

Sawbones: Book Club

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Clint: Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin: Hello, everybody! And welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: Welcome to 2025, the first recording we have done this year. And you have found us at quite a challenging moment here at the McElroy ranch. [titters]

Sydnee: Well, I think for all of us in the polar vortex, right? Because it wasn't just here. So, West Virginia got hit by the polar vortex, but so did like this sort of horizontal stripe of the country.

Justin: Okay?

Sydnee: So, we are not the only ones perhaps trapped in their house.

Justin: But we have gone from two weeks of the children being out of school due to the holidays to now two consecutive days of the children being out of school due to being encased in ice basically. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah, well—

Justin: Inaccessible.

Sydnee: That's what I—so we—our local weather people, I love how they've phrased—I—we know a lot of them too, and they're very funny people. The important thing about the storm isn't inches. Did you see our local weatherman talking about that? He said, "Too often we measure something's importance in inches."

Justin: Oh, my. No?

Sydnee: Oh, Brandon. Oh, Brandon. But the impact of this storm is what we need to think about. It's the—and the impact of this storm is intense, even if the inches aren't as impressive.

Justin: The impact is that the kids have been here for two more days than they were supposed to be here, which was two weeks, and that's already so long. So the kids have been here for seven months, basically.

Sydnee: And there's a layer of snow, and then there's like two inches of ice on the snow. And now it's snowing more.

Justin: Great.

Sydnee: And it's also not gonna get above freezing all week.

Justin: Yeah, it's good times here. But what's—here's the thing. This is throwing our recording plans, obviously, into disarray.

Sydnee: It's been hard for me to do the research I normally do. Well, first of all, we're coming off of a lot of holiday. I hope everybody had a restful, calm, peaceful holiday, full of love. But then we've had a lot of people around, and it's hard to do the research. And also, I'm spending most of my time dressing children in many layers of clothing, and then undressing them from the clothing, and then drying the clothing, and then doing that again.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's hard.

Justin: So, here is going to be—here's the thing. Sometimes, Sawbones, things can get heavy. And we had this thought, wouldn't it be fun if maybe once a quarter, once every few months, not frequently, but once every few months, we just set up a little Justin and Sydnee book club. And it's just a little check in with some stuff we've been reading. And nothing serious here, just gonna have a little bit of light fun.

Sydnee: Just a breather.

Justin: Just a breather.

Sydnee: Just a breather. This is a little bit of self-care.

Justin: And we're easing back in. That's really tough. You know, if you've been on a different schedule for a couple weeks and you're getting back into the swing of things. It's been stressful here, especially being locked in ice.

Sydnee: Mm-hm.

Justin: It's not helping.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: And also, I think this is predicated on the fact that Sydnee and I, for... I think it's been a few months now, have been making an effort to read more and read the same books at the same time. We have very different hobbies, we have very different careers, and we have very similar children. [chuckles] But I think that gets old. So, we thought it would be fun to have a new conversational topic. So, that's—this is kind of an offshoot of that, if that's been something you've been thinking about. The way we were talking about structuring it is maybe the first half of the show is going to be a little bit more all ages, or, you know, less adult content, depending, I guess.

Sydnee: Did we read anything that doesn't have adult content?

Justin: I did. I'm—I—yeah, I'll talk about some less grown-up stuff. And then—

Sydnee: I read a couple things.

Justin: Yeah, you read a couple things. And then... and then in the second half, we'll talk about more adult reading—

Sydnee: I mean, we're not going to—we're not going to describe things. We're not going to—

Justin: But like—

Sydnee: The show is still the same rating. But we will talk about books that I would not recommend for children to read, yeah.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: When they—they're there for when you're older. [titters]

Justin: Yeah, they're for older people.

Sydnee: But we're not going to describe those. I don't want to get—I don't want to get it twisted. Like that's not what this podcast is becoming.
[chuckles]

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: It's 2025, we are taking a hard turn! This is a very different show. No, it's not. We're just taking a little breather.

Justin: You know what, Syd? As a way of opening this, this is—why don't you talk about *The Appeal*? Because that was one of the first things that you and I read sort of in parallel.

Sydnee: Yes. So, the book, *The Appeal*, by...

Justin: That is by Janice Hallett.

