of this book just became more and more part of the fiber of my heart and mind. I just loved our lead character. She's a mom of grown children. She is very secure in her relationship with her grandchildren and her grandchildren don't necessarily think that she's the greatest mom in the world. But she is totally fine with that. And being in this interior conversation of this very secure woman who's in her 60s, I just loved being in that space. I just felt like she was the kind of woman that I wanted to be. I wanted to rest in the secure thought that I'd done the best that I could and whatever happens happens, but it's also, *The Shell Seekers* is also tremendously interesting in the actual plotline of what's happening. There's great family dysfunction, there's disputed inheritance. There's art, there's so much it all takes place in an English village with these gorgeous houses who were there very much a part of the story. I love that too. I loved *The Shell Seekers*. It was such a surprise to me. I wanted to tell everyone about it. And there's no question that it will be on the top 20 books that I've ever read list, because it just was a book that became a part of the fiber of my being. And I was so glad that I read it this year. So that's *The Shell Seekers* by Rosamund Pilcher.

Kaytee Cobb 45:14

We love a book that becomes a part of the fiber of our of our being.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:19

Yep. And a book that I will reread often, because it's one of those books that I think every time you read it, you it comes to you with something new.

Kaytee Cobb 45:30

Yeah. Yeah. Which I know that's why Roxanna dips in to it so often. Right?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 45:35

Right. She's been reading it since she was a teenager, I really can't imagine. I mean, I know what she's told me. It's interesting to hear what she took from it as a teenager and what I'm taking from it as an

almost 50 year old mother and grandmother. And it's just, it's just one of those books that has something there, no matter what season of life that you're in, right.

Kaytee Cobb 45:55

My seventh one was also fraught. Meredith, you talked about moving *The Shell Seekers* up and down your list. For my seventh one, I fully prepped two books to put in this slot. And right, this second, I'm going to make a call about which is my seventh on the list. So I am going to go with *The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles. So I didn't bring this one to the big show, because I didn't want to usurp Meredith from reading it because I was so excited for you to pick this book up. And I didn't want it to be like KaiKeyi, where you're like, Well, I wanted to put some distance between but but I loved it so much. And it doesn't change the fact that this book shows to me that Amor Towles is one of the classicists of our time. I think that in the future, he's the one who's going to be swapped in for writers like Steinbeck or Hemingway, or Fitzgerald, because he has that classic sensibility that incredible wit and alacrity, will also be really approachable and having these complex characters and storylines that interweave and just excel, they show excellence on the page. I loved the timeline of this book, I took it as a slow but steady with one chapter a day that matched the dates in the novel. And that just blew it out of the water. For me the experience of feeling like I was traveling with these boys on their journey on the Lincoln Highway. I loved the way he ended the story, even though that statement is a little controversial, because other people hate the way he ended this book. But it shows me that he's not just a writer of our time. He's a writer for all time, this book, I'm still getting goosebumps. And I read it six months ago, talking about this book, it's *The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 47:37

I'm so glad that you really really liked it. That is one that that I'm going to buddy read with Roxanna and we have kind of scattered around it a few times and then decide it just hasn't been the right time yet. And because we love Amor Towles so much. We want to read it when it feels right. Perfect of us. Yes. Right. So that's the only reason. So it's it's sitting there on my shelf. And it's one that I keep going oh, I can't wait to read that one. And we definitely will. So I'm looking forward to that. All right, my sixth book of 2022 is *The Anomaly* by Herve Le Tellier. Okay, this was one that I initially heard about from Knox McCoy on The Popcast. This is speculative fiction, at its absolute best. This is a French author, writing a book that starts out grabs you by the throat and keeps you in that chokehold until the end of the book. This is the book that is about a plane that takes off from Paris, lands in New York City, everyone gets off and goes about their business. And then three months later, that exact same plane with the exact same people lands in New York City, but it's three months later, and they don't know where those three months have gone. Because they think that it's three months earlier. It's so mind bending, but clear the entire time. It's not difficult to follow. It is very, very interesting. You follow some of the different people who were on each one of those planes and you know, how what do you do if you have a, an exact double somewhere in the world who is also you but you know, it's just it's really, really, really interesting. It's totally sci fi. It is very complex, but again, written in a very clear way it's going to make you question, all kinds of things. I would definitely recommend it as a buddy read because you are going to want to discuss these things with somebody in real time. There's so much discussion to be had, but it's also just a really well paced. I don't want to say thriller, but it is written in that style. It's not slow and plodding. It clips along at a really really fast pace and you got to hang on, to keep up. And I think about this book all

the time, it's so amazingly done, it had to be on my list of top 10 books of 2022. So this is *The Anomaly* by Herve La Tellier.

