

The Hidden Bookcase Transcript

Fire Chats: 2023 Reading Wrap Up

Morgan

Welcome to The Hidden Bookcase- come through and get cosy. Pick a book, your favourite book; that's the one that opens this room. Inside you'll find a warm fire, a loving cat, and a wide skylight to the stars.

Sorren

And a dangerously high to-be-read pile.

Morgan

I'm Morgan, I use they/them pronouns, and I'm 368 books fighting to death in the Trojan War.

Sorren

I'm Sorren, I use he/him pronouns and I'm 86 books floating in a wizard's hut.

Morgan

We've been friends for over a decade and are always swapping books.

Sorren

Usually we recommend each other our favourite books and talk about them on this show. For today, join us for a chat beside the fire about our 2023 reads

Morgan

And our plans for 2024.

Sound Effect

[THEME MUSIC FADES OUT.]

Sorren

Okay, Morgan, the time has come. Explain yourself.

Morgan

(Laughs) I feel like I'm on like- I'm like, in court.

Sorren

(Laughing) This is an intervention.

LM

(Laughs) People are lining up, every person on Tiktok who has ever been like, "How do you read that much?" to anybody ever is lining up ready to fight me.

Sorren

In fact, you know what, okay... Before we go on, can I quote you from last year?

Morgan

Yep, yeah.

Sorren

Because I relistened to our episode today.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

And you called 2022 "an unhinged year."

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

And you said "This year, I'm not going to read 200 books and I'm going to do my diss." In fairness to you, you did not read 200 books... and you did do your diss.

Morgan

A fair amount of those books were for my diss, you know? And I got a first in my diss. So I was not neglecting my work- was I neglecting my work? Yes. But... I still got a first, so...

Sorren

But no, but it's fine. Because you're just like, a natural genius, as we all know.

Morgan

Yeah, this proves that actually, I never need to do any work ever. Because I can always do things the day before and the 7000 words I have due, um, like in six days? I'm coming for 'em. I'm coming for 'em. But at what cost.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughs) So yes, everybody... Morgan read 368 books this year, which is more books than there are days in the year. Do I know how I did it? No. Does anybody know how I did it? No. My audiobook speed has gone from 2 to 2.5 slash 3. I read the entirety of The Promised Neverland series, which is 20 manga. I read some short stories. I read some graphic novels, I did a lot of rereading...

Sorren

Can I ask how many of them were graphic novels?

Morgan

I read 48 graphic novels.

Sorren

Ooh. I read a lot of graphic novels as well in terms of proportion... Of the 86, I read 26 graphic novels. So that's like more than one in four.

Morgan

You know, I read The entirety of Promised Neverland. I read Die twice, it- it adds up.

Sorren

To be fair, I only counted Die once, and I was thinking about this today. I was like, if I had counted it as four separate books...

Morgan

Aw, you should have counted it as four separate books.

Sorren

(Laughs) I know, but I didn't want to meet my target just for the sake of meeting it, if that makes sense?

Morgan

Oh, yeah, no, no, no.

Sorren

And also, I was actually kind of thinking we have two perspectives now, on The Hidden Bookcase, we have someone who didn't meet their target- because if anyone was wondering, my target was 90 and we have someone who hugely outstripped their target...

(Laughing) Which is Morgan.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

Because what was your target? I don't remember now.

LM

It was 120 originally, and then I got to April, I want to say, and I'd already read 120 books, and I was like, I'll go for 300. I reread Silence of the Girls like, five times. I reread the Iliad at least three times. I reread Song of Achilles about four times...

Sorren

On that subject, can I ask who was your most read author?

LM

My most read author is Rick Riordan because I reread the entirety of the Riordanverse. My busiest month- it helps that I did not label these months- for the listener, I'm cross referencing my bullet journal....

Sorren

Oh my god, we should establish as well- We're just assuming that everybody's listened to the 2022 wrap up, because of course they have... We track via Goodreads and we track via a spreadsheet that Morgan devised, which has various columns, including, 'Did it make you cry?' 'Did it make you put your hand over your mouth in shock?' 'Have you read this author before?' Lots of fun metrics.

Morgan

The month my diss was due...

Sorren

Yes?

Morgan

I read 37 books (Laughs)

Sorren

Wow. Yeah, that is more than one a day.

Morgan

Yeah, clearly I was going through it.

Sorren

Respect Rick Riordan as the top author.

Morgan

But Sorren... Tell me about you.

Sorren

My top author... You know who my top author was because you saw me losing my mind on Goodreads recently...

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
[It] was Arden Powell. Realistically because I was trying to fill the hole in my heart due to finishing The Last Binding trilogy. But the Flos Magicae books are very good and earned my affection in their own right. I had a good time.

Morgan
You went crazy.

Sorren
I did, I just read all of them.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
They were on Kindle Unlimited. I could just get them, and I did just get them. And I forgot that I had a Kindle Unlimited subscription because we did Sixth Deaths of the Saint in February we recorded it, I think? We recorded it ages ago.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
And then I just never cancelled it. So I was like, "I have to recoup my investment. I hate Amazon." So...

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren

That was what I was doing. Let's not question the logic of it.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
I think as a result nonbinary authors are overrepresented in the author gender category, just because...

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Of Arden Powell, so thanks Arden.

Morgan
I love that for you.

Sorren
Let me see that actually. I'm pretty sure I read the least men...

LM
I gave up on gender. I mean just, in general but also in...

Sorren
(Laughs) In real life as well?

Morgan
I gave up on recording it.

Sorren
Yeah, I read... Well- a couple of them I've put "Various," because there were like, more than one author but it seems like female was first and then nonbinary and then male- you know, splitting it into those very arbitrary categories. Because that is the problem, isn't it? Sometimes I'm like, "This person uses these pronouns. Why am I assuming that that's their identity? Just because they use whatever pronouns doesn't mean that's how they would self describe. Maybe

they're more than one thing." It's a little bit limiting. But I just want to make sure that I'm not just reading men, which doesn't seem to be a problem to be fair.

Morgan
No! (Laughs)

Sorren
So maybe I should just stop tracking this.

Morgan
But Rick Riordan for a sec. I made the foolish decision of going "Yeah, I think I can reread the entire Percy Jackson verse before the new book comes out." I made this decision in June. There are 26 books in the Percy Jackson verse.

Sorren
Oh, wow. Yeah, that's a lot... Did you?

Morgan
I almost succeeded. I got stunted by The Sun and the Star. Because I couldn't find an audiobook of it. And I read some of them in audiobook and I wasn't used to reading it-

Sorren
Is that not what you were catching up for?

Morgan
No, I was catching up for The Chalice of the Gods...

Sorren
Ah, okay.

Morgan
...Which I now haven't read.

Sorren

Which is set before the Trials of Apollo, so you didn't need to do all of that anyway!

Morgan
Listen!

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
I hadn't read the Trials of Apollo before and I really wanted to so I was like, "You know what I'm just gonna go for it," and actually Trials of Apollo slapped. Magnus Chase slapped even harder. I can't believe I hadn't read them before. I only read the first one. Second and third one, the genderfluid rep, the vibes? Incredible. And also just in general, the characters, the dynamics were just so good. But have now finished the Sun and the Star.

Sorren
(Laughing) Have you still not read the Chalice of the Gods?

LM
No! I needed a break from Percy Jackson at that point... (Laughing)
I think. I was done.

Sorren
You bought it like the day it came out, though, so I'd assumed...

LM
I bought it the day it came out- there are two copies because I was worried that my copy that I'd preordered would not have the spreadges.

Sorren
Ah.

Morgan

But it did. So I have two copies now, I need to do something about that.

Sorren

Should- Should we should we do our top 10? Last year we talked about our one-stars: I don't want to do that this year. I just want to be positive.

Morgan

Yeah, you'll be happy to know that this time I did listen to the assignment. So I didn't do them in order.

Sorren

Okay, I didn't do them in order either. I did a top 5 and a top 10. Because last time I did top 5 and I didn't actually read that many more books this year, but I figured we should match...

Morgan

Ah...

Sorren

But you've done a top 15. So that's fine.

Morgan

(Laughs) Just out me to the listeners.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

Yeah, I mean, considering ratio wise...

Sorren

Ratio wise, I think that's fair...

Morgan

So I wrote down all of the books that I had rated five stars...

Sorren
Which was?

Morgan
186.

