

## Ep 33 - 2020 Reading in Review with Karen and Allison

AJ: Allison Jones

KN: Karen Ng

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AJ: Welcome to the Organizing Ideas Podcast. I'm Allison.

KN: And I'm Karen and we are two new librarians and archivists and your hosts for this podcast.

AJ: Together, we're taking a closer look at the relationships between organizing information and community organizing, how libraries and archives are never neutral, and what we mean when we say that knowledge is power. We are now living in different cities—heartbreaking—so I'm recording on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

KN: I'm recording on the territories of the Lekwungen peoples, including the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples.

AJ: Today we are going to talk to you about our reading highlights from about the last seven months, what happened for us in 2020, and maybe a little of what we're looking forward to in 2021!

<intro music>

[1:03]

AJ: So maybe we can start off by updating people a little bit on how we've been doing things for the podcast, because it's been a bit different, and we do get people asking us, like how do you podcast? How could I podcast? So it's nice to provide people with little updates on that. Everything is virtual this year. People are a lot more used to going on to a phone call <laughter>, or on a video call with us. We don't get to go to the Inspiration Lab anymore.

KN: Which I guess is easier for scheduling, but I do miss seeing people in person. It was kind of cool to hear our audio through our headphones <laughter>.

AJ: Yeah.

KN: Yeah. But we've been doing everything over Skype because it's pretty easy to record it, and this year we've changed things because I guess—we mentioned last time, I think—with COVID, suddenly everything became a lot harder to manage. We decided in the summer we would just do all of our preparation and recording, interview, editing, and then release into the fall. Some of that prep work trickled into the fall, but it was so much more manageable to have that backlog of episodes to work with.

AJ: Yeah. It helped us a lot, especially at the beginning of the season. Towards the end of the season we've had a few things that we were hoping were going to fall into place but didn't. So the last few weeks have been a little bit more challenging, but by the time you're listening to this, the end of the year is upon us. We are relaxed, maybe. <laughter> We'll see. One thing we never did this year—we said we were going to do an episode about COVID, and some of you send us some really really powerful voice clips, and we just never had it in us to actually record something about that. For a long time it felt like things were changing too fast, and by the time we had said something, it was different. I think it was also a really emotionally heavy topic that I at least was not really, and am not necessarily really ready to process in a podcast that will be around for a long time. I may not want to revisit my thoughts about anything going on in any one moment this year for a while.

KN: Yeah, and it's just such a big topic. I feel like a lot of conversations I have with anyone, we talk about COVID so I feel like maybe there's enough conversation going on, and I think we had trouble figuring out how to focus...like what kind of angle are we taking? We did bounce around leadership and COVID, or whatever, so yeah. Maybe we'll return to it, but I think we're kind of...we hit a wall.

AJ: When we've been talking about our episodes for 2021, we do have a couple that may look at quite specific parts of librarianship and how...and what they're like these days, and of course that's going to include how they've been affected by COVID. But we're not going to tell our plans for episodes in the new year. We haven't yet invited people <laughter>. We want them to know first. But the last thing we have to say about the podcast, we try to say this regularly, and we can't say it enough probably, which is our huge gratitude and appreciation for our friends Sam and Victoria, who so generously volunteer their time to help us transcribe these episodes. We hear from people quite regularly who say that having the

transcripts makes this podcast accessible to them in ways that it would never be otherwise, so people really appreciate that work. We are really grateful that these two have been doing that for us. A huge, huge, huge thanks to them, and I know that people are out there reading this in a Google doc right now, and that's thanks to Sam and Victoria.

KN: It's been such a great help. Super super grateful. Yeah...and then in terms of how we do the podcast, we have [a page on our website](#) about just how we do it specifically with what platform or what software we use. There's a page there for you if you're interested.

[5:25]

AJ: Onto other news from this year. We both have had some changes in our professional lives, I suppose. This spring, in one of our episodes we talked about this a little bit, but I've worked most of this year, since March, as the Digital Resources Librarian at Burnaby Public Library where I work, which has been a wild ride during the pandemic. There is a lot to do for digital resources. It's been extremely interesting and fun. But in the new year, I am going to be starting a new job—a permanent one, which is exciting.

KN: Yay!