Kaytee Cobb 50:14

When I was thinking of books that surprised me, this was almost the very top of that list. And it ended up just out of my top 10. Because it was such a singular experience, which is a funny thing to say about this book. But it was a singular experience.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 50:30

And it has an ending that you are going to know why I'm saying, getting yourself a buddy to read with because the second you're done, you're going to be like scrambling for your phone to be like, holy, what if you just read it, read it with your book. It's a great book club book, because it is so incredibly readable. You're not going to struggle getting people to finish this book. And it's imminently discussable. So this is a great book club book.

Kaytee Cobb 50:59

Excellent. Okay, my sixth one is the one that I am most worried about overlapping on so but you haven't said it yet. So my sixth book is *Hench* by Natalie Zina Walschots.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 51:15

Not on my list, but definitely in my top 20.

Kaytee Cobb 51:18

Okay, perfect. So most worried about overlapping with Meredith on this one. The unlikely story of how this book got into our hands is part of what made it so fantastic for me. And that is a pun and our bookish friends will absolutely understand why it is an unlikely story that put this into our hands. Not only did I totally see myself in the pages of the story, and our main character whose name is Anna, she loves spreadsheets. She uses their powers for both good and evil. But I also love a fresh take on a superhero story and flipping the script on who's the hero and who is the villain, Anna and the ensemble cast that make up the story are unforgettable characters and there are certain scenes that I will never be able to unsee. I cannot say enough good things about this book. And I shudder to think about the idea, the alternate history where I never got to read it. Because the way that it came into our hands that ended up in the hands of so many bookish friends is just such wonderful, bookish serendipity that it added to the experience in a huge way this was *Hench* by Natalie Zina Walschots.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:25

Well you know, I love that book. And it this the super villain in that book is one of my favorite like sexiest book characters of 2022. I love him so much. I love everything about everything about that man is my jam. I loved *Hench* so much.

Kaytee Cobb 52:45

Excellent. Okay, so let's talk about your fifth book, your number five book for 2022.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 52:51

Alright, so now we're in the top half of our books for the entire year. Okay, so number five, In This House of Brede by Rumer Godden. This well, I mean, this could also have been in the category of books that completely surprised me. Because this is a book about nuns, written by an author that I had no idea about, but who now I want to read everything that Rumer Godden has ever written. This is one of those books that is very hard to sell on a podcast to other because it's like it's, yeah, it's about a woman who's in her 40s. And she's super successful in her career in Britain, but this is like in the 60s, you know, so she's a successful woman in the corporate world. And then she gives all that up, and she goes in becomes a nun in, you know, in the house of breed. And that's what the book is about. And then it's about nuns over the decades and why the heck would anyone want to even read it, let alone have it as the number five book of their entire reading year. And it's really hard for me to explain it. Kaytee, I just, this book has so much in it. That surprised me. It has so much in it about female friendship, it has so much ended about being a woman and what that means and the course we choose for our lives. But then it also has interest in backbiting and lost jewels and fraud within the convent. And it has a lot of stuff happening. And I think that that's what I didn't expect. Like I thought it would be meditative or quiet and in some ways it is. But in a lot of other ways. It is just a really interesting story about a fascinating group of women who happen to be nuns. And it's about them but it's also about all of us as we navigate the world as women trying to figure out who we want to be in the world who we want to be as a part of our community. And it is an it is the second book of this list that I will say The shell seekers and this one both of which came from Roxanna were recommendations from Roxanna that just literally knit themselves into the fiber of my muscles, like this book In The House of Brede is just, it's just an all time favorite. I loved it so much.

Kaytee Cobb 55:19

That's so great. And I love that there's multiple books on this list that are very backlist that are not just like, this is from 2022. And now I want to tell you about this is this is way back in the time machine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 55:32

Way back. Exactly. So the other thing that books like this makes me think is, how many more books are there that are sitting back there available on our library shelves that we're passing by to go get the latest, you know, whatever on the shelf I love. I love when those gems come out and just, you know, come to our attention. It's so much fun.