Sorren
Oh my god, okay.

Morgan
According to my bullet journal, I rated 186. According to my spreadsheet, I rated over 200.

Sorren
Oh?

Morgan
There's some things going on. I'm not sure. I do like to change my ratings sometimes to be fair.

Sorren
Yeah, so maybe that's what it is. I didn't rate very much this year. I think I only rated things if I got on ARC of them, and was therefore supposed to or if I rated it on the show, obviously. I'm about to be cancelled for lying.

Morgan
(Gasps) Gasp!

Sorren
Everyone's like, "You rate all the time!" Yeah, I- I- I just don't really rate on GoodReads.

Morgan
Yeah, I feel like we've kind of moved on from rating as a thing for us.

Sorren

Yeah, I was gonna say that going forward into 2024 we're probably not going to write at the end of these episodes, just because we feel like, you know, you know our opinion, if you've listened to us talk about it for like 25 minutes...

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
Or longer... so it's fine.

LM
Halfway through the year, I sort of stopped rating anything below four stars. Because I was like, "I don't have anything constructive to say on this."

Sorren
Fair enough.

Morgan
I'm gonna make it good vibes only, I think.

Sorren
Sometimes I want to review, even though I didn't like something because I'm like, I have opinions. I feel like I want to say them.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
But at the same time, I haven't really written that many reviews this year, either. So it is what it is. Yeah,

LM
I really want to try and review everything I read this year, but just at the rate I was reading last year..

Sorren

You have to slow down if you're going to do that...

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

You have a choice.

Morgan

Yeah. I don't think there's a way I could physically read more than I read.

Sorren

Please don't. For your own health.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

Please replace some of those books with sleeping.

Morgan

Mmm...

Sorren

Mm-hm.

Morgan

(Higher-pitched) Mmmmmm...

Sorren

Yep.

Morgan

(Lower-pitched) Hmmmm....

Sorren

Wait, okay. Do you have a target for this year?

Morgan
(Laughs) I've put 120 on Goodreads.

Sorren
Okay. I think that's reasonable.

Morgan
'Cause that's 10 a month.

Sorren
Okay.

Morgan
Will I surpass that with ease? Yes. But I want to give myself grace
for like, the second half of the year...

Sorren
Fair.

Morgan
When I inevitably go off the rails.

Sorren
Mm-hm. Mm-hm. Okay.

Morgan
What about you?

Sorren
Controversially, I'm not doing one this year, I don't think.

Morgan
Oooh!

Sorren

I think I'm just going to leave it. I'm stressed about writing projects, and I'm kind of prioritising that in my brain. So I think I'm just not going to put one.

Morgan
That's so valid.

Sorren
But last year- Okay. How are we doing this? Are we just going to do the back and forth thing, again? No particular order?

Morgan
I think yes. I think that's good.

Sorren
You go first.

Morgan
I mean, I have a pseudo order. Like I definitely- I wrote out all my list and then I was like, "These ones definitely". And then...

Sorren
Yeah, yeah.

Morgan
So...

Sorren
But you go first because you have more.

Morgan
Okay. I mean, I started a lot of series. I finished a lot of series that became instant favourites this year.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan

And the first one I have to talk about is A Good Girl's Guide to Murder...

Sorren
Ooh!

Morgan

By Holly Jackson, which deserves all the hype it gets. I went into it being like, "Okay, I've seen it about on TikTok all the time. It's on the library audiobook app. I'll try it." Finished the first book in one day, finished the second book in a second day, finished the third book in a third day.

Sorren
Ooh.

Morgan

It was boom, boom, boom. It was the only thing I was listening to. It was eating up my entire brain and it's not fantasy or sci fi or- it's not even queer!

Sorren
This is very unusual for you.

Morgan

I know! But it's just like... The main character is so not-like-other-girls but like, because she's basically just very autistic-coded and I love her deeply with all my heart and she's just iconic. For anybody who hasn't read it, it is a thriller about a girl who... There was a murder in her town five years ago and everyone thinks it's solved. But for her EPQ slash special project, depending on whether you're reading the UK or the US version, she decides she's going to reinvestigate this murder because she thinks it's not solved.

Sorren
Mm!

Morgan
And then she figures out what really happened.

Sorren
I remember you telling me that it was her EPQ and laughing at it.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Quintessentially British.

LM
It's so British. I'm so excited from the TV show. It's one of those books where you're like, "Okay, is this gonna be like, a different mystery every time, it's gonna get a bit antiquated." And then you get to the third book and you find out things about the first books mystery...

Morgan
Ooh!

Sorren
That completely reframe the entire mystery.

Sorren
Tha'ts fun.

Morgan
And we did it for our book group. I had COVID at the time, so I couldn't go, which was devastating.

Sorren
Aw!

Morgan

And my flatmate- who also doesn't usually read but then when she moved in with me, she suddenly started reading and like not to flex, but um...

Sorren
Your influence.

Morgan
(Overlapping) My influence.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
Yeah. So she also read these three books, like one after the other. And then she had to go to the book group and then not say anything, because everybody else had only read the first book. It's genuinely like, your brain is on fire. And it's so good- and because it's structured with sort of, like found footage stuff. So there's like, interviews and stuff like that, that she's done...

Sorren
Mm?

Morgan
For the audiobook, they actually make it like, a podcast. And so they have audio footage and they have different actors coming in from the different other parts.

Sorren
That's so cool.

Morgan
They have like, coffee shop noise in the background of some of the interviews. It's so cool! And because in the second book, she actually does a podcast, which really threw me off when she mentioned RSS feeds in the first five minutes. And I was like...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
"Hang on, that's- that's a word. That's a word I know."

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
It was just so good. And also it's one of my favourite audiobook narrators, um... Kristin Atherton, my beloved. I don't want to spoil anything, so I'm not gonna say anything, but it rewired my brain.

Sorren
This is very encouraging. Maybe we need to do like, a non sci-fi/fantasy month.

Morgan
Please. I actually would love you to read A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. Before the TV show comes out?

Sorren
When does the TV show come out? Is it next year- this year?

Morgan
(Sing-song) Sometime next year in theory?

Sorren
As in 2024?

Morgan
Yeah- (Sing-song) This year in theory!

Sorren
(Laughs)

LM

It will take me a while to get used to 2024. Oh, it's so good, Sorren. It's so good. I've rambled about my favourite book- (Laughing) You can tell this is probably my favourite book of the year to be honest.

Sorren

That's good to know though, we got to know your favourite-favourite.

Morgan

Yeah, that's the vibe. Tell me about your first one.

Sorren

Um, I'm surprising nobody. It's Nona the Ninth.

Morgan

Yes-yes-yes-yes-yes!

Sorren

Of course it's Nona the Ninth, come on. If you don't know, it's the third book in the Locked Tomb series of which we've done the first three on the show. Alecto is possibly my most anticipated 2024. But Nona was gorgeous. And I've said why it's gorgeous so I won't go on. But it was the first one I wrote down. I wrote it down with several exclamation marks, there was no question in my mind that it'd be the first thing I wrote down.

Morgan

As it should be,

Sorren

As it should be. What else was on your list?

Morgan

Another one that was vying for the top spot is another trilogy that I finished: A Deadly Education by Naomi Novik. I just reread the third book because I couldn't get the other two off the library in time. But rewired my entire brain. The magic system is like, all desire based and is all like, if you believe in it, it will happen. So if there are

people who don't believe in magic, it will stop happening. If you get drunk, you can believe more things are possible. So like...

Sorren
(Wheezes)

Morgan
(Laughing) That's quite a big plot point in book three. There's language based magic system parts where like, the more languages you know, the more magic you can do. The logical progression of things you'll find out in book one, versus the things you find out in book three. And you're like, "Oh, of course. I'm devastated!" I just... Yeah, I know that you have differing opinions on this series...

Sorren
Yeah, I meant, for the listeners benefit, I didn't love book one. I liked it. I liked the language-based magic system a lot. That was really fun. I'm torn here because I'm kind of like, "Morgan. you're tempting me to keep going." But also- I did also DNF Uprooted this year. So I feel like maybe me and Naomi Novik are not on the same wavelength.

Morgan
Mm. Audiobooking it at a really high speed helps.

Sorren
I did audiobook the first one at a fairly high speed though, at a Sorren-speed, not a Morgan-speed.

Morgan
Because the narrator is very personal in how she narrates.

