

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 2: Steampunk

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hi, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library. I'm Rachel.

Melody: I'm Melody.

Rachel: And we're librarians at Oak Creek Public Library in Wisconsin. We are part of the Milwaukee County System which, actually, is fairly large and very rad. Trust us. (laughs) Today we'll be exploring the steampunk genre. First, we wanted to talk a bit about what that means and our own backgrounds with the genre so, Melody, do you want to introduce the genre?

Melody: Yes, so steampunk is kind of a difficult genre to define. Most often it's kind of, like, an alternate reality or alternate history, and usually there's modern technology involved in the story, but it's powered by steam. And, most often, steampunk is set in Victorian England. It's not always the case, but that's pretty common.

Rachel: And more airships and robots. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, so, like, these are the things you want to look for when you're reading steampunk: gears, gadgets, gizmos, airships, robots, goggles, corsets, all of those things.

Rachel: Yup.

Melody: So, if you see all of those things overlapping, you're probably reading steampunk. And then, steampunk tends to overlap with a lot of other genres, as well. So, you know, you can have sci-fi, fantasy, fashion is a big part of steampunk, engineering, history, drama, romance, action—all of these things can be part of steampunk.

Rachel: For sure. I mean, it has definitely bled into social society. They have conventions and everything.

Melody: Yeah, so that's kind of a general, basic definition of steampunk, but again, it's kind of hard to define. So, after we talk about what we've been reading, I think it would be fun to kind of decide: do we think it is steampunk, why do we think it is?

Rachel: Yeah and, I don't know about you, but I have not had much of a history with steampunk.

Melody: I haven't, either.

Rachel: I'm pretty excited for this episode, because I wanted to get more into steampunk reading. But I knew it existed in the periphery with things like conventions, and costuming, and things like that, but the closest thing to steampunk that I've taken in entertainment-wise are Alan Moore's comics, "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen." There's another one called "Gotham by Gaslight" by Brian Augustyn which is Batman but set back in Victorian England. Yeah, it's pretty good.

Melody: Oh, that sounds really fun. Is it—are you a comic book person?

Rachel: I am! (laughs) How did you know?

Melody: (laughs) Okay. I just got the feeling.

Rachel: And other than that, it would have to be Hayao Miyazaki's films "Castle in the Sky" and "Howl's Moving Castle"—they have airships and things in a lot of his films, those two in particular. And that's pretty much the extent of it. How about for you?

Melody: Yeah, so my...I've never automatically gone to steampunk as my favorite genre. I tend to like fantasy and young adult and postapocalyptic things, so fantasy and young adult kind of dive into steampunk a little bit. One of the books I'm going to talk about today, "The Golden Compass" by Philip Pullman, I read a while ago, and that definitely has some steampunk elements, but it's leaning more on the fantasy side, I think. So that's kind of my experience with steampunk, too. And I'm very familiar with the costume look which is...seems like a really fun thing to do.

Rachel: If you haven't any idea what steampunk is, you've probably seen it somewhere on TV or out in the world at some point and just not known what it was.

Melody: Yeah, someone would be wearing, like, goggles on their forehead and—

Rachel: A tiny top hat, maybe. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, and have, like, gears and cogs, that sort of stuff. So, it's a fun genre. So, do you want me to get started with the first one?

Rachel: Sure, yeah!

Melody: So, I read "Soulless" by Gail Carriger. I think that's how you say it.

Rachel: Let's go with it.

Melody: It'll be in the show notes. And "Soulless" is set in Victorian England. Again, it's kind of, like, a cross between Jane Austen and the TV show "Supernatural," if you've seen that.

Rachel: Yas.

Melody: So that's kind of...it's, like, a melding of those two things. So, it's Victorian England, all of the societal expectations are in place. There's this...the main character is this young, unmarried woman who is not quite so young because she's, like, 26, but still not married, so they call her a spinster.

Rachel: (laughs) Of course.

Melody: Which means I am far beyond a spinster.

Rachel: You do you.

Melody: Thankfully, I'm not in that era. She happens to be soulless. So, in this world, vampires and werewolves are alive and part of society.

Rachel: Already loving it.