<laughter>

AJ: At Burnaby, as the Systems Librarian. So I'm really looking forward to that.

KN: What is a Digital Resources Librarian? Because I know from asking you, and from what you've told me, but in case folks don't know, what are digital resources? What did you do?

AJ: Yeah, it's very jargony. It's a very library jargon kind of thing. Okay, digital resources are all the stuff you can get access to digitally, generally online through the library with your library card. It includes things that people tend to be familiar with these days, which is like audiobooks, ebooks, streaming videos, streaming music. But it also includes other kinds of online databases. So at Burnaby we have stuff like car repair database. We have databases with more academic publications and journals so people can get access to articles. We have Lynda.com, which is like video tutorials for learning how to use different kinds of technology and business skills. We have tools for people to learn a new language. We have a huge array of stuff, so as digital resources librarian, my job is to deal with the backend of those things. So questions like, licensing and paying for them, and making sure that the sign-in is set up properly so you can type in your library card and get in seamlessly. That takes up more time than you think. Making sure that those are working smoothly and troubleshooting when something is going wrong or helping patrons when they're trying to do something for the first time and don't know how. I don't do a lot of that support directly with patrons. A lot of what I do is supporting our staff, so training staff when we get a new resource, or helping them with troubleshooting with a patron. Yeah. The audiobook and ebook stuff has taken up a lot of time this year. We've had more on that than we would in a typical year because of redirecting funds to that during the pandemic. I do a lot of selection of materials, so picking what ebooks and audiobooks we're going to buy, and paying for them, <laughter> and a little bit of weeding. We don't weed it in the same way as we do a physical collection. Managing holds queues to make sure that when the latest stupid book about Trump comes out we buy

enough copies so that people don't have to wait for that. Yeah, there's a lot of different parts of it. It's really, really interesting and fun work. So if anybody's ever considering working in digital resources and you wanna talk about it, let me know because I truly do love it and would love to talk about it with people.

KN: That's so cool! I didn't know all the other different aspects of your job. I knew that if I requested the library to buy an ebook, you were behind it <laughter>.

AJ: Indeed, and I know that as a Burnaby patron <laughter>. Yeah.

KN: Nice! So what is a Systems Librarian though?

AJ: Systems Librarian, there's some places where the two things kind of overlap and touch on each other. But Systems Librarian is responsible for library systems, technology, kind of generally. As a public library, we also have a relationship with City IT, so they do some of the technology support for staff especially. But the Systems Librarian takes care of things like our public computers and printers and scanners and self-checkout machines. For librarians that have automatic materials handling systems, is usually involved in setting that up and making sure that that's operating smoothly. And then Systems also deals with stuff like our—here's the time for more library jargon!—ILS, integrated library system, which is the big database that holds all the information about all the books and movies and stuff that the library owns, as well as information about patrons. So you know, you have a library card, we have a little record in our system that says your card number and your name and how we can get a hold of you, that kind of thing. Our OPAC, which is an online public access catalogue, which is when you go to our website and you log in and you see what you have a hold on, or you go and check what new books we've ordered or whatever, that system is pulling information from our ILS and putting it into a web version that patrons can interact with. So dealing with that connection and making sure that's set up properly with a good user experience, that it is fun and easy to use, all that kind of stuff. And the other thing that I think our systems team at Burnaby is going to start having more of a role in that's exciting for me because it's where a lot of my interests lie, is in digital literacy. That has to do with supporting both staff and members of the public in both accessing technology, learning how to use it, thinking critically about it, and it's something that's growing, kind of, in what we do as a library, and is something that our systems team is going to be involved in because it has to do with what technology we offer and how we train people with it, and supporting staff, which is also a big part of systems because a big part of how well our database is our how well our staff know how to use it <laughter>. That's going to be my new year. There's a lot of things I gotta learn!

KN: Yeah, that sounds really cool! And a lot of things that I would be curious to know more about.

AJ: Well, once I know more, I will tell you! <laughter> So how about you, Karen? You've had some pretty exciting changes yourself this year.

KN: So much happened this year! I graduated into pandemic, but when I graduated, so that was a big relief, and also I wish it felt a little bit more momentous—like oh that's the end of you know, my formal education, I think, so far. And then I had—because of pandemic and a

lot of library closures and hiring freezes, it was really hard to find work for a long time. I kind of expected post-grad job searching to be difficult anyway, but I didn't expect it to be this level of difficult where there was just a lot of competition.