Sorren
She is really, really good. I did love that aspect of it.

Morgan
That's another series I got my flatmate to read and she like, knocked it out again in three days. Okay, your go.

Sorren

I've put these in as one because we're doing the like, one book in a series rule from last year, but *Pet and Bitter* by Akwaeke Emezi.

Morgan

I also have that on. Yep.

Sorren

I mean, they're just so good. Gun to my head, I guess I would pick *Pet* out of the two of those. But...

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

I think Emezi is such an amazing writer. And I also read their book, *You Made a Fool of Death with your Beauty* this year, which was like, so not the kind of thing I usually read. But their prose was just so good that I enjoyed myself massively anyway. And I think that's a huge testament to their skill as a writer, because... age gap holiday romance with...

Morgan

Mmm...?

Sorren

Heavy themes of grief, but also bisexuality.

Morgan

Okay!

Sorren

And I was like, well, you're just wordsing so well.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren
They just words so well. What was next on your list?

Morgan
A Memory Called Empire.

Sorren
Oh, that nearly made my list.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
I was thinking about it.

Morgan
I'm not going to talk too much about it because we are doing an episode on it this year which will be out...

Sorren
In May.

Morgan
Eventually.

Sorren
Sorry. (Laughs)

Morgan
(Laughs) So I will just- I'll give you guys a little= little bit of a hint that it's a really good book, and you should get on it.

Sorren
Yep. And if you read it now, then you'll be ready for the episode.
Just saying,

LM

Exactly. It's just- Dark academia, in space with sapphics, and themes of colonialism...

In Unison
And poetry.

Sorren
(Laughs) Jinx!

Morgan
What more could you want? Your turn.

Sorren
This was funny because I relistened to our 2022 wrap up earlier today.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
And in this wrap up, I said, this would be the next thing that I would read. And then I joked that maybe I would actually read it in nine months time. Who knows? And I did read it exactly nine months after I said that.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Not on purpose, just by coincidence. And that was A Taste of Gold and Iron by Alexandra Rowland, and I'm so feral about it. I really want to reread it already. But I've been resisting, because I'm trying to read other things. But we will definitely be doing this on the show at some point, because I'm...

Morgan
Mm, so you can't say anything about it...

Sorren

...Frothing at the mouth. I can say that it's got economics, and it's got fealty. And it's got homosexuals. And I don't really need to say anything else because that's- that's all you need.

Morgan

That's pretty good.

Sorren

It's about the yearning. It is about the obsession. It is about the mental health representation, and to The Last Binding fans of this podcast...

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

You'll definitely love a Taste of Gold and Iron. They're shaking hands. What was your next one?

Morgan

Six Deaths of the Saint by Alix E. Harrow.

Sorren

That was in my top ten rather than my top five but it made it. It definitely made it.

Morgan

Yeah. It was one of the first things I read in 2023 and just... changed my world, changed my life. I made you read it, Sorren. I made like, most people at work read it. I yelled about it on Twitter for a bit.

Sorren

We did an episode on the Patreon for those who do not know so if you do want to hear us...

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

Dissect it in great detail and talk about second person for like half an hour

LM

Second person, Joan of Arc-esque vibes, female warrior badass, friends-ish to lovers-ish.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan

Vaguely tragic. Just literally, what more could you want?

Sorren

What more could you want? Completely agree. I also had, another book that we did on the show, not on the Patreon, and that will not be out yet, is A Power Unbound by Freya Marske. It had to be on there.

Morgan

That was in my top 36. (Laughs)

Sorren

Ooh, it got knocked out- you have so many books that I cannot possibly be offended. (Laughs)

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren

Yeah. I- Oof, I just love it. I just love them. I just love the found family. I will never stop thinking about them.

LM

Ah just- they're so good. Yeah, I just- I want it to be longer. I think that's why it didn't quite make it to my top 15.

Sorren
Fair.

Morgan
I just- I wanted it to be longer.

Sorren
Yeah. I would like seven more books, please. Thank you.

Morgan
Please and thank you.

Sorren
(Laughing) But we'll talk about that in more detail... Later.

Morgan
I'm going to come in with another non-fantasy non-sci-fi one...

Sorren
Ooh!

Morgan
Which was also a Women's Prize for Fiction Longlist. So I'm- I'm really moving up in my literary fiction vibes.

Sorren
You're very- You're very cultured.

Morgan
That was The Bandit Queens by Parini Shroff, and oh my god, I audiobooked this one as well, and it was just so funny.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan

It's about this woman in this like, small Indian village, who's like, known for having killed her husband because her husband went missing five years ago. But she didn't. And then... (Laughing) All these different women in the village, come to her and go, please help me kill my husband.

Sorren

Ah.

Morgan

And just- it goes more and more out of control.

Sorren

This sounds amazing.

Morgan

It's so funny. It's so good. But the main character is so like, unsocially aware, like so autistic-coded, and has no idea that all these women want to be friends. She's like, "No, no one ever invites me to things. I'm really on the outside."

Sorren

Aw!

Morgan

And everyone's like, "You just- We've invited you multiple times. What are you talking about?" And she just keeps infodumping about bonobos which she's obsessed with.

Sorren

I love her already.

Morgan

And the bandit Queen who's like this, sort of, folklore figure. She keeps, like, reframing everything like, female friendship through the concept of bonobos, how they have family structures. It's like female friendship, and like, it's really darkly funny. And it's so good.

Maybe this is the year that I like, have accepted that I will read things that aren't fantasy and sci-fi.

Sorren

I'm adding this to my Goodreads as we speak.

Morgan

I would highly recommend it.

Sorren

This sounds so cool.

Morgan

If you can audiobook it, even better.

Sorren

Ooh, okay.

Morgan

It's so funny! Like I keep coming back to this, but it's really funny.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

I was trying not to laugh while like making my dinner and stuff like this.

Sorren

That's- that's the best. That's what you want.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

I was thinking about that, actually. I was thinking that maybe that should be a measure for us, for 2024, is "Did it make us laugh?"

Because-

Morgan
Mm!

Sorren
Actually it was A Memory Called Empire, which was making me
laugh and I was like, "This should be a column."

Morgan
I-Yeah, I want to add that column because all I've got is crying at
the moment. And gasping.

Sorren
Yeah, I don't think we should just have crying. (Laughing) I think we
should have laughing.

LM
I like that one. I'll add that to the- to the spreadsheet.

Sorren
New year, new column.

Morgan
What's for you next?

Sorren
Another book that we did on the show. ..That was Morgan's
recommendation...

Morgan
Ooh!

Sorren
...Slash a guest recommendation. The Very Secret Society of
Irregular Witches.

Morgan
Yes!

Sorren

I just loved it so much. I just had so much fun with it. Whether it was going to be in the top five of the top 10 was my- my battle, if you will. But in the end I just had choose it because I was just like, "It made me so happy. I just had such a good time. And I feel happy just thinking about reading it." And we have a whole episode on that one too. So I won't go too into detail...

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

But it's, uh... It's cosy fantasy. I read a lot of cosy fantasy this year.

LM

Yeah, I feel like we've hit quite well with the... With the things we've done this year.

Sorren

Yeah, a lot of- a lot of the reasons that I've mentioned and ones that I'm going to mention were on the show, so that's fun.

Morgan
Wa-ha!

Sorren

Even if they're coming out next year. What else did you have?

Morgan
I'm gonna say, volume 20 of The Promised Neverland.

Sorren
(Laughs) This is the "one book in a series" rule!

LM

I read it in such quick succession that I'm not sure which books I liked more. India, friend of the show, India recommended me the

series. And so I started borrowing them from Libby as in the Library app, but she was on like, book four. And I'd be on book three. And I'd have to wait until she gave it back... (Laughing) Before I borrowed the next one..

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
And so we were just going like that. And eventually I managed to overtake her because she took a break. And I was like, "India, do you mind if I read the next one?" And she was like, "Yeah, go ahead." And so I like, banged out like, the rest in like, the next few days

Sorren
(Laughing) That's so funny.

Morgan
(Laughs) We had a lot of fun. It was a vibe. But I'm gonna say volume 20, which is also the only one I read physically, because it's the only one that the library doesn't have for some reason.

Sorren
Ah.

