



**WSIRN Episode 196: What the cool kids are reading**  
*Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Anudeep Reddy*

[00:00:00]

ANNE: Some people really like the sound of rules otherwise we could call them ideas.

ANUDEEP: Yes. I'll definitely employ these ideas — I'm making air quotes — into my head.  
[BOTH LAUGH]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 196.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader:  
What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

Readers, you may have noticed when you hit play on this episode that we are closing in on a big milestone—one that ends in 2 zeros. In just a couple of weeks, we'll reach our 200th episode here. We have lots of fun stuff planned, both here in your feed with a special episode and over at Patreon and Instagram.

For our 200th episode, would you help us celebrate by introducing 2 friends to What Should I Read Next? Most podcast players now have a share button that allows you to text a link right to this episode OR depending on who you want to share the book love with, it may be better to tell them in person so you can show them how to listen to a podcast for the first time.

It's been amazing to see this readerly community grow over almost 200 episodes now and I'd love to see more readers find the show, enjoy the book love, and figure out what they should read next.

In today's episode, you'll get to know Anudeep Reddy, a Kansas City reader who grew up in a competitive school environment where engaging books were in short supply, so he had to get creative with his reading from a young age. Anudeep's an imaginative reader who appreciates the escapist quality of a good novel, (in fact, he says it can even be a problem sometimes) but lately he's struggled to find books that call out for him to live between their pages.

Fantastic escapist reading can be found in any genre, so today I'm recommending three books to Anudeep that you'd find on completely different bookstore shelves. We're also exploring books that combine adventure and philosophy, streamlining reading decisions, and what it's like to have a librarian girlfriend (uh, spoiler alert: it's pretty great, because books show up. Out of nowhere. All the time. What a dream, right?)

Let's get to it!

Anudeep, welcome to the show.

[00:02:25]

ANUDEEP: Thank you. I'm very thrilled to be here.

ANNE: Someone else I think is thrilled for you to be here. This has happened in the past, but not terribly often — your girlfriend actually submitted you to be on the show.

ANUDEEP: Might have been a prank on her side. [ANNE LAUGHS] Not a prank, no. She did it out of love. I'm lucky in that sense.

ANNE: She said that you all bonded over a love of PG Wodehouse and *Calvin and Hobbs* on your first date.

ANUDEEP: Yes. I don't even know why I brought up the old man Wodehouse, but-

ANNE: I was wondering that myself honestly.

ANUDEEP: Probably I was nervous. But she read him, and she was like oh yes, I have the collection. I have *The Jeeves Omnibus* and everything. I was like what? I didn't know anyone else in the world was reading these British books, and then I obviously had like *Calvin and Hobbs* collection because I grew up with them. And as a kid, the dream was one day I should be able to afford this and that day I would think I made it in life.

ANNE: Have you made it in life yet?

ANUDEEP: No, I've grown to love more things that I want to buy now so. [BOTH LAUGH]

[00:03:20]

ANNE: Actually my whole family rekindled their love of *Calvin and Hobbs* thanks to a recording with a podcast guest here. I spoke with Eric Zimmer who has his own podcast called The One You Feed back in episode 139 and he loves *Calvin and Hobbs*. He chose that for one of his favorite books and we didn't own any *Calvin and Hobbs* in my house at the time, so I was inspired to get a couple of ones from the library, and left them on the coffee table and anytime anyone sat down on the couch, they'd just grab the book and read a few pages and start chuckling. And now we have quite a collection but not the box set.

ANUDEEP: I think there's an arc with *Calvin and Hobbs* when you're a kid, you're oblivious to the depth of the it and you just enjoy the shenanigans and then as you grow older, you're more of the parent I guess. I mean, I'm not a parent, but I'm more looking at it as a dad would.

ANNE: Not as a six-year-old?

ANUDEEP: Yeah, not as a six-year-old, but I think maybe in the arc ... In the ending arc of my twilight years, I'll again read *Calvin*. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: So Cara said that she was inspired to nominate you for the show after a conversation you all had about what you wanted to be different in your reading life. And then she emailed us. Can you tell us about that?

ANUDEEP: We were talking about how perhaps we are jaded now or we lost the magic of reading something and being blown anyway in a word. Just captures you and holds you in the magical world. And I'm the sort of reader were I live through the books vicariously. As in like, I'd become the characters. I think I'm living in the world. Like I really get deep into them.

So we were talking about *Harry Potter*. I said to her, I haven't come across such an amazing place again where it was just childlike wonder and being fascinated by everything. Where you suspend all your pretentious ideas or you'd be like, oh, that's not right. That magic doesn't sound right. You know, you just suspend everything and you're taken away by the magic of things. And it doesn't have to be fantasy or so far out there that you believe it.

I was talking about books like that because somehow, I was blaming myself to an extent, being that, oh I'm trying to read books but I'm not getting as interested and I'm not finishing these things. That was our conversation where we just ... I just. Not her. She constantly has love for books — but I wanted to rekindle my love for books by finding something as exhilarating or exciting again.