Kaytee Cobb 55:54

Yes. Okay. My fifth book of 2022 was I Take My Coffee Black by Tyler Merritt. This was my favorite memoir of the year and it was hard to choose my favorite memoir of the year I read a lot of really great ones. But this year, I have to go with the one that I physically I laughed so hard, I cried out, and then I also cried so hard, I sobbed. And this, it's truly a talent to be able to span that range of emotions in one book, and Tyler Merritt pulled it off. His memoir does have a Christian worldview, but it also pushes back against the Church, which is a really happy place for me. I like that tension of I love Jesus and also, I have a real issue sometimes because that's where I live. That's where I find my faith and doubt. I want the hard questions. I want the doubts. I want the grief. But this is a man who's filled with joy, who's trying to reach across a table or across an aisle or across a country to meet people where they are and he recognizes that he doesn't have the answers. So it's not a like, here's how we fix racism book. It's

more like a here's where I've been. Here's what surprised me about the journey and I adore this man for the way he invites us into story through. I Take My Coffee Black by Tyler Merritt.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 57:10

Yes, that is one that that he's just such an amazing person. And I'm so glad that he came to all of our attention over the course of this past year. Definitely. All right. My number four book also was one that totally surprised me. So this is definitely a theme to my reading this year. And again, these only come up as we really think about these and talk through them. Legends and Lattes by Travis Baldree. I, this is cozy fantasy. This is high fantasy low stakes is the book, you know the tagline that a lot of people talk about. This is a book that is a genre none of us knew we needed but we all want more and more of cozy fantasy. Legends and Lattes started out you know, I interviewed Travis Baldree. So I was so happy to be able to talk to him about the fact that he just wrote this book as a part of NaNoWriMo. And he never ever, ever thought that it's now currently on the New York Times bestseller list. Amazing. It's been published, he self published it. And he and now it's been published by Tor. And it's everywhere. And I just ordered a special edition copy of it and paid ridiculous amounts of money for that. It's such a favorite. It is an emotional support book in the best possible way. This is a book about Viv, who is an orc, she's fought all of her life as a mercenary orc. So she's had, you know, battles and fighting and earning her money where she could and having to, you know, dodge bad guys and all of that. And then at some point, she just decides she's made enough money, and she's had enough of that life. And so she goes to a faraway village and opens up a coffee shop. And in this world, very few people have ever heard of let alone had coffee. And so the entire book is about her being in this small town, and opening up a coffee shop, building it from the ground up making friends through that process, finding love through that process. And it's high fantasy with low stakes. It just is a balm for the soul. It's so fantastic. I'm so glad that he wrote that book. I'm so glad that we're going to get another book at some point, hopefully in the next year in that world. And it just this was a book that just makes me want to hug it. It just warms the cockles of my cold dead heart. This is Legends and Lattes by Travis Baldree, brought to my attention by Betsie Ikenberry who, again, you'll hear her name several times. She is another great recommendation source for me.

Kaytee Cobb 59:50

Definitely. So we didn't spend time only on our books that surprised us because they're kind of sprinkled throughout here but when I thought about the books that most surprised me in 2022 When I called that category cozy comfort and Legends and Lattes was at the top of that list along with Love and Saffron, A Psalm for the Wild Built, The Secret Society of Irregular Witches by sang Gu Madonna, and even Downton Shabby by Hopwood, Depree, which is about fixing up an old castle in England, Scotland, the UK. And each of those requires like a scone and a cinnamon roll and a cup of tea or coffee. And you just want to be in that world and sit with those people and not have a huge ball of tension in your gut about what's happening. And those books surprised me this year that, that there was such a mood around them that I couldn't read them so far into that was surprising to me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:00:44

Well, and I think you make a really good point, Kaytee. And that may explain why I didn't have as much middle grade on my list because that cozy comfort is what I'm often looking for in middle grade, and I was finding it in different kinds of books. So that that actually might really be the number one reason for

that change in the percentage in my in my genre breakdown. So that was kind of an aha moment for me.

Kaytee Cobb 1:01:12

Okay, so my fourth book for 2022 was Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt. It's a hard year if I make it all the way through the year and I don't have a curmudgeon end up on my top 10 list. I did have a few to choose from this year, but the top one has to go to Marcellus, the the Great Pacific Octopus of Remarkably Bright Creatures add in a curmudgeonly human whose name is Tova. She's a Swedish octogenarian to the mix with our cumudegeonly octopus and this one was bound to steal my heart. While I could have read an entire book just about Marcellus and the metal some ways he messes around in the lives of the humans who you have in contact with, I loved the human storyline as well. I wanted to strangle one human and hug another, but I had big feelings about each of them. This book is enhanced by the beautiful cover despite the ugly read with Jenna sticker printed right on the front of the octopus. And my copy is personally enhanced by a signature that Emily and An Unlikely Story sent to me after it was part of our Indie Press List with them. This is a debut novel that blew me away in the best way I wanted to wrap it in an eight arm hug. This was Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:02:25