Morgan
But I did sob my eyes out, and it's so... Character refuses to lose hope, and refuses to compromise their morals but in like, a not-annoying way.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
And just are it's one of those series where like... The worldbuilding keeps peeling back and you know, as much as the characters know, and the characters know nothing. And then they know all the wrong

things. And then they know different things. And then other things are revealed. And you're like, "How can this keep growing?!"

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
And then it does! And I can't explain any more because literally the end of book one is a spoiler, so...

Sorren
I think I know some of the major spoilers about The Promised Neverland, unfortunately, just from being on the internet too much.
But...

Morgan
Ah...

Sorren
I am very excited to try them. I want to read more manga this year, so maybe that'll be where I start. I read a lot at the beginning of last year, and then I just sort of fell off.

Morgan
It's so good. Yeah. I feel like the listeners can probably tell that I'm like, moving around a lot.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
And emoting as I talk about this series. Tell me Sorren, what's next?

Sorren
What's next is another Morgan recommendation.

Morgan
(Gasps)

Sorren

There's so many Morgan recommendations on here.

Morgan

Yes!

Sorren

Our Wives Under the Sea, which we also did an episode on so again,
I will not go too deep into it.

Morgan

Did we do that last year?

Sorren

We did it in 2023, yeah.

Morgan

Time is actually a lie. Jesus Christ.

Sorren

It was for Moist Month.

Morgan

Yes, yes, yes, yes, I remember now.

Sorren

But you know, we love the sapphics and we love sea horror. That's
all I've got to say. What was your next one?

LM

The Spirit Bares Its Teeth by Andrew Joseph White.

Sorren

Ooh!

Morgan

I am an Andrew Joseph White enjoyer.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan

I fell in love with Hell Followed With Us and have been obsessed ever since. This book was just so visceral. TAGE, but also hope, but also the main character is so messed up, and I love him so much. If you want Victorian spooky ghosts, mediums, but also autistic trans man who's obsessed with like, surgery and thinks about everything through those terms... But then is also stuck in a women-only boarding school for people who are messing around with the veil and are supposedly getting sick from it because, you know, hashtag hysteria or whatever...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan

But then discovers that girls are being murdered at this school and has to investigate. It's got T4T romance. It's got like, queer solidarity. It's just so good! Like, it's- it's so like, how is this allowed to be a YA book? But it's also so good.

Sorren
(Laughs) Okay, okay, I'll think about that going in after the- after Hell Followed With Us.

Morgan
You- Yeah. If you- If you struggle with gore.

Sorren
Yeah, I'm worried about that. But you know, I think it'd be worth it.

LM
You know, main character is doing an abortion in a bathtub at two in the morning for 2000 words.

Sorren
Okay, I will be aware of that.

Morgan
Just to warn you.

Sorren
I'm warned. Consider me warned.

Morgan
But it's good if you can get past that.

Sorren
Yet another Morgan recommendation...

Morgan
Hee-hee!

Sorren
Daughters of Sparta by Claire Heywood.

Morgan
(Gasps) Really?

Sorren
Yeah, I really loved it! It was just such good character writing and I loved the prose and the fact that it was just centred around these women from myths, and I just think it did a great job of showing it through their eyes. And that's yet another one that we have an episode on. So go watch- go watch it? No, don't. Go listen to it. You can watch it if you like, but you won't see very much. (Laughing) Go listen to it.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
If you want.

Morgan

That makes me so happy. I'm always worried that I'm like, missing the mark with my recs.

Sorren

No, you hit the mark so many times.

Morgan

I just get so excited that I'm like "Everybody will love this!"

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

And then... That's good to know.

Sorren

Like half of these are your recommendations.

Morgan

Yes!

Sorren

Nona...

Morgan

Mm-hm.

Sorren

The Very Secret Society of Irregular Witches, Our wives Under the Sea, Daughters of Sparta and the Six Deaths of the Saint. That's five of my top 10.

LM

This show is doing its job, clearly.

Sorren

Yeah, exactly. What about you?

Morgan

To reciprocate I'm gonna go with Hooky for my next one.

Sorren

Hey! I- I figured this would be on the list somewhere.

Morgan

Yeah, it was just so cute. I'm not gonna say any more because we do an episode on it.

Sorren

That was the most recent episode, go back, go back one!

Morgan

If you love like, cosy fantasy witches, but also prophecy about the chosen evil one and also a little bit of found family and also "aren't you tired of being nice?"

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

And it's also just beautiful, in general.

Sorren

Ooh, the last two that I've left are both non sci fi and fantasy ones.

Morgan

Oh, tell me.

Sorren

The first one. I believe you have read: Yellowface by R. F. Kuang.

Morgan

Ah, yes. (Whispers) So good.

Sorren

I don't remember that much about it because I kind of read it in a fugue state. I read it really, really fast.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
But I had a great time.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
So I felt like I have to include it.

Morgan
It's on my- It's on my top 36.

Sorren
Fair enough, fair enough. (Laughs)

Morgan
Yeah, I read it so fast because I audio booked it, which is a whole experience considering it's supposed to be like this first person very biassed narration.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
But when you're audio booking it you're like so much more in her brain that you're like, "I feel like the world is a lie."

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan

It's (incomprehensible noise).

Sorren

Yeah, I just loved the way that she did that unreality, slipping into this like, paranoid state. It was just- It was very good. It was almost empathising with her, even though you really didn't like her.

LM

Yeah, I think that's why I couldn't put it anywhere near my top 15 is because it just made me so uncomfortable to read. (Laughs)

Sorren

Yeah, ironically... (Laughs)

Morgan

Like it was so good. But... (Laughs)

Sorren

Yeah, I think that's why that didn't make it to my top five because I was like, "All of the top five, I look at them and I'm like, 'Oh my God, that just makes me happy even reading the name, and I can't wait to read it again.'"

Morgan

Mm-hm.

Sorren

That- That said Pet did make it in there. So you know, that one was also...

Morgan

Yeah

Sorren

Harrowing. What else have you got?

LM

This is a weird one. Because it feels like this has been part of my life for so long. Because I recommend it all the time.

Sorren
Mm?

Morgan
Even though I only read the first four books for the first time this year. And that is All Systems Red slash The Murderbot Diaries by Martha Wells.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
Which I had never read before 2023, and now I've reread the first four books twice. I'm not gonna say too much because I really want to do on the show at some point because it just has rewired my brain.

Sorren
I really want to read it, ooh...

Morgan
But...

Sorren
Okay.

Morgan
So much casual rep so much main character is just... I love it so much. Awkward robot.

Sorren
The specific reason... (Laughs) That I've wanted to read it very does is because I follow a fanartist on Tumblr who draws a lot of Murderbot fan art. And it just looks so good. They've compelled me.

Morgan

Awkward robot gains sentience, wants to watch TV. I relate on a visceral level.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
What was the last one?

Sorren
The final one that made it into my top 10...

Morgan
Mm-hm.

Sorren
The Perfect Crimes of Marian Hayes by Cat Sebastian.

Morgan
Oh, yes.

Sorren
I just had a lot of fun with this one. I really liked both of the main characters. I really liked the discussions about bodily autonomy and consent. It just brought a new dimension to that, that I feel a lot of romance could benefit from. I feel like I'm accidentally slagging off Bridgerton without really meaning to.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
But you can write historical fiction and ground it in the setting and still have the characters treat each other with respect. Not that you can't write problematic characters you can but when you're framing them as if they're the paragon of romance, then it's a little bit... Eh.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
Doesn't feel so great. Whereas these two... They just care about each other so much. I just- I just love bisexuals in love. They were so cute. I had such a good time. I liked it even more than the first one which I liked a lot.

LM
Damn. I've heard a lot about these from you. So I feel like I need to- I need to jump on that.

Sorren
They're very fun. They don't have any fantasy elements, sadly, and I know you're not a historical fiction person, but I think you would like them even just for the disability rep and the queer vibes.

Morgan
Mm. I feel like I could do it.

Sorren
Okay, you've got five more for us. So...

Morgan
Okay, I'm gonna bang them out super fast.

Sorren
Gotta go.

Morgan
What have I not said? The Last Tale of the Flower Bride by Roshani Chokshi.

Sorren
Oh yes.

