Pick Up & Deliver 874: Reading Roundup, Q3 2026

Welcome to pick Up and deliver, the podcast where I pick up my audio recorder as I step off the train and deliver an episode to you while I walk home. I'm Brendan Riley.

[Intro music]

Well, greetings, listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. I'm walking home in mid-October. The sun is out. We're in excellent sweater weather with temperatures in the low sixties. I think right now, if I had to guess. It's very comfy without a jacket, but you could tell this evening I would want one. And this morning I wanted one. It was forty two degrees, I think, when I left the house this morning. So lovely weather. I was looking at the podcast record and trying to think what I might talk to you about today. And I realized we're in quarter four of 2026, so I thought I would do the reading roundup for quarter three of 2026.

For those of you new to the podcast, each quarter of the year, for every three months, I do a reading roundup episode where I talk about the books that I've read or listened to in the last three months. Over the summer, I had a good time, but I ended up kind of stalling out on the reading of physical books. So I have ten books to talk to you about today. I think six or seven of them are audiobooks I listen to, and only three, I think are physical books. So, uh, yeah, that's kind of where I am.

I've been kind of stalled out on the two towers for a while now. I got to, I was making progress and then I just got distracted a bit. I've been pretty tired when I'm going to bed lately, so I haven't been reading in bed, which is usually where I do my physical book reading. But I've been getting in bed and going right to sleep, so I've fallen behind a little bit. Perhaps here at the end of the year, I can speed things up a little bit in October, November, and December. This is a good personal self spur to get back to my physical reading. All right, so here are the books that I read or listen to in quarter three of twenty twenty six.

The first book I read in, uh, in like two days or I listened to in two days in July. This is **true grit**. True grit is written by Charles Portis, and the audiobook was narrated by Donna Tartt, who also did a really good introduction to it. This is one of those books that I, I think I was listening to a podcast. I think it was the member mailbag of the Judge John Hodgman podcast. And Jesse and John were talking about how great two True Grit is as a book. And I said to myself, well, self, let's listen. Let's see if it's available. And it was available in audiobook form. So I listened to it, went through it very quickly in just a couple of days because it's really good.

True grit tells the story of a girl who's thirteen years old, whose father is murdered by a cowardly cowhand so he can steal the father's gold and his horse. And the girl, not trusting the law and order to do what needs doing, hires a marshal at freelance to go hunt him down and get the bounty for the man who killed her father. That's a pretty straightforward story. But that is the story. There's not a whole lot more to it, but it is impeccably written. The dialogue is excellent. I'm going to have to read some more Charles Portis, I think, to see what other wonders he works with a conversation. Um, particularly the characterization of the little girl is very tight and funny and witty, and Donna Tartt does an excellent job narrating it. Her voice is reminiscent of Holly Hunter in a good way. And yeah, I just I thought it was great. I really would like to read some more of the work or other books of that caliber. So true grit. Excellent.

Now, if I was going to try to play a game that's thematically connected, there's a couple options. One is there's a really good two player hidden movement game or two player deduction game, which is themed around like nineteen suave nineteen sixties heist game. I think it's called what is it called? Uh, it's from Red Raven games. And one person is a US marshal chasing a bank robber. The other person is bank robber trying to get away. There's each turn. You're revealing stuff about where the other person might be hiding. As the ranger, you have to find all of the hideouts of the other person. The other person's got to get away. This seems like one kind of pairing that would go really well. Fugitive. It's called fugitive.

One pairing that would go really well with the game. If you want something more Western themed, I suppose bang the dice game would work. Or you could go for something a little more open, like Western Legends, which is not a game I've played, but seems to have room for this kind of narrative to emerge. Even Firefly, the game still has the sort of Western theme which the idea of like hunting down a mad a bad guy who's gone on the run and there's a bounty for him. Those feel right up the alley of those kinds of games. So that's true grit.

