

Robbie McNeil's Hit List

Book Club Kit

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Snacks & Sips

FRENCH TOAST SNACK MIX

In a large bowl, mix together 5 cups French Toast Crunch cereal, 3 cups Rice Chex, 1 cup pretzel sticks, 1 cup pecans.

In a separate bowl, combine 1/4 cup melted butter, 2 tbsp maple syrup, 1/4 cup brown sugar, and 1 tsp cinnamon.

Pour butter mixture over dry ingredients and toss to coat. Microwave 1 minute, stir (don't forget to scrape down the sides). Repeat until blended. Spread mix on a sheet pan to dry and enjoy!

CREAMY COFFEE TRUFFLES

In a saucepan over medium heat, combine 1 can (14oz) of sweetened condensed milk, 2 tbsp butter, 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder, and 1 tbsp espresso powder or instant coffee. Stir constantly until it begins to thicken (you should be able to drag a spatula across the bottom of the pan and not have the two sides immediately come back together).

Pour into a shallow bowl or pan, cover, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight (colder is better!). Scoop approximately 1 tbsp and roll into a ball with your hands. Roll in chocolate sprinkles, cocoa powder, or powdered sugar. Repeat until all of the mixture is used up and enjoy!

ROBBIE'S NOT-A-MORNING-PERSON SUNSET (COCKTAIL)

Pour 1 part vodka, 1 part triple sec, 1 part lemon juice, and 4 parts orange juice into a tall glass over ice. Add a splash of grenadine on top.

WHISK-DEE SOUR (MOCKTAIL)

Mix together 2 parts strong black tea (cooled), 1 part fresh lemon juice (lime juice works too!), and 1 part maple syrup or simple syrup. Pour over ice and garnish with lemon peel.

80s NIGHT CODA SPECIAL (COCKTAIL)

2 parts vodka, 1 part blue curucao, dash of lemon juice, 3 parts water (or soda). Add first 2 to tall glass over ice. Add lemon and water. Garnish with cherry or orange wedge.

Behind the Pages

Robbie's story went through a lot of changes from first draft to final book. Below are some key changes that took place (and some that didn't!). How do you think these would've changed the book?

1. The original book concept was to take place in a futuristic society living on space stations. The setting didn't change to modern day Earth until two or three chapters into the first draft! And the city of Reevesburg wasn't created until about a third of the way into that draft.
2. The first draft started with alternating chapters going between Robbie and Dee's points of view. After a chapter or two from Dee's perspective, it became clear that wasn't the right way to tell the story, so it switched to all Robbie. The only scene in the final version that's not through Robbie's eyes is the prologue (Overture) where James approaches her about becoming a contract killer, but in the first draft, that same scene was actually from Robbie's point of view.
3. At one point, a suggested edit was to have Robbie keeping the financial difficulties of the bar and show a secret from Dee, driving a wedge in their relationship. This change was never implemented, because the idea of having anything in the story truly endanger their trust in one another felt like it went against everything that makes their relationship what it is.
4. The Kyle Lynch job was a relatively late addition. In early drafts, James was dead in the present day, so he couldn't have given Robbie a job! A large part of the reasoning for adding the Lynch job was to show Robbie in action (and her reactions) as a killer. There was also a second scene with her murdering someone in a bar during her training days with James, although it was cut. Robbie didn't kill anyone at all in the first draft.
5. In the outline, Robbie was supposed to kill Nicholas on opening night by (genuine) accident, shooting him while trying to wrest a gun from his hands. Instead, early drafts had Nicholas surviving to be arrested for Alexandria's kidnapping. Robbie hiring someone to have Nicholas killed was the very last change made to the book before it was finalized!

Author Q&A

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WRITE A KILLER MAIN CHARACTER?

When I started brainstorming, the idea of writing a traditional murder mystery didn't really excite me. It usually starts with discovering a victim and then follows the character trying to learn who killed that person. I wanted to sort of flip that script, so I started planning out a story that started with you knowing who the killer is and the story is her trying to figure out who the victim is. The moment I locked in on contract killers, the rest of the story immediately started coming together! And I loved writing the contrasting sides of Robbie: killer, partner, musician. As the saying goes, she contains multitudes—and those multitudes were so fun to write!

WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART OF WRITING THIS BOOK?

Robbie's murders, hands down. She's supposed to have this genius mind, able to see a complex series of events in her head in an instant and intuitively know how to put it into action. I do not have this ability. It's really hard to write a character who is smarter than you in some regard, because then *you* have to try to be that smart. There was one murder that I don't think I planned half as well as Robbie would've, and thankfully, that scene got cut so I didn't have to figure it all out!

WHAT WAS THE MOST FUN PART OF WRITING THIS BOOK?

All of it. Honestly, this entire book was an absolute delight to write. (Editing, on the other hand... There were tears.) Robbie isn't the character I thought I was going to write, and discovering her as I went along was such a delightful process. I also really loved picking the music! I would sometimes spend hours trying to figure out the perfect song for a scene, and every single one I included was an intentional, meaningful choice.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE SCENE?

I have two! The scene in chapter 10 where Robbie and Dee are lounging on the couch throwing popcorn at each other always makes me smile. It's just so very *them*, especially planning brunch and murder in the same breath. I also love the scene where Xavier comes to Coda and overhears that Robbie's going to kill him—and thinks the hit on him was worth only \$20.