

YA Café Podcast
Episode 43: *Death Prefers Blondes*
31 January 2019

Speaker 1: 00:00 Welcome to the YA Cafe, where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode, we'll be talking about *Death Prefers Blondes* by Caleb Roehrig. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books. *Music*

Ad: 00:21 Have you tried the Radio Public app? It's a great app where you can find all of your favorite podcasts like this one. You'll experience the same great content for free and we'll receive a small kickback every time you listen there. This is a great way to support any podcast you enjoy. Come find us over on Radio Public. *Music*

Speaker 2: 00:43 Welcome y'all. As always, our first segment will be spoiler free and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher.

Danielle: 00:50 I'm Danielle Hall an an 8th and 9th grade English teacher, and I blog at teachnouvelle.com. And our guest today is books. Bookstagrammer and friend of the podcast, Courtney from [@coco_chasing_adventures!](https://www.instagram.com/coco_chasing_adventures/) Hey Courtney!

Courtney: 01:00 Hi Guys. How are you doing today?

Danielle: 01:03 Good! Thanks for joining us.

Courtney: 01:06 I'm happy to be here.

Danielle: 01:06 So, I know we're in January and it's been a minute, but how did your NaNoWriMo go?

Courtney: 01:12 It went good, I didn't make the 50,000 words, but I got pretty close and I'm hoping to finish this month.

Danielle: 01:19 What are you writing?

Courtney: 01:21 I'm writing a fantasy that's a little maybe romance and lots of black magic.

Danielle: 01:27 Yeah! *Laughter* Our book this week is *Death Prefers Blondes* by Caleb Roehrig. By Day Margo Manning appears to be your average vapid socialite heiress, but by night she is the leader of a highly skilled group of drag wearing thieves, pulling off notorious heists and making hundreds of thousands of dollars. It's a perfect balance for Margo until a series of disasters causes her to live in twined together and increasingly dangerous ways. Can Margo keep herself and her friends safe from the threats that are high crime lifestyle has brought into their world? We'll see!

Danielle: 02:00 That's a great summary Amanda.

Amanda: 02:01 Thanks Danielle. I felt great about it.

Danielle: 02:04 Alright, so the elevator pitch for this book was that it is a heist novel about a group of teen drag Queens. Courtney, I know you had a lot of expectations going into this. What were you excited for?

Courtney: 02:18 Well, I had actually read an article, on Book Riot about this upcoming release. So, I was excited to see the diversity in the characters as relates to drag culture. Specifically, Caleb made this comments, "it's challenged gender conformity, emphasizes femininity over masculinity and gleefully rebels in a lot of the stereotypes that queer phobic people have used to mock the LGBT community for generations." So, I was excited to see his play on that and the premise of the novel. How you Amanda?

Amanda: 02:49 So, I agree. I was also, you know, excited about the premise because who doesn't love poking the bear? That is the gender binary with drag and Jewel thievery. So, I was excited going into it. I think that a lot of the highest elements didn't quite work for me, but I really loved that we had this great diverse cast of drag queens with different backgrounds, different reasons for going into crime, different relationships with each other. And I thought it was a really cool ensemble cast. I would've loved to see more of the ensemble this from it, but I think overall that it was really cool to have all of these different drag queen thieves with different backgrounds. What about you, Danielle?

Danielle: 03:27 Well, I liked the heist I saw Ocean's Eight twice and like have seen the Ocean's, movies several times. Like I love heist movies. I wrote a will, like not successfully, but I tried to write a heist nano. *Laughter* I got my 50,000 words but they like weren't the right words *Laughter* but, it's fine.

Courtney: 03:49 So, now you have to share them clearly. *Laughter*

Danielle: 03:54 Um, and I had teen thieves too and one of Amanda's , thing going into it that she said to me was like, Danielle, I want to read about crime for crime sake. Like you don't need to have noble reasons, like you need to give your character's like just a love of crime because in the Ocean's movies, like sometimes there's like motivation and like revenge and stuff. But sometimes they want that money.

