

As I'm busy working on NaNoWriMo this month I'm finding myself swamped with words and stories, but none of them quite right to share here for all of you. So rather than leaving you with nothing for the remainder of the month, I thought I'd share some of my favourite book series with you. Please note, these are in no particular order other than what came to mind as I was writing. Also note that the books in this post are recommended for teens and adults, I will share some favourite children's book series in another post.

### **The Cottage Tales For Beatrix Potter**

[Audible](#) or [Book](#)

I began reading this beautifully fun series when I stumbled upon the very first book in my local library roughly eleven or twelve years ago. I was really excited after reading the blurb on the back of the book, a quaint English mystery with a real historical character inside! The premise of the entire series is that it takes place in the Lake District of England when Beatrix Potter was writing her animal stories.

Each book takes place during the year she wrote one of those very books, and the writing of each story is woven into the book in some fun and interesting way. Often with much historical details of the how and why that Beatrix chose to write her story or what she sketched for the pictures inside.

I adore how there are so many side stories in all the books, many of which wind up being related. There are, of course, animals in the story as well. Little ones that live within the village, or without, and they also have their own stories going on. I believe my favourite of all the animals might just be Bosworth Badger from the Brockery.

The stories are all told from the narrators point of view, which is so much fun. One of my favourite lines in the series is when the author moves you from one important scene to another by saying things like, "But let us not snoop at the window here, let us go over and visit Miss Potter instead, I don't think she'd mind a bit."

There are a total of seven stories in the series, and while I'm big on reading any series in order, I think this one is especially important. Although, the author does a fine job of filling

you in on slight details without giving away all the important story bits. She even encourages you to, “refer to ... book if you haven’t read that story in full yet.”

Every book contains a mystery, often two as the animals within are attempting to solve one {or help the big people}, and of course then there are the humans solving a mystery too. Interestingly enough it is generally the inquisitive and attentive Miss Potter who puts all the pieces together and helps to solve the small town’s problems.

I own some of these books in paperback versions, although I’d love to see the whole series in hardback in my home library someday, but for now I own the entire collection via Audible. Now, here’s where it gets interesting if you are debating between listening or reading.

I purchased many of these books one at a time as they released on Audible, and oh what a delight it was to see the next one ready so I could purchase it and then head out for a luxuriously long walk and listen away. The Narrator does a simply splendid job getting every little accent correct, and I feel so sucked into the story that I find it very difficult to put down—even on my 100th listen.

Reading the physical book is another story. The English accents are written right into the story, and if you aren’t familiar with the brogue you may find it hard to read or, in some cases, interpret. However, with the physical copies you get lovely recipes in the back, and absolutely adorable artwork on the front of the books. Of course, you can find some of these recipes on the author’s website too.

Some of the later Audio versions began including the recipes, and perhaps all the previous books have been updated to contain that, although when I crash listened to these books last year, that was not yet the case. I think this is a fantastic situation where owning both the audio and the physical is completely worth it.

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## **Harry Potter**

Audio or Book

Many many years ago I received a bizarre chain email. Do you remember when chain emails were all the rage? I was never a fan, but regardless I was somehow included in one. In said chain email there was a slew of craziness about the Harry Potter series, which at the time had 2 books out. I remember reading the email and being absolutely amused by the silly things it contained.

However, rather than causing me to sign the petition, I went to the library to check out book 1 in the series to see what all the fuss was about. Only, the book was checked out, and as the sweet old Librarian I was formerly familiar with having worked along side her many Saturday afternoons, was no longer working at the library, the newest librarian wasn't too bothered in letting me know when a copy might be due. So, instead I made my way over to my local Wal-Mart and purchased a paperback copy. I read it through pretty quickly as I found it a real page turner.

I really enjoyed the series, and each time I reread the books I find some new connection I hadn't noticed before. I love how, at times, the author weaves her own words so brilliantly. One of my all time favourite lines has to do with a seasonal change where the author shows a lengthy passage of time in a mere sentence, "... autumn changed into winter...." Hopefully Rowling will forgive me for mangling it, because I'm not sure I've quoted it even slightly right.

I have been known to quote other lines from these books with better accuracy and quite often, especially when I'm headed down one of the many dark hallways in my home and no one notices. My voice generally floats up with, "And I will be in my bedroom, making no noise and pretending I don't exist."

I think what I adore the most about this series isn't the "magical" element, it's not the fantasy element that another world might exist just beyond our reach if only we opened our eyes and truly looked. It's not even the age old tale that good or light triumphs over bad or darkness. Nor is it the many allegories within. No, it's the incredible friendship of the three main characters.