Melody: Yes, and she...there's, like, groups, you know, groups of vampires of werewolves that are, they work together, they kind of have their own place in London. Queen Victoria has supervisors, she has a

werewolf who supervises her and a vampire who supervises her and, you know, kind of keep her up to date on what's going on in that kind of world. And so, our main character is soulless, which means if she touches a vampire or a werewolf, their powers—their supernatural powers—go away.

Rachel: Oh, wow. So, for good, or just temporarily?

Melody: Just temporarily, while she's touching them. So, at the beginning of the book, a vampire tries to attack her, and she touches him, and his fangs disappear, and she might kill him with her parasol.
(laughs)

Rachel: Nice. The coolest of weapons.

Melody: Right, so it's a...I enjoyed this read. It's very clever writing. There were a...like, I noted a couple times in the book that made me, like, laugh out loud. And, the characters...she's very, she's your modern woman in Victorian England. She says what she thinks and, you know, she's not conforming to society.

Rachel: So, a bit anachronistic, but that's what we need in our fantasy.

Melody: Right. She also is kind of innocent, too. So, there's a love interest that happens with a werewolf, and at one point he kisses her, and she's, like, if you read her commentary, it says, 'She did not quite know what to think, and then a tongue appeared! She did not know how she felt about the tongue'.

Rachel: (laughs) Wow. Uh-huh.

Melody: It's just hilarious writing, yeah. Fair warning, this is kind of a steamy book. This is not a young adult book, this is an adult book. If you're reading it, just don't be surprised. This is your warning now. There are some mature themes. One of the things that I liked about this one was the...kind of the social commentary and idea of what would happen if there were vampires and werewolves in society, and the differences between the U.S. and the U.K. and how they deal with them. So, in the U.K., like I said they kind of become part of groups and they have their own, you know, societal expectations and class and ranking, and in the U.S. they're just feared and hunted.

Rachel: I'm somehow unsurprised by that. (laughs)

Melody: I know, right? And if you happen to be turned into a werewolf or a vampire, you either have to hide and, you know, protect yourself, or you will be, like, killed and burned.

Rachel: Jeez, yeah.

Melody: Yes, so that was really interesting, that whole difference between how the two places dealt with it.

Rachel: Seems like she's tying in actual historical accuracy with that.

Melody: Yes, that's what I felt, too. Yeah, so, if you happen to...you know, if this book catches your fancy, if you've read it before and you want to have another readalike, then "Dark Days Club" by Alison Goodman is something I would recommend. That's a little bit of a safer read, so if you're a younger reader, that's a good one, too, and that one is very similar. It's Victorian England and there's some supernatural things, yeah. And there's always a handsome, brooding man.

Rachel: When isn't there?

Melody: Right? (laughs) And that's fun, too!

Rachel: Yeah. (laughs)

Melody: So, if you're interested in this book, it's available on CountyCat. You can get it through our library system, so you can request it to come to the Oak Creek Library if you want. You can also listen to the audiobook or check out the Ebook on OverDrive or, if you're using a mobile device, on Libby.

Rachel: Nice. I am all about those audiobooks lately. I used to be completely for just, you know, print books. I never really got into eReaders, but audiobooks are great because you can listen to them while you're doing other things. So, for people who are busy—which, hello—they're fantastic.

Melody: I used to drive a lot, too, and audiobooks are your friend when you're driving a lot.

Rachel: Definitely. That said, I just finished reading "Mortal Engines," and I say 'reading', but I listened to it as an audiobook! Which...it still counts. It still counts, guys.

Melody: Absolutely still counts. Don't discount audio. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) So, again, this book, "Mortal Engines," is by British author Philip Reeve. He's written a lot for children and young adult audiences, but many of his books are enjoyed by all ages. So, don't discriminate just because of the subject classification, guys. "Mortal Engines" was first published in 2001, and it's the first in a quartet known as the "Hungry City Chronicles," and you'll see why as I get more into it. The other three titles are "Predator's Gold," "Infernal Devices," and "Darkling Plain," which all sound very ominous to me. (laughs) This series is categorized as steampunk, of course, but it does bleed into dystopian, alternative history, and fantasy genres, much like the book you were talking about. I listened to it as an audiobook, and it was narrated by Barnaby Edwards who I think did a very good job with the characters' voices. There are plenty of them, and they are all super distinctive, believe me.

