



## Waves of YA, Ep 13, The Evolution of YA Science Fiction

### **Transcript:**

00;00;09;02 - 00;00;24;00

Sara

[SARA] Hello and welcome to the Waves of YA, a podcast focused on young adult literacy. Brought to you by the Ocean County Library's Teen Literacy Workgroup. My name is Sara. I'm the branch manager of Waretown. And joining me today, we have...

00;00;24;00 - 00;00;26;08

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I'm Courtney. I'm the teen librarian of the Stafford branch.

00;00;26;21 - 00;00;29;09

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And I'm Colleen. I'm the teen librarian at the Lacey Branch.

00;00;29;21 - 00;00;57;13

Sara

[SARA] In today's episode, we will be discussing Science Fiction. Science fiction is a story that takes place in an imagined future. Society changed by drastic influences such as technological advances, major social change, or environmental disaster. Last decade, there was a boom of popular YA science fiction stories such as Hunger Games, Divergent and Maze Runner. Let's talk about how the genre has evolved and where it is today.

00;00;58;19 - 00;01;05;06

Sara

[SARA] So what is a recent trend that you guys have been seeing in science fiction? And are you a fan of it or no?

00;01;05;22 - 00;01;28;21

Courtney

[COURTNEY] One of the books that I read recently is a perfect example of one of the big trends lately, which is the kind of eco apocalypse, science fiction, some sort of ecological disaster comes about and

ends the world, essentially. But this book I read recently, it's called *The Ones We're Meant to Find* by Joan He. It's just a beautiful story.

00;01;28;21 - 00;01;50;25

Courtney

[COURTNEY] It's like a really intensely atmospheric story told in alternating point of view between two sisters. The one sister woke up alone on an abandoned island. It's been three years. She can't remember much of what happened, but she knows that she has a sister somewhere out there in the world and she needs to figure out how to find her sister.

00;01;51;22 - 00;02;16;05

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And the other point of view is Casey. Her sister, Celia, has been missing for three months and everyone's pretty much given up on any hope of finding her, especially since she took steps before she left to make sure that she couldn't be found. But she decides to retrace the last couple of weeks of her sister's presumed life when she was there to try and figure out what happened.

00;02;16;24 - 00;02;45;11

Courtney

[COURTNEY] All of this is set on a backdrop of a world that is suffering and maybe on the verge of dying due to ecological collapse. Casey and Celia are members of a privileged part of society, and it is set up in such a way so that they're living in these cities up above the world. And they do a lot of their day to day tasks in virtual reality to try and reduce their carbon footprint more or less, to try and extend the lifespan on the environment.

00;02;45;19 - 00;03;06;22

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And so it's got this mystery and this exploration of the social differences between the people who are privileged enough to live in these sky cities and everyone else who is just on the ground suffering the earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes and all that. It's really, really great. Highly recommend it.

00;03;07;28 - 00;03;38;20

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah. I actually have three books on my list to talk about that are all like ecology. Like, does that look post-apocalyptic, ecological things? So the first one is *Dry* by Neal Shusterman. And if you guys don't know, Neal Shusterman is a perennial favorite in YA, he's amazing, he always does a lot of crazy different dystopian books. So this one is called *Dry* and it's about a drought that is just expanding and expanding and expanding until there's severe ordinances against water.

00;03;39;20 - 00;04;00;25

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And you have to like get in line to get water. It's like it's like almost like a gas crisis, but it's like for water, which is even worse. It only is like over the course of a week or so, I think. So it's about

this girl and her brother and their parents go out to get their allotment of water or whatever and they don't come back and everything goes to crap.

00;04;01;18 - 00;04;15;20

Colleen

[COLLEEN] There's writing, there's looting, there's murder. And it's only over the course of a couple of days. It's so realistic of what might happen if you were abandoned when your parents went out and like you had to try to live on your own with your sibling and try to fight for water, just to live and neighbors or against neighbors.

00;04;15;25 - 00;04;34;06

Colleen

[COLLEEN] There's like people that have set up shelters that are like turning away other. It's just like it's so wild that it happened so quickly. It's really, really scary. And then the ending is strange because everything turns out kind of okay. In the end, we get an influx of water, it starts raining, or I forget what exactly it is that happened.

00;04;34;17 - 00;04;52;08

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And then it's like it never happened. And I feel like that's so it's like a commentary on society. Like these things happen and we talk about them for a week. It's like, Oh, did you hear this is going on? And then it gets dropped. It's like we were all talk. We were talking about the Ukraine war so much and then in a couple of months we're probably not going to be talking about it as much.

00;04;52;08 - 00;05;04;27

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It's like it never happened. And that happens with social events. It happens with celebrity gossip. Like one thing is the big thing for that week, and then you never hear about these people again. It's just our time spans to think about different things. It's so quickly.

00;05;05;17 - 00;05;38;11

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely. And what I think is also very telling is how you said it broke down, because I think that we have seen that, especially now that we've all been exposed to how things work with Covid and everything like that, just how quickly the public zeitgeist can change essentially. And speaking of that, and another that I think that we're going to start seeing more of and we already have seen a couple bit more of another common motif is disease, pandemics and things like that in science fiction.