Sydnee: I love that you're right there with the authors for me. By Janice Hallett. If you haven't read it, and we won't—we shouldn't spoil books.

Justin: No, I think we'll endeavor not to do that.

Sydnee: Yes, we won't spoil them. It's a wonderful mystery. Murder-mystery. And it takes place in a community theater setting, so that was kind of fun for us, because we participate in community theater. And it's written in a non-traditional sort of way, in that you are trying to understand the story, the mystery, solve it, by reading text messages and letters and all kinds of other forms of communication.

Justin: It is an epistolary novel.

Sydnee: Oh?

Justin: A novel told through letters, a term that I did just have to look up again. Though, on some level, I know it exists. But yeah, epistolary is a novel told through letters.

Sydnee: Interesting.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Now we've learned a new word. Now we've all learned something. But it's really interesting and funny and clever. I think that if you like—obviously, if you like mysteries, it's great. Also, the—I think the community theater setting made it even more appealing to me.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Appealing.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: The Appeal.

Justin: Yeah, that's cute. No, but it is. It's a really fascinating way of telling a story. You do have to, I find it's like... I found it to be less of a casual read than you might assume from what we're describing. Because sometimes

with the emails, you really have to kind of dial in. Because there's a good amount of the context left out that you kind of have to bring to it with like your own awareness and the things that you've read previously. So, I kind of—I kind of like that aspect of it.

Sydnee: Yeah, it is hard to solve, I would say, in that way. Because you're not—there isn't a narrative that's kind of holding your hand and walking you through it.

Justin: Right, yeah, it's much more decentralized. You're getting—yeah, you're getting the narrative like... Because there isn't like a—I mean, there is a build, but it's not like in the propulsive sense that you would normally think of with a mystery like this, because it is told through—

Sydnee: So if you want to solve it, I would recommend you need to get a big board, some red string.

Justin: Do it!

Sydnee: Push pens.

Justin: You're worth it. Try it. The other book that I wanted to highlight—well, I've got a few here that I want to talk about. But I did want to talk about Major Labels. This is not fiction—this is a non-fiction book, but it is by Kelefa Sanneh. And it is a music history of popular music that is told through these discrete genres. So, it tells the story of pop music through rock, and then sort of retells it through the lens of R&B and country and punk.

And seeing how these different styles and these different genres like—especially genres that I don't really have an interest in, but how they overlap with each other, and how they connect, and how one really does feed into the other. It's also fascinating to see artists who excel in one genre trying to step into others. And that seems to be a path that everybody—everybody doesn't want to just be a genius in one field. They want to be a universal genius. It's a common thread. It is a really incredible way of like understanding a lot of what's happened to music in the past 50-70 years. And it's a really personal book, too.

It's much more of a personal book than it sounds, but it's really through his experience as somebody who had parents with a very different musical background from him. And then his growth through like punk and becoming a music critic, et cetera. It's called Major Labels. It's really good. And then I thought maybe, Syd, you could talk a little bit about Piranesi, because that's one that I roped you into reading.

Sydnee: Yes, you did, I—Susanna Clarke, the author of that book. And I remember because I got you an autographed copy for Christmas.

Justin: Yeah, it was very sweet.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, it's your favorite book.

Justin: It is.

Sydnee: And I read it for the first time. It is a fantasy book in the sense that you—we're in a fantasy world.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: And except there's just one person there. And so your understanding of how and why and where we are and who this person is really evolves as you read the book. You have to—you kind of walk in without any of those—you're in this person's perspective, so you have none of those questions answered. And as they discover those answers, you, the reader, also discover those answers.

Justin: Yes. It's hard, isn't it? Because it's hard to find the things to say that aren't revealing too much about the book itself.

Sydnee: It's really, I mean, I think it's really lovely. It's a really beautiful idea of—I kind of went into it with 10 different theories. Is this literal? Is this metaphorical? What am I supposed to understand about like the author's view of the world and existence from this? And I think all of that can be there. I don't know what was intended. I don't know what the—you know, I'm not going to put that on the author. But I think you could take a lot of messages about... I don't want to say good ways to experience—to go

through life or... But helpful ways to interact with the world around you and moment to moment. And how to experience the situation you're in and accept and live where you are at this time. I think there's, I don't know—I know that's vague, but I don't want to say too much about.