Melody: That's helpful when you're listening to audio, too.

Rachel: For sure. I mean, the book is half the battle, but when it's an audiobook, the narrator has a lot of influence on the story itself. So, always on the lookout for good narrators, and Barnaby Edwards—fantastic.

Melody: That's awesome. I've turned off audiobooks because of poor narration, so that's always a nice plus.

Rachel: Mhm. Definitely something they have to factor in when translating, so. The entire audiobook series is available through Hoopla, which is the online streaming database we talked about last week and a bit this week. For those who don't recall, it lets you stream and download digital media for free. This includes movies, TV shows, eBooks, graphic novels, and more. Each installment of the "Hungry City Chronicles" ranges from nine to fifteen hours in length, which I think is that sweet spot, because not too short, not too long. I mean, I've been listening to Stephen King's "Dark Tower," which is definitely very long in comparison.

Melody: How long is that? Is it, like, a 24-hour book?

Rachel: Each one, yeah, and there are, like, seven or eight in there.

Melody: Gosh.

Rachel: Yeah, it's...it's been a trial. (laughs) But enjoyable!

Melody: That's a long haul.

Rachel: Yeah. As for "Mortal Engines" itself, the story goes like this: Long ago, there was a 60-minute war that destroyed a lot of the world as we know it.

Melody: 60, six zero?

Rachel: Six zero, yeah, 60-minute war, so very quick. Bad things happen very fast!

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: It made the place difficult to live in on a geographical scale, so think earthquakes, draughts, volcanoes, that kind of thing. In this postapocalyptic setting, people have turned all the great cities into giant, mobile machines. As you would...duh.

Melody: (laughs) Uh-huh.

Rachel: These are known as traction cities, and they roll around dismantling smaller towns, taking their people as slaves and eating up their resources. So, it's a very new concept. I have not heard of this sort of thing before. "Mortal Engines," though, takes place years down the line, so the earth itself is more stable, but the resources needed to keep the cities going are dwindling down, okay? There's nothing sustainable about these cities, but they keep going anyway because they refuse to die out. The few people who live on the outskirts or, basically, literally on the ground in non-traction cities, are viewed as terrorists. But basically, they just pretty much want to live off by themselves and not bother anyone.

Melody: That's interesting.

Rachel: Yeah. The traction city of London is divided into separate guilds, so kind of like how your vampires and werewolves go off by themselves. We've got—in this book—the guild of engineers, who keep the cities running, the guild of historians, who keep track of old technology, and there are a couple others that I won't get into because of spoilers. Because a lot of knowledge was destroyed during the 60-minute war, people have reverted into a Victorian-esque society, so there's one of our...

Melody: Oh, there's our little steampunk check...check the box! (laughs)

Rachel: Yes! Absolutely. And London also has a corrupt mayor bent on using the old technology that the historians find to get rid of the non-traction cities, and kind of take over the world...mwahaha! (laughs)

Melody: Evil mayor!

Rachel: Yes but, weirdly, the people in London seem happy enough to go along with this. I guess it's just the culture they live in. So, going in, that's kind of important. As you can probably tell, worldbuilding in this book is great. I mean, there are divided social classes, perspectives on the altered timeline, and interesting characters popping out of the woodwork every so often. If you're looking for the telltale signs of steampunk, there are also airships, an entire air city, as well as killer automatons and all that good stuff—yes! (laughs)

Melody: That's cool! Oh! (laughs)

Rachel: What I like most about this first book was all the alternative points of view. So, there are three main characters—Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, and Katherine Valentine—and they're all very different people who come from very different places. So, it's nice to join Tom on his adventures with Hester outside the city of London, but then come back and join Katherine as she tries to solve a mystery inside the city. And the narratives are parallel, too, so it's not confusing like you get in some books. You know, when you jump back and forth, it can get pretty bad. But this one, it flowed really well.

Melody: That's good.