One brainy and bossy and yet totally willing to be patient, most of the time, with her less brainy friends and guide them through difficult situations. One who is, let's face it, a geek and

odd man out and quick to fly off the handle, but at his core he is good and kind and loving, and will always have your back- even if he just has to get over himself a little first. Then there's the friend who loves so selflessly he's willing to die to save everyone. He feels so unloved and utterly alone in the world and comes to realise that in truth he has many friends who love him for who he is, and that he's impacted even the most wickedest of people around him.

There is just something wonderfully comfortable about returning to this series time and again and watching it all unfold, like peering in on your friends and joining them through their ups and downs. Admittedly, there are some difficult moments in the series, and there are also some dark moments too. I was so so angry when the author allowed one of my all time favourite characters to die, okay I'm still a little raw about that!

I own both the physical and audio copies of these books. I even owned the books on cds once upon a time, but have since updated to the Audible editions read by my all time favourite narrator, Jim Dale. He has a different voice for every character, and he does them all so flawlessly that it's easy to be sucked in quickly and know who's talking without having to be told.

While I own hardback the first editions of all but book one, I also own the new illustrated hardback editions as well, and crazily enough I think we have a paperback set of the "new" covers as well. If I was to only own one of these options, I'd probably say the audio version hands down, but only if you have the version done by Jim Dale.

I'm not sure that Mr Fry will ever forgive me for saying so, but I do believe that Jim Dale does a better job with the series. Which is interesting because [Fry read a chapter](#) during the [#AtHomeWithHarryPotter](#) series, and it was brilliantly done!

I think, the *problem* is that I'm so use to hearing Dale's voices that when I hear Fry's I feel they are all wrong. You may, however, feel very differently. Having said that, I believe Fry's are only available in the UK/AU region and that Dale's are available for US peeps.

As for the illustrated versions, they are very large books height wise in comparison to the

hardbacks, and certainly compared to the paper backs. They are, however, beautifully done. Jim Kay has captured the characters so well and brought so many small things to life that we tend to pour over the books just to enjoy the artwork.

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## **The Chronicles Of Narnia**

Audio or Book

I can still remember the [old boxed set](#) of The Chronicles Of Narnia my parents owned, and I can still remember curling up with a fuzzy blue oversized pillow while my parents read these books to us. When I curl up with my own copy of any Narnia book, I am not only transporter to a new world and time within the story, but I am transported back to those very early memories with my family. I was absolutely infatuated with Narnia.

I even remember when the BBC brought out the [original movies](#) and my father dutifully recorded each of them on his old VCR that required a cord to make the remote work.

The world of Narnia seems to beckon to me often, and since none of my closets, paintings, train stations, or local gates seem to be open portals to Narnia or the worlds beyond, I find my way back through the books often. In fact I just finished my current rereading the series, which my kids joined me for, earlier this year. They had not both made it all the way through, despite having heard the first few books repeatedly. I decided we must rectify the situation, and quickly cast aside the Classics we'd had in our read aloud pile, and pulled up our Narnia books instead.

I find it nearly impossible to not feel the need to curl up with a good quilt, a sunny spot, and a cup of cocoa when reading these books. Each one is it's own story, but they do have some things that build off of each other. For instance, you wouldn't want to read Prince Caspian prior to reading The Lion The Witch & The Wardrobe, or you'd likely be confused by a few story elements and plots within.

Having said that I am a big believer that anyone's first trip through Narnia should begin with

The Lion The Witch & The Wardrobe, after all that is how the author wrote the series. Yet, it appears that many are reading book 7 before they have ever read book 1, and I believe this is because the new numbering on the books tells them to! So, may I suggest that you simply read the whole series twice? First with the proper book 1, and then with the suggested book 1? There, that should fix things up nicely then!

I know many adults resonate most with Aslan, but my favourite was, and likely always will be, Lucy. There are many reasons, some of which are far too personal to ever share publicly, but I will share that I was most smitten with Lucy due to a scene in Prince Caspian, that is forever etched on my heart. Lucy's genuine love and care for others was a huge reason, as was her belief that what she saw was real, and despite the fact that no one in her family believed her, she didn't quaver on her stance.

Returning to Narnia, for me, is like a trip back to my childhood time and time again. It's also a trip to a land I long for and can travel to anytime I open the pages and travel and learn with those within.