00;05;38;11 - 00;06;16;22

Sara

[SARA] I personally, I think the only book I read recently that mentioned that was Any Sign of Life by Rae Carson, which is kind of like a science fiction slash horror book that had an alien disease and it was in a post-COVID world. The main character was reminisced about COVID happening when she was a child and how this disease was different and things like that. So that was very interesting to see that fear

coming alive once more. Environmental changes, diseases, is there any other motifs that you guys have noticed in your stories?

00;06;17;00 - 00;06;44;06

Sara

[SARA] Another one that I was seeing a lot of I think it really came to life. Marie Lu sometimes focuses on this a lot and it was around ten years ago, but I think it's becoming more prominent today, which is A.I. and its impacts and how it could potentially evolve in a crazy different way. Usually as a villain, and sometimes not, like you mentioned, Neal Shusterman, and I know that in his story the A.I. really is not a villain at all.

00;06;45;04 - 00;07;12;23

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I feel like A.I. I haven't seen as much recently, or it's maybe that I'm just not noticing it as much, because part of this question that is a little bit difficult is, are you a fan of these subgenres within those genre? And it's hard to answer because I feel like it's compelling to read about this, but it also seems too possible it all seems a little bit too realistic and it's kind of scary in a real world way to think about climate disaster.

00;07;13;01 - 00;07;36;24

Courtney

[COURTNEY] That make society as we know it not function or I haven't read Dry, but like that idea, like these kids whose parents go out and then don't come back and how dire of the situation that would be instantly. It's a little bit intense sometimes. I actually feel like reading about A.I. gone a little bit wrong feels further enough away that it's a little bit more fun.

00;07;36;24 - 00;07;39;00

Courtney

[COURTNEY] It's less intense than some of the other stuff.

00;07;39;04 - 00;07;58;11

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, that's exactly why I have a hard time watching Black Mirror, because some of it is so real and I'm like, Oh God, it's like I had to watch one episode at a time. And sometimes I'm reading like, because I love science fiction, obviously, that's why I'm here and I love post-apocalyptic novels, but sometimes it's too much and I find myself in a really sad, depressed state. Like, should I read something happier now?

00;07;58;28 - 00;08;20;02

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, that actually reminds me, I'm just going to jump ahead a little bit, but we were talking about this, and I think we should flow with it because when we talk about science fiction, all genres do, but I think that the science fiction always does this in the way that it always embodies the fears that society has at the time.

00;08;20;20 - 00;08;40;11

Sara

[SARA] So, you know, we're talking about how we're seeing a pop up with the climate change and we're talking about how we're coming seeing that come up and Black Mirror and it all feels too real. So what are some of the messages hidden in our recent books? We talked about environmentalism. We talked about the disease, but maybe there's some other ones.

00;08;41;09 - 00;08;49;21

Sara

[SARA] What is the message in those environmental books? What are they trying to tell us? What are the warnings that we're hearing in the most recent publications?

00;08;50;27 - 00;09;10;25

Colleen

[COLLEEN] So I just read the book called The Electric Kingdom, and it was about a deadly flu fly. It wipes out most of the population. It's almost like The Stand where these people are being drawn together after they're like the only survivors in some of their towns. And I think the message there is just that you have to still find connection in your society.

00;09;11;06 - 00;09;37;18

Colleen

[COLLEEN] You have to still find other people that you grow with. And they do come across because if something wipes us all out equally, there's still going to be the horrible people living in society. It's not just a bunch of wonderful humans that want to repurpose the earth. Sometimes people are still out there taking advantage of the situation. Electric Kingdom is so good and it's so hard to describe because you think it's just this one thing about, you know, an avian flu or whatever, but there's also some psychic stuff going on there.

00;09;37;21 - 00;09;57;20

Colleen

[COLLEEN] There's like time travel. I don't want to give away the ending because it's phenomenal, but it just is about really trying to rebuild society and coming together and working together among your differences. And that's what a lot of books are about. And I also did have one random graphic novel thrown in here because I don't really read graphic novels, but this one just intrigued me.

00;09;57;27 - 00;10;22;00

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It's called Skyward, and it's about this girl that's living in Chicago, and gravity has dissipated like there's almost no gravity. I forget what the percentage is, but if you jump too high or you get thrust too much, you can go and enter that the atmosphere and just like disappear and die. She has, like, tried to figure out ways to survive in this society.

00;10;22;22 - 00;10;47;07

Colleen

[COLLEEN] There's rich people, we were talking about this earlier, the rich people obviously can pay their way to get anything. So they all still live on the bottom of the cities. They have gravity, boots, but the poor people don't have this. So they have to figure out different ways to survive. And she's, again, trying to rebuild her world and having to find her friends and having to find fellow people that are willing to still do good in the world.

00;10;48;05 - 00;11;02;23

Sara

[SARA] That's something that I'm seeing a lot actually tied hand in hand when you're talking about these environmental disaster books, which I know the gravity, I guess it's not the environmental disaster that we expected to happen, but it certainly is, I guess, an environmental disaster.

00;11;02;23 - 00;11;21;14

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, because that's something that was so beyond what I think would ever happen, so that I could really enjoy that. I don't know how we could ever, we either have gravity or we don't. I feel like I well, I don't know what could happen that it's only a certain, I forget even what the catalyst was. It might have been like some sort of wacky science experiment, but I don't remember.

00;11;22;00 - 00;11;52;00

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, but you did mention something that kind of grounded it back in reality, and that is the economic disparity and how it affects people differently. I think that's something you mentioned with DRI. It's something that Courtney mentioned with her book, and I just find it interesting to see about how these stories, those two motifs or those two things are usually tied hand-in-hand is there is an environmental disaster and some people are affected differently than other people, which is also something we see in our everyday lives as well.