ANNE: I don't think you're alone in that quest. How old were you when you first read the *Harry Potter* books?

[00:05:45]

ANUDEEP: I was a little late. I think I was in my 7th or 8th grade. The thing is, up until a couple of years ago, I never even owned a *Harry Potter* book. So, as growing up, my parents couldn't afford to buy me those books because they were expensive in India, so I had to just wait until people finished them. And I was kind of low in the pecking order of the friendship list of people who had the book.

ANNE: Oh, no.

ANUDEEP: [LAUGHS] So I had to wait until it passed around ten people before I got it, and then later on, my very close friend got interested in these, and so his parents bought him books. So, I got it much quicker then, but they were not ... My parents' priority was we're not going to spend that much money on a book. It's fine if you don't read it. It's okay. You can read it later. But when I read it, it was so bizarre and out there because I never read anything like that before. Something so fantasy and I obviously immediately thought I was Harry Potter. [ANNE LAUGHS] Someone's going to take me away the same way. I'm just going to go to a castle and things are going to be ... I don't know if there were darkly better for you. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: That's a good point.

ANUDEEP: That book when I first read it, it just swept me off my feet. I never even knew of this genre before. Yeah, never look back. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: You said that reading *Harry Potter* was a requirement to have a functional high school social life.

ANUDEEP: Yes. It's a contrast between how an American high school works. Here the quarterback or, like, any sports person is considered the coolest in the school, and they're the clique or whatever. Or that's what I read far away on the other side of the world. Gleaned from, from movies. But in India, you're cool if you read a bunch of books and you come first in class in the ranking system. You had to be sorta a nerd to be cool. *Harry Potter* was the cool thing, where all the cool kids were like, uh, we read this book and this conversation with each other about Dobby when he got the sock ... Do you remember that? Oh do you think they could have done .... Like all these conversations were going on. If you hadn't read the latest book, then you were left out, uh, what do you think dementors are? Is Voldemort gonna give vision to the dementors ... Like all these weird [LAUGHS] ideas all the kids were having and you could not participate in this discussion. Half of the school year was just absorbed in these things and then people would start writing fanfiction for them, and so you absolutely had to have read *Harry Potter* to really have any cool in to any group.

ANNE: I cannot make a direct comparison because here in the states, the first book was published in 1997. I graduated high school the year before. But that is not what my high school experience was like. I do remember going to college and my freshmen year, I caught a ride with

a couple of seniors to an event outside the city where I was in school. And we had all just seen the Romeo and Juliet movie adaptation that had Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes.

[00:08:42]

ANUDEEP: Yes.

ANNE: And I remember knowing that oh, I have landed someplace different. I went to a pretty nerdy college. When one senior girl turns the other, fun girls, they were my sorority sisters. I wasn't expecting this. I hadn't lived like this in the past. But one turned to the other and said, so, what did you think about the water symbolism? And I was like oh, wow, this is not a conversation that I would have had in, you know, a car ride with friends in my past life. I was here for it personally. I don't know how you felt about your *Harry Potter* high school days.

ANUDEEP: I know you said ... you gave a nice anecdote, but I am now just completely sidetracked on what water symbolism thing? [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Oh, it was so good. If you hear that comment and you go back and watch the movie, any reader who's accustomed to looking at imagery will be like ohhh. Wow. Water, water everywhere. 'Cause water always means something.

ANUDEEP: Oh, that's a new thing I learned. Thank you. [ANNE LAUGHS] I'll have to watch that movie again.

ANNE: So how was *Harry Potter* high school in India.

ANUDEEP: This will sound very dystopian to you, but initially they just brought books to the library and just spread them across a classroom. And you read whatever landed in your hand. It wasn't that the school didn't care. It was more that they wanted us to learn the language more and get meaningful reading out of it, you know? Like life education out of reading. That wasn't happening. It was just here, take these books and read them 'cause they are in English. Somehow you're just going to absorb this language. My whole education was in English, but still. They wanted to make sure that we could speak it and write it very well.

ANNE: Your whole education was in English?

ANUDEEP: Yes, I know. That surprises a lot of people, but yeah. I learned my mother tongue, which is Telugu and the other language they also taught in school was Hindi, which is the national language of India. Those were, like, side languages that got added on after Kindergarten, but I started out learning A, B, C, D in English and then other languages came in. So my entire curriculum, the serious social scientists, all these textbooks and everything was in English. But they wanted to make sure we spoke English always in school grounds. You're not supposed to speak any other language but English. I went to a Catholic missionary school. Missionary schools in India are different compared to, like, Africa or other places where in India,

they're a status symbol to an extent to get the better teachers all across the country. 'Cause they have a bigger system. The library periods were very frustrating because the librarian was this weird, sadistic personality that would open up only one cupboard and we had to just pick books from them. In those days, before *Harry Potter*, *Famous Five* by Enid Blyton, those were really fantastic among the kids.