This one was definitely a good one. I don't lean toward curmudgeon stories, but this one was a good one. And I really love Marcellus it's just an unforgettable curmudgeonly characteristic. She really is. This is a good one. I'm glad. All right, my number three book of 2022. And these, putting the top three. Like that's the hardest, the hardest part, right? Because I can make an argument that any of these three books could have been number one, but I settled on this order. And this is what we are going with number three. I'm really going back to do it three, okay, I'm just going to call it number three is A World of Curiosities by Louise Penny, which is, I have not even brought to the big show yet. Trust I will bring a full treatment. I have a lot of words about what I want to say about this book. But for here, we're just going to say that is the 18th book in the Three Pine series. And I am very comfortable in saying it is the best one yet. And that is shocking. 18 books into a series period end of story. This book brings together every single thing that is wonderful about the Three Pines series, about Louise Penny and her writing that she's doing. And it is dark. And there are lots of trigger warnings in this book, do not come to this book, wanting a cozy hug that is not what you're going to get this is a psychological mystery. And that is what you will find here she is has always had this in her series. She is really really doubling down on you know, the darkness that also there is light so it's not all dark, but she is not afraid to go there and she goes there in the world of curiosities. And it is again, I could make an argument for it being my number three, my number two or my number one book. I'm gonna go with it being my number three and I feel really really good about it. She's doing the best work of her life. This is A World of Curiosities by Louise Penny.

Kaytee Cobb 1:04:35

So good. It's so good. I'm so glad that made it into this episode that makes me just sing with joy. I'm not gonna sing. Nobody needs that but she's already fantastic. Great. Okay, my third one I don't think is going to surprise anyone because it is The Violin Conspiracy by Brenden Slocumb, at least our bookish friends are like well done, Kaytee. You could have You know, just pretended this one didn't exist and we

still wouldn't know and it was on there. This debut novel is the story of Ray, a Black classically trained violinist. In chapter one his \$10 million Stradivarius violin goes missing stolen from his hotel room in the run up to the Tchaikovsky Competition, which is like the Olympics of classical music. In the subsequent chapters, we get to see Ray grow up, where Brendon often pulls from his own life experiences. This is interspersed with the mystery surrounding the stolen violin. And the way that stolen pieces of art and instruments get investigated, I could not put this book down and I found it to be so much more than a mystery. It's billed as a mystery thriller. It is much more than that, if you're not looking for a coming of age story, you're not going to be happy picking this book up, because it's so much about raise childhood and growth. As a musician. What puts it near the very tippy top of my list of the entire year is that it was everything I love in a book, it had that mystery element, it had that Own Voices element, it had music, it had intrigue it had growing up. I love all these. It has a messy, messy family. I love all these elements of a story. And that also makes this no four of my top 10 that came from the indie press list, specifically three of those from an unlikely story. So it was one of my top recommendation sources of the year and you could see how that played out into my actual best reads of the year. This was The Violin Conspiracy by Brenden Slocumb.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:06:30

Well, speaking of An Unlikely Story, no question that is another theme that we're finding in this episode because Bill who is now their main their main book buyer, and he is who I call book boyfriend bill because he has a segment that they do on their Instagram, which you guys just all pause the show and go follow and unlikely story on Instagram, because one minute with Bill that he does every week. This next book, which is my number two book of the year, came from book boy from Bill and I mean, he's a huge recommendation source for me. I absolutely love An Unlikely Story and all of their book buyers but Bill is just really my cup of tea. So completely my number two book which came from a recommendation from him is Babel by Rf Kuang. This was a book that I really was not that interested in at all until I heard Bill talk about it. And then I also heard Betsie Ikenberry talk about it. And from there, Roxanna and I picked it up, and we did it as a buddy read. And it was easily our favorite buddy read that we did all year long. It Babel is like no other book I've ever read. It's build it's fantasy. And I think that's the number one problem with its marketing because this is not a fantasy. This this book is not fantasy. It is historical fiction. It with some very few, but very interesting, magical elements. And I really use the word element there. Purposely, it is not fantasy people. You don't need to like fantasy to love Babel, what you do need to do is you do need to love great storytelling, you need to love amazing prose. I mean, so much book darting of Babel. So many times I was booked writing, I had two different colors. Rose Gold was just phrases that just gave me chills or just blew my mind with their luminosity. And then gold was ideas that I had never thought of in that particular way. So this is an Own Voices story. This is a deep dive into the politics of colonialism, and how that has affected multiple other countries outside of the UK. I learned so much reading this book from RF Kuang. I learned from reading this with Roxanna, who has who brings a completely different view as a Canadian, Muslim woman of color. We had so many conversations reading this book together, conversations that we each really had to be very vulnerable about because we were talking about things that really get to the core of our very different life experiences. And we got to know each other, even better through sharing this book and this experience together. And it really was that Babel is an experience. It's just not a fantasy novel. That's just when it's big and huge and long and gorgeous. And it's exciting all the way through and you're going to learn so much, but don't call it fantasy because that's not what it is. It's not magic. It's