Amanda: 04:19 Yeah. I think this was a good balance because like they wanted money for like ostensibly good reasons or whatever, but they still just wanted stuff that wasn't theirs and I liked it. I mean obviously you know, you don't want to steal like medicine, but I mean stealing fancy artwork from

Danielle: 04:37 Rich people.

Amanda: 04:38 Rich people, Sure! I'm on board with that.

Danielle: 04:40 Me Too. Alright. So we have in addition to Margo, who is a white bisexual girl, we have these four dudes. We have Davon who is a drag queen. He's like the most experienced drag queen of the lot. He's also the car man. We have Quino & Axel who are brothers and Quino is the acrobat and Axel is something.

Amanda: 05:07 What did Axel do?

Danielle: 05:08 I feel like he's just like a second, like a lieutenant.

Amanda: 05:12 Okay.

Danielle: 05:13 And then we have Leif who...

Amanda: 05:16 Is a ballerina.

Danielle: 05:17 Oh yeah, he's a dancer. We didn't really have a grifter. There was no grifting and at one point it was lamp shaded that like Margo doesn't do grifting. I love that.

Amanda: 05:27 But we had all of our other tropes, like you've got your queue and your gadgets and..

Danielle: 05:32 Mastermind

Courtney: 05:32 Right.

Amanda: 05:32 Yeah.

Danielle: 05:33 But no grifting, I'm just saying. *Laughter* I feel like heist teams can have a grifter.

Courtney: 05:39 They should have a grifter. Until you said that i was like, you know what, maybe that's what was missing.

Amanda: 05:45 Maybe that's the thing. *Laughter*

Courtney: 05:47 That was it.

Amanda: 05:48 That's what this book needed more characters. *Laughter*

- Danielle: 05:52 We will come back to that in the spoiler section. But um, I really, I said I enjoyed the heist and Courtney you and I had different opinions on the amount of technicality in the heist. I really liked the technical details.
- Courtney: 06:06 You know what it was, is that after about 20 pages of swipe left kick right *Laughter* I started to skip past those kinds of panels, like okay, well they got into a fight and then what? And I also am a person of character driven storylines. So I was more interested in what the person was feeling as a result of that, or what they revealed about themselves in the fight less than the fight itself. So, if they were fighting, but what he revealed was, he was fighting, he was fighting against his anger or this person represented some characteristics. I would probably be more interested, but I couldn't take too much more of the fight scenes and the technical things or the screwdrivers or whatever they were talking about. *Laughter*
- Danielle: 06:47 I really liked your thoughts and it made me think that what the world needs is like a hybrid graphic novel, like pros heist so that the graphic novel is the fight and the heist portions and the next chapter. They're all sitting around at coffee talking about what the heist meant to them and that'll be like pros.
- Courtney: 07:09 Yes. *Laughter*
- Amanda: 07:10 I am not sure I have ever read a heist book that I thought really worked. I think that there's something about a heist movie and the way you can like hide information and do like a big reveal with flashbacks to the seeds to it the way you do in your Ocean's movies and Logan Lucky.
- Danielle: 07:29 Leverage which is a TV show which you skipped over and it's great.
- Amanda: 07:32 Well, because I didn't watch it
- Courtney: 07:34 Leverage is clearly my favorite show. *laughter* You guys we're kindred now because that is what I mean, that's my show.

Amanda: 07:40 Yeah. I mean I think that you just don't get those really great moments in books in the same way. I don't know. I mean, I know, I know that everybody says Six of Crows is like the best, highest novel, but I have not read it so...

Courtney: 07:54 Whoa...

Amanda: 07:54 I know. *Laughter*

Danielle: 07:54 It's on our TBR.

Courtney: 07:56 Listen, I'm like, I'm not going to judge you, but Six of Crows pretty awesome.

Amanda: 08:01 You're not judging us except you're kind of judging us. *Laughter*

Danielle: 08:03 TBR, TBR. So, um, one thing about Leverage and also to go back to my NaNo, like another thing that Amanda and I talked a lot about when I was writing the heist novel is like what you share with the readers and viewers and like what you keep secret so that there's still that element of surprise for them. And I didn't feel like this book kept very much secret from us.