00;11;52;07 - 00;12;07;28

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, the rich people are causing these problems and they're not going to have to reap the terrors of them either because they can, whether they're going to fly away eventually from the world in a spaceship or whether they're just going to live in like high rises, whatever is going to happen down the road, they're going to somehow make it work for themselves.

00;12;08;05 - 00;12;10;04

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And it's just really depressing to think about sometimes.

00;12;11;02 - 00;12;39;22

Courtney

[COURTNEY] One of the places where I feel like the intersection of science fiction and YA stuff really shines is this idea of, it's similar to the, you know, there's the, the social inequality, the income

inequality. But teens are also specially kind of positioned to where they don't have a lot of social power yet. So you can end up in, and I don't want to give too much away of Shaun David Hutchinson, A Complicated Love Story Set in Space.

00;12;40;16 - 00;13;08;13

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Really good, kind of strange. But I think that it goes into a lot of how this you might have these advanced technologies and there's no one guaranteeing that they're going to be used for the good of everybody or the good of everybody equally. So you can have advanced technologies, stuff that should be able to be used to improve people's lives, but how is it actually being used?

00;13;08;13 - 00;13;34;17

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And I think a lot of times you end up with teens who are kind of bearing the brunt of this because they're old enough that society kind of sees them as not needing as much protection as young kids, but they still don't have the power to be the one making the decisions that are affecting their lives, which all of that was super vague, but I really don't want to give away anything about A Complicated Love Story Set in Space.

00;13;34;24 - 00;13;39;07

Colleen

[COLLEEN] What else has he written? Because I know that name, but I can't think of Oh gosh.

00;13;39;29 - 00;13;46;15

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I am going to have to look it up because I cannot think of it off the top of my head. What did you write.

00;13;47;09 - 00;14;13;22

Sara

[SARA] Or while you're thinking of that, Courtney, or finding that answer? I do think that's a really great observance is a difference between agency and that difference. Being an agency is very apparent in the difference between YA novels and sometimes with adult novels, sometimes that can be almost like the wonderful thing, the wonderful fantasy about a YA novel is the actual, having the actual ability to enact change and to change these things.

00;14;14;19 - 00;14;33;15

Sara

[SARA] I mean, that makes me think all the way back to the old days, to like Hunger Games and things like that, where Katniss, that was the great thing is that she could change these things and that's what made her such an appealing hero at that time. And sometimes in these books now, we also have people that can enact change.

00;14;33;18 - 00;15;00;08

Sara

[SARA] For example, I was reading Iron Widow, which I really love because it's definitely a formula changer. And in that, the main character, she starts off really being a person with no agency in a society with no agency, that gives no agency to women. She really changes that around and no spoilers, but things definitely changed for her and she is able to make moves on enacting the changes that she wants to make.

00;15;01;10 - 00;15;02;06

Courtney

[COURTNEY] We are the ants.

00;15;02;21 - 00;15;09;16

Colleen

[COLLEEN] We probably we are the ants. Yes. Okay. All right. There we go. That was a really weird one, right? Yeah. Strangely.

00;15;09;28 - 00;15;11;13

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I think, I think so.

00;15;12;04 - 00;15;35;21

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It's so hard sometimes to remember something I read more than two years ago. Even so, I always try to pick like really modern books that I've read. Oh, but so speaking of changers, one of the best books I've probably read in the past year was The Last Cuentista. And I feel like I talked about this. I don't know if was on a podcast or maybe it's just one of our YA meetings.

00;15;36;04 - 00;15;54;01

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It reminded me a lot about of The Giver. It's a dystopia in society. Let me start at the beginning. This about this girl with her family and they're leaving Earth, they're on a spaceship. And only a certain amount of people got chosen to leave Earth because I think they're getting it's getting hit by a meteor. I think that might be what's happening.

00;15;54;13 - 00;16;10;23

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Whatever is happening, we have to leave Earth because everybody's going to be wiped out. So her whole life, she wanted to be a storyteller, and that's what cuentista is, like her grandmother, but her parents are geologists. They're scientists. That's why they get chosen to go on the spaceship. So she and her brother and her parents are set to go in the spaceship.

00;16;10;29 - 00;16;37;16

Colleen



[COLLEEN] But something goes wrong with her capsule. They're supposed to be going to sleep for 100 years, 200 years, whatever it is. But she wakes up at a different time and she like she woke up like it was like it might only be five years down the road. And she can hear fighting going on in fighting on the on the it's almost like a different co-op was trying to take over because they have people alive that are specifically there to take care of them through the generations.

00;16;38;12 - 00;16;53;18

Colleen

[COLLEEN] So she knows she knows something weird is going on, but they managed to put her back to sleep or whatever. So she wakes up again and everything has changed. It's the proper time. She's supposed to be woken up. But there's this co-op that has taken over the ships and they don't believe in diversity. They want everybody to be the same.

00;16;54;03 - 00;17;11;13

Colleen

[COLLEEN] They have almost made themselves look translucent because they all want to look the same. They have same skin, the same hair color, same eye color, and it's super creepy. And they brainwashed everybody in their sleep to like want to help out the co-op except for. So for some reason it didn't work on her. So she is the only one that remembers Earth.