Morgan

Such vibes, such weirdness, such Gothic. Incredible vibes.
Vespertine by Margaret Alderson- the setting, the cool vibes, the friendship, the- the two main characters teaching each other how to cope with their anxieties.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
But also kind of hating each other and having to go on a quest because they're stuck in the same body. Beautiful. Swordheart by T. Kingfisher. This is the year that I admit that I do read a fair amount of romantasy.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
I was trying to blame it on my coworker Libby and being like "All the romance in my Goodreads wrapped is your fault." But um, it's not, I do just sometimes- if it's well written, enjoy a romantasy- and this is just a cute little sentient sword man X widow who are going on a little quest with a nonbinary priest to try and sort out an inheritance issue. Incredible vibes. Would recommend the audiobook if you can get it. It is currently free on Audible, but it is being traditionally published in like, 2025. So run while you have the chance.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
Die. I've specifically listed volume two, but all four volumes. We have an episode on it. So I'm not going to go into any more detail. I feel like I've miscounted somewhere.

Sorren
No, because we had some of the same ones and then we like..

Morgan
We had overlap.

Sorren
Yeah, that was why.

Morgan
So the last one which should not be lost, but I love- I love it dearly,
but I'm not going to go into it too much because again, we're
probably gonna do it on the show because Sorren needs is to read
it...

Sorren
Okay?

Morgan
...Is Dragonfall by L. R. Lam.

Sorren
I want to read this so bad!

Morgan
Which is another one of the "Okay I'm a romantasy reader I guess!"

Sorren
(Laughs)

Sorren
I was really listening to our disabled sci-fi and fantasy episode
earlier today as well, because- Basically because I was on the train
and I was relisting to our 2022 wrap up and then it finished and
then I couldn't move and it randomly autoplayed that one.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

But you talked about Dragonfall there too. And that made me really want to read it. So I've been thinking about that as- as recently as like, two hours ago how bad I want to read Dragonfall. We've still got to do- We've got to do a dragon theme. It's gonna happen. Hopefully in 2024.

LM

Can I do like a really quick fire list of all of like, my honourable mentions?

Sorren
Go, go!

Morgan

I'll be so fast, I promise. Okay, Princess Flora Linda and the Fourty Flight Tower by Tamsyn Muir. Eyes, Guts, Throat, Bones by Moira Fowley. A Power Unbound. Cruel Seduction by Katie Roberts. The Ship of the Dead by Rick Riordan. Queen of Coin and Whispers by Helen Corcoran. Spirits Abroad by Zen Cho. Yellowface. In the Shadow of the Wolf Queen by Kiran Millwood Hargrave. The Elevent Hour by the McElroys. The Kingdom Over the Sea by Zora Nabi. Please Return to the Lands of Luxury by Jon Tilton. All Our Hidden Gifts by Caroline O'Donoghue. The Elemental Detectives by Patrice Lawrence. Salt Slow by Julia Armfield. And The Mimicking of Known Successes by Malka Older. Tamsyn Muir... like I was relistening to our 2022 wrapped.

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan

And I read eight of her books, despite the fact that she only had like, three published at the time.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan

This year I read 10 of her books, despite the fact that she's only got like five published.

Sorren
Y'know?

Morgan
At the moment. And one of them is Princess Floralinda and the Forty-Flight Tower, which is incredible. It's a four hour audiobook. It doesn't exist anywhere except on Audible. If you listen to my Tranthologies season three episode, I wasn't thinking about it at the time. But if I look back, I probably was.

Sorren
Her influence.

Morgan
Her influence is unmatched.

Sorren
Somewhat on the subject of Tamsyn Muir...

Morgan
Mm-hm?

Sorren
What are your anticipated reads for 2024?

Morgan
(Laughs) Well, my anticipated read for 2023...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
Was Alecto the Ninth.

Sorren

Yes, yes!

Morgan

(Laughing) By Tamsyn Muir. My anticipated read for 2024 is also
Alecto the Ninth by Tamsyn Muir.

Sorren

It's also at the top of my list.

Morgan

When will it come out? It doesn't even have a release date, it
doesn't even have a cover!

Sorren

We're manifesting it- by saying it on the show. It will come out this
year.

Morgan

Yes. Tamsyn take your time.

Sorren

Your mental health is important as well.

Morgan

I understand it has to be really well done. Because how you're going
to pull off this series in a single book I really don't know...

Sorren

Mm...

Morgan

But.

Sorren

But.

In Unison

Please.

Sorren

I don't want to be- I've never done this. I've never gotten stuck in a book series in- that hasn't finished. This isn't- I've just been very lucky. It hasn't happened to me. I've never been that guy. And I don't want to be that guy with this. This is the best thing.

Morgan

Mm!

Sorren

Do you have any other..?

Morgan

I do! I mean, we're reading Sunbringer by Hannah Kaner at the moment. The second Godkiller.

Sorren

You're right. I forgot to put it on the list because in my brain. It's already out because I have it..

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

And I'm reading it right now.

LM

Ah yes... No, I'm very excited for that. I will say no more. Because again, episode, and again, it's not out yet. So...

Sorren

Exactly. Exactly.

Morgan

Yeah.

Sorren

I have one that I think... It doesn't have a cover yet, even... I don't think...

Morgan
Mm!

Sorren

On Goodreads but I know I'm pretty confident that we will both love it. And it does have a date which is September.. I Shall Never Fall in Love by Hari Conner.

Morgan
(Gasps) Yes.

Sorren

Their next graphic novel, which I believe is t4t historical romance, which I'm very excited about. Because what- What more could I personally want, especially if it's by Hari Conner. So I'm screaming, I can't wait. I will be buying that physically because it will be published traditionally.

Morgan

I've got lots of like, random ones that I either have proofs off or I'm just very excited for in general that I see about everywhere. But I have to start with The Principle of Moments by Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson, because I have been hearing about this book since I knew Esmie at uni. So... I have been waiting for this book longer than anybody has known that it was going to be published...

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
Esmie is the person who lent me Gideon the Ninth the first time I ever read it.

Sorren
Thank you Esmie for your service.

Morgan

(Laughing) Yeah. Truly shaped me in a fundamental way.

Sorren

Shaped this podcast!

Morgan

Truly! And just- This book sounds amazing. It's like Doctor Who meets Gideon the Ninth meets Long Way to a Small Angry Planet meets Star Wars meets Regency romance. It's about a girl who is like, an Amazon worker in a 65th century. But then like, her sister is kidnapped and she has to go and find her, but then there's also this second protagonist is a time traveller who's currently having a regency romance with his boyfriend. And I don't know how those two stories interact yet, but I know there's a prophecy I know that it's very much about like storyness and stuff, I know that the first chapter is the end...

Sorren

Oooh!

Morgan

Like it's called the end.

Sorren

What?! This sounds incredible.

Morgan

Yeah! It comes out on my birthday: 18th of January. So it'll be out like, three days after this episode. Preorder it, go buy it. Esmie's an amazing writer, amazing person. Go. The- The cover is also beautiful. But yes, I'll calm down now.

Sorren

(Laughs) Never. Well, on the subject of never calming down, a book that I've not been able to shut up about in Morgan's vicinity is the Pride and Prejudice retelling by Gabe Cole Novoa, Most Ardently, but

I still haven't read anything- I mentioned a Gabe Cola Novoa book coming out last year, on the last wrapped, and then I didn't read it.

So I should really pick up some Gabe Cole Novoa. But I really like Pride and Prejudice. It's even better to me if Lizzie Bennet is a trans man. So I'm just very excited that- this just like, is very specifically catered for me, and the cover is so beautiful. I love it. So I'll have to buy that as well. Because I need to have it in my hands.

Morgan

There's just so many books coming out, um...

Sorren

There's a lot.

Morgan

Yeah, there's just so many bangers. I'm mainly trying to stick with authors I already know just because there are so many new authors.

Sorren

Oh, catch me having like- the rest of mine are authors I don't know.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

But I'm just excited.

Morgan

I will go searching for those, but mainly I'm going to be trying to read my physical TBR this year, and I know I said that last year, but this year, I have a lot less money. (Laughs)

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

So I will be actually reading the books on my physical TBR this year. So...

Sorren
Gotta make a jar, gotta do a challenge.

Morgan
But I do have to, of course, hype up the new Leigh Bardugo book that's coming out this year. The Familiar.

Sorren
Ooh, yeah.

Morgan
Which is a historical fantasy set... at some point?

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
In the Spanish Golden Age, it says.

Sorren
Ooh! The Voyage of the Damned by Francis White.

Morgan
Yes. Oh my god.

Sorren
Which has been comped to Fruits Basket which is such a specific comp that it means that legally I have to read it.