Amanda: 08:30 Yeah. But I thought it was fine. I just thought it was a different kind of highest. Like it's a very step by step heist. It's all clear to you what's happening and what's going to happen versus like, oh, I can't believe that's how they pulled it off. That's the reveal you get in Leverage or Oceans or whatever.

Danielle: 08:46 Yeah.

Amanda: 08:46 So, as much as you love heist Courtney and you didn't love the detail in it, but like did it feel like good and heisty to you?

Courtney: 08:53 I still enjoyed it. I definitely was surprised at some elements. I was definitely enjoying the characters and what they revealed about themselves through the heist. And I did like some of the technical pieces of it. I definitely liked some of the science, I'm a scientist engineer so I was definitely into that. It just probably went a little longer than I wanted it to, but I still thought it was a good heist. And I appreciate it that some explanations I really liked because if I didn't get it the first time, Caleb's a little bit more time explaining it one more time. It's which I think is well suited for a YA book you know. It's mature, but it also gives you an opportunity to really understand what's taking place with, for the next part happens. I don't think he leaves his behind.

Danielle: 09:33 Right.

Amanda: 09:33 I agree. I think that's so important because the last heist novel that I read, I'm not going to say what it was...

Danielle: 09:39 Was it mine?

Amanda: 09:40 No, *Laughter* but the last heist novel I read, I spent so much of the novel going, like, what is even happening right now? Like I don't know what we're going after. I don't know what's going on. So, I really like you said, I never felt left behind in this book. *Laughter*

Danielle: 09:58 Right. So, Courtney, you glossed over it, but you told us before we started recording that you work in biometrics.

Courtney: 10:06 I do

Danielle: 10:07 That is a word that makes me tingly *Laughter* tell me about biometrics.

Courtney: 10:12 So, I work in biometric forensics for the Army. Primarily it's about you being specific qualities of you to be able to identify you. In my case, for altruistic purposes

Danielle: 10:25 Likely. *Laughter*

Courtney: 10:25 Yes, for my purposes mostly about force protection. So in the novel, for example, you might have a biometric that says don't open this safe or don't open this door or whatever without a biometric response. And so, and that's kind of things that I work on. So, I appreciated his attention to detail from an engineering perspective. I really liked that. Um, the nerd in me, I suppose.

Danielle: 10:49 I love it. And with that, friends, we'll take our first break. When we come back, we'll share about Things We Like a Latte. Then, we'll return to our discussion of Death Prefers Blondes and dig a little deeper.

Music: 11:01 *Music*

Ad: 11:14 Hey, friends! Are you sitting there thinking 'this podcast is awwwwweeeesome'? I know me too. Well, here's how to support us and our authors'. Preorder our book choices through our affiliate links. We'll get a small kickback and preorders count towards an author's first week totals. Everybody wins! Next week we're going to discuss On the Come Up by Angie Thomas. If you'd like to help us keep bringing you great content, preorder it through the link in our shownotes. Happy reading!

Music: 11:38 *Music*

Amanda: 11:52 Welcome back, y'all. It's time for Things We Like a Latte! Courtney, what's your brew of choice this week?

Courtney: 11:52 I'm so excited guys that you guys are doing on the come up next week. That is actually my Things We Like a Latte.

Amanda: 11:59 Oooo...

Courtney: 11:59 I really love Angie Thomas' The Hate U Give. So, I'm looking forward to her new book and I just saw the cover and it's beautiful. So, anyways I'll be till next week.

Danielle: 12:09 Awesome!

Courtney: 12:10 Danielle, what are the Things We Like a Latte?

Danielle: 12:13 So, we started watching Killer Mike's Trigger Warning on Netflix...

Courtney: 12:18 Oooo...

Danielle: 12:19 And, I'm like guys, I'm just so culturally unaware. I did not know that this dude existed but he is really funny *laughter* and really smart and his first episode is called Living While Black and basically he laments the loss of black owned businesses and black owned economic ventures and he tries to see if he can like live in the black economy for three days and ends up being super hard even though historically when the United States was more segregated there were like strong black communities that had every aspect of the economy covered. So that was super fascinating to see him do that. And also got me thinking about like, well, could I live by only supporting women owned businesses and ventures, like I'd have to find a grocery store that was owned by women or like queer owned businesses and economic ventures.