00;17;11;13 - 00;17;31;17

Colleen

[COLLEEN] She's the only one that remembers any kind of stories. So she tries secretly to like recruit all the other children and teens by telling them stories of Earth. And she finds out that anybody who has seemed to have gone wrong with the sleeping stage has been sent out to pasture, so to say. So she finds that her parents have been killed off in her sleep.

00;17;31;23 - 00;17;54;18

Colleen

[COLLEEN] She can't find any word of her brother at all, so she doesn't know what happened to him. So it's this really crazy, futuristic world. But also it's still like a mystery she's trying to solve, and she's just and this is like a middle grade book. She's only like 12. So she's really young in this. And I'm not going to give away the ending of this either, because it was absolutely heart crushing, but ultimately uplifting because it is a middle grade book.

00;17;55;04 - 00;17;59;14

Colleen

[COLLEEN] So and there was just so wonderful. Just it's just a great book. I can't recommend it highly enough.

00;18;00;06 - 00;18;06;14

Sara

[SARA] When you first started talking about it, I was like, oh no, is this going to be like the passengers situation of the movie with Jennifer Lawrence?

00;18;06;14 - 00;18;06;29

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yes, yeah.

00;18;07;12 - 00;18;24;22

Sara

[SARA] And I'm so happy to hear it wasn't. And that is something that I've been super excited that I feel like is changing in YA, because I swear that if I was going to have to read another love triangle, I was going to lose it. And I really haven't been seeing that lately because I think everybody was getting sick of them.

00;18;24;26 - 00;18;30;11

Sara

[SARA] Yeah. So I'm very, very happy to hear that that did not occur.

00;18;30;11 - 00;18;45;16

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah. And I don't know if it was because it was she was such a young age or not, but yeah, there was absolutely no love story at all. Just, you know, love of friendship and parents and love of humanity in general. And not to say I don't like a nice romance, but sometimes it just it was getting way too cliché.

00;18;46;08 - 00;18;51;02

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It's like, oh, she has to have these two options to pick from. Like, Okay, why?

00;18;52;11 - 00;19;11;14

Sara

[SARA] And that's actually like I was saying about Iron Widow, that's a big game changer. Again, I can't I really feel like I cannot say a lot without giving it away, but essentially like you're like, Oh no, is this going to be a love triangle? And the author made a big, bold move to say no on that one. And I super enjoyed that.

00;19;11;14 - 00;19;30;01

Sara

[SARA] It was very interesting direction to go in. The other interesting direction that she went in with that one is that the main character is not, I think, a lot of times we had a lot of main characters that were, I'm not cool at all, but I'm actually super cool. You know, I'm not pretty, but I'm actually super pretty.

00;19;30;09 - 00;19;53;19

Sara

[SARA] Yeah. And all of that. And this main character is different in the way that she is not ugly, like physically ugly. I don't really remember how she was specifically described in the book and it's not important, but she is not, I would say, a pretty person. She doesn't always make the happy, good choices. She doesn't always rise above.

00;19;54;11 - 00;20;12;17

Sara

[SARA] But instead she, she is angry and she has hurt and she has trauma. And she acts like a real person who has hurt and has trauma and sometimes makes bad choices because of that. But it makes sense within her character, you know what I mean? So I appreciated that and I appreciated that realism.

00;20;13;07 - 00;20;32;10

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah. And I think we're seeing more of that. Just like with any genre, the more diversity is always better. And we're seeing actual characters with actual emotions. And actually something else that was in Skyward was there was a person with a disability and he was a main character. He had, he had lost his legs. And the antigravity actually helped him.

00;20;32;23 - 00;20;51;03

Colleen

[COLLEEN] He can move around without his wheelchair. And it was really interesting. A main character thought that he would not want to help her get gravity back because he has is privileged without it. But he didn't care about his own self. If it was going to help society, but he still was, he was conflicted because, you know, his life was, was better.

00;20;51;03 - 00;20;57;18

Colleen

[COLLEEN] But he's like, but yeah, he has other aspects. But it was just really good to see like a person with a disability visually in a graphic novel.

00;20;58;04 - 00;21;20;19

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, absolutely. And I would say that there's been lots of cases that I was reading recently of great handling of inclusion and things like that, one that kind of miffed me, and you saw I put this on the list and I said, I'm not really a fan, um, was Aetherbound by E.K. Johnson loved the set up the first like I was tearing it apart the first 78 pages.

00;21;20;22 - 00;21;48;29

Sara

[SARA] I love this, I love this, I love this, I love this. And it wasn't just the diversity factor, although that did miff me, the story took a very wild, very weird turn halfway through and I was like, whoa, I don't like this at all. But essentially they did introduce this one trans male character. And he for some reason, I'm like, we're talking in this story like millions of years in the future.

00;21;48;29 - 00;22;05;01

Sara

[SARA] Like, this is far, far, far, far future. And there was really no reason for this, but they definitely implied within the story that transphobia still existed. And if there is no plot purpose for it, then why? Why make a world where transphobia still exists?

00;22;05;01 - 00;22;27;06

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, I just can't believe, that's really unfathomable, that there's, because we're used to like Star Trek, where everybody's so happy and like, it's great. There's no, any kind of bigotry at all. And just for her to for them to be like, oh, it still exists, like, really? And millions and years. Yeah, I would find that odd as well.