Justin: I will say this. It is a book that, having read it a few times now, it's one where it really feels transportative in a way that a lot of books don't. Like literally, like it's so—the place that the book is set, which is, it's called the house. And as far as we know, Piranesi is the only resident of this house. So, it's his description of this house, which is full of statues and things that we don't think of houses having. Like infinite rooms or their own tides, or things like that. But the world that's created in the book is... it's so sort of like completely realized that it really does feel like a kind of magic to me reading it. It feels transportative, in a sense. But it's called Piranesi, and it's great.

Sydnee: I think it's a really beautiful book. It's a great book to read if you do have a friend or a partner or a book club or a group of other people to read it and then talk about your experiences of it, I think is really interesting. Because I think you can... you can interpret it, like what the point is, in a lot of different—if there is a point.

Justin: It feels like a fable, in that sense, a little bit. Or like a—there's like a lot of different truths you could extract from it, I think. And that's kind of fascinating, too.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: I, lastly, wanted to touch on one that I have been reading, The Thursday Murder Club. Which was such a big book that it doesn't really bare—like probably most people have heard of it. But in case you missed it, I did want to mention The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman. Who I am more aware of from—he was on Taskmaster. And he's also the host of a great podcast called The Rest is Entertainment, which is a, as you might have guessed, an entertainment podcast.

But The Thursday Murder Club is about a group of... older British people living in a—together in a sort of retirement community. And they have

bonded in a weekly club over their enthusiasm for like cold cases and murders, and things like that. And each of the people in the club is coming from a different perspective, but brings their own expertise. There's one that was a psychiatrist for many years and is still kind of practicing.

There's a man who was a... like a rabble rouser for labor and like a labor leader, and he's still very much like someone who's on the lookout for people being cheated or people being ripped off, or whatever. And basically, it's about these four people who are each sort of experts and each sort of looking for something to do, and are sort of chronically underestimated. And are thrust into an actual murder investigation where they have to kind of work together and work with a... the local police to help like solve this murder.

And it's just incredibly—it's like an incredibly pleasant read. It's very well-observed. The characters are all very—like, he writes characters in a way that you can't help but be endeared to them. And it's just a very lovely read, it's very pleasant. And if you want something that is a lovely sort of humanist read, then highly recommended. It's called The Thursday Murder Club. There are others in the series, but they're great. I think your mom read them too. Many people's moms and dads have probably read them. [chuckles]

Sydnee: [titters] I also enjoy listening to—when you're listening to that one. It's pleasant to listen to. There—

Justin: You're just giving an endorsement for the audible aesthetics, the—yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, it's a good one, I—so Justin tends to listen to books.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I refuse to listen to books.

Justin: Piranesi is read by Chiwetel Ejiofor, and it is... incredible. That is an incredible audio book.

Sydnee: I'm not doubting that.

Justin: No, I know, I'm just saying.

Sydnee: I just, I prefer... I prefer to read. And I prefer to read the physical book.

Justin: Yeah. [titters]

Sydnee: Primarily. I don't like to read... electronics.

Justin: Yeah. So, yeah, those are some great...

Sydnee: Well, and I will just say. Justin, I know we were—we had talked about we wanted to keep this one light, and so—but I—it makes it sound like you're reading a bunch of books, and I'm not. [titters]

Justin: Yeah, that's right.

Sydnee: Because you tend to read—

Justin: A lot.

Sydnee: Well, you... you do read a lot. You read more than me. That's fair.

Justin: But I listen to a lot!

Sydnee: But that's because you listen to books, and I don't like to listen to books. And it—I will say that I would never try to read a book while I'm also providing patient care. But if I did, I think the patients would be very offended.

Justin: Yeah, she does—she will read a book while folding laundry, somehow. I don't know how she does it. While cooking soup. You spent a good chunk of yesterday making soup while reading. It seems impossible.

Sydnee: I read books while doing everything. I read books while I get ready in the morning, I read—like I can—

Justin: I do too, but I listen to 'em.

Sydnee: Well, I like to—like, I like to carry around the physical object. It feels nice.

Justin: I get it. I 100% get it. I just know that it would limit my own personal consumption, because I would always—it would always be a thing of like, it's in the other room. No way. I'm not gonna do it.