Amanda: 13:21 That would be hard.

Courtney: 13:22 That would be interesting.

Danielle: 13:24 Yeah. And so it really got me thinking about all these things that we use every day and like where they come from and who it economically benefits when I buy them. Really good show Trigger Warning by Killer Mike. How about you Amanda? What's your brew choice?

Amanda: 13:40 So, my brother and I argue a lot. We agree on very little and there was a moment a year or so ago where I got this text from my brother and it said we can disagree on a lot of things, but can we both agree how great it is to watch spoiled, rich kids who flew to an island for a concert gets stranded? *Laughter* And now I can relive this moment of united this with my brother over what, how do you pronounce this word? Danielle?

Danielle: 14:14 Sibling schadenfreude.

Amanda: 14:16 Schadenfreude.

Danielle: 14:19 Schadenfreude *Singing*

Amanda: 14:19 With the two...

Danielle: 14:20 Making feel glad that I'm not you. *Singing* *Laughter*

Amanda: 14:23 With the two documentaries. One is on Hulu, it's called Fyre Fraud, the other is on Netflix and it's called Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened. And they're both just really enjoyable to watch. They're not particularly thought provoking or inspiring, but they are just great to watch and just have your Schadenfreude and popcorn *Laughter* But, also like you get to follow this whole road map to disaster. And both the documentaries have a great way of telling this story. And I really enjoyed both of them. I'm not sure I could pick a favorite because they both do really different things. But yeah, I thought it was really good.

Danielle: 15:17 We're going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll return to our discussion on Death Prefers Blondes. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast. We'll be back after this quick break. We'll be back. *Music*

Speaker 2: 15:37 Welcome back, y'all, to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on Death Prefers Blondes by Caleb Roehrig. If you haven't read this yet, we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.

Danielle: 15:49 Spoilers! *Singing*

Amanda: 15:50 So, I want to start us off with my number one thing that would have made me like this book so much more.

Danielle: 15:56 Alright.

Amanda: 15:56 And I liked it like I thought it was good, but here's what it needed. Margo needed to be a trans-girl or a drag queen.

Danielle: 16:04 Yes.

Courtney: 16:05 I have to agree. For all the diversity that's in the cast they weren't really the main thing. So, I guess I wanted to see diverse characters as a part of the main story-line. I wanted to see the entire ensemble together make the plot.

Danielle: 16:21 Yes.

Courtney: 16:21 Not just Margo.

Danielle: 16:22 The middle third of the book or like the Middle 50% because it's 20% too long. *Laughter* Is Margo alone and I missed the DQ's. At one point I was like our DQ's got back burned. Where'd they go? And I would have liked them to stick around or like you said, for Margo to be truly a drag queen herself.

Amanda: 16:48 So, I mentioned to Danielle, Courtney that I did think that Margo was trans at the beginning of the book for a couple reasons. One was that she said I'm not technically a drag queen and the other was like, she had this like barb situation with Valentina, where Valentina says something about like, "what about all your other fake parts", which seems like the kind of thing that like a terrible person would say to a transgender girl. So I thought that Margo was going to be trans and then when she wasn't like, I was pretty disappointed.

Danielle: 17:16 Right, and we just come off of the Meredith Russo book and one of Meredith Russo's things was like trans characters need to have adventures and do awesome things. And I was like, well this would be an awesome thing.