00;22;27;21 - 00;22;43;23

Sara

[SARA] Yes, I would understand, absolutely. Like I said, like in Iron Widow, for example, there's sexism, that makes sense because the whole story is based around that. Like that's the point of the story. But if that's not the point of the story, why have bad stuff, still? That's the first thing I would write out.

00;22;43;23 - 00;23;17;18

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Yeah. I feel like usually, or a lot of times in science fiction you'll get other things that it's still relatable to, like we're talking about the anxieties and the problems in our society today, but it's not just that transposed kind of, I haven't read the book, so I mean, just going off what you're saying, it sounds like it kind of sticks out like almost like you've got the representation, which is great, but then you've also got the kind of like jab of like and still not really quite accepted.

00;23;19;00 - 00;23;51;12

Sara

[SARA] So that was a rough pill for me to swallow. I was like, I just can't like, this really just threw me out of the book. So for that being my fault, obviously these things, people will have these problems and they still exist. And I think it's fine to discuss them, especially when they're part of the story. Or, even a lot of sci fi doesn't happen to too far in the future, like, Any Sign of Life, that book happens ten years in the future. So a lot of the social problems that they deal with in that book are the same ones that we have today and that's very realistic.

00;23;51;28 - 00;23;52;12

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah.

00;23;54;02 - 00;23;56;15

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Can I, like, hard left turn?

00;23;56;15 - 00;23;56;25

Sara

[SARA] Yeah.

00;23;57;14 - 00;24;00;06

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I'm sorry, you can, but you should finish what you were saying.

00;24;00;15 - 00;24;01;22

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Oh, no, I forgot already.

00;24;02;07 - 00;24;31;11

Courtney

[COURTNEY] I'm sorry. Look, I just. I feel like we've been talking a lot about some of the heavier stuff in sci fi. And sci fi is also really a great genre rousing adventure tales. And I think some of the best sci fi across the board that I've ever read was The Illuminae Files by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff, it's been out for a few years now.

00;24;31;11 - 00;25;02;24

Courtney

[COURTNEY] It's not like new, new, but it's pretty recent. It's the trilogy, and it's basically, a group of teens get caught up in this rivalry between two mega-corporations in their space battle. And wild technology rips in the fabric of the universe and advanced A.I. and romance and espionage and just like all of it, and the set up of the book, there's the normal narrative and then interview transcripts and what's supposed to be like email messages or like instant messages.

00;25;02;24 - 00;25;24;02

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And I mean cool tech stuff where it's almost like poetry that's written in like a cool shape across the page and all of that just absolutely worked for me. It's high stakes and there's some definite bad stuff that goes down. But ultimately to me, I think it's a pretty feel good adventure story.

00;25;24;06 - 00;25;50;26

Sara

[SARA] I want to thank you so much for bringing that up because actually I was really struggling with that when I was doing a lot of my sci fi reading lately. And I felt like every book that I was picking up was so heavy. For example, Early Departures, which I just finished yesterday, very, very heavy, very depressing. And I was like, where are my fun pupu lasers in space?

00;25;50;26 - 00;26;06;19

Sara

[SARA] What I really, really need just some high jinks, just some crazy, wild, wacky alien fun stuff. And so I'm glad to get that recommendation. And Colleen, if you have any that also have that same vibe, please let us know.

00;26;07;05 - 00;26;28;16

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah. Just read anything that Amie Kaufman has written. I have another one of hers is like science fiction, romance, adventure. So she writes some stuff with Jay Kristoff or Christopher, whatever. What is this name? I just forgot. And that she, and then she writes some stuff with Meagan Spooner. That's her more romance stuff. The Other Side of the Sky is her new series that she wrote with Meagan Spooner.

00;26;28;26 - 00;26;49;06

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It's about this world where people live on the earth, on like the ground, and they are ruled by this, some sort of oracle, god, goddess. And then there's also people that live in the sky that are like the futuristic part. So it's like and so the Prince of the sky world, he has this little makeshift spaceship that he wanted to use to explore the down below because they don't really know what's going on down there.

00;26;49;18 - 00;27;06;07

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And he crashes. So then he meets up with this goddess woman. And so, like, their worlds are combining and it's just, I love it. It's super romantic, but it's also like an adventure story. And her other series that she wrote a couple of years ago with Meghan Spooner was equally as fantastic. What the heck was it called?

00;27;06;07 - 00;27;10;17

Colleen

[COLLEEN] We Scatter the Stars or something, I'll have to come back to that.

00;27;10;18 - 00;27;14;02

Sara

[SARA] That's right. That sounds very familiar. Something like that.

00;27;14;02 - 00;27;23;28

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, and then her new series with Jay Kristoff was Aurora Rising. That's really hard for me because I have a hard time with too many R's.

00;27;23;28 - 00;27;36;23

Colleen

[COLLEEN] That was a lot like Illuminae Files, but different, you know, because it's a different story. Spaceship like a team of people coming together, and it was just awesome. So whenever she can write with Jay Kristoff, it's like magic that comes out of the writing. It's so good.

00;27;37;28 - 00;27;44;05

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely. I've been definitely looking for more of those fun reads lately, so I appreciate the suggestion.

00;27;44;25 - 00;27;56;21

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And it's funny because there's still like, sad stuff going on, so I'm still like, like balling, but it's not making me like, depressed about the state of the world. It's just normal. It's just a good book. Look at me like emotions.