not a fantasy books about what it is. But it is so absolutely wonderful and worth every bit of the time that you can give it to. This is Babel by RF Kuang.

Kaytee Cobb 1:10:10

I love this book so much. And so now I'm I'm in a quandary, Meredith, because Babel is my number one book of 2022.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:10:23

Is it really?

Kaytee Cobb 1:10:24

Yes. Even though you'd read it, yes. I loved it so much, but I knew you were slow but steadying it. So again, I didn't bring it to the show because I wanted to talk about it with you. I, I cannot agree more. I felt like, I feel like Babel was made for me. Even though I know that's not true. There's so many people that loved it. And I even feel a little bit like that girl to be like, This is my favorite book. And everybody else was like, Well, duh Kaytee. It's our favorite book, too. But the way that RF Kuang plays with language, the way that she includes silver working and translation, as the power of words being magical, it feels perfect to me. And this is one of the first fiction books that like you talked about, I had book darts, and highlighters, and pens. And I wrote all over this book, because those turns of phrases, those pivotal scenes, I was so in it, that it felt like the world outside me fell away. I loved this book so much. I just put it into my mom's hands at Barnes and Noble and said, This is my number one book of the year. I want you to read this book, it is important to me that you read this book because you love words, like I do. And this story is like that. It brings me joy in rages me, it I love the way it opens eyes and hearts and feelings. I adore this book. It's my top book of the year.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:11:56

Yeah. And it Kaytee, um, I, I literally didn't even know that you had read it and so if I had obviously I would have you know, I would I mean, you just saw me barrel right into that, like, it never even occurred to me that it was going to be because I guess I thought I would have heard something about it. But it is so mean, I really want to say a couple of things about what you just said about it. Because I think you did such a good job of of saying it really does meet each reader in a really specific way. And I mean, it I've never read a book that felt like it was for me. But as I could also see how it was also for you, and how it is also for Roxanna, and how all three of those experiences are what we're bringing is really different. And yet she's meeting each one of us. And for me just again, so much that I did not know about British colonialism, just out of pure ignorance. And this book doesn't bang you over the head with things it's not it just tells such an amazing story at its core. It's just a really interesting story. But the way that she uses translation, to explain the power in the ferocity of British colonialism, which by the way, not something I ever felt like I needed to read a 600 page novel about, you know what I mean? Like, if it's just one of the things where you're like, bore me finish, but then she does such a masterful job. It's such a beautiful book, I really went back and forth as to where it should be in my top in my top three, really, it could easily have been number one,

Kaytee Cobb 1:13:47

That was exactly what I was doing was putting it everywhere and what what it came down to was I knew this one needed to be number one. So then I had to put the other two in another spot. Like when I when I went as like the full experience of the book, this one had to go in number one for me.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:14:05

Which is interesting, because you're gonna do your number two now, but then I will I will give you my number one. And I will tell you kind of how I made that that decision. So kind of a joint this is like a joint top Book of the Year for both of us really at the you know, right there at the top spots. But what did you find? What did you end up slotting in number two?

Kaytee Cobb 1:14:25

Okay, so my number two book of the year, which again, it could have been number one and went back and forth. It could have been number three, I didn't know. It was *An Immense World* by Ed Yong, which I just talked about. I just finished it was only a couple episodes back that I brought this as a current read, but it was my favorite nonfiction of the year. It's the combination of learning and like cocktail party factoids, and looking at the world around me, with new eyes and different eyes and seeing layers of experience that I didn't know existed in the animals and plants. and people around me. It went under multiple Christmas trees for me. But it also made me a raving Ed Yong fan girl. This is what I want to display outward on my bookshelves not just for the cover, but for the ways that that cover sparks conversation. And the ways that it made me see the world around me differently in new and vibrant ways. It feels it feels almost like it should have light shining out of the edges of the pages for me like it has that much it illuminates the world around you so much. It's fantastic. It's *An Immense World* by Ed Yong.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:15:34

Did you see that it was on Barack Obama's list of top books for the year.