AJ: Just a comment on that too, I think it was so stark because the timing of your graduation was such that in February I remember postings were coming out for all of our local public library systems, were going to hire auxiliaries, like you know, stuff had already started to move in the way it more typically would. And it all just dried up instantly and disappeared. It was kind of horrifying to watch knowing you and other people graduating to be like oh my God, this is brutal!

KN: Yeah, and like, my confidence level went up and down. I had an interview for a position across the country, and I made it to the second round. I felt good about it in that even if I...I was thinking, even if I didn't get it, I was enjoying the process and I really liked the interviews. And then later on, I was checking on who got the job and I was like oh that makes sense, that person is way more qualified. But I really enjoyed the process, but it was very...like, the pandemic really did change a lot of things. And as the summer went on, there were jobs where I thought that I...I feel qualified enough to at least get to an interview stage, but didn't, and it just felt like, well what am I doing wrong? I must be doing something wrong, and maybe I am, I can never know. It could be, like we were talking about, am I not formatting things right in the way that they really specifically want things to be. Or it could just be there's a huge competition, like people who graduated maybe a year or two years, or just they're switching jobs, so they definitely have more experience. I did have one 15 minute not interview, but it was like a 15 minute preliminary interview-conversation, where I felt that a lot of my student experience was just completely invalidated. Afterwards I was like, why? I still did work, like the same work kind of, as other people, but I was just a student. So it's just been a lot of wavering confidence and my perception on how qualified or the amount of stuff that I know...sometimes I feel like I do know how to do some things, and sometimes I feel completely like, I know nothing. And I think both are true. So the pandemic has made things very weird. But I have a Young Canada Works internship right now with the University of Victoria Special Collections and University Archives. Young Canada Works is a grant-funded program in Canada for those who are under thirty and Canadian. So I'm really grateful for the opportunity, but it also kind of narrows...it's a little bit, it excludes a lot of people. Especially people who are coming into this profession as maybe a second career, so they might be over thirty. I remember in school, we had a lot of American and international classmates, and so they obviously wouldn't qualify. A lot of these positions wouldn't apply to them, so I feel very grateful, but it's also frustrating to see that other people who are also struggling wouldn't have access to these positions. But anyway, the stream that I'm in is for people who have recently graduated because I had a Young Canada Works co-op at UVic two years ago for people who are students and who are going to be returning to school. So this one is for people who just finished school and it's meant to kind of be a 'you just graduated, here's a kind of six to seven month internship to transition you to a grown up job.' It's nice to be back where I was before because I know I really like all my coworkers. It's just different now that we're all two metres apart and sometimes not all together.

AJ: In some ways I guess that must be a real advantage to have worked there before for a summer. Can you imagine having to come in and do that new job if you hadn't known

anybody, and getting to know everyone during a pandemic? I really feel for people making these positions and starting new jobs in this very very weird circumstance.

KN: Yeah, just the way we interact with people is so different. Now you kind of, when you interact with someone you send an email because you need something, and it's so much harder to just chat with people. I think the library at UVic and our unit has—we're doing our best, and I really appreciate the daily emails, our weekly zooms. But it's definitely very different. It's weird being in a mostly empty library because we are open for student study space by appointment. So it feels very lonely, which is good for public health, but also very lonely.

AJ: Yeah. Fair. Do you want to share a bit about the kind of things you're working on during your internship? Because it's pretty interesting.

KN: Right now...I did some inventories of book collections that we have to help with appraisals, so it helps the librarians and archivists to know what we already have in our holdings to see if we want to keep this stuff or sell it or do whatever to it. We have a lot of artists' archives at UVic, so sorting through and processing those archives are fun to see what artists consider worth keeping about their stuff. And there was a previous intern, either last year or the year before—her internship, she produced the Digital Ethics and Reconciliation in Libraries and Archives report—so that's like a very comprehensive report on what the library can do in terms of digital ethics and reconciliation with Indigenous materials. So I'm kind of using that and applying that to—we have an ethnobotanist's materials, and she worked a lot with BC First Nations. So I'm going through the report and seeing how we can use that in that collection. Because it is an internship, it's pretty flexible in terms of what I can do.