00;27;57;18 - 00;28;00;25

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, absolutely. And I like that. I like a book that you can have fun with.

00;28;01;20 - 00;28;09;19

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Oh, These Broken Stars is the it's a star bound trilogy. But the first book is called These Broken Stars, and it's just the I just loved it so much.

00;28;10;25 - 00;28;16;20

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Did either of you read On A Sunbeam, Tillie Walden, it's a graphic novel? Okay.

00;28;16;25 - 00;28;18;13

Colleen

[COLLEEN] It sounds lovely, though. sounds like the song.

00;28;19;16 - 00;28;45;10

Courtney

[COURTNEY] It's not as, like high intensity adventure as the ones we've been talking about. It's a little bit quieter. The art is just gorgeous, very like subdued and interesting colors and the like, but it's still ultimately fairly positive. The main character is working. She joins a spaceship crew and they work as part salvage and part rebuilding old abandoned structures.

00;28;45;10 - 00;29;06;02

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Just kind of like around the universe. And while she's getting to know the team she's working with and trying to fit in with this small crew that's been working together for a while, she is

remembering a year in boarding school. I think it was supposed to be five years prior. So the flashback, I think she was probably 12 or 13 and she needs a new suit.

00;29;06;04 - 00;29;33;24

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And this girl named Grace and the two of them become closer and closer and gradually fall in love. And then Grace gets taken home and she never hears from her again. And it's her processing what happened in the past. And there's some great worldbuilding in there. And I may be already spoiled some of this stuff in it, but like ultimately, ultimately, she's like, can we see if we can find her and make sure she's okay?

00;29;34;25 - 00;29;44;08

Courtney

[COURTNEY] If you can do graphic novels, which I always struggle with, I have trouble looking at the pictures and reading the words like, My brain just wants to skip words to words, but I recommend On a Sunbeam.

00;29;45;15 - 00;30;14;00

Sara

[SARA] That would be awesome. No, I love graphic novels, so that will be great for me. I appreciate it. But, also when a sci fi book, it's rarer, when a sci fi book can be small scale, it doesn't have to always be, although it often is, because sci fi is about the society that they're living in. So it's very often about the problems with the society changing the society, etc. But sometimes it can just be about a personal story taking place in a sci fi world.

00;30;14;00 - 00;30;46;03

Sara

[SARA] And yes, this environment, the setting affects that, but not necessarily, oh, we need to change this world or oh, like we're caught up in this huge environmental disaster. So that really sounds like a great example of that. And Early Departures was another example of that. It's essentially just modern day. The only thing is that they've invented this technology that once somebody passes away, you can, in some rare cases, bring them back for a couple more weeks.

00;30;46;03 - 00;30;49;21

Sara

[SARA] So that way they can live out a couple more weeks and say their goodbyes.

00;30;49;21 - 00;30;51;06

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Oh, my gosh!

00;30;51;06 - 00;31;05;21

Sara



[SARA] So, when Jamal, the main character, his friend slash ex-friend, a friend that he was fighting with, has an unfortunate accident and passes away, his mother makes the choice to bring him back for a couple of weeks, but says, don't tell him.

00;31;05;21 - 00;31;24;04

Sara

[SARA] And it's about them living in those couple of weeks. But it's not about the technology at all. It's really about friendships, mortality and dealing with all these different relationships that you fostered during your teens. And also, of course, some really heavy stuff.

00;31;25;15 - 00;31;41;20

Colleen

[COLLEEN] That reminds me a little bit of They Both Die at the End. Did you guys ever read that one from a couple of years ago. It's, it's a little bit of a technology thing, that there's a, you can find out if you, when you die pretty much you, like we'll call up and they'll tell you when you're going to die, or if you're, if you're on the list to die that day.

00;31;41;20 - 00;32;00;22

Colleen

[COLLEEN] I forget what exactly it is, but this kid ends up finding out that he's going to be dying that night. And so, like, what? What do you do with that day? In that time? It was just such a heartbreaking story. You think he's going to overthrow this and somehow. But it's not about like changing anything. It's about acceptance of what's going to happen and what he's going to do with his time.

00;32;00;22 - 00;32;03;19

Colleen

[COLLEEN] And it was just so good.

00;32;03;19 - 00;32;18;12

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, absolutely. And same thing for this story. Sometimes it is just a person living in a world that just happens to be different from ours. And they don't have to change everything. And then coming to terms with that.

00;32;18;12 - 00;32;20;11

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Yeah.

00;32;20;11 - 00;32;23;06

Sara

[SARA] And the other things of more fun...sorry?

00;32;23;06 - 00;32;23;22

Courtney

[COURTNEY] No, continue.

00;32;24;06 - 00;32;45;25

Sara

[SARA] Um, I was going to say, a more fun one that I read, because I know I said I didn't really read any fun ones. I think the funniest one that I read though, was The Infinity Courts. It starts off very dark. Unfortunately, our main character, she passes away and she goes to the afterlife to find out that the afterlife has been taken over by Ophelia.

00;32;45;29 - 00;32;58;11

Sara

[SARA] And Ophelia is basically their AI that, for copyright reasons, will remain nameless that you know, you talk to on your phone, it has taken over the afterlife and basically subjugated humans to be like the AI...

00;32;58;11 - 00;33;00;07

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Oh my god!