I own The Chronicles of Narnia in 2 audio forms, cds {which are in storage somewhere on another continent}, and paperback. I enjoy each, so let me try and break them down for you. The two audio forms are: [word for word](#) and [audio drama](#). Both are beautifully done. Having said that, in an audio drama you will hear someone walking, water splashing, wind swirling, you will not be told that is what is happening. In a word for word reading you will have just that, a person reading the book and narrating however they choose. I own all seven books in both formats and enjoy both depending on the mood that I am in.

The [paperback books](#) that I own have slick pages and illustrations throughout. I'm a sucker for illustrations, so I enjoy that factor. I love having these versions as well because I am not so smitten with any narrator that does the Narnia Series that I find myself trying to get all the voices just like them.

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**Bailey Ruth Raeburn**

## Audio or Book

I stumbled upon the Bailey Ruth Raeburn series on Audible one miserable winter afternoon while hunting for a new book to read. Preferably something cozy and simple and inviting. I've read many of Brown's other book series with her [Henrie O series](#) being my favoured, although her [Death On Demand](#) is equally enjoyable. After reading most of her Bailey Ruth series, I think it's my new favourite.

Bailey Ruth Raeburn is dead. Yes, dead. She was once a well known woman around Adelaide, mostly because of her beautiful flaming red curly hair. She and her husband died in a boating accident one fateful day leaving behind two adult children. In book one Bailey Ruth feels a little caught up in the humdrum life of paradise, and decides that she'd like a little more adventure in her life. She makes her way to the Rescue Express depot and begs for an earthly assignment that will return her back to earth where she can help a person in need.

Now, I know the premise of this series is not everyone's cup of tea. I can't imagine being bored in heaven, nor can I imagine much of how Brown describes heaven as being real, but I can appreciate her imagination and the story she's created.

In each book Bailey Ruth makes it back to her hometown, and despite her faults as a really bad emissary {Higgins doesn't like her to use the word ghost...} she usually accomplishes the job she's sent to do, with a lot of laughter and silliness along the way.

As murder mysteries go, these are light hearted and not gruesome, and it's pretty hard not to find yourself smiling at Bailey Ruth's antics as she attempts to "help" the local police along in their investigations. Bailey Ruth's memories about home and family are filled with a deep love and fondness for her children and the many wonderful family memories she had with them. While she's full of personal character flaws and tends to act before she thinks, she means well which is what makes her such an incredibly loveable character.

I have nearly the whole series that is currently published via Audible. I have not, as yet, read the final two books that are currently out. I also opted to read a couple via my library, merely because my kids were caught up in a deep discussion with the librarian about graphic novels,

new released book, and upcoming novels so I grabbed the next Bailey Ruth title off the shelf, curled up in a sunny chair and read my time away.

I do not own any of these books in physical book form, as I've fully enjoyed Anne Marie's narrating on Audible and intend to finish my collection in that form.

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## **Mrs Pollifax**

Audio or Book

I was looking for something new and fun and charming to listen to, and I can't remember if someone suggested Mrs Pollifax to me, or if I happened to stumble upon it and ask fellow biblio lovers their thoughts. However it came about, I'm grateful.

I was smitten with Mrs Pollifax's very first story. I loved the idea that Gilman came up with, and perhaps having spent so much time with the senior community I could completely understand the dilemma Mrs Pollifax found herself in. Not so much lonely as bored. After all, there are only so many garden parties, bingo nights, and card games one can go to before you feel as old as people claim you are, or so Mrs Pollifax tells us.

She wanted some adventure in her life, some excitement, and so she finds herself applying for a job at the local CIA agency where she hopes to do some good for her country. Due to a major miscommunication Mrs Pollifax is actually hired for a job, almost on the spot, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Over the course of 13, there are actually 14, but I cannot find Book 14 to read!, books Mrs Pollifax learns karate, gets married, goes on many assignments for the CIA, finds herself in many precarious situations she manages to somehow escape, and despite the doubts of most people around her, always seems to get the job done in her charming grandmotherly way while winning the hearts of those around her.

Perhaps one could best describe Mrs Pollifax as a more modern day American Miss Marple. Observant, pointed when she needs to be, kind to those around her, and somehow easily



capable of getting the information she needs to solve the mystery!

I really find these light hearted reads, although there are some scenes that are a little more intense than others. Over all though I've enjoyed my journey with Mrs Pollifax and have reread the books that I do own a few times over- or perhaps I should say "re-listen", as I only own the Audio versions of Mrs Pollifax.

## **Refiners Fire**

Audio or Book

I love historical fiction, it's probably one of my top favourite genres, if not my top. I was introduced to Lynn Austin's books about ten or eleven years ago, and this was the very first series of hers that I listened to.