Morgan
Mm,

Sorren

Sure, I'm not usually like a locked room mysteries- I say that as if we haven't been hyping up Gideon the Ninth for like, half of this episode-

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
(Sighs) Usually! I don't know about boats and mysteries, but that comp specifically and apparently it has loads and loads of queer rep, including like, I think there's an ace character and an nonbinary character. And I know that there's a chronically ill character, there's a wheelchair user. I'm very excited about all of that. That sounds fun.

Morgan
I have to mention another book that we were hyped for in 2023 that it's now a 2024 hype is Heavenly Tyrant by Xiran Jay Zhao.

Sorren
Yes! Oh, I completely forgot. Yeah, absolutely. Very hyped for that. That's actually coming out this year.

Morgan
April 30th. I'm so excited. I need to reread the first book because it's been like, three years since I read it now.

Sorren
What else have I got on here? So Let Them Burn by Kamilah Cole.

Morgan
I see that everywhere. It looks so good.

Sorren
It looks so good. I love dragons. I love lesbians. What else does one need? I've also got on here The Absinthe Underground by Jamie Pacton. Which is also sapphic. 20s-fantasy. The cover has ensnared me. It's so pretty. I really like the Art Deco Vibe.

Morgan
A good cover...

Sorren
Some good friends to lovers. It just- it just sounds fun. There's fey in it, but I feel- I trust queer people to do fey more than I trust straight people to do fey...

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Also it has been described as Moulin Rouge meets Holly Black and I am a Mouling Rouge lover. So...

Morgan
Okay, I have not consumed Mouling Rouge, unfortunately.

Sorren
Oh my God. Have you not? We need to watch Moulin Rouge Morgan.

Morgan
(Laughing) No, I'm sorry.

Sorren
The romance! They invented romance! They didn't. They're toxic.

Morgan
I'm gonna watch 52 movies this year.

Sorren
Okay, that has to be one of them. I will join you on Zoom or something. Please.

Morgan
Okay.

Sorren

I can't believe you haven't seen Moulin Rouge, this is horrifying.

Morgan

Considering that we were talking so much about Very Secret Society, I feel like we have to mention-

Sorren

Yes!

Morgan

A Wich's Guide to Magical Innkeeping by Sangu Mandhana.

Sorren

How did I forget about that? When is that coming out?

Morgan

April 2nd, according to GoodReads.

Sorren

Oh my god that's quite soon!

Morgan

GoodReads could be lying, but...

Sorren

You know, I'm just gonna believe it for my own sanity.

Morgan

April is like, a heavy month because April we've got The Familiar by Leigh Bardugo. We've got The Reappearance of Rachel Price by Holly Jackson.

Sorren

Ooh!

Morgan

Heavenly Tyrant by Xiran Jay Zhao. A Witch's Guide to Magical Inkeeping by Sangu Mandanna. Song of the Six Realms by Judy I Lin. The sequel to Silver Under Nightfall by Rin Chupeko.

Sorren

Oh God, I have to hurry up and read Silver Under Nightfall!

Morgan

The new F. T. Lukens book. The final book in the Twin Crowns trilogy. Darker by Four by June C. L. Tan, Deep is the Fen by Lili Wilkinson, which is a sequel to one book I read in December called A Hunger of Thorns, which I really enjoyed. Yeah, April's crazy.

Sorren

Wild. I have to take off April from work now.

Morgan

To Gaze Upon Wicked Gods comes out in April as well.

Sorren

This is simply so many books.

Morgan

It's too many books.

Morgan

(Laughing) I didn't read like, any of what I intended to read last year, I feel like and there's so many more books! What?

Morgan

I feel like we should make a list of books we're going to read by the end of this year.

Sorren

What are our reading goals? Do you want to read more graphic novels, more fiction, more poetry?

Morgan

I'd like to read less audiobooks.

Sorren
Oh, okay.

Morgan
Yeah, because I- for context listener- I read 211 audiobooks.

Sorren
So the majority were...

Morgan
I read a lot of audiobooks, whereas I read apparently 102 physical.
Which is still a lot.

Sorren
Do you not have ebooks in there?

Morgan
I have ebooks in there as well. Yeah.

Sorren
Oh, wow. I read 44 ebooks.

Morgan
That's a lot.

Sorren
That's a lot

Morgan
That's a lot more than I thought it was gonna be.

Sorren
That's way more than I thought it was gonna be- 20 paperbacks and actually, I- 45 really because I just put one as a 'webcomic' which is an ebook really, come on. It's just a graphic novel on your phone. I

can't believe I read so much on my phone. Only 12 audiobooks though, that's low. That's one a month.

Morgan

That's- That's crazy. Yeah, I'd like to reduce the number of audiobooks I read and I'd like to get back into podcasts. I write a podcast, I need to consume podcasts. And I haven't really done that in the last year. I also am on committee for my university's podcast society. And it's getting to a point where all the podcasts we're recommending, we're just recommending the same things over and over again each year.

Sorren

Well, Morgan, if you want some podcasts recommendations...

Morgan

I will go onto the Attic Twitter, and follow the audio drama sunday tag.

Sorren

(Laughing) Exactly, exactly... Or you can talk to me if you want and then I can come up with something specific.

Morgan

(Laughing) Also that!

Sorren

You know me, remember?

Morgan

I need to get back into audio dramas.

Sorren

And if you, listener, are curious about audiodrama, we are currently doing The Bright Sessions podcasts on our Patreon, and we're having a lot of fun.

Morgan

Yes!

Sorren

I think conversely, I want to read more audiobooks, because I've had a really bad habit of just scrolling through my phone before bed. And I know that I fall asleep quicker if I just listen to 15 minutes of an audiobook, and 15 minutes of an audiobook a day, especially a little bit sped up, is not nothing. I've blocked all of my social media off at a certain time now. We're at that point of our lives. My audiobook apps are enabled. So hopefully I will be forced. The problem is you can always just say no and override it. And I'm not very good at...

Morgan

Ah.

Sorren

Telling myself to... Yeah, sometimes it's okay.

Morgan

Terrible.

Sorren

I've only been doing this for like four days. So we'll see how it goes.

Morgan

I'd like to review all the books that I read that are five or four stars, which I'm doing well, so far, I've read two books. So far this year, guys, all of them were just books that I finished on like, January 1st but still, and I've reviewed them both already. So...

Sorren

(Laughing) I would like to read books set in places that aren't America and England...

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

Or a fantasy setting, the majority of books that I read would not set anywhere in real life. And that actually, to be fair, I have more books in Japan than in the UK. But that's probably also partially because I read a fair amount of manga. But the last book of the year that I read was set in China. And that was really fun. I read something set in Mallorca at the beginning of the year, which I did not love the book, but I really enjoyed it being in a place that was familiar to me, but that I hadn't seen in fiction a lot. I would like to keep doing that.

Morgan

I would like to read an NK Jemisin book this year.

Sorren

Same! Literally, okay, I was going to do- You know, that TikTok thing where people were doing 10 before the end?

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

I was really late on that. So I was like, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to do five before the year dies!" One of her books was going to be on there and I did not even have time to make the TikTok let alone read five books.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

(Laughing) But I feel like she's at the top of my- my list for- for this year.

Morgan

Yeah. I have The Fifth Season just staring at me for my bookcase right now. And that's why I came up with that.

Sorren

Ursula Le Guin. I need to get to some Ursula Le Guin.

Morgan
I need to!

Sorren
I have multiple Ursula Le Guin books and I've never read any of her books. That's terrible.

Morgan
I feel so bad because I was doing a fantasy book group with some of my coworkers. And we all- We did *Lies We Sing to the Sea* by Sarah Underwood as our first book.

Sorren
Oooh!

Morgan
Because we were doing an event and it was like, that's great. Cool. We all met in the pub and chatted about it. And we're like, "Cool, our second book is going to be the first book in the Earthsea books." So we all bought it and only India has read it only and that was in May.

Sorren
Gotta get on it! And then you can watch the film together.

Morgan
I- I did not know there was a film.

Sorren
There's a- It's a Ghibli film. Apparently it's completely different. And Ursula liked it. She was like: "This is completely different, but I do like it," so...

Morgan
Okay. I would like to finish some series because I am good at finding new authors now, I've accepted this. I'm- I'm great at that.

Sorren

How many books that you read this year were new authors? I'm curious.