And there was only one book in there. Any kid who was before me would always pick the cool books. If you don't sit up front, they're all gone and you're just reading all these really sad, adult looking books that are left in there and my reading was sad at least until I finished high school. I wasn't buying books by myself and my school library, their priorities were completely different. They weren't trying to spread, like, literature. They were just making sure people read things in English.

[00:11:52]

ANNE: Now that's your English reading history. Where did you grow up in India that Telugu was your native language?

ANUDEEP: I grew up in southern part of India, in Hyderabad. It's a city down there, but it's huge. It has a population that is more than Kansas and Missouri together. Just the city, eight or nine million people in it.

ANNE: There's a rich history of Telugu literature. Did you grow up reading any of that as well?

ANUDEEP: Actually, no. [SIGHS] I was too aloof of a kid to pay attention. Now I regret it, looking back and I think I should have read more Telugu things back then. Now I try to read it and I'm a little rusty, but I try to go back and read books that were part of curriculum. And I realize, oh, these were actually really great works of art that I just missed out on because Telugu was not the cool thing in the school. They really forced on English, so Telugu was, like, a side thing because oh, all your future education, your exams, your job interviews, every letter you write is going to be in English.

Telugu as a language has amazing poetry. I try to teach my girlfriend some of it. She's a country girl from Illinois. She loves it because the language is phonetic. So if you learn how to read, you can never mispronounce anything.

ANNE: I didn't know that.

ANUDEEP: You just read the words, and they'll sound exactly the same no matter who says it.

ANNE: And now you are all in Kansas City. We've had quite a few guests actually from Kansas City. I just got to visit for the first time back in April of this year and I don't know if Kansas City is having a moment or if it's that enjoyable to visit all along, and I just didn't know what I was missing out on. But I really enjoyed visiting your town.

[00:13:29]

ANUDEEP: Kansas City is having a good moment. I moved here three years ago. Right around the same time she moved here as well. And I moved here thinking hey, this is going to be middle to midwest, and I don't know how people are going to be here or what kind of art and culture and social activities happen here, but it's like Kansas City sucks up all the young people from all the surrounding giant, Midwest land. And they all come here and there's a giant art district here. They started to crowd young people, but now the whole city is involved in it. It did jack up the prices of things here, but-

ANNE: Oh, no. I'm sorry about that.

ANUDEEP: But no, it's completely worth it. Kansas City is now a really exciting place to come to.

ANNE: I hadn't really put this together even though I knew your girlfriend Cara was a librarian in Kansas City. But when we went to Kansas City, of course one of the things we had to do was see the main location downtown of the central library with the amazing 25-foot mural of the books. Readers, if you don't know what we're talking about, we'll put it on Instagram and in our show notes. And we had to go play chess on the roof, and I got to look up my own books which were on the shelves, which was lots of fun. I know the central library is amazing, but I've heard from our Kansas City readers and listeners that there's a really vibrant literary scene in your town. So, thanks, Cara, for being a part of that.

ANUDEEP: Yes, definitely. That took me by surprise. I did not know there were so many authors coming out of Kansas City. You can go to book events and you'd see lines around the blocks from people were trying to get signatures from authors. All the tickets for those events are, like, gone within the minute that it gets posted. There's a nearby town which is just 30 minutes away, Lawrence, is a university town and that places is amazing. So many authors come visit it. We had Neil Gaiman come and talk there as well, which was just great.

ANNE: Did you go?

ANUDEEP: Yes, yes. We were there.

ANNE: Ah. So jealous!

ANUDEEP: He read a short story from his short stories book, and then he read several sections of three or four books. And he went on for like an hour and a half, two hours, but we just loved it. It was an absolutely amazing time.

ANNE: So, Anudeep, in your reading life right now, how do you decide what to read?

[00:15:41]

ANUDEEP: Well, since I told you about my dysfunctional upbringing [BOTH LAUGH] reading upbringing. Not my upbringing. I don't want to throw my parents under the bus. I have a giant list of books that I didn't get to read in schools or when I was going to college 'cause I just didn't have access to them. So, Steinbeck or Road Not Taken poem has never been read by me. Or you know, Neil Gaiman books. I didn't discover him until I came here. I was in my 20s. So a lot of books for me were things I discovered later. And so, I just haven't gone through a lot of the classics even right now. So my pick is always confusion between do I read this red hot book that came out last year or in the last few years, or do I read this classic that I know that's been admired for a century? So it's always a tossup between those.