Next up, we have **Axiom's end**. I listened to this in July as well. This is the first book of a trilogy of books by Lindsey Ellis, which are sort of first contact books. That's what they are. They're first contact books about humankind coming into contact with aliens. They take place in the near future, but mostly present day and it's pretty good. Um, it's kind of an adventure story. The main character is a bit down and out. Her father is a famous anti-government conspiracy monger, very reminiscent of Edward Snowden. And she's famous for having him as her father. And meanwhile, there's an alien running around in her aunt works in the government alien office.

So I thought it was pretty entertaining. I think I will read the other two books in the trilogy or listen to them when I get the chance. I think the game that I would play in pairing with this is **Visitor to Blackwood Grove**, which is a game about trying to understand an alien before the government understands it. Looks pretty neat. Or it is pretty neat.

Next up, we have the **fellowship of the ring**. This is a book I started a couple months earlier, but I finished During quarter three. So there it is. I haven't read this in a long time, so I'm not super familiar with the page by page the way a lot of people are who are rereading it. I'm enjoying the story, but it is really slow and I think it feels slower because I know many of the main plot point plot beats because I'm so familiar with the films and the games and such. So it's almost counterproductive to be so familiar with it, because it's hard to discover the events when most of the big events I see coming. Now, there's a lot in the book that's not in the films, so I am certainly discovering interesting and new stuff as I'm reading, but the writing style is just a little slower than I usually enjoy. And while it's good, it's not knocking my socks off. That's fellowship of the ring.

And like I said, I'm still working on the two towers, mostly because of this sort of pacing That is fellowship of the ring by J.R.R. Tolkien. If you're going to match it with something, I think the Lord of the rings cooperative card game or cooperative board game is the way to go. This is the game where you are literally playing the fellowship, trying to get to Mount Doom and throw the ring in the mountain so it's right up the alley of the story being told.

Next up, we have the **Art thief, a true Story of love, crime, and a Dangerous Obsession** by Michael Finkel. We read this in August of 2026 as part of a road trip. My wife read it to me. So again, I did not read it. I listened to it, but it was really interesting. So this is the story of a guy and his girlfriend who went on a art theft spree over the course of like fifteen years throughout Europe, and it's estimated they sold something like one and a half billion dollars worth of art. They stole a couple hundred pieces of art, many of which were worth a lot of money. And the wild thing about it is that they didn't like they weren't cat burglars who broke in in the middle of the night.

They weren't super elite criminals who were firing flash bangs and holding up with armed with guns and stuff. They just knew the psychology of people at museums, of guards and like, they just like, grab stuff and put it in their pocket and then leave. It was wild. The guy got really good at removing paintings from frames, so he would grab a painting off the wall, quickly remove it from the frame, ditch the frame in a corner behind some furniture, and walk out with the painting under his coat. He would steal silver. He would steal all kinds of stuff, and he often stole from small regional museums that didn't have good security. And because he and his girlfriend stole from all sorts of different places, it was never. And they didn't hold anybody up. They didn't make it obvious. Like people would discover stuff was stolen when later they noticed that it was gone.

And sometimes stuff wouldn't get noticed at all because like, there'd be like a display case with six things in it. And he would give me the display case open, take two of the things and spread out the other four things. So it looked like there are only four things in the case to begin with, so they don't even look like anything's missing. He did stuff like that. It was wild. Now he was kind of a jerk to his girlfriend, who didn't really want to steal nearly as much as he was stealing. And he went a little out of control with it, but eventually he was caught. And it's just a really interesting story. That's the Art thief. A true, true story of love, crime, and a dangerous obsession.

Now it feels like the game to play with this would be **Burgle Bros**. Which is a game about breaking into a casino. And that fits very well. I guess you could also play a game like modern Art if you wanted to reflect on the art part of the thing. What's interesting about that character, that person is at the beginning of the of his career, he was really interested in art for art's sake. He was stealing art because he couldn't afford to buy it, and he thought he deserved it more than the people, the museums. He should be able to look at it whenever

he wanted. By the end, it felt like it was an obsession to steal. He wasn't treating the art well. Some things were broken or damaged in his home because he didn't have room for the art he was stealing. So in the end, he wasn't, uh. In the end, he was definitely not just doing it for the love of the art. But at the beginning, that's kind of what it seemed like.