Sydnee: Well, but I will say—and I won't get into these books, but there are some of us out there who—I had this thought, who—the way that we unwind is maybe by reading stuff that's a little heavier or that's non-fiction. Like, I want to learn more about this. For some of us, and I know you always think I'm kind of a Debbie Downer, but reading about that stuff can be... relaxing. So, I will say, and I won't get into the particulars, but if you are one of those people—

And especially if you're somebody like myself who's concerned with issues related to economic inequality and social justice and housing insecurity. I read *Poverty*, by America. That's a really excellent—if you want... we all know the system is bad and rigged. And if you want a good sociological, like scientific, like evidence-based, how did we get here and why, and what can we do? I think that's a good—so you have the language for it, so you don't just constantly have to say like I do like, "The system's rigged." Like, now you can use—

Justin: You can show.

Sydnee: Yeah, now you can show off. And then I just received a copy of *Takeover! A Human Rights Approach to Housing*, which I'm really excited to read about, from the Poor People's Army, to learn more about how do we approach housing inequality. So, if you are someone like myself who likes to read more serious fare and finds that relaxing and edifying, there. There's a couple recommendations.

Justin: I'll have you know, I read *Killers of the Flower Moon*.

Sydnee: That's a serious one, right?

Justin: I know, it was very serious to read. And everyone was proud of me.

Sydnee: I was very proud and impressed by it.

Justin: And everyone was impressed by the seriousness of my book that I told everyone about. Okay, let's take a break.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: Yeah. And then after this, we'll talk about... more grown-up fare?

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: So.... okay, you've been warned. That sounded worse than it meant to. Let's go to the Billing Department. [titters]

Sydnee: Let's go.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

Justin: So, I don't know why I thought it would be fun for us to read *A Court of Thorns and Roses* together. It didn't—I don't know why. Maybe you remember why that idea occurred to me.

Sydnee: Because, okay, so I'm assuming that you were getting a lot of—for me, it was TikToks—referencing it.

Justin: No, not at all. [chuckles]

Sydnee: No?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: Okay, I somehow like slid into book talk.

Justin: Okay?

Sydnee: And I don't know how, because at the time, I wasn't—I used to read constantly when I was younger.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And then, you know, life. Job, kids.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Busy. Wasn't reading really much at all. So I don't know how, in that state, I accidentally fell into book talk, because I wasn't reading.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I kept seeing the #Acotar.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And I didn't know what that meant, but I knew it had something to do with fairies. And that also, it sounded spicy, because people would sort of like wink-wink when they talked about it.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And then in that milieu, you said, "I bought us copies of this book, and I think we should read it together." And I don't know why.

Justin: I don't know why either. It just seemed like a good—it seemed like something that would be fun. You know, it seemed like a series that a lot of people were into, that I knew nothing about. So I thought that if we experienced it at the same time together, that we might have interesting insights. Sometimes, folks, you gotta take a flyer in life. Honestly, sometimes, don't overthink an idea, just do it. And then, you know, if it doesn't work out, great. But you gotta mix things up if you want things to change.

Sydnee: What are you supposed to—30 pages into a book?

Justin: What?

Sydnee: Is that what they tell you?

Justin: I don't know.

Sydnee: I remember somebody... somebody probably made that up, that's probably not a thing. I remember somebody said you should give a book 30 pages before you decide if you like it or not more.

Justin: I mean it more broadly. Just like if you get an idea, sometimes just go for it. Try something different. So we chose something different. We both read this series of books.

Sydnee: And if you—and I—I know I've—I've actually gotten a couple of emails on this show about it that I have sort of peripherally referenced sexy fairy books.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: That's what I'm talking about. The accord of thornier of row—A Court of Thorn and Roses series.

Justin: Which I'm now going to talk about, I—yes, there—so there are... we're gonna speak generally about these books. Because if you want to read 'em, that's great, it's—I will also say, you know, I don't know—we don't research these authors. I don't know anything about any of the authors of these books. I hope everybody's... great. I don't know the conversation behind these books, but I'm just gonna talk about the things that happen in them.

Sydnee: Yeah, we're just talking about the books, I don't... I'm gonna assume that everybody's not gonna read it, because this is what recent history is. [chuckles] I hope they are, but I won't assume anything.