Currently, I'm reading *Exhalation* by Ted Chiang. Amazing, amazing short stories. On the side is *The Darkening Age* by Catherine Nixey. Completely nonfiction. That's another section I got into very recently where I realized okay, I think I'm old enough now that I can tolerate nonfictional books that are real-life stories or autobiographies or political books. [LAUGHS] So I gave a very winded long answer to just say that I'm picking fancifully, but anything that would deliver on a good ah-ha moment. A moment where you read it and you feel like oh, the emptiness inside of you or that special feeling that you get when you finish a book and you feel like you've gone through someone's life or you have this, like, experience emotional or intellectual where you feel you left with something. It's hard to search by that criteria, but-

ANNE: It is hard to search by that criteria. I know that I personally really relate to your quandary of debating between the red-hot, newer recent release and the classic that you know you want to read, but do you want to read it right now? I really relate to that, and I know a lot of other readers do as well.

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*ANNE: Readers, the news has been heavy lately, but whether you're looking to lean into that and become more informed or you want to escape and relax, The Great Courses has enriching, empowering courses for you. With this streaming service, you can pick up a new hobby or build your knowledge on virtually any topic you want to know more about.*

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ANNE: Let's talk about your books. Anudeep, you know how this works. You're going to tell me three books you love and one book you don't, and then we'll talk about what you may enjoy reading next. I might be able to guess what your first selection is.

[00:19:32]

ANUDEEP: I mean, it's *Harry Potter*. Pretty much explained all I could about it. [BOTH LAUGH] And my second book was something I read very recently actually. *Of Mice and Men*. If anything is an indication, the other two books are tiny books. They're not long.

ANNE: Yeah, what does that mean, Anudeep? Is it just coincidental?

ANUDEEP: No. A) I love that I can read it in a sitting and, like, be engrossed. There's something encouraging I think, knowing that it's only 50 more pages. I read 75, and 50 more and this book will be done, so, yes, I can sit through this. And it'll end up being, oh, I read 50, there's 300 more pages, so maybe I'll read 50 more tomorrow and maybe you get back to it. Sometimes you don't. You get engaged in other things. So I think the small books really encourages you to just finish it in a slot. I know I'm making it sound a little mechanical, but there's encouraging part of it that it's small and I think they're meant to be read that way because they're just short, amazing experiences.

My second thing that I probably admire even more is how an author can fit such an amazing story or so much details in the story in such a short amount of pages. You don't feel that they left things out or well, these are the good books. [LAUGHS] But you don't feel that they left anything out or they cut short in some parts. They leave you a lot more to chew on. You spend days wondering about this book, and I think *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck is like that. It just leaves you emotionally devastated, I guess, after it.

You can also just admire how much you came to understand, love or hate every character in the book and you did it completely with all your heart because he convinced you in such a short amount of time. You just got that proper slice of a life section, and it told you so much about the

time period of that area they were in, the misery or the conundrum of the happiness of these characters.

[00:21:32]

ANNE: And yet, *Harry Potter* is a seven book series with thousands of pages. [ANUDEEP LAUGHS] So if you're going to live in another world, I mean, you pack up your things and you move in for awhile.

ANUDEEP: Oh, yes.

ANNE: Okay. But you don't need thousands of pages to keep you happy as a reader.

ANUDEEP: I mean, I read the *Game of Throne* series. It was a struggle at times, but I still went through it, so, yeah, I'm always ready to pack up and be like, okay, I'm moving to Hogwarts now, so [ANNE LAUGHS] I'll see you again in a couple of years. So it's like an admiration of both. Even in the small books, I still pack up and move in. That's the way I read. The length doesn't appreciate anything. You're just happy you're reading more about this world. You're just happy that it's taking you in on a longer journey.

ANNE: Okay. We will look for that in the books we send you away with, but you hinted at your next book. What did you choose for your third favorite?

ANUDEEP: When I picked this, I thought, this is going to be a cliché choice and hundreds of people have probably picked this. *The Little Prince*.

ANNE: No. No one has.

ANUDEEP: How? [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: I love that that is your reaction because it's your favorite book. Okay. Tell me about it. How did you end up choosing this one?

ANUDEEP: It is the fantasy land I want to be in. It takes me back, including the drawings in it, to the cartoons I watched as a kid, but with greater depth than story to it. It seems like such a simple world, yet the things that *The Little Prince* sees have such depth and weight to them. They didn't try to make it, oh, we're going to utilize so much philosophy into this. It just feels like childlike wonder. You read it with a smile on your face. You can't help it when you're reading it. It just takes you in. The way I read it, I am a cartoon in the book. I'm just in there, in the desert. I'm not a real person. I am a cartoon-y sketch, and that's the life I'm going to live when I read this book. It's like *Calvin and Hobbs*. Ah, there's no words to explain the emotion that *The Little Prince* brings up in you. It's happiness, it's sadness. It's so many things mixed together. But overall, you leave feeling like ... with this serene understanding of the world. Everything is in place as if you made sense of the world reading this children's looking book. [LAUGHS]

[00:23:44]

ANNE: I love the way you put that. But what did you choose for a book that was not for you?

ANUDEEP: This might be controversial. *Dark Matter* by Blake Crouch.

ANNE: First of all, can I just say, when it comes to any opinion in the reading life, I mean, you might feel like it's controversial 'cause I know many people love this book, but it's never just you, so I'm sure you're in good company here as well. [ANUDEEP LAUGHS] With that being said, tell me about it.