- Courtney: 17:28 I thought the book was good and I love the diversity and the characters I just, I really enjoyed it and I love the backstories that each character is allowed to have and they weren't stereotypically bad or anything like that. I just wanted more from Margo. I guess with this one, he had so much more potential to take Margo to the next level, so maybe in the followup book he will take it to the next level and reveal something great about her.
- Danielle: 17:52 Right, and we don't know that there will be a followup book, but like we all felt it.
- Amanda: 17:56 Oh yeah, they're going to Europe for revenge. Like that's clear followup territory.
- Danielle: 18:02 Okay. So, let's talk about Europe. Uh, at the 70 Margo goes to Venice, like just goes to Venice.
- Amanda: 18:11 I think it's like an homage to like all of these, you know, dramatic chase scenes that always seemed to happen in Venice. Like why Venice, I don't know, but it definitely slowed down the action there.
- Courtney: 18:21 I'm just two ways about it. Like I really, I thought it was a weird placement. You could tell it was a mechanism to move the plot to be able to, I guess if it was a hero's journey. You need it to be able to go somewhere and return back to the main plot. You have to be motivated and maybe that was the mechanism by which that motivation occurs. So, I'm not sure I liked that part of it, but I did love that when he described it, it sounded beautiful. It sounded fun. I really, truly. And maybe that's again that followup. It could have been his own thing. I mean Venice was its own thing really in the middle of the book.
- Danielle: 18:53 Yeah, Maybe instead of following Marco to Venice, like maybe we stuck with the boys and saw them do a heist on their own and they needed Margo to mastermind.
- Amanda: 19:04 That could have been good.
- Courtney: 19:05 Yes.

Amanda: 19:05 I don't know if we need a third or fourth highest fifth heist.

Courtney: 19:09 Yeah, that would have been good or it could have been the heist. That could have been the heist where something happens to the machine has to return back from Venice now. That was her call to action.

Danielle: 19:19 Yeah. Okay, we're rewriting the book. *Laughter*

Courtney: 19:22 That's the fun part in heist stories. That's kind of what I liked about Caleb. He gives you some room to explore what you would've done if you were in that position. And so, I mean that makes heist books fun.

Danielle: 19:33 Yeah.

Amanda: 19:33 Can we change gears and talk about the great little romance that happened between Leif & Quino ?

Courtney: 19:42 Woo! Hot stuff.

Amanda: 19:43 It was hot. *Laughter* So, I liked it because a lot of times, especially with gay and queer characters YA the romance is very like hold hands, peck on the cheek *laughter* and like Leif and Quino we're like, man, we want to go to pound-town. *Laughter* Like right now.

Courtney: 19:58 I loved it! One of the things is I have to give Caleb kudos for is that he really allow a true hot romance to happen. It wasn't cheesy. It was great for a lonely night here. *Laughter*

Danielle: 20:13 And like I think that Leif and Quino, get their romance and their steamy scenes. Um, but we also have Axel and Davon who are friends with benefits. I like the juxtaposition of like Leif and Quino who like want to be in a relationship and Axel and Davon who just want to go at it.

Amanda: 20:35 And...

Courtney: 20:36 I agree.

Amanda: 20:37 And Margo and Dallas who also are doing, their like, flirty starting a relationship thing.

Courtney: 20:42 So, what did you guys think about Margo and Dallas?

Amanda: 20:45 I liked it. I thought they were, uh, you know, I thought it was a good couple. I thought it was a good way to get Margo more behind the scenes information about the lawyer without adding another character that didn't add a lot to the plot.

Danielle: 20:56 There was like the fake out where we were supposed to think that Dallas was betraying Margo. What'd you think about that?

Courtney: 21:03 You know, I was tricked. This is where the heist element worked for me a little bit because sometimes if you said heist books are very hard to follow sometimes and I think he did a good job or tricking me. *Laughter* I'm like, Oh man!, *Laughter* I was counting on you. And then when you realize that it was a part of the plan, I, I thought that was one of those good reveals one of those satisfying reveals.

Danielle: 21:26 Yeah.

Amanda: 21:27 Yeah, I agree. I was tricked for a second until he actually went into the meeting. I was tricked, but then when we saw Dallas go into the meeting, I was like, 'oh, okay, this is part of the plan.'

Courtney: 21:37 Yes, yes. *Laughter* Because I was like, 'Oh man, don't tear my heart out.'

Amanda: 21:41 I know, I was like, oh, I like this random guy who's just dudein' long.