Kaytee Cobb 1:15:38

Yes. And I was like, I know, Barack, I'm just as smart as you are. It's fine.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:15:43

Kaytee already told us about it. No, I love I love Barack whenever his list comes out. And I'm always very interested in it and right clearly it's it's an amazing, amazing book, that is one that I definitely want to read. Alright, so then my number one book of the year is actually a book that I read really early in January of 2022. But all year long, when ever, I would say best book of the year, this was just the one that kept being at the very top, and it's backlist, and it's *The Ten Thousand Doors of January* by Alix E. Harrow. And I just know the reason that it's number one that I went back and forth between *Babel*. I just literally back and forth, back and forth. The reason that I gave this one, the top spot is because it had that language that was so beautiful. And I was booked darting that book, for sure. But also it had that transportive feeling of just just being completely taken away into this other world and not wanting to close the book because I just didn't want to come back to the real world. It had that feeling of I am so jealous that other people get to have that experience of reading it for the first time again, I cry, you know, I cried. No, I do have to say that there were a couple places in *Babel* that I I was struggling with tears. But most of those were mad tears, like tears are tears, you know, rage. But still eliciting emotion

without feeling that it was manipulated emotion just a very in a very organic way in Ten Thousand Doors of January. There was that a couple of times, not great, but just having a lot of emotion. But then at the end, the reason it got the top spot was because at the end when I close the pages, I had tears in my eyes because I didn't want it to be over. And that to me is what edged it to number one, it was just the perfect reading experience start to finish. So it gets my top spot. The Ten Thousand Doors of January but Alix E. Harrow.

Kaytee Cobb 1:17:58

Oh, this makes me so happy I almost cried. I seriously almost cried. I had to put my face in my shirt. How embarrassing. I am so glad that you love this book. It didn't even like when you said Well, it's a book I read way back in January. And it's just been like sitting maybe at the top all year long. I was like, gosh, what book could this be?

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:18:21

I feel that this is on my forever forever shelf for sure. Because I just I just absolutely, it was just such a great, entertaining, emotional, interesting, heartwarming experience with like just the right amount of romance because it's not a romance. But it had like a love story that I really cared about, like so much. And I don't even know what that's called. What do we call that? Because it's not romance. It's like,

Kaytee Cobb 1:18:58

it's just like has to have a love story element.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:19:01

Yeah. But like I was like, Oh, I want these people to be together and just know I just love that book. It was just, it's the kind of reading experience since I was a child. I've been wanting to replicate. And it it's a singular experience. You just don't get it that joyously that often. All right, and the number one for you, as we said

Kaytee Cobb 1:19:22

Babel. Yes. Which was one of which was a tandem read for me. So I actually I listened to the audiobook got the story read to me, as I highlighted the pages in front of me, which just deepened and enrich the experience so much for me and both of those number ones for both of us are about the power of words. Ten Thousand Doors of January is about the power of story, the transformative nature of story. Babel is about the power of words and how they can shake empires to their core. And I think that's really I I think that's really special that both of our number one reads for the year are about how transformative and how life changing stories and words are. And that's, that's what we're doing here. That's the whole point in Currently Reading, right that we want to share that with all of you every week, every month, every year, for five years now. So thanks for being here.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:20:21

Way to land the plane Kaytee. I think that we had a great 2022 reading year. I know we're both really excited about our reading in 2023. And continuing to use all the data and all of our gut instincts toward choosing books that feel really, really right for us. And I know we're both really excited about getting to

continue to bring them to all of you. All right, that is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at [@Meredith.reads](#) on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 1:20:52

And you can find me Kaytee at [@notesonbookmarks](#) on Instagram,

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:20:55

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 1:21:05

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

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:21:12

And if you want more of this content, if you want to be part of our bookish friends community, join us as a Patreon supporter for \$5 a month on Patreon. You can also rate and review us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. Every one of those things helps us to find our perfect audience.

Kaytee Cobb 1:21:31

Yes, bookish friends are the best friends thank you all for helping us grow and reach our goals.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:21:37

Alright, until next week, may your coffee be hot,

Kaytee Cobb 1:21:40

and your book be unputdownable and surprising and all the other best adjectives.

Meredith Monday Schwartz 1:21:45

Happy reading Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 1:21:46

Happy reading Meredith