AJ: I know you were also doing some instructional stuff and supporting classes and things like that, which is kind of interesting and weird online. Different, than it might be otherwise where you get to show people around.

KN: Yeah, when I did my co-op, because we had classes in person, it was great to help support that, and I would like to do that more with this internship. We had a theatre class and I helped our director with selecting which materials and maybe how to structure that session, but then on the day that they did the session, we were recording that keynote, so I just kind of helped with the preliminary, the preparation. So hopefully in the future I can actually help with facilitating and online, in-person session, but I imagine it's much different now. I attended a webinar on virtual remote support, and people are definitely teasing through the hiccups of just how to work with primary sources when you can't touch the primary sources.

AJ: Yeah. Well, you're in the internship until the end of March

KN: Yes.

AJ: So the only other thing I'm going to say, is I'm going to give a little Karen plug, which is whoever's listening to this that's hiring in the new year <laughter>

KN: Well that's one thing that I've been stressed about. We did that [keynote on precarious work](#). I can't stop thinking about the fact that this internship will end. I've told myself,

because I like—not I like—I try to schedule when I worry about things so I don't just constantly worry. So I'm like okay, I will worry about what will happen after this internship in January or February, but I can't...I can't do that. I just constantly think about how this will end soon, what will happen afterwards. Hiring takes a while. It's this stress that I can't get rid of <laughter>.

AJ: Yeah, that's very real. It's just totally brutal to have to go through that.

KN: Precarious work sucks. And it sucks because I'm so grateful for this position, and then you know there are problems with gratitude I think, with just holding on to this one feeling, and it kind of eclipses a lot of other underlying issues that are harder to fix. Yeah.

AJ: Yeah, holding both those things is tricky for sure. Okay, well.

KN: Reading highlights?

AJ: Yeah, reading highlights. Let's distract ourselves with books! <laughter>

<transition jingle>

[21:58]

AJ: Let's start with general thoughts. I'm curious what reading was like for you in 2020. You've graduated. Often people find graduating from grad school changes their reading, but you also lived through a pandemic <laughter>.

KN: So in the beginning of the year, I did a lot of reading for school. I was taking an English graduate course for credit, so there were some readings for that. I'm trying to remember what I did read for that class that were like novels. But, I also took an LGBTQ materials for children and teens in school, so there was a lot of reading for that too, which I think I mentioned in that other episode that we did. Post-grad though, because of that LGBTQ class, that gave me a lot of reading material, so I tried to continue that. This year I also bought an ereader, and I just read more ebooks. That was really nice.

AJ: It's easy when your local library has such a fabulous ebook collection!

<laughter>

KN: That ebook collection has a librarian behind it.

<laughter>

AJ: How do you find reading on an ereader compared to reading paper books?

KN: I mean it's obviously different in terms of that tactile experience, but it's nice to be able to read out in the sun even though I'm not supposed to be in the sun because of my skin condition. And it's nice to be able to be sideways in bed in the dark and tap the screen <laughter>.

AJ: I know, and it's not heavy and you're like ah, okay I have to turn over because the pages are now too heavy on that side of the book.

KN: I love it. It's fast to just get a new book now. If I really love a book I will buy the physical copy because I would like to try to support independent bookshops and authors, and it's nice to have the physical copy. It's great. I definitely recommend it. I'm not too into audiobooks, yet maybe. Ebooks are great, I love it. But then in the summer I had a big reading slump, I don't know why. How was reading for you though in general for the year?