ANUDEEP: How does anybody tell why they don't like a book without sounding like a pretentious ... [BOTH LAUGH] 'Cause I'm not. I don't want to be bad on the book because the premise is amazing. 'Cause I'm an engineer and I study these things. So I do really understand the physics, but that gives me more complaints to have where in a factual sense, I'm like ah, that's not right or that's just too much of a MacGuffin or Deus Angst Machina, whatever those clever names that are there for plot devices. [ANNE LAUGHS]

So I have maybe a personal grudge against it. [LAUGHS] But I thought the premise was insanely good. But it turned into an action thriller than I wanted it to be more philosophical and more observation on humanity. Yesterday night, I was talking to my girlfriend about this and I made an analogy, and I promised her that I would repeat it on the radio show, even though it's stupid. [ANNE LAUGHS] I said if this got made into a movie, it'll star Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. And one star, Benedict Cumberbatch. That's the kind of book this is. [BOTH LAUGH]

And I might be really wrong 'cause Mr. Cumberbatch, he can really pull off roles so he might be probably do this and make it look good. But I love the premise way too much and I thought, ahh, but he was using it for an action thriller kind of setting. I wanted it be more philosophical, being more like the golden sci-fi books.

ANNE: Okay, two things. One: non-sciencey people — I mean, like myself, liberal arts major right here — love to hear what people who actually know about the fields that are so important to novels they enjoy reading, what those people actually think about the way, for example, the science is executed. So please don't feel bad about that. And secondly, wishing a book had been something else and being disappointed it didn't fulfill what you would like it to read, that is an opinion that you can also hold without feeling pretentious. Although I have to say, when Cara wrote it, she said that she recommended this specific book to you because she really enjoyed it and it just killed her confidence in her abilities to recommend books that you will love. Has she come up with other good ones since then?

ANUDEEP: She has.

ANNE: Okay. That's what I was hoping to hear.

[00:26:27]

ANUDEEP: I think that this was perhaps a year ago or more when I read this book. And even to this day, we still debate about this book, so you know how big of an impact it had for her where she was like, I really thought I had him figured out. [ANNE LAUGHS] And then he's now on the podcast talking bad about it. [BOTH LAUGH] I just compounded the problem even more.

But no, it's ... She likes the challenge. As a librarian, she loves the idea of being able to find the niche and like getting the specific area in which people's ideas or their preferences fit in. I think she loves figuring that out. It's a journey, and she's - she's realized that I'm not this very specific guy and just very moody in how I pick my books. [BOTH LAUGH] She's given up too. She's turned into, I'm just going to give you a list and pick whatever you feel like from that. But it's just amazing having a librarian in your life where you just come home and randomly there's a book she thought you might like and you read it and you go, oh, wow, this was amazing and her eyes just light up.

ANNE: Well now I wish I lived with a librarian. Although honestly, I probably have enough books in my house, so.

ANUDEEP: Yeah, we have a mini library.

ANNE: I'm glad that you have a librarian in your life. Anudeep, is there anything you'd like to be different in your reading life?

ANUDEEP: My mind went blank ... Too much burden on you with this question. How do people in this day and age where you can be gratified quickly by browsing on your phone or on the Internet or watching things on TV 'cause there seem to be infinite good shows on TV — how do you throw away all of that and read a book? Is it like you have to come up with a regime? You have to be straight? You have to be like, oh, I'm just ... No ... Nothing digital. Unless it's like a Kindle maybe. Nothing digital for this hour. Or ... How do you people do it because I keep getting very distracted. Phone, direct messaging, oh I could have been reading ten different ... Or looking at 20 different memes in the times I read these three pages 'cause I'm a very slow reader. I just wanted to hear your opinion on it.

ANNE: I think this is a question that depends a lot on the person for the specific ... Let's say anecdote. That makes it sound like we have an illness. [ANUDEEP LAUGHS] But I do think there are two general things that can benefit almost everyone in this situation and that is: You need to have good books on deck waiting for you to read them at all times. If you don't know what you want to read and you also have a phone in your hand, it's even easier than it would be otherwise to keep doing the thing with the phone. Or Netflix 'cause you probably have a big queue and you know what you want to watch next, especially if you're in the middle of a good series there. But if you have a good book, ideally that you're in the middle of and you know what's coming next and you know that you've got another good book you're looking forward to

after that and another good one after that, I think it makes it more enticing and just a lot easier to pick up the book instead of the device. So that's part one. You need good books.