The Refiner's Fire is a Civil War Trilogy told from the aspects of the north, south, and those in slavery. Each book focusing on a different aspect, but all the characters are there, sometimes hidden in the background.

Each story, written from the perspective of a woman, weaves the struggles of life the character is enduring specific to that time in history, as well as the added hindrance of living in a country affected by a Civil War. As these are also Christian fiction, these women also wrestle with their faith.

I appreciate how thoughtfully Austin wove these stories together sharing the different aspects of life for all, no matter where they lived or what side of the battle grounds they stood on. There are, of course, difficult topics in these books, but each is handled with such care that I found myself incapable of putting the books down in order to find out how each woman would come to find peace with her situation and role in life.

While I own many of Austin's books in physical form, I do not own these as such, and sadly my local library doesn't seem to carry any of Austin's books. I own each of these copies in audio format.

As a bonus, I'd love to suggest, that if you do read all three of these books you also indulge in Austin's *All Things New* which tells the story of a widow and her daughters as they attempt to salvage their life in the aftermath of the Civil War. Not only is it just such a fitting book to read after the trilogy, it's a beautiful reminder of how much was won and lost during a dark time in American History.

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## **Lunar Chronicles**

Audio or Book

I'm not a big sci-fi reader. It took me forever and a day to make my way through *iRobot*, which was nothing at all like the movie that I have watched far too many times, it being a favourite of my husband's. I wouldn't say I enjoyed the book as much as I endured it, but that might be more due to the fact that it was also more a collection of short stories.

So when I heard about the Lunar Chronicles in various book unboxing on youtube, I smiled and moved on. When it was a suggested "fun read" for one of my teens year of biology, I became a little more interested, but when I caught site of the cover: a robotic leg in a high heel shoe, I moved on with life.

Yet, during the craziness of 2020 when our own small town library was closed I was pretty desperate for some new title to sweep me away. It was during that time that our local library hooked up with Bolinda Audio for a fun new app called *Borrow Box*, which opened up a whole nw world of Audios for our state library users.

This allowed me to listen to the first book in the series without having to use an Audible credit or purchasing the book from a shop, a perfect arrangement because if I disliked the book, no biggie!

The funny thing is, I didn't dislike the book, I plowed through it, and then grabbed the second, and eventually the third. I'm blown away with how the author has rewritten three well known fairy tales and set them in a sci-fi setting!

All three books hinge on each other, and you wouldn't want to read them out of order of you'd have many surprised ruined, but I think I can give you a premise of the whole series without giving anything away.

Book 1's main focus is Cinder, a future version of Cinderella who just so happens to be an Asian cyborg, in an anti-cyborg society. Her father is dead, her stepmother hates her, and she even has some step-sisters. There are many familiar aspects to the story if you are familiar with the general story of Cinderella, but there is also enough uniqueness to this series to make it delightful and surprising as you read through.

Book 2's main focus is Scarlet, a futuristic French Red Riding Hood who lives with her grandmother on a farm where they grow organic vegetables. There's an alien named Wolf who plays a crucial roll, Cinder makes multiple appearances, and again if you are familiar with the general story of Red Riding Hood you'll have some tells for this story while also having some surprises along the way. However, be forewarned, both Book 1 & Book 2 have major cliff hanger endings. It is without a doubt that Meyer had little issue getting her readers psyched and lined up for each instalment in this trilogy.

Book 3 is about Cress, better known in older fairy tales as Rapunzel. This Rapunzel's tower is a spaceship orbiting just far enough in space that she is a prisoner for her homeland, and kept out of reach of earth as well. Cress plays a crucial roll in the story, and we unknowingly met her in previous books.

Again, there are some similarities between Cress' story and the Rapunzel story most of us know, but far more surprises seem to jump out in this book than in the previous two. Perhaps because I am least familiar with Rapunzel's story, or perhaps because Earth and Luna are headed into a climatic battle.

This series is geared for Young Adults, and I can understand why, but I confess I really really enjoyed this series. It was an ironic time to listen to it too considering there is a plague within the series that, when one person catches, everyone freaks out while the person is taken off to quarantine.

I hesitated to add this, because I haven't made it to Book 4 yet, but I've enjoyed this series so much I opted to include it anyway.



I had intentions of writing book reviews here now and again, and this seemed a perfect opportunity to share just a few of the series I have read, fallen in love with, and in most cases reread a few times over.

I had a few others I wanted to share as well, but some of these reviews became quite lengthy, not to mention some of the other book series were geared towards a younger audience. Not that I mind that, but I thought it might be more enjoyable to create another post at another time with a series aimed at a younger age level that are so enjoyable I've read them a few times over too.