AJ: It was kind of hard. I read a lot of books last year. I also read a lot of graphic novels last year. And I have not read very many graphic novels this year because I've mostly been reading ebooks and I don't really like reading graphic novels on my ereader. I have tried reading audiobooks this year. Mostly because of doing the digital resources stuff, I'm buying them all the time and reading these reviews of them and I'm like wow that sounds really good, I should try listening to this thing. For most of the year I commute by bike, so I can't listen to audiobooks, but I listen when I ride transit, which I'm doing a little bit more of now. I also did a lot of walking this year, like going for walks, and I listened to a lot of audiobooks doing that in the spring. And I feel medium about them. I see the benefit. I can't listen to very long audiobooks and I can't listen to anything really complicated because I zone out and then I zone back in and I don't know what's going on. I don't know how to find the place where I was before <laughter>, unlike a book where I can really strongly visualize what the pages look like, I'm skipping backwards. Anyways, audiobooks are—I'm learning how to use them still in a way that works for me. But I also found this year, I gave up on a lot of books. There were a lot of books that I think usually I would be really into, like the description sounds like my kind of thing. People I know like the book, etc. And then I would start reading the book, and if the book didn't grab me quite quickly, I just gave up on it. I was like whatever, I don't care. I even gave up on some books that I was really far into, like halfway through, or like more. I would get to a point and I would be like you know what, this book is not doing it for me. I'm not going to finish it. And I don't usually push through if I'm not enjoying a book, but I think I felt a lot more ambivalent about a wider range of books than I usually would this year. So that was weird for me. And another thing that's new for me this year, and when we get into specific recommendations, this will be clear, but I kind of got into historical fiction, which was a genre I remember liking as a kid, and then haven't read much of for a long time. And I've gotten really into it. I think it has something to do with, well there's something similar between historical fiction and sci-fi and fantasy, which is usually what I read a lot of, which is this worldbuilding element and getting to know a new place and time, but I think also, I'm finding historical fiction really interesting this year because I feel like we're in this momentous historical moment, and things are changing really fast around us. And reading about other times and places where that's been the case is somehow reassuring and interesting somehow. I don't know. We'll get more into it with the specific things, but I'm kind of getting into it, and if people have suggestions for historical fiction they really like, send them to me. But my qualification is that a lot of historical fiction are these big brick-like books. Like you know, Hilary Mantel's books or Ken Follett's books or whatever. I don't read those. <laughter> I tried reading Hilary Mantel's books because she won all those prizes and the last one came out and I heard it's good, and that was one I gave up on after soldiering through fairly far. I gave up. Anyways, that's kind of how my year was for reading.



KN: Interesting mentioning commuting, because I no longer commute I read a lot less. I think maybe that's why. There was no hour long bus ride and if I'm walking or biking or driving, I can't read or listen to anything. That definitely changed my reading habits.

AJ: Yep. And that's another reason, we've talked about this before, but that's another reason I like reading on an ereader. I prefer reading on my ereader if I'm commuting. The other thing, I'm notorious for if I'm eating, unless if it's a meal where I'm eating with other people, I always like to read while I eat. And I like the ereader for that because it stays open to the page and I can use my hands to eat because when it's a paper book, oh it's not good. You've got the phone balancing on it to hold it open, or you're trying to hold it while also using a knife. It's just bad. So that's my other ereader plug for people who struggle to make all those logistics work. Anyways, okay, let's move on to talk about specific books <laughter>. What books have you enjoyed this year? We can go back and forth.

[29:23]

KN: So I won't mention the books that I mentioned in episode 26 when we were like Books and Feelings in the Time of COVID-19. I remember at the end of that episode I was like, I've been reading really heavy books! I need to read lighter books! But I immediately after, I read [Hello I Want to Die Please Fix Me by Anna Mehler Paperny](#). I guess content warning for depression and suicide. She's a journalist and it's a memoir about her journey with mental health and mental illness. It was depressing to read. It was kind of clear with telling you that this is not going to be a you know, 'stay strong and everything's going to be okay.' It was good, I think, to read someone's journey through it. It kind of gives you a little bit of hope but in a very realistic sense, I think.

AJ: That sounds good. It sounds like good balance of tone. I think that's really hard to strike when writing about that kind of topic.

KN: I hadn't read very many...I don't read any self-help books on depression and mental health generally, so I don't know...I think the title caught me with this one. <laughter> How about you? What were some of your highlights?