Part two is: You need time to read them. This could mean either a designated time in your day or it could mean that you literally just pick a time and you, for example, set a timer. My friend Laura Tremaine, she has a great episode about reading early in her fairly new podcast Ten Things To Tell You and we'll put a link to that in show notes. Set a timer, set it for 10 minutes even or 15 minutes and sit down and read. And if you are a person who's distracted by your digital devices, then don't read on your phone or on an iPad. But chose a physical book or an old-fashioned ereader, the kind that doesn't have say email on it and you can read the book. And if you think you might get an important call, then don't silence your phone, but just put it in another room. Don't leave it in your pocket. Or it's so easy, especially as we develop habits and we kind of train ourselves to check our devices and refresh our notifications. Just put it in the other room and sit down and read. I know that so many readers are surprised that even if they just read for ten minutes a day, or ten minutes several times a day at a time when they didn't used to read, they'll notice that they're getting through those books a lot quicker than they would otherwise because even those small minutes add up.

Now if you want to take that a step further, you could start reading in the pockets of time when you usually might check Instagram. Say if you're in a really long line at Target, or you could try listening to audiobooks when you commute, or something like that. Whatever specific way it looks in your life, have good books and designated time to read them. Really if you could eliminate decisions about the reading life, you get more reading done. You know you have a good book. That's already decided. And you know you're going to read 20 minutes before bed, already decided. All you gotta do is do it. But when we're left in a moment thinking, well, what do I want to do right now? I don't know what your, like, poison of choice is, Anudeep, but mine is Instagram and that's when you're like well, I'll just look at this if I can't decide. So make it so you don't have to decide. Not just speaking to you, but to readers everywhere because this is a very common question.

[00:31:22]

ANUDEEP: I'll definitely try to put those rules in.

ANNE: Some people really like the sound of rules. Otherwise we could call them ideas.

ANUDEEP: Yes. I'll definitely employ these ideas — I'm making air quotes — into my life.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Okay. Now I know how you feel about rules. Not a bad thing in your book?

ANUDEEP: [LAUGHS] No, not at all.

ANNE: Okay. With that in mind, are you ready to try to get some good books in the queue for when you're not looking at your phone?

[00:31:50]

ANUDEEP: Yes. Very excited.

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ANNE: First of all, I was wondering about a nonfiction pick by ... I don't know. There's people who love Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and call him Saint X with great affection. He has a not nearly as well known memoir slash autobiography. Its English title is *Wind, Sand, and Stars*. Is this one you know, Anudeep?

[00:35:12]

ANUDEEP: I know he has a memoir, but no.

ANNE: When you were talking about *The Little Prince*, I was remembering how when I first ... I think actually my only trip to France, and I've only been to Paris, and I would love to see the rest of it. But the four days of my life I spent in Paris, I picked up a French copy of *The Little Prince* when I was there. I've always wanted to learn French. I really can't say anything except a few food items and Je m'appelle and - and where's the bathroom. Like this is the extent of my French. [ANUDEEP LAUGHS] But I had aspirations, and I still have my French copy of *The Little Prince* and I've always wanted to read it, and I have no idea what is or isn't lost in the American translation. But I do know with *Wind, Sand, and Stars*, the title is different in French. It is *Terre des Hommes* and that literally means Land of Men. First it was published in the U.S. as Land of People, but-

ANUDEEP: Yeah, that's a horrible title. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Yeah. It's - it's not great. The reason I'm telling you this is that this is a story of adventure. It's a story that especially appeals to people who have any interest at all in flying. It's

on national geographic's 100 greatest adventure books of all time. But it's also really beautifully written and he's very philosophical and that's the part I really wanted to get to here. *Terre des Hommes* refers not only to the beautiful landscapes that you can see when you're up in the air in an airplane, and he does talk about those views and how it causes him to think about humanity in a different way quite a bit in the book, but also his philosophy about how to be a person in the world. And that same gentleness and serenity that you see in *The Little Prince* himself I think is really evident in this book. And you can see just how much of not just the author's mind, but his beliefs and his personality are in that book that you love so much, and I think that might make really interesting reading for you.

Something else that I really like about this book is given your love of *The Little Prince*, you can read about Saint-Exupéry's personal adventures and you can see how his personal experience became the experiences of *The Little Prince*. Like one of the, I think, best parts of this book is where Saint-Exupéry lands on this plateau that couldn't be reached except by air in North Africa, and he's writing in 1939, so air travel is nothing like it is today, even for these small planes. But he lands on this plateau in North Africa. There are what he believes are small meteorite craters everywhere. And you've read *The Little Prince*, so I imagine immediately, you're like oh, I've read about that.

[00:37:47]

ANUDEEP: Yeah.

ANNE: But in a different form. And I think for anyone who loves his fictional work, that this could be really fascinating to come to afterwards from that perspective. He's talking about so much of the same things. He's talking about love and life and friendship and also flying, except this time it's an airplane flown by humans. So all those themes are present but it's a different type of story, and I think the contrast could be really fascinating. How does that sound?

ANUDEEP: Wow, okay, you set the bar really high. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: Okay, but I will say that some readers who are not particularly interested in flying find all the flying descriptions tedious. It is a tale of adventure, but it's a quiet, serene, philosophical adventure. It's not let me race to the end so I can find out what happens kind of adventure. But I think given what you enjoy and what you don't enjoy, that would actually make this a good fit for you.