00;33;00;07 - 00;33;08;02

Sara

[SARA] ...just there on demand. But because of that, the afterlife is made of human consciousness, so you can morph things and the environment around you as well.

00;33;08;02 - 00;33;28;20

Sara

So it has a very much like a cool science fiction factor, but also a very cool fantasy factor with essentially magic, just science fiction magic. It's about her. And she joins up with this rebellion of people and they're going to try their best to overthrow this Ophelia. But she is what I find just funny, because it's very relatable.

00;33;28;28 - 00;33;52;00

Sara

[SARA] She is one of those people that is polite to the robots in their lives. And I don't know about you, but I always try to say my pleases and thank you's. And because of that, she's, like, she's like, well, you know, like, you know, maybe they do have feelings and maybe you should be nicer to them. So it's about that conversation a little bit as well.

00;33;52;21 - 00;34;06;05

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Happened to me yesterday. I thanked my certain device for giving good information. But, then some days I yell at him or whatever, it, I'm like, what are you doing? Why? Stop! Quiet!

00;34;06;05 - 00;34;15;21

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Then sometimes it'll just start saying something when we didn't ask the question. Like, what are you doing? So I do try to be nice occasionally because I feel that it's so much.

00;34;17;02 - 00;34;25;18

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, so that was a kind of terrifying question. What if you go to the afterlife and what's taking care of you is that device that's watching your house?

00;34;25;18 - 00;34;29;22

Colleen

[COLLEEN] That definitely sounds like a Black Mirror episode.

00;34;29;22 - 00;34;49;29

Courtney

[COURTNEY] So, when we're talking about these closer in like character studies, sci fi things, which is one of the things that I love sci fi for, I feel like some of the best that's out there is you have this this wild science fiction setting, but the real meat of it, the real good stuff is the characters.

00;34;49;29 - 00;35;23;24

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And I feel like that's one of the places, like a lot of sci fi, I feel like YA sci fi, adult sci fi. It could be cross, you read across the age range on it, right? Like there's a lot of good adult sci fi, but I would not hesitate to recommend to a teen who was interested in it, but when you get into this part where it's going in on the characters like that, I feel like there's just such a difference between what is going to resonate with a teen and what will resonate for me as an adult.

00;35;23;24 - 00;35;50;25

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Like Sarah, when you were talking about Early Departures, that book, it's for teens, so it's focused on these relationships, this friendship and everything. But even hearing about it, all I can think about it is, as like as an adult, as a parent, how do you make that decision? You know, like it's a whole different story. There were a couple of adult sci fi that had read that I thought I could maybe recommend this to a teen.

00;35;50;25 - 00;36;14;07

Courtney

[COURTNEY] And I guess a lot of it is it not going in to deep character stuff like, Andy Weir, Weir, however you pronounce his name, the guy who wrote The Martian? Yeah. Yeah. His recent one, Project Hail Mary, it's not a teen book, but it's kind of like a fun sci fi adventure. And there's, you know, any reason I don't think that would appeal to a teen who was interested in reading sci fi.

00;36;15;29 - 00;36;35;24

Sara

[SARA] I am so happy you said that because I have an adult sci fi series that is super short, super easy to read. I love it. And I do think that teens would enjoy it, too. And this is actually what I was talking about that I wanted, which is purely science in space, wacky high jinks, which is the Murderball Series.

00;36;35;24 - 00;36;37;28

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Yes! Yes or no?

00;36;38;22 - 00;36;48;17

Sara

[SARA] Yeah. It's just so much fun. And I think the main character can be relatable to a teen. I think main character relatable to an adult. Essentially, it's a person with social , so...

00;36;48;23 - 00;36;54;05

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Oh, super relatable, great.

00;36;54;05 - 00;37;08;24

Sara

[SARA] So, if you know what it's like to have social anxiety, then you'll vibe with The Murderbot. And if you know what it's like to want to be left alone to watch your favorite Netflix shows, then you'll vibe with The Murderbot. But despite that, obviously they have to deal with challenges in life. So it's definitely a lot of fun.

00;37;08;24 - 00;37;30;07

Sara

[SARA] And I think that that's one of them that the problem that the main character is dealing with, trends move across the ages. On the other hand, there are definitely stories though that can be a little bit, like you said, more one way or the other. You mentioned that Early Departures, you would just be seeing yourself in the shoes of a parent.

00;37;30;07 - 00;38;08;01

Sara

[SARA] I, or like myself, I definitely read some adult science fiction books that spend too much time on like the society, the intricacies of society, the science, and they're clearly meant to be more like political pieces than character deep dives. And because they don't have that relatable root, there and they're more about the society, I think I really wouldn't recommend that to a teen because the type of story that they are is just like there's no relatable factor, especially if you're not deeply involved in this political statement or whatever the book is trying to make.

00;38;08;24 - 00;38;26;28

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, that's definitely what I look for in my books as the characters. It can be the worst written book in the world, but if I've invested in those characters, I will still read it like no matter what.

Like, Oh, what's happening here? It's just like when I was younger, when I was when I would watch soap operas, like they were like the worst garbage TV shows.

00;38;26;28 - 00;38;36;24

Colleen

[COLLEEN] But I need to know what was happening that day. What happened with Jane and Michael. Like, I had to find out. So yeah, for me and I think for a lot of teens, a lot of people, it's really about characters.