[30:28]

AJ: I kind of struggled to come up with highlights. And a little bit like I was saying in the intro, I struggled with finding books that I really really really liked this year. I read a lot of romance novels because I know exactly what I'm going to get when I read it. But I did struggle to come up with, and even the ones I have on my list, I don't even know if it really... So I basically only have two <laughter>, actually maybe three. One of them, I wanted to talk to you about because I read, well actually I listened to on audiobook, a new translation of *Beowulf*. I basically thought of you the whole time. I don't even know if you like *Beowulf* <laughter> but I associate you very strongly with old complicated literature things because your undergrad <laughter> you studied English and you know about that kind of stuff and I never took an English class. Anyway, so I listened to this translation of [Beowulf by Maria Dahvana Headley](#). I'm gonna be honest, and say I also did not finish it. But the part that I listened to, I did enjoy, and the introduction I also found very interesting because she explains how she made all these translation decisions. She really used modern language,

which made it more approachable for me. And the reason I didn't finish it is not because I didn't like it, but it's because I was listening to the audiobook on the ferry and Sean was like, I don't wanna listen to this <laughter> so we only got halfway through, and then I never had the time to finish listening to it. But anyways. Do you like Beowulf?

KN: My first introduction to it was actually the [graphic novel](#), and it was beautifully illustrated. My undergrad was in Medieval Studies, with a focus on medieval literature.

AJ: Is *Beowulf* medieval? Maybe whether you like it is not even the right question, because it's obviously a big deal and an influential piece of literature.

KN: Yeah. I enjoy it as a piece of literature. I think there was always that question, like is it good because it's genuinely good, or is it good because it's the only surviving, and there's only one copy and it almost died in a fire? I think it's interesting as an object as well though, like as a text that exists through history and how it made it into our canon and how it shapes the way we study literature. I think after I wrote my thesis on the manuscript itself and its place in our canon, I was like okay I'm done with it now.

AJ: Yeah that's fair. Okay maybe I'll try the graphic novel because I kind of want to know what happens. You know, I got through the intro, it's very dramatic.

KN: It's a fun story I guess with dragons and kings and stuff.

AJ: Okay, I'll check out the graphic novel. Over to you.

[33:30]

KN: I did a lot of rereading this year too. I reread *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones. It was also a Studio Ghibli adaptation, which is beautiful, and I rewatched that too for the millionth time. Some friends and I, we reread books that we read in high school like *The Hunger Games* and *A Great and Terrible Beauty*, which was not as great as we remembered it to be <laughter>. I guess the other book I genuinely really liked was [The Poppy War](#), which I mentioned in our last episode by R.F. Kuang. I read the sequel, [The Dragon Republic](#), and now I'm reading [The Burning God](#), which came out end of November, so I'm enjoying it. It is a war story. It's very violent, and my one gripe with it so far, and I was telling our friend Victoria about this, because it's just so violent and the characters are just suffering so much pain and injury, my suspension of disbelief is just like not working because I also have a martial arts background, and I also know how fragile a body can be. So when a character undergoes just a lot of physical harm and they just keep going, I'm like...also because I'm just going through a lot of health things myself, I'm just like this feels unrealistic! <laughter> I can't stop that thought.

AJ: Yeah that's interesting. You putting *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones made me think of some audiobooks I did listen to that fit my short attention span, were I listened to the Chrestomanci series, which is also by her, which I had read as a kid. It's been probably twenty years since I read them. I remember them enough and they are kids' books, so I could follow along even if I zoned out for a while. But also they're very engaging stories, so I didn't zone out so much. But it is weird to reread stuff that you read as a kid. I fairly regularly will reread a thing that I read as a kid to be like what's this like? I remember loving this. It's

often fun and the plot moves fast and the characters are funny and whatever, but it's also kind of horrifying stuff that's in some of those books that when I notice it now, it really sends me into a lot of questioning of like, did I notice that as a kid? And if I did, what did I think of it? Did it affect me? How did it shape me? Did it just go over my head and I didn't realize that what they were saying or doing was so problematic? Obviously a lot of this stuff has to do with race or gender or class, or different kinds of power dynamics, but yeah, that is like that weird tension of rereading and revisiting and enjoying things but still being critical of them or being like really? Do you need to use that example or do you need to have that word in there? Maybe I should listen to *Howl's Moving Castle*. I didn't do that one, it's not in the series, but it is good and the movie is very beautiful.

KN: That is interesting about rereading. I think a lot of things might have gone over my head. I was rewatching a lot of old movies actually, and I realized, maybe my English wasn't very good, but I realized a lot of movies, I had no idea what they were saying. Now I can hear it, and I'm like ohhh, that's what the movie was about <laughter> or that's what they were saying. Yeah.