ANUDEEP: Yes. I'm sold on even the name of Sand, Wind-

ANNE: *Wind, Sand, and Stars*, which might not do justice to the layers of meaning in his original title, but I still think it's a pretty great title.

ANUDEEP: [LAUGHS] Just the title, Saint X wrote it. Okay. I have to read that.



[00:39:02]

ANNE: We're just going to end this episode right here. [ANUDEEP LAUGHS] Maybe I shouldn't have started with my best book because I'm going to go out on a limb more with these other two.

ANUDEEP: No, no, I mean, I'm just happy with this that no matter what books you recommend, you can say *50 Shades of Grey* now and I'd still just be like smiling giddily.

ANNE: Oh. I like the way you're thinking. Okay, so you said that you're often torn between the hot new releases or the classics that are burning a hole in your bookshelf. You probably don't need anymore hot new releases, but I'm going to give you one anyway. I think this could be really interesting for you, and I just want to say now that I'm not trying to think of thousands of pages long series that you could really move into for weeks, months, because I think that ... Well, first of all, that's a tall order and readers who specifically try to find the next *Harry Potter*, I think end up inevitably disappointed. But instead, I'm trying to find some of the elements of that reading experience that were so satisfying to you. And it's really freeing to me, so thank you for saying this explicitly to know that you do love the shorter stories that you can finish in a sitting.

Readers who love *Harry Potter* often try to look for something similar. Something written for a younger audience. Something with fantasy elements. Something set at boarding school. But I think readers can get that same experience, where you feel like you know the community and you're deeply invested in the characters in a lot of ways. Like my husband blew through the Colorado set, Kent Haruf novels last year and I think that was similar. For many people, it's their favorite mystery series, like the Louise Pennies or the Deanna Raybourn, so I have in mind a book that is definitely fantasy, but I don't think it's obviously a *Harry Potter* readalike in anyway. But some of the things you said about *Harry Potter* made me think this could be promising for you. Also this is about 400 pages, so it's long like *Harry Potter*. It's not short enough to read in one sitting. I don't know if this is a good thing or a bad thing, but I'm going to put it on your radar anyway.

This book doesn't come out until September. It's called *The Ten Thousand Doors of January*. It's by Alix Harrow, who I was just delighted to discover this morning is actually a Kentucky author who is not terribly far from me. Do you read much fantasy aside from *Harry Potter*, Anudeep?

ANUDEEP: Yes, I do.

ANNE: I do not read a ton myself, so I wasn't going to be scared either way. Those knowledgeable about the fantasy genre would call this a portal fantasy. This also has a strong historical element and this is a book about a book because *The Ten Thousand Doors of January* is her story of finding not only one of these ten thousand doors, but a book called the ten thousand doors. You know very early that she's an adult now and she's telling you her own story, but in time the story begins in the, I'll say, late 19th century, possibly early 20th. She was

seven years old and she found a door. You come to understand as a reader that she's not talking about, you know, like the door that goes from my office into my kitchen, but a capital D Door that is a passageway between worlds. Your narrator, January Scaller, she finds a door and she says that oh, many of you listening will have that ring of recognition as I describe what this door was like and where it took me. She says that many people have stumbled through doors, either on purpose or accidentally. There are ten thousand stories about ten thousand doors that lead to fairy to Valhalla to Atlantis to Lamuria to Heaven and Hell. All the directions a compass could never take you.

She's grown up as the ward of a wealthy man because her father is out ... Well, she thinks he's out finding artifacts from all over the world. But her father is actually embarking on a secret project that is extremely important to January, but January has been left out because she is not old enough to know about Doors and their power.

Meanwhile, the adults in the room, or on the other side of the world, have no idea that January herself has this proclivity to find Doors, and not only that, without them realizing it, she has inherited her father's power to write reality in words. And so not only is this magical adventure where she's finding Doors all over the world, but it also is extremely suspenseful because at a certain point, the bad guys figure out that January has this power and they want to use it to their own ends. Which of course are completely opposite her own.

And so readers who are highly sensitive, I will say that I had to cringe and skip ahead seriously for a few 15-second chunks because I have a thing about blood and needles and that became an issue in this book. Just briefly a little bit. It was really fun to read the way the book was written as in, ah! Doors are real things. We all know about them. No matter what and repeated premise in the book is that Doors are change and anytime there are uprisings or revolutions or breakthroughs or discoveries or interesting occurrences in remote places, it was a Door and someone found it and walked through it.

[00:44:07]

ANUDEEP: I am captured. I really love that idea. And I also like the style of books where they start with the assumption that oh, the history of we always had dragons. Like that's normal. It's just natural facts. So, this should be really interesting. Yeah.

ANNE: I'm excited that you're excited and honestly, oh, I'm sorry, I can't help myself. But you really did fling the door wide open to what I now think would be a great, final pick for you. [ANUDEEP LAUGHS] Have you read anything by John Scalzi? Especially *Lock In*?