All right, so next up, we have **death of a witch**. This is by M.C. Beaton. I read it in August. I did read this on paper. Uh, death of a witch is another of the Hamish Macbeth novels. Probably number fifteen or twenty, something like that. These are cute little, uh, detective stories. They suffer a bit from what I can only describe as M.C. Beaton's relatively vicious depiction of women, that Hamish seems a bit sexist, and the way that the women in the stories are depicted is not particularly kind to them either. They're. The stories are generally pretty funny, although I would say death of a witch was less funny than a lot of the other Hamish Macbeth books have been. The one I read before this I thought was pretty good. This one I thought was mediocre. So we'll see. I'll read one or two more. If they don't get better again, I may stop reading them for a while. Um, but I try to read one or two a year maybe one a quarter, because there's just a ton of them and I wouldn't mind finishing and I still get enjoyment out of them. Uh, as a game. I think any of the detective type stories would fit here, although something like awkward guests probably close most closely matches the kind of story that gets told in Hamish Macbeth Mysteries.

Next up, we have **the Vor game** and **Cetaganda** and **Ethan of Athos**. These are three Lois McMaster novels, three Lois McMaster Bujold novels that I listened to in a row. They're all relatively short. Many of them are about, um, Miles. They're from the Chronicles of Miles, and they're just good space opera adventure stories. This Lois McMaster Bujold, uh, Miles Sarkozy, that's his name. Or Vorkosigan. Miles Vorkosigan. And they're fun. Uh, they definitely benefit from, you know, having a character who is delightfully competent and enjoying seeing them tackle a difficult problem and solve them. The characters are intimately carefully crafted.

And while some of the stuff that happens in the books is a little sketchy in terms of contemporary taste, Bujold has her heart in the right place, I think. And these stories are really fun and well told. Looking forward to listening to more of them. I've been enjoying listening to them on audiobook. They're well, well recorded and easy to digest. I think I listened to three in a row because I was doing some manual labor stuff that benefited from just sort of mainlining these books.

I've got two left. **Body in the Library** by Agatha Christie. I listened to this one because my daughter was listening to it, and I thought, oh, that'd be fun. I'll I listen to that. I thought it was okay. Not great. It's a pretty bog standard mystery where we're trying to figure out who done it. There's lots of possible suspects. And so I thought it was fine. Nothing compelling one way or another for me in that one.

And again, like the Hamish Macbeth story, **Awkward Guests** is your best bet there. Finally, I played Iron Sunrise. This is a Charles Stross. Or listen to Iron Sunrise. This is a Charles Stross novel, the second of two. I don't remember what the first one was called, but the. It is in the far future when there are human beings across the galaxy and we've spread through these ancient wormholes that we did not build. But we are learning to understand in tone and shape. The world of this story feels most like the world of Murderbot.

Singularity Sky is the first one in the series. They're delightful to listen to. Well written. I always enjoy a good Charles Stross novel, and there aren't very many bad ones as far as I'm concerned. So that's what's what with that. Uh, I'm not sure what sci fi adventure story I would suggest to go with this one, but probably something like the Expanse board game. Maybe, uh, or even if you wanted to push about civilizations coming together, you could do sidereal confluence, although that would be a stretch to meet the tone. Maybe something even more like Project Elite would fit better if you were trying to match the tone that is Iron Sunrise by Charles Stross. So those are the books that I mostly listen to. And a couple of them I read in July, August, and September of twenty twenty six.

I'd love to hear what you read or listen to. Head over to BoardGameGeek Guild three, two, six nine and share your thoughts on what you read and listened to and what games you've been playing that would go with those. Well, that's about it for me today. I want to say thanks for joining me, and I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

[Exit music]

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