00;38;37;09 - 00;39;03;03

Sara

[SARA] Absolutely. Speaking of character that I guess goes back to your point as well, Courtney, Any Sign of Life, the main character was, she was a teen and she was the basketball player. And she was very unlike how I was as a teen, but, I found that her character would be very relatable to other teens. As I was reading it, I kept thinking that, but myself the whole time I didn't really relate to her.

00;39;03;04 - 00;39;30;21

Sara

[SARA] But I would say that it's definitely a book that I would recommend to teens because it does have a main character that has kind of a different background than those that you usually see in books. And also that she does have relatable struggles and she does have relatable drives. Whenever she really needs to push through, she thinks back to what is pushing through for her, which for her that is pushing through in practice, pushing through for gain, pushing through school.

00;39;31;05 - 00;39;34;26

Sara

[SARA] So those are what kind of grounds her and her experiences.

00;39;35;21 - 00;39;43;23

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Okay, so how about the books that started you on SCI fi? Has everyone always been a sci fi reader?

00;39;43;23 - 00;40;08;19

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Oh, man, I guess I got into sci fi probably through Stephen King, because he was what I was reading when I was in my teens, because I was a horror fan most of my life. And obviously there's lots of science fiction that's horror. So I guess that's how and then I just branched out from there. I just really like a good story and good characters and you can find them in many different genres. So if it's science fiction, then, yeah, I'm all in for it.

00;40;09;03 - 00;40;39;26

Sara

[SARA] Yeah, absolutely. That is a great question. And I have to say, Colleen, that's really funny that you say that because that's kind of how I started as well. I also read a lot of Stephen King as a teenager, and that also got me into sci fi. I think also fantasy was still very popular back when I was a teen, but there was like, I think the very beginning, like right when I was graduating high school is when a big boom came when like Hunger Games really took off and Divergent and Maze Runner and all of that really took off.

00;40;39;26 - 00;40;59;12

Sara

[SARA] So I kind of like missed it, but some of my friends were still really into it, so that might have got me more interested into the concepts. I don't think that sci fi was something that I really got super into though until later on in my life with a couple of books that dragged me back into it.

00;41;00;04 - 00;41;17;23

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Because I always liked science fiction movies and stuff like watched Star Wars my whole life and that, although I always think that's a little more fantasy or a mix of both. So it's not like I was averse to science fiction. I just didn't maybe it wasn't as prevalent, I guess, I'm trying to think.

00;41;18;03 - 00;41;44;04

Sara

[SARA] I think I always thought of sci fi, for a while I wasn't into it because I thought of it as like, those big political society books that I was talking about before, that are all so sciencey and based in intrigue and don't have any relatable characters. And it wasn't until, I think, a friend recommended to me some books, and I wish I could remember what they were, but they really struck a chord with me and I was like, oh, it doesn't have to be like this.

00;41;44;04 - 00;41;57;09

Sara

[SARA] Like it can be it can be fun, it can be relatable, can be about the characters. And because of that, I got more into it, I think. But really, like, I thought it was all like doom, and doom never really was a good match for me.

00;41;57;15 - 00;41;58;01

Colleen

[COLLEEN] Yeah, it's funny...

00;41;58;01 - 00;42;01;05

Sara

[SARA] I just happened to discover there's things other than Dune out there.

00;42;01;10 - 00;42;16;19

Colleen

[COLLEEN] I think that's what it was, like because I didn't really read YA as a teen. I read YA as a person in my early twenties, and I don't read really adult science fiction that much. I read Dune in college and actually I relistened to it this year after watching the movie, and I was like, Oh, okay, this is fine.

00;42;16;19 - 00;42;27;08

Colleen

[COLLEEN] I wasn't ready for it in my early twenties, but like I could reread it now and like get into it. But I think that's why I didn't really read a lot of science fiction until like I was reading Young Adult Y.A., and it was all over the place there.

00;42;27;28 - 00;42;42;28

Courtney

[COURTNEY] When I was younger than teen, there was Bruce Coville, he's got a whole bunch of different sci fi like My Teacher is an Alien type and is still, I think, still putting books out and the Animorphs, did either of you read Animorphs?

00;42;43;28 - 00;42;48;11

Colleen

[COLLEEN] My brother did and my friend did. I never did. But yeah, that's right. That was very popular when growing up.

00;42;48;11 - 00;43;12;23

Courtney

[COURTNEY] That was such a good series. I mean, actually really it's serial and there are a couple in there that are maybe not as great, but like overall as a series really good and now they're coming out with graphic novels. So the first couple of graphic novel adaptations are out. So I would say that that was probably my in on it because who doesn't want to turn into animals? Yeah, like...

00;43;14;15 - 00;43;18;01

Sara

[SARA] That is so much fun. I'm so excited for those books to come out, the graphic novels.

00;43;19;03 - 00;43;23;27

Colleen

[COLLEEN] I just remember those covers. It was like, bah bah bah bah bah bah bah bah.

00;43;23;27 - 00;43;28;21

Colleen

[COLLEEN] That sounds like a visual from my childhood, that I'd never read the books, but I could, like, pick out a million different covers.

00;43;29;02 - 00;43;29;17

Courtney

[COURTNEY] Yes.

00;43;29;28 - 00;43;47;06

Sara

[SARA] Thank you for joining us today. Be sure to check out the ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events on our website Calendar of Events page. All titles mentioned in today's episode can be found at The Ocean County Library free with your library card. Until next time, happy reading.