[38:00]

AJ: Yeah. I mean that's what got me in some ways, like all those things are really deeply underlying...I guess how we're socialized or whatever. Anyway. The other thing—my other one, the thing that I have loved most reading this year, and this is probably actually my last recommendation—I just, I don't know...somehow this year has made it really hard for me to enjoy a lot of these things. I have fallen in love with an author, whose name is [Gillian Bradshaw](#). She mostly was writing during the 80s, 90s, early 2000s. I don't think she's publishing anymore. But if she's waiting to put out another book I'll be the first in line to buy it. She writes historical fiction, and later she's also written a lot of fantasy for kids, but I haven't read any of that. I've read most of her historical fiction that I've been able to get, and some of it is hard to get now. I started by reading this book called [The Beacon at Alexandria](#). And I read it because Jo Walton, who I think I spoke about last time we did this because she wrote this book *The Informal History of the Hugos*, she has a monthly blog post that she puts on tor.com about things she's read over the last month, and I love it. Her descriptions of books are extremely good. They're conversational and funny, and she writes like she's talking to a friend so it's very nice. She recommended this book, *The Beacon at Alexandria*, and it's about a young woman who wants to be a doctor. This is like during the Roman empire, which I know is a long period of time and in a lot of different places but I'm not gonna remember details <laughter> But anyways, and her dad has picked somebody she's supposed to marry, and she's supposed to get married but she's like I really don't want to do this, so she runs away to Alexandria and disguises herself as a eunuch and pursues the study of medicine. It's about her whole life and she ends up going to all these different places and meeting all these different people and doing all this different stuff. Anyways, it's a good book. I really enjoyed it. The writing really pulls you into the plot, the setting is good, the character is interesting. And I just read so many of her books, and I really liked [Island of Ghosts](#), which is about a Sarmatian warrior in Britain. I just finished reading one this week, which was called [The Wolf Hunt](#), which was more of a fairy tale retelling in twelfth century France. That was really good. Just anything—all her historical fiction I just really love. There's definitely some heavy stuff in there—content warning for her books, some of them

involve rape, and there's heavy stuff that happens in some of them—but they're fantastic books. So they have really given me a lot. I've really enjoyed them. I really recommend. And I'm trying desperately to find other writers who are like her and I'm having a hard time finding people who do the same thing. So if anybody knows of one let me know.

KN: I was talking to some friends about how we find books, and I think most of the time I very fairly find an author and then realize oh I really like their writing and then just read all of their stuff. And I wonder if I should try to do that more, because I just don't do it very often. I kind of just read what other people enjoy, or maybe I see it, and oh that cover is pretty, I'll read it. Because I noticed recently, summaries of books don't really catch my eye anymore. Things will sound interesting but I don't feel that urge to read it because it sounds so interesting. I feel that urge more if someone I know also enjoyed it, and I don't know if it's because now I'm just grateful to have time to read and I'm like I'll read anything. [42:02] But two books that I also really enjoyed that I found because people kind of hyped them up was [This Place](#), which is a graphic novel anthology by various authors. It's very beautiful. The last 150 years of "Canada" through Indigenous perspectives. There are timelines before each story so I learned a lot through those, and it really highlighted gaps in my Canadian history education. I think that combination of text and visual was a really good experience, it was a great graphic novel anthology, I really recommend it. [42:54] I guess I'll mention the last one which is a book translated from Korean by Cho Nam-Joo called [Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982](#). I think I saw it on someone's Instagram story. It was good but the whole time I just wanted to scream because it was, it's about... so "Kim Jiyoung" is apparently one of the most common names for women in South Korea. It's about sexism and misogyny and it's about a woman who suddenly, in the beginning, she kind of slips into the personality of other women. So the book is written from a psychiatrist, like a mental health professional's point of view, and it's kind of a biography of her life and how she moved through being a young girl, a student, at university, becoming a working woman. And in the end it was like... I think it was done really well but it was so frustrating because I guess it was relatable and it was just realistic in some ways too? So I wouldn't recommend it if you're looking for a happy read, but it was definitely a well-written book. <laughter>

AJ: Fair, fair. You know the thing with finding authors and then reading all their stuff, it is something that I do for sure when I really like an author. But I think in this case with Gillian Bradshaw, it also has to do with—she's a Classics scholar, so her stuff is well researched. She has these great epilogues always after, and she tells you this has historical evidence for these things, and for these things I took some license with. I really value that for that kind of historical writing. It added a lot to it. I think it's hard too because some authors, a lot of their stuff has very similar tone and style, and then you get other authors where the stuff they write is so different that it's hard to follow them in the same way. You might pick up one book and you're just like wow it's a whole different thing than what I thought I was going to get. I don't know.