Danielle: 21:45 It is the hardest thing about us both reading the same books, like you know, she's like "Dallas no!" And I have to be like poker face, which I don't have one of those.

Amanda: 21:56 She does not at all ****Laughter***

Danielle: 21:56 So, usually I just have to leave the room.

Amanda: 22:02 I wanted to talk a little bit about Georgia, who was Devon's drag mom. I liked her presence because a lot of people do develop very close relationships with their drag mothers and I think that was an important thing to show in the book. I did not like that they made her a drug addict. I felt like this book is pure escapism. Like it's like high absurdity, you know? I just didn't think it was necessary to put in there. I feel like it Kinda slowed down the plot. I dunno wasn't for me. What did y'all think?

Danielle: 22:34 So, did it help that all that Georgia was like an adult? So, that teens can still identify with the teens who provided escapism? It's not like a teen was a drug addict, It was removed from the teens because it was an adult.

Amanda: 22:50 But most teens who are impacted by drugs in this way are not drug addicts themselves. They're the children of drug addicts. There's an epidemic in this country...

Danielle: 22:58 Right.

Amanda: 22:59 ...of people dying of Opioid overdoses. So, for many kids it's not like they're friends on drugs. That's their parents on drugs.

Danielle: 23:06 Right.

Amanda: 23:06 So, the opposite of that for them.

Danielle: 23:09 Yeah, I guess I can see that.

Courtney: 23:12 I was connected to Georgia as a character because it was more to me that I'm glad that Davon, when he had his flaws, he found someone, so I think I just liked that even in this weakened state, she meant something to him and I liked her as a mechanism by which you can see how much, how caring the Davon was. So, I liked that part. I guess I didn't draw too much. Other than that. I probably didn't connect as much to the drug addiction portion of the story.

Amanda: 23:39 I just felt like it wasn't necessary because it was erased so quickly, was just like she went to rehab and then she's better and decided to be better, which is I don't think it's fair

Courtney: 23:51 This is not reality, not the 31 years of addiction or however long.

Danielle: 23:54 Yeah, and I think this would have been a good opportunity. Not to like rewrite the book again, but like this would have been a good opportunity instead of having Georgia there at all just to have Davon with his super supportive parents and have him be doing crime for crime sake to like test out his tech genius and his car genius and all of his geniuses.

Courtney: 24:17 Yeah.

Amanda: 24:17 And maybe having having Leif have this very supportive drag mother because he had such unsupportive parents.

Danielle: 24:24 Oooo!

Amanda: 24:24 Just changing the whole thing. *Laughter*

Courtney: 24:27 So, I really liked Davon's character. So, from my perspective sometimes in the black community, in the black community, a lack of acceptance of LGBT, anything. And a lot of times you see toxic masculinity in black community where black kids, I have a really tough time as in any kid would and coming out. So I liked the idea of them showing a black father and a black mother being supportive of their son in his endeavors and then enabling him to be able to fight against those people who would not love him the same way they will. I thought that was really good, and so for that reason I would have loved to see those parents persist in the story-line.

Danielle: 25:11 Yes.

Courtney: 25:11 That was my thought on that. I really liked his parents. I just love the role that they played in. I'm glad that that wasn't a weakness that he had as a character in him that having supportive parents.

Danielle: 25:21 Yeah.

Amanda: 25:22 Agreed. So overall we thought that this was a fun read that maybe dragged on a little bit in some places..

Danielle: 25:28 "dragged on" haaa!.

Amanda: 25:30 I didn't know that would have happened, I'm really proud of myself. *Laughter* So, if you have kids who really just love heist, like Ocean's Eight and Leverage and all these kinds of things and are up with a little bit of breaking the gender binary, I think this will be a great recommendation for them.

Danielle: 25:46 That's our show for today, friends. Thank you so much for joining us, Courtney.

Courtney: 25:50 Thank you guys for having me!

Danielle: 25:52 You can find Courtney on Instagram at [@coco_chasing_adventures](#), and you can find us on Instagram and Twitter [@yacafepodcast](#) we'd love to hear from you! And if you're enjoying the show, leave us a review. Happy reading!