Morgan

148.

Sorren

Oh my god. Well, I can't compete with that because you that's more books that are let's see 50 of mine renewing 35 word.

Morgan

Yeah, I'd like to finish some of the series I own. For example, I own the entire Ancillary Justice series by Anne Leckie- have not read a single book by this author. I own, again, all of the Fruit Baskets up to like however far collector's edition five goes.

Sorren

I am on my knees. I am begging you.

Morgan

I would like to finish that. Do I remember what happened in the first two? No.

Sorren

I will buddy read them with you.

Morgan

(Laughs) I'm now reading Full Metal Alchemist.

Sorren

Yes, I saw that today. I got so excited.

Morgan

Yeah, there's so many volumes.

Sorren

How are you finding it?

Morgan

I'm enjoying it a lot. I'm reading it because I've been told that I should read it for ages.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

But also I'm writing an essay at the moment for uni on how magic systems fuel plots. And I was like, "People give me ideas!" And somebody in my class was like you should read Fullmetal Alchemist and I was like, "Okay."

Sorren

I said Fullmetal Alchemist as well when you were saying this I was like, "Fullmetal Alchemist." (Laughs)

Morgan

So. Yes. So, will it actually make it into the essay considering the essay is due in five days? And I haven't started it. Hm. Let's see.

I've read the first three volumes of Fullmetal Alchemist. And I enjoyed them a lot. A lot of good themes that I enjoy. So we shall see. But yeah, I would like to finish the books I own. I would like my number to not grow so much.

Sorren

(Laughs) If it grows.

Morgan

You know, last year's episode, I was like, "Oh yeah, I think my physical TBR is on 350, I'm gonna like, get it down."

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

Listener. my physical TBR is currently at 512.

Sorren

See this makes more sense when you admit that you've read 200 audiobooks. I know some of them you also own, but...

Morgan

All of the books I own on my audiobook trophies most of the time.

Sorren

Yeah?

Morgan

Like a fair amount of the books I own are audiobook trophies.

Sorren

Fair.

Morgan

But consider the fact that I read 368 books. And yet my TBR increased by 150 books.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

I don't understand the maths. And yes, I receive a fair amount from the publishers because of my job. But...

Sorren

Morgan, I think you actually have to go on a book buying bam.

Morgan

No, I think... I think I do. I have found recently I've been walking around bookshops and being like, I own all of these...

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

(Laughing) So I have a great library to pick from at home now, guys

Sorren

Everything you're interested in you already own and therefore it's fine.

Morgan

Yeah, so it's gonna be fine. And I'm going to tackle that TBR. And that's the ever increasing lie. But also, I'm not shamed for my TBR.

Sorren

No, I don't think you should be.

Morgan

I'm not ashamed of it. Like I know a lot of people are like, "Wow, consumerism much?" on TikTok. And I'm like, You know what?

Sorren

No, I mean...

Morgan

I had the money. I'm- I enjoy it. And honestly? I would rather live on bean and buy book.

Sorren

See, this is what I'm concerned about.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

But I don't think that there's anything wrong with buying book- But you know, you could also, you know, go blow all of your money on a night out or on a plane ticket or whatever. This is just what you choose to spend it on. That's up to you.

Morgan
I don't go out. I don't do really anything.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
I just buy books.

Sorren
You can do whatever you want forever!

Morgan
I want to buy books!

Sorren
Oh, I have another question about your reading habits this year...
You said that you were going to theme your months? Did you do
that? Or did you just mood read?

Morgan
I did that for the first two months.

Sorren
Ah, okay.

Morgan
And nothing happened. I did not read a single book on the physical
TBR.

Sorren
Ah. That's understandable. When people are like, "Ooh, here's my
TBR for the month," I'm like, "I- I wish I was you. I could never- I
could never be you. I'm just gonna read whatever."

Morgan

Yeah. I'm such a mood reader. So this is an issue. But I do want to make like mini TBRs. So I'm like, "I'd like to get to these if I have a chance."

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
And I think I'm going to focus on new releases. And like, books that I've received from publishers because the ARCs shelf is getting out of hand at this point.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
And I'd like to try and read them before they come out. So that I can review them before they come out. Rather than reviewing them like three months after they come out.

Sorren
I've still got ARCs from when I worked in a bookshop.

Morgan
Mm.

Sorren
For reader reference, I quit in 2021.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
Listener- I keep calling you guys readers. I don't know why- I mean, you are readers, but you're not reading this unless you're reading the transcript.

Morgan

They're bookwyrms!

Sorren

Bookwyrms. The other question was you DNF'd a few books last year, which you had never done in your life before.

Morgan

Mm, yes.

Sorren

Did you DNF anything?. We don't have to go into detail because I want this to be like, a positive vibe. But did you actually DNF something this year?

Morgan

I did DNF at least one thing this year.

Sorren

Okay. Because you know, I DNF'd some- some things because I had things that I was still technically reading at the end of last year that I only gave up on like a month ago.

Morgan

(Laughs) The one thing I will say I did DNF on this podcast, and I will rant about it for a second. I DNF'd Heretics of Dune by Frank Herbert. It is the fifth Dune book, I got that far in. I was audiobooking them, and I just couldn't do it anymore. I was pushing so hard. First book, very good world building, questionable characters, then book two, you're like, "Okay, we're seeing the aftermath. It's been a long time. I don't necessarily agree that this is where any of the characters would have gone. But sure, whatever." Book three: actually quite interesting, 'cause it's about his kids, a lot of like, new stuff you're learning. Book four, is "Would you still love me if I was a worm?"

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan
And the answer is no.

Sorren
But not in a good way?

Morgan
I would not. You're a genocidal dictator.

Sorren
Ah.

Morgan
And then book five is, "Oh my god, this man climbed a mountain
and when he got to the top of the mountain, I had an orgasm
because he was just so masculine."

Sorren
Ah, oh my god, I remember you telling me this.

Morgan
Literally shoot me, I'd rather be shot. Like...

Sorren
I'm very happy that you DNF'd: that was important for your health.

Morgan
Like what? An also, just like, I know, the author is homophobic and I
know that he writes his homophobic views into it...

Sorren
Mm.

Morgan
The way that he does it, like in book one, you're like, "Oh, this is a
homophobic stereotype for this one character. Fine.² In book four or
five, it's like, "Oh, yes, men should never be allowed to be soldiers.
Because at war, men are more likely to have homosexual

relationships. And that makes them violent. So they don't consider fatalities." What?!

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Huh?!

Sorren
That's such a take. It kind of circles back around to being funny because it's just so wild. But also...

Morgan
Yeah! One of the main characters who is like, the OG we love him a lot. He sees two women making out and has like, a breakdown, he's like- this is disgusting. It's horrifying. And everyone else is like, "That's just what women do."

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
Like, "What?" Your entire world is built in a very particular way. Your own views being insert- Like they don't make sense into the world that you've built them into. The worldbuilding and the personal beliefs just don't gel in any way, shape, or form. I'm scarred for life.

Sorren
(Laughs) I'm so sorry. Okay, we've been going for an hour and 20. I think we should ask the final question...

Morgan
What's the final question?

Sorren
What are you reading next?

Morgan

Ah no! I mean, I'm gonna read The Principle of Moments, I think next. I really want to start that one next. That's the theory, at least.

Sorren

I did buy The Haunting Season for myself, like, two years ago, thinking it would be like, a good Christmas, spooky read.

Morgan

Mm.

Sorren

And now we've passed... So maybe I'll try and get to that before the winter is over. So that it's still thematically appropriate. But also now I have to read Silver Under Nightfall before the next one comes out.

Morgan

Yes.

Sorren

So...

Morgan

You do. You have to read it first? I can't read it before you read it, Sorren.

Sorren

(Laughing) Why not?

Morgan

You've been going on about this book for ages. This is the Castlevania poly AU that you've always wanted!

Sorren

I'm just a Trephcard shipper. That's all I am. I'm not a human.

Morgan

Read it so that I can read it. If you read it I'll watch Castlevania.

Sorren

I will take you up on that. You should watch Castlevanie. You can-
You can handle gore more than I can you'll be fine with Castlevania.

Morgan
Oh yeah!

Sorren

You'll like it. Marie Brennan's A Natural History of Dragons...

Morgan
Ooh, yes.

Sorren

I discovered is free on Kindle Unlimited right now. So...

Morgan
Oh!