Justin: So, Sydnee, you are better, I think, at describing the events of novels. So, I think you could broadly talk about—because you had to often explain to me what was happening in the books we were reading. [chuckles] So, I will say this. A Court of Thorn and Roses, the best way I can describe it to you is it is kind of like a reimagined version of Beauty and the Beast.

Sydnee: Yes. And I—and that's intentional, right?

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: I mean, my understanding is—I haven't read the other series, Throne of Glass.

Justin: But I understand it to be—

Sydnee: But that's a Cinderella retelling.

Justin: A Cinderella story.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: If you will.

Sydnee: [titters] So this, I mean, this is intentionally—and it's funny because I didn't know it was intentional. And I made it like halfway through the book where I was like, this is so much like Beauty and the Beast. [chuckles] And that's—it's supposed to be.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: The general idea of this series, and there's five books in this series at this point.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: At this point—is that we live in a world which, if you look at the map of the world, it just looks like the UK and Ireland. [titters]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, that's what the map looks like. Where there are fae. There are fairies. And like, if you are not familiar with this—

Justin: Not little fairies.

Sydnee: Right. If you're not familiar with this at all, you need to understand this about the fae. They are not like Tinker Bell.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: These are not little fairies.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: They don't like... they're not little ringy fly jingly things. They are gorgeous, humanoid—

Justin: They're super sexy.

Sydnee: Creatures.

Justin: They got the wings and—some of them have the wings and what all.

Sydnee: Some.

Justin: Not all of the have the wings.

Sydnee: Most of them don't.

Justin: Many of them have the wings.

Sydnee: No.

Justin: None of them have the wings.

Sydnee: No, most of them don't.

Justin: Most don't have wings.

Sydnee: Those are Illyrians.

Justin: Sorry, go on.

Sydnee: [chuckles] They're not fae.

Justin: Yeah, right, okay.

Sydnee: They're something else. Anyway, there—[laughs] they don't—they do have magic. And as far as you can tell from the book and the many, many fan arts that are out there, they look like people, basically. Except their ears are pointy.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And they're *gorgeous*.

Justin: Yeah, super sexy.

Sydnee: Like every character in the book is more gorgeous than the last character.

Justin: It becomes hard to visualize all the people in it, because, you know, you have—I tend to cast from like people I know, and celebrities. And even dipping into that pool, I run out of physically perfect people to draw on. You know what I mean?

Sydnee: Right. Because they are all physically perfect. There are humans that we meet in the first Acotar book, but I feel like we abandon humans at some point in the series.

Justin: We very quickly stop hearing about humans. The one the human family that's sort of at the center of the first book, a Court of Thorn and Roses—

Sydnee: The three sisters.

Justin: Yes. And one of them is swept up into the world of the fae and learning about their—very much a fish out of water thing where she's learning about the ways of the fae and like that classic thing. And like she's learning their traditions while also maybe... challenging them? You know, that kind of deal.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: But it is very much an exploration of that fae world and how it interacts with the human world, and how those cultures interact with each other. And it's a book about choice and perception, I think is a good way of looking at it. How villains see themselves and how heroes see themselves. And I... there is a very traditional three book sort of like—traditional in the fantasy sense. A three-book cycle in the first three. And then there's a fourth book that is unlike any book I've ever read in my entire life. It is a holiday special in the middle of a series. Is a holiday novella where nothing much happens and everybody just kicks it for Christmas. [chuckles] I'm sorry, it just—

Sydnee: It's solstice, but yeah.

Justin: You know, it's like a holiday book, which is wild, I—maybe this is a thing in this—in the romantasy genre. But it's just like one chill one, where everything is like pretty chill. [titters]

Sydnee: I don't know, because then the—

Justin: It's not real long, and everything's pretty happy.

Sydnee: Well, I don't know what's gonna happen next with all the books, but—

Justin: There's a sexy snowball fight.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Yeah. There is. There's a sexy snowball fight. There's, so there's the fourth book, which is very short and kind of a bridge to the fifth book.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Which I think is setting up another trilogy.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: At least, that would be my assumption, but I don't know that. I don't know that. But I would assume that's why, is that we're trying to connect the story that ended after the first three with the story that started with the fifth. But I don't know.