ANUDEEP: No. No.

ANNE: Well he's a science fiction writer. He writes about freedom and ethics and what I didn't say is that in *The Ten Thousand Doors of January*, freedom is a major theme. You found *Dark Matter* not to be the book for you because it wasn't the book you hoped it would be. I think this

one might do science fiction in a way that more fulfills your expectations and hopes for it. That's interesting because Scalzi built his reputation writing military science fiction, so this book and it does have a follow up which just came out in 2018. This first one, *Lock In*, came out in 2014. They're a change of pace for him, but what he does here is write science fiction that has social consequences and philosophy deeply embedded in it.

[00:45:29]

ANUDEEP: Ooh.

ANNE: And you also said, you like a book that tells it to you straight. Not like it doesn't mess around with the niceties or anything, but just completely takes for granted, this is the world we're in. We're not going to act like it's weird. We're not going to acknowledge that it's fiction. Like you signed on for this ride and here we are.

So, in this book, *Lock In*, it's a little bit police procedural which does give it a mystery adventure kind of feel to it, and a whole lot of science fiction. I'd say it's equal parts of each. The deal with *Lock In* is that there's been a virus. 1% of humanity are affected. It causes the condition known as Lock in, which leaves its victims fully awake. They know what's happening, but they cannot move without help, and they cannot respond to anything happening around them. And it seems to affect every sort of person without discriminating. And the world has had to change because of what's happened to help these people move on.

But the reason that you know that this is the situation, and this is what happened, is right at the beginning of the book, you get a news report almost that is attributed to the entirely fictional, high school cheat sheet dot com, so right away you've got this believably reality, this like, hey people! Here's what's happening. We've had this virus. Everything is changing. This is what's happening. This is how we're dealing with these people who are suffering from Lock In and the real way they're dealing with it is that these people are getting around using robots. Or more strangely, they can rent time in the bodies of people who are not suffering from this illness. And those people are called Integrators. And I don't want to get way down deep-

ANUDEEP: Wow.

ANNE: Into the science-y stuff, but there is a crime. Someone is murdered at The Watergate Hotel, as a matter of fact. But the person accused of the crime was using an Integrator. So the question is, who did it? Who had control? Who's truly responsible? What does this mean for the world? What are the extent and limits of human freedom? It asks all these questions about the world we live in, and it's able to do that really effectively because this story is not set in the world we live in. It's also a rookie on the beat story because of course, the guy assigned to the case has been on the job for, like, two days. So that's kinda fun. And as he's getting oriented in this world and figuring out what on earth is going on 'cause he's new to this, you get to follow along as a reader 'cause you are new to this too and I think that theme really works.

The only reason I know about this book is because a What Should I Read Next guest who loved the same kind of science fiction you love, that's Keith Watts, chose this as a favorite back in episode 100. So any listeners whose ears are perking up right now, episode 100 is meant for you. But Anudeep, we're talking about your books and reading today and how does that sound?

[00:48:25]

ANUDEEP: That sounds actually great. Sounds like Michael Crichton and Robert Ludlum and all these guys came together in algorithm and came up with it. [BOTH LAUGH] Tom Clancy, you know, the military writers.

ANNE: Just put it in the bestseller hopper.

ANUDEEP: Yeah. I like it. I really like it. A part of my story I didn't tell you is, I used to read some of the military fiction that my dad loved so much, like, Robert Ludlum's books or Tom Clancy books, which were thick, fat books that were so engrossed and I read them out of desperation literally because I had no choice. [LAUGHS] And this reminds me of those, and I love the premise so much. I really do like this sorta like kinda of who is in the body, who did it. There are so many possibilities. The set up is so great that you can't really guess the ending. I like those kind of stories, you know, you can't guess the outcome.

Three books you told me are so in their own fields. It's just amazing. [LAUGHS] I mean, it's like, if i want to pick and read one, they're just so different from each other that there's no way I'm wanting something else for awhile.

ANNE: Well, I am happy to hear it. Anudeep, we talked about three books today. They were *Wind, Sand, and Stars* - we're going to go with the U.S. title -- by Antoine de Saint-Expuéry, *The Ten Thousand Doors of January* coming in September 2019 by Alix Harrow, and *Lock In* by John Scalzi. Of those three books, what do you think you'll read next?

ANUDEEP: I can't read the second one anyway.

ANNE: It does make it easier.

ANUDEEP: Uhh. I think I'll pick whatever's shortest first. I'm sorry. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: *Wind, Sand, and Stars* it is. Anudeep, this has been a pleasure. Thank you so much for talking books with me today.

ANUDEEP: I'm blown away. I can't even tell you how blown away I am. I have enjoyed this more than I even imagined I would. Thank you so much.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

[00:50:18]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Anudeep, and I'd love to hear what YOU think he should read next. That page is at [whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/196](http://whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/196) and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today.

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