Sorren

That's also up there now, sort of. So I've just named like, six things
so I should shut up, because that's- that's not the rules.

Morgan
Oh.

Sorren

I should just pick one.

Morgan

Pick one. You gotta commit. Feel like mine was an easy commit, like
it's the logical next step, so I'm also going to pick another one,
that's like I'm going to hold myself to read it by the end of the next
year.

Sorren

Siler Under Nightfall. I want to be in my vampire era. It was supposed to be Halloween read. It's not Halloween. I bought Dracula at the same time, I was going to go into an era, it hasn't happened it's gonna happen now.

Morgan
It's Halloween all year if you try hard enough.

Sorren
Exactly. What's your other one?

Morgan
I'm gonna say To Cage a God by Elizabeth May.

Sorren
Oh, I don't think I've heard of this.

Morgan
Oh, I'm very excited to read it. It comes out in February and it looks really good. It's sort of Slavic folklore... I found out that one of the main characters is sapphic, and that's motivated me even more and it's about these two sisters whose mother grafted Gods onto their bones to try and win the war.

Sorren
Obsessed. Okay, that sounds so good.

Morgan
Yeah. So I think that is my next one after Sunringer. What else do we have to say anything to say? How many books did you cry at, Sorren?

Sorren
I thought it was two because I had- I had two ticked and then I realised that it's Pet twice.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren

So... I'm amazed Nona didn't make me cry. But I think I was just too in shock at the end to cry. So yeah. How about you how many?

Morgan

I cried at less books...

Sorren

Less books?

Morgan

Considering that I read...

Sorren

More.

Morgan

More. I cried at 59 books. I think it might be the audiobook thing to be honest. On some books, it subsumed me more and on some books that subsumes me less.

Sorren

Yeah.

Morgan

I have photos of some of the ones I actually did quite like Promised Neverland volume 20 I have a photo of me just in floods. Lies We Sing to the Sea?

Sorren

Ooh.

Morgan

I was in the bath.

Sorren

(Laughs)

Morgan

I did have way more things that I gasped at, I think, though- I had 124 hand in my mouth.

Sorren

I didn't have that many gasps this year. This was kind of making me sad. How many books did you reread?

Morgan

58 rereads. Which considering I read 40 rereads last year... Like... That's way more new books.

Sorren

Yeah, that's more new books in total. Yeah.

Morgan

That's a lot. I was going crazy that year.

Sorren

I read- I reread-

Morgan

Literally what was I on?

Sorren

...Seven things.

Morgan

Seven is good. That's a lot of new books.

Sorren

How many of them? Were because of the podcast? Is it just gonna be all of them? I reread Nimona for the vibes because the film came out.

Morgan

I went through a reread phase in December because I was like, I want to like, remember some of the books I really liked during this year, like, "Did they hit really good just because I was reading for the first time or do they hit again on a second read?"

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
And all of them hit again on a second read? And also of course rereading Percy Jackson, and Heroes of Olympus, and Kane Chronicles and... That definitely upped my reread numbers a fair amount.

Sorren
The final question- How many were queer in some fashion? And I will say for people who are like, "How do you define it?" I don't know. We just decide.

Morgan
It's vibes-based entirely.

Sorren
I'll tick nonfiction as queer if it's queer. But that's also kind of up to vibes, like how queer is it? It's queer enough that I say it's queer.

Morgan
I say yes, if it had any queer characters in it, and then I specify what kind it had. And I'll usually be like, background sapphics or something like that.

Sorren
Yeah that's what I- yeah.

Morgan
There are a few blanks on the spreadsheet, 'cause I'm going to be honest guys, I was not keeping up to date with it in any way, shape, or form.

Sorren
Give us an estimate.

Morgan
According to this. Bear in mind, there are some missing I have 193
yeses.

Sorren
Wow.

Morgan
137 nos, nine, where it's just the author is queer, but the narrative
itself was not. Six that were kinda. And two that were question
marks, and one that says unfortunately.

Sorren
(Laughs)

Morgan
And that's Dune.

Sorren
I just have a tick box. So I've 63 were yes and 23 were no.

Morgan
We're doing well.

Sorren
We're doing well.

Morgan
I definitely had more queerness than I did last year because I had
that weird spell where I just was reading straight books for a
month. And I couldn't get out of it. And I didn't know why I was
there.

Sorren

Yeah, mystery books are pretty few and far between and that I have like random runs of them.

Morgan

I have one note that just goes "If I recall correctly, yes."
Helpful.Thanks past Morgan.

Sorren

That's another thing I want to do. Because last year, there's like the thought section at the very end, I would type my- my vibes like, the minute I finished and I was not doing that this year. So I've written stuff but I've written it like, afterwards. So a lot of them are just like, "Sweet and interesting." "That was bad, I fear." That's what one of them says.

Morgan

(Laughs)

Sorren

"'Twas okay," underneath that. !I'm proud to be a man on a day like today." That was [a book] about being a transgender man- there's just a lot that just don't really make any sense.

Morgan

I love those. I love this.

Sorren

I've got: "Mid." Full stop.

Morgan

I think you should do a slideshow.

Sorren

"Girl." Full stop. "Irrevocably changed." (Laughs) What was that?
...Nona the Ninth. Okay.

Sorren & Morgan

(Laughing)

Sorren
That makes sense.

Morgan
That makes- Yeah that makes sense.

Sorren
Yeah, you know what I will that will be like a TikTok that I make.
Now before we go, we did want to say... In 2024, we're slowing
down so that I don't die.

Morgan
(Laughs)

Sorren
That's basically what's happening.

Morgan
Yeah.

Sorren
We're slowing down because we have other projects that we want
to focus, on in short, but The Hidden Bookcase is not going
anywhere. It's just that editing is really time consuming- I would
read a book on here a week if I could, I would love to. I want to talk
to Morgan about every book in the world. But sadly, time is finite.
And it's very sad.

Morgan
Sorren needs to sleep.

Sorren
Yeah.

Morgan
Everyone should go support the Patreon so that Sorren can sleep.

Sorren
Thanks, please.

Morgan
Please, as a birthday gift to me, everybody go support the Patreon that Sorren can sleep.

Sorren
(Laughs) Can go to sleep eventually, it's fine. I'll go to sleep eventually. So- I am- I am going to sleep. And we're taking episodes down to once per month, but not this month. Because we promised two episodes this month, the episode that is coming out in two weeks time is The Bright Sessions, Seasons 1 and 2 of The Bright Sessions, which is not a book. Shocking. Horrifying.

Morgan
Gasp!

Sorren
It's an audio drama. It is about people with powers. But rather than saving the world, they're just going to therapy, or are they? They're trying to, anyway. (Laughs)

Morgan
They're certainly trying.

Sorren
They are certainly trying, and they're not having a good time. And we love them all. And this podcast formed our brains as teenagers.

Morgan
Yep.

Sorren
We were- we were neuroplastic.

Morgan
And we've mentioned it a lot on the show.

Sorren

We've mentioned it like a million times on the show. So that's from our Patreon feed. So we're just releasing it to the world. And then if you are like, "Wow, I want to hear the rest of this." Then this month, also season 3 and 4 of The Bright Sessions will be out on Patreon feed. So you can go listen to those.

Morgan

And then we'll be doing the spin offs. And we'll be doing everything!

Sorren

And then we're doing The Am Archives and then we're doing The College Tapes. We don't usually talk about what what themes we're doing, I suppose. But what I will say is that we are theming by season. So if you're a listener of ours, you will know that we do... Spring has three months in it, our spring reading term, if you will. And then each month has a different theme. We're just doing a spring theme because we're only doing a book a month. So that seemed logical to us. I hope it seems logical to you. Thank you for joining us for 2023!

Morgan

Yeah, this is chaos, and we love you all.

Sound Effect

[THEME MUSIC FADES IN.]

Sorren

Um, and if you want to talk to us about the books that you enjoyed in 2023 or what you are reading in 2024... You should come join our Discord because we want to chat with you about your books. You know about all our books now but we want to know about your books.

Morgan

Yeah, there is one person on the Discord I'm having very good conversations with about The Final Strife series by Sara El-Arifi. Come join us for that.

Sorren
We'll see you in two weeks for The Bright Sessions!

Morgan
Until then, you're always welcome through the bookcase.

Sorren
Don't forget to scritch the cat on your way out into 2024.

Morgan
Woah!