Justin: So, that. It's by the same author, Sarah J. Maas. There is another series that we actually just finished—I just finished yesterday, *Crescent City*. Which is in—I would say, in conversation with *A Court of Thorn and Roses*. I don't think they're—she's hiding that. There's still an idea of fae and veneer in this world of *Crescent City*.

Sydnee: Well, there are no veneer—

Justin: No veneer. No veneer.

Sydnee: In *Acotar*. That's a term—so, *Crescent City* introduces the idea that there's lots of magical—

Justin: Beings.

Sydnee: Things, yes.

Justin: Not just fae.

Sydnee: No, there's fae and there's shifters, and there's...

Justin: Vampires.

Sydnee: Vampires. There's angels. Angels are a big feature in this one.

Justin: Crescent City is wild, y'all.

Sydnee: There's demons.

Justin: I still don't know if I can sit here with a clear conscience and say you should read Crescent City, because it is really wild. If the—it's a similar structure, I would say, to Acotar.

Sydnee: Is this a—is this a known—you say that this is true for a lot of fantasy, and I don't—until this, I really didn't read fantasy. I mean, I don't know, do you consider The Princess Bride fantasy? Is that fantasy?

Justin: I do... yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. Well, then I'd read that. But I really didn't read a lot of fantasy before these books. And it made me start to wonder because it—I kept thinking in my head, it's the Star Wars structure.

Justin: Yes, it's—I mean, yeah.

Sydnee: So, is that sci-fi too? Is like sci-fi fantasy, they all have this sort of—you get the first episode or book or whatever, which is kind of its own story. And finishes things in a satisfying way.

Justin: But leaves it open, right?

Sydnee: But it's not a cliffhanger, but it does definitely tell you this is only the beginning of the world.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: And then a second story, which very like kind of blows everything up and leaves you with questions.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: Very clearly, like, there's got to be more. And then a third one that sort of sums it all up in a triumphant kind of way.

Justin: So here's what—

Sydnee: Is that a standard—

Justin: This is my—this is my take on it. And people who read a lot more than me could probably tell you better than me. But here is my—this is my take. I think that you're seeing more authors after like you had authors hit it big with these very long cycles of books. Like you think about what George RR Martin did, where Game of Thrones is huge, right? But he's not even done with it.

So, you're maybe seeing—if you're like someone who is—my theory is, or my feeling is, that books have adapted to try to be shorter arcs and more consumable arcs that are maybe easier to adapt for a TV audience, right? Like, I think it's easier to maybe net a three-movie deal than it is to net a seven-movie deal. And it's easier to maybe sell your series if it's done rather than saying, you know, it'll be done in 15 years, and no one really knows what they're buying.

This is my theory, that these cycles have shortened to now there's a, I think, a fairly like predictable like three novel sort of structure of you introduce a new character into a new world. The first book is about them finding their place, their second book is about rallying the forces, and the third book is about upending the power structure. And I think that that's—I think Red Rising is a similar one.

Which is a sci-fi where it's like a similar arc of like... well, it doesn't matter, because I read that a long time ago. And those are still going on. But still, yeah, I think it's a... you know, it's the hero's journey. But I think the pace at which it's being written is based—like I think it is a bit of a tail wagging the dog, where like the success of movies and trilogies like that lead to these.

Sydnee: I gotcha.

Justin: Anyway.

Sydnee: Well, and I definitely think Crescent City is structured similarly. You get that same sort of thing. But it is hard because—so, what intimidated me and what I wasn't—what I was nervous about with Acotar, and I would not say is true, is the world building that sometimes is involved in fantasy and sci-fi and things like that isn't always something I enjoy. A little bit of it is okay, but if we're spending a lot of time trying to get me to understand that, I get a little—

Justin: Acotar does a good job of walking you into a much more human story.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: That is it's not necessarily about the wider world at first.

Sydnee: It's mainly about the relationships between the characters.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Which are pretty human. I mean, they're pretty straightforward and easy to understand because they're—even though the fae are not human, and there are things about them that are very clearly not human, it's generally... it's human stuff. It's love and betrayal and revenge, and stuff that you understand. Crescent City is a lot more world building. You have a lot more kinds of magical people to understand.

Justin: A lot more hierarchies of power.