Rachel: Occasionally, there are other perspectives from those three main characters, like that of an artificially intelligent killing machine named Shrike. (laughs) His passages, though few and far between, are my favorite. Reeves switches to the present tense for those, so things become more immediate and foreboding. And it kind of wakes you up if you're listening and suddenly the tense changes, right? Your brain latches onto that, and it gets you to pay more attention.

Melody: Yeah, I...I love it when authors do that, when they kind of play around with narration a little bit and it's done well.

Rachel: And I've read a couple interviews where Reeve discusses why he did that, and he doesn't like it. He thinks it was a cheap shot that he did.

Melody: Really?

Rachel: And I'm like, dude! It's great! Don't Worry about it! (laughs)

Melody: Yeah it is! That's funny.

Rachel: Yeah, so I decided to talk about this book today because I first heard of it when I saw the movie trailer for the film adaption late last year. The movie, going by the same name of "Mortal Engines," was released in December in the U.S., but it didn't do very well, particularly speaking. I know you've seen it, too.

Melody: I saw it. Did you go see it, too?

Rachel: I watched it on Amazon Prime through streaming, because it was just released. It's not on any of our databases yet. It will be eventually, hopefully.

Melody: Yeah, it's coming.

Rachel: Watching it for the first time a couple weeks ago, I was worried the creators would be too reliant on CGI for special effects. I mean, the last thing you want from a steampunk world—where everything is metal or mechanical—is poorly rendered eye garbage that will look outdated in a few years, anyway. Aesthetically, though, I was mostly impressed. For the most part, it wasn't distracting. I didn't think it was too bad. The environment looked cool and the airships were all right. I think they could have gone for more practical effect makeup and prosthetics for Shrike because, truth be told, and to be brutally honest, he looked kind of lame, okay?

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: He was not intimidating. But, other than that, I enjoyed the acting. I thought maybe they...the actors were a bit wasted on the plot. They had to cram a lot in there.

Melody: My complaint was the plot, the storyline.

Rachel: With fantasy epics—and, again, it's steampunk, but we're bleeding into fantasy—when you try to cram all that into a movie on the silver screen, a lot can get sacrificed. I think...I won't say anything more than this, but it might have done better as a limited mini-series on TV.

Melody: Yeah, especially because I haven't read the book, so while you were describing the book, I didn't realize this is a much deeper world than I thought it was. And if you had more time to be able to explore that and explain that, and beef up your story a little bit, I think that would be helpful for this movie. So, I watched this movie while I was tired.

Rachel: (laughs) Oh, joy! Best time to watch anything.

Melody: (laughs) Yeah, so my memory of it is kind of vague. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) Yeah. Yeah, I can see that happening.

Melody: But I...I do remember my general impression was that the story could have been more engaging and deeper. But it is an interesting world and a cool concept.

Rachel: Yeah. Plot-wise, the main thing I rolled my eyes at was the treatment of character Hester Shaw, who I mentioned earlier.

Melody: She's the one with the scar on her face, right?

Rachel: Yeah, well, in the book she has a super messed up face, okay? So, she receives an injury that...basically, her nose is gone, she's missing an eye, her mouth is perpetually twisted up, and she has this massive scar. But then in the movie, ickle-tiny scar going down one cheek and her jaw!

Melody: Yeah, she has this gorgeous face and just a little scar down her cheek.

Rachel: That, dear listeners, is the widespread epidemic that is Hollywood's forced beautification of physical ugliness. Okay? Which, I mean, that sounds like a mouthful, but it's nothing new, is it? I mean, it happens all the time, we've seen it before in other movies. "Phantom of the Opera" springs to mind first.

Melody: That's exactly what I thought of.

Rachel: Yeah. In Gaston Leroux's book, the character 'the Phantom' is basically a walking corpse, okay? The dude is fugly, he has a skull for a face, and he smells of decay. Then the Hollywood adaption of the musical came out in 2004. Once again, the actor's facial prosthetics are minimal. I mean, I don't find the disfigurement unsettling, let alone terror-inducing, you know?

Melody: I find it unsettling, personally.

Rachel: A little? Yeah? (laughs) Okay. I mean, it could be worse.

Melody: I also see the Phantom as a creep.

Rachel: For real.

Melody: Like, I'm team Raul all the way. Like, the one person I know who doesn't want her to end up with the Phantom.