KN: I think it's a good strategy though. Like if an author's books are all similar in some ways, because if you like those elements, hopefully you would get that again. I feel like that's a good way to at least be on a good reading kick.

AJ: Yeah.

KN: I should try it more often.

<laughter>

AJ: It's hard too because then you get the debate—I struggled a lot with her stuff, because there's only so many of them. Do you pace yourself if you really love them so you can enjoy them over time? And I know some people who swear by that, or do you take the Allison approach and you read all of them really fast and then you're like why aren't there more?? But I don't have a lot of qualms about rereading so I don't mind. Give me a year, I will have forgotten everything that happened in the books so I can reread it and have pretty much the same good experience. I think that's a tension that I know some people struggle with, with authors they love too.

KN: Mhm.

[46:15]

AJ: So what are you hoping... maybe we can finish with some thoughts for 2021. Let's not get too grand because of COVID. Who knows? Is there anything you're really hoping for in terms of reading in 2021? Do you have something you want to read or a book you're really anticipating or a genre you want to explore or are you doing a reading challenge? Do you have any reading things coming up that you're thinking about?

KN: I kind of want to read more non-fiction. Being in school, we read a lot of articles, but I don't have the time to sit down and read a non-fiction book very often. But one book that was actually, I've been thinking a lot about, was—because we interviewed Jessica Schomberg earlier this year, and their book, co-authored with Wendy Highby, *Beyond Accommodation: Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Disabled Library Workers* had come out recently. I really want to try to get my hands on it because that was such an interesting conversation. I don't have a disability, but I do have a chronic health problem that's been flaring up a lot for the past year, maybe because of stress or weather or whatever. I've just been thinking about disability studies a lot because, like my eczema has just really affected my ability to work. Being able to work from home has been such a big help where I can just take care of myself and not feel too bad about constantly having to get up to go to the washroom and wash my hands and moisturize and do whatever. I just have more flexibility with my day if I can't adhere to a strict schedule. But yeah, I've been thinking a lot about chronic health and disability and accessibility and accommodation and what will things look like afterwards? And being a new professional and not wanting to come off as lazy, but also yeah...just a lot of internalized ableism that I think it would be good to tease out and process. But that's just the one big thing I've been thinking about going into 2021.

AJ: Non-fiction. Okay!

KN: How about you?

AJ: I'm hoping stuff starts to connect with me more than it has this year that I'm reading. I'm really looking forward to, I know last year we talked about this, but I had read all the Hugo nominees and I really really enjoyed doing that. I'm very much looking forward to looking that again in 2021. I'm talking with couple friends—I should invite you, Karen—about starting a

little book club that reads all the nominated books and discusses them. So I'm looking forward to reading the Hugo nominees. There are a couple of series that I'm hoping the next book will come out in, like I actually don't know if it's due on in 2021, but I hope I talked about it earlier this year, but *Gideon the Ninth* by Tamsyn Muir was my favourite of the Hugo nominees this year. The second book in that series came out this year and it was fantastic and very weird. I'm really looking forward to the third book in that series. There's a couple others but I can't remember off the top of my head. I think that's what I'm excited about in the new year. I think that's everything. Have I forgotten anything?

KN: I guess if folks have any suggestions or things they really want to hear from us in the new year, let us know. We have some ideas but again, it's not set in stone yet. We're still planning it out, so we'd love to hear from others.

AJ: Definitely. And send us your reading suggestions. Maybe you can help us find things we're going to love. Okay well, we can be found on Twitter at OrganizingPod (that is organizing with a Z and not S). Our email is organizingideaspod @ gmail . com and our website is organizingideaspod dot wordpress dot com, where you can find links to things that we've talked about. We'll link to some books and so forth, and transcripts to the episodes. Thanks again to Victoria and Sam for doing them.

KN: Bye!

AJ: Bye!

<outro jingle>

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Transcribed by Karen Ng