Sydnee: Oh my gosh, there's houses and there's structures within the houses. And then everybody belongs to a house, but then sometimes they defect and belong to other houses.

Justin: Also, a lot of like powers. Like people get a lot of powerful spheres and items and totems and spells. And like they talk about like leveling up their powers a lot. It's... it's rough.

Sydnee: There's also a structure within the world, not just within each like species, but there's like the angels are over things because they answer to the Asteri, who are over everything. I mean, it's very complex. I will say that underneath that, you have a pretty traditional like sort of murder mystery in the first one.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: And then you have the grander theme of oppressive regimes that are lying to you and need to be toppled.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: You know, and that sort of, you know, will the heroes succeed kind of thing. I would say that generally, characters are taken care of in these books. If that's something that worries you, I don't like—

Justin: That's a good way of putting it, yeah.

Sydnee: I don't like books with—like where I have to see the sacrifice that was made in losing a lot of characters I care about. That's really not my thing. I'm not saying that's not good storytelling.

Justin: She's not usually try—as an author, she's not trying to twist the knife too bad. It's not as much about like, who, you know—

Sydnee: That's hard for me.

Justin: It's not about like destroying vulnerable characters or like making people miserable for no real reason. I mean, it's not really the—

Sydnee: And again, this is not me saying that can't be good storytelling. I understand there's lots of that out there that is very well done. I don't tend to engage with that media myself. I don't really need that. And there's not a lot of that. I would say I would heavily endorse Acotar as something you could read and enjoy. It is, we should say in all these books, there's spicy stuff.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: If that's not your cup of tea—

Justin: No, but I think that that's been good for—I mean, I don't know.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: We're married couple.

Sydnee: We don't need to—

Justin: It's good—

Sydnee: We don't need to share any of that.

Justin: No, I don't—I will say this. We have—I don't—I think you could pass on Crescent City, unless you really, really love the Acotar books. In which case, there is some overlap that you should—you may want to check out.

Sydnee: And there's more coming, which I don't know what it's—which one it's following, or if there will be overlap, I don't know. So...

Justin: Also, Syd, because we'd be remiss if I didn't—I did force you into Fourth Wing as a result of your enjoyment of these. And you really, really, *really* dragged your heels on it. Really did. And I was saying to you, "It is not great, Syd, but you're gonna rip through it in like a day." And I will say—

Sydnee: And I did.

Justin: And you—and you sorry, I missed—

Sydnee: And I did. And I did, and you and Raleigh were both all over me to read it. And you were right. I, again, I really—fantasy was never something that I loved. Which is why like Acotar was really accessible. I think if you're somebody who doesn't read a lot of that, it's really accessible. Crescent City less so. When you told me this is a book about people who ride dragons, I was not exactly thrilled because—

Justin: Because you don't like dragons! But you don't have a dragon?

Sydnee: Well, no, because I feel like as you're going deeper into fantasy, like dragons is pretty far in there.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Like you're in there.

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: It is a whole fantastical world, if dragons are around. And so I think what I said was, "Just tell me dragons aren't like a big part of it." And you said they are. And I said, "Well, please at least tell me they don't like talk." [titters]

Justin: And I said they all do, yeah. I will say this. I—

Sydnee: But then—but you were right and I was wrong, and I really enjoyed it.

Justin: There is a very wide gulf between—like fantasy as a genre, there is such a huge gulf between a lot of the fantasy that I think you're talking about. Which is, I'll be honest, I've read my own fair share of. There's a lot of fantasy that is much more about the sort of like power fantasy and like factions warring against each other. More that Game of Thrones style thing. I think these books that we're talking about are much more about like fantasy as a setting, but what they're about is like human stories.

And I think there's like—and then there's series that like walk the line between. I read the Shadow and Bone books and the... the two Six of Crows books. I forget the other, Crooked Kingdom, I think it's called. By Leigh Bardugo. Which is like a good balance I think of like that power fantasy stuff, and also like the human stories. But they're much less about how the characters interact with each other, and much more about, you know, getting a magic sword to kill a wizard or whatever.

Sydnee: Right, right. No, these are a lot more character focused. And I will say, Fourth Wing, I did, I devoured it. And I've already started in—I hadn't read the second one, so I've started into that one.

Justin: I'm doing something different with the second one. I'm listening to it fully staged with like different character actors and like soundtrack and sound effects. It's very immersive.

Sydnee: Okay, but can I tell—I will share this, though. So, Justin and I embarked on the second book together, since we—I caught up to him and finished the first book. And the—what you are listening to, the abridged, I would say, version, does not—obviously, it leaves things out. And so, I was following along in my book while listening, so that we could be in the same room doing it together.

Justin: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: And I was—there were whole big chunks of things being left out.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that's not okay with me.

Justin: Yeah, but also, it is the sequel to Fourth Wing, right? It's not exactly, you know, One Hundred Years of Solitude or whatever. Like you know, you can skip around a bit and nobody's gonna—

Sydnee: I want all the context! I don't want the—there's only one book that's acceptable to have good parts version of the Princess Bride, and that's because there is no S. Morgan Stern who wrote the real one. If you—man, I hope I didn't ruin anybody's life out there when I just said that. I thought it really was the good parts version for a long time. It was many years before I thought—before I knew that was all fictional.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: Anyway, I would, I—Fourth Wing was fun. And I—and it's affecting! I mean, I cried at parts in a Acotar. I cried at parts in Fourth Wing. They got me. They, I mean, they... it pulled me in.

Justin: I listen—

Sydnee: And affected me.

Justin: When you told me—listen, no—

Sydnee: Even Crescent City got me at one point. I think I cried at one point in Crescent City!

Justin: Yeah. I will say that I'm—listen, I don't need any of the judgment on this. When you heard that this book was actually 908 actual human pages long, you were probably a little bit jealous of me for my adaptation and my abridgement.

Sydnee: No, that means it won't end.

Justin: Oh, you're one of those.

Sydnee: I would prefer books just keep going on forever and never end. Once I'm in it and I like it and I'm comfortable with the characters and what's happening, all I want is more of it forever.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't want new or different, and I don't want things to change. And if we could get to a point where they're all happy and just living their lives, and I could just read that every day about like how they're all enjoying things. [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I'll read that too.

Justin: Yeah. In—

Sydnee: There's my final endorsement. Read Archie Comics, if that's what you're looking for. Nothing happens and everybody's fine!

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Archie Comics. [chuckles]

Justin: We'll do another one of these in the spring. We'll check back in and see what we've been—what we've been reading, both together and separately. And of course, if you have a great recommendation, you know, please don't send just single titles of books. [titters] Because we probably won't go looking for the context. But hey, if you want to try to tell us about a book series that you think we'd dig, that you think other people in the Saw Boners would dig. I'm still trying to get that going, but it hasn't really caught on yet.

Sydnee: Yeah, and I... like I said, I love these fantasy books, the lighter stuff, like that now these that we're reading at this point. But I do read, like I like—if you have recommendations for...

Justin: Baby, they know you're smart too, hun. You don't have to—

Sydnee: No! Well, our—

Justin: You don't have to be self-conscious that you're not reading smart people books like all the time.

Sydnee: [titters] Well, I don't—

Justin: Do you know how many books I read about fast food and TV shows that I didn't mention. It's a lot. [titters]

Sydnee: Our listeners send us—

Justin: I've read books about TV shows I didn't watch.

Sydnee: Lots of wonderful medical history books and books about, you know, stories specifically of different ailments or fictional accounts of things. And I really appreciate and read all those things too.

Justin: Oh, listen, folks, she's reading smart stuff all the time. You wouldn't even believe it. She's very often going, "Huh," or like, "Hmm," or like, "I agree." Like, smart stuff. Like, really smart stuff. It's not all dragon sex. [titters]

Sydnee: No, I read—my friend Bella just sent me *The Butchering Art*. That's on my list—

Justin: There's—oh, yeah, no, no, list the—list all the grown up, adult work that you've been enjoying too. Yeah, what—like literally, folks, 36 hours to read that dragon book. [titters]

Sydnee: Well, sometimes you need—right? We need both! Life's about balance.

Justin: Life is about balance, and so is *Sawbones*. Thank you to the Taxpayers for the use of their song *Medicines* as the intro and outro of our program. And thanks to you for listening. That's gonna do it for us until next time. My name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: As always, don't drill a hole in your head.

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

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