Rachel: (laughs) We've talked about this before! The Phantom, he's rape-y. It's creepy.

Melody: He is! Yes, so anyway.

Rachel: Well, and then...it's not just in movies, though, it's in TV. Think about "Game of Thrones," okay? Tyrion Lannister...for fans of the show, diehards know the series is based upon George R.R. Martin's book series "A Song of Ice and Fire." In that, the character of Tyrion Lannister is described as...what was it? 'A hideously deformed imp'. Then, on the show, he's played by Peter Dinklage, who is not really made to look ugly at all.

Melody: He's actually a pretty good-looking guy.

Rachel: Yeah. I won't fight that too hard, though, because it's just nice to see people of short stature on the screen. It's baby steps, right, when it comes to movies and TV. But still, the...I mean, the examples of this are endless. So, we'll stop there, but yeah.

Melody: So, to paly devil's advocate, I have a friend who will often say, you know, 'I don't want to pay to see an ugly person in a movie'.

Rachel: (laughs) Oh, no...

Melody: And she kind of says it facetiously, but there is something to that, in a way.

Rachel: Well, we're definitely used to seeing beauty on the screen.

Melody: Movies are a visual media, so that's part of it, too, I guess.

Rachel: I think the gripe with...the one for Hester Shaw is that she's supposed to be ugly. It's a big part of the story. These characters are meant to be aesthetically unappealing, really. They're morphed into what is known as 'Hollywood homely' with, like, an ickle-tiny scar. It's an old practice and definitely annoying, sometimes even harmful, I think. So, whenever I notice that happening I get irritated, not going to lie.

Melody: Yeah, did you ever see "Divergent?"

Rachel: I saw the first one, yeah.

Melody: So, she comes from this background where they are very simple and plain and they...

Rachel: Yeah, almost a kind of religious sect kind of thing, from what I remember.

Melody: Mhm, and they wear, like, gray clothes and don't wear makeup. And in the movie, she's clearly wearing mascara. (laughs)

Rachel: Yeah, that happens all the time where, like, a woman is sleeping in a scene and she has makeup everywhere!

Melody: Full makeup on, yeah! (laughs)

Rachel: Well, a big part of “Mortal Engines” is that some characters who are beloved for their outward appearances and personas are actually horrible people while those who are plain, unremarkable, or ugly on the outside are forces of good. Okay? So, people tend to align goodness with beauty. I think that’s another facet of this discussion here. And, I mean, I’m air quoting with ‘beauty’, because that’s clearly subjective. And Philip Reeve really flips that concept on its head in his book. That said, his villainous characters have lots of shades of gray, be they dudes with dark secrets who have somewhat understandable motivations, or cold, artificial intelligence that feels a sort of attachment toward human beings, or marauding pirates who simply want a taste of the high life after being in the dirt for so long. I dig that sort of complexity no matter the story.

Melody: Yeah, because no villain thinks he’s a villain.

Rachel: No.

Melody: He thinks he’s the hero.

Rachel: Yeah, and the ones that do aren’t layered. They’re just kind of boring, blah, comic book...you know. We’re used to that, and we want to see more. That’s my spiel, really. I mean, the movie tanked so, if that puts you off, read the book. If you like the movie, read the book and like it even more! (laughs) If you want to watch the movie and make up your own mind, I know the library ordered a copy earlier this month. Yeah, so it should be in soon, if it isn’t already. “Mortal Engines” is new to DVD, so remember to give it some extra time when it comes to availability at the library. Or, like we were talking about before with digital services, there’s always a bit of lag there. And, lastly, I have a couple readalikes for this one, and then we can get more into yours. There’s a book called “Worldshaker” by Richard Harland that seems incredibly similar in premise. It’s also a young adult book, so audiences who enjoyed “Mortal Engines” will not doubt enjoy this one, too. The ratings are on par with each other, so take that for what you will. Or, you could give the prequel novels a go. I have mixed feelings about prequels, because of course I do.

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: But they are a thing, so check out Philip Reeve’s “Fever Crumb” series or his collection of short stories set in the world of “Mortal Engines” titled “Night Flights.” That one was published in 2018 just ahead of the motion picture release, so it might have been a promotional gambit, but it does have really good reviews.

Melody: Okay, good. Nice! Would you...they’re probably not going to make any more films.

Rachel: Probably not! (laughs)

Melody: Would you have watched them had they...?

Rachel: Probably not! (laughs) No.

Melody: Good to know.

Rachel: I do have the other books lined up. I plan on listening to those, so the story and the world is really good, but movies...

Melody: The adaptation into the movies was...

Rachel: Yeah. If it was a mini-series it would have been a different story. They would have had more time to expand things, I think. But, as it is, nah.

Melody: Yeah, that's too bad. I know there's this trend of adapting—especially young adult fiction—into films. And while some of those are—I think are—well done, I think it...you can, you know, kind of do that very poorly and totally ruin the whole thing. Which is a shame, because people will say, 'Well, I saw the movie "Mortal Engines," I'm not going to read the book because, obviously, the movie was horrible', or whatever. When, in fact, that's not the case.

Rachel: Yeah, there's the old adage 'read the book before the movie', or 'the book is better than the movie', or whatever, but I don't know how true that is. I just think it...it's a good idea to give both a try.

Melody: Right, mhm, and understand that they're two separate, distinct things.

Rachel: Mhm, yeah. By different creators, almost, so yeah.

Melody: All right, so the last steampunk book I want to talk about is "The Golden Compass" by Philip Pullman, and this is a young adult book. This is a really interesting concept, and I actually read it a couple years ago, so I...I went on SparkNotes to kind of get a refresher for the story. And it...now that I remember reading it, I read books one and two and never read book three.

Rachel: (gasps) Dun, dun, dun!

Melody: I know! So, I feel like I need to go back and finish the series. So, this story is about a young girl, her name is Lyra, and the world is, like, what holds this story together. The world is really amazing. So, every human being has this thing called a 'daemon'. Not like a 'demon', devil-demon, but it's sort of like a spirit animal, I guess you could say.

Rachel: Or a Patronus, from "Harry Potter?"

Melody: Yes.

Rachel: Yes? (laughs) Wow, okay. Slipped that reference in there!

Melody: (laughs) So they're animals, and they can talk, and they're kind of an external expression of the person's soul. And they are connected, so if the animal gets hurt, the person feels it, too, and vice versa. And they can't be physically too far apart from each other, otherwise it will cause them pain. And the other really fun thing about it is adults have a certain animal that is their daemon, but children...their daemons can morph into whatever animal they want to be. So, it's kind of representative of children who are, you know, still learning about themselves and figuring themselves out, and they're not quite grown up and haven't been set in their ways yet. So, that's part of it, too. The daemons can kind of change as they will depending on how the child is feeling. Lyra has this daemon, Pan, and she ends up kind of going on this adventure, unexpectedly. She overhears a conversation about...she lives in a college, and overhears her uncle talking to these professors about this thing called 'dust' which happens to surround grown adults, but it doesn't really follow children as much, and they're kind of studying...what is dust, does it make human beings impure or sinful? It's very...has very religious themes. So, then she ends up kind of being...I'm trying to remember the story, it's been a while. She ends up leaving the college and being taken on a trip with this woman names Mrs. Coulter who has this...she's,

like, this gorgeous, perfectly manicured woman who has...her daemon is this golden monkey who's, like, vicious and hates people. Which is an interesting sign.

Rachel. Oh, interesting. Because it's a reflection, right?

Melody: Yes. Talking about beauty versus ugliness! So, this woman kind of takes Lyra to—I think—London, I could be wrong. I think London. And then Lyra kind of runs away and realizes that she...okay, so I'm remembering now!

Rachel: (laughs) As you go.

Melody: Yes, so there's a bunch of children that are disappearing, and the rumor is that they're being kidnapped by 'gobblers', and Lyra learns that they're being kidnapped and taken away for experimentation.

Rachel: Oh, dear.

Melody: And it's all related...

Rachel and Melody: ...to the dust.

Melody: Mhm. So, she kind of goes on this quest to kind of find these children and save them. There's some really fun and cool characters along the way. There're these people called 'gyptians' which are very similar to gypsies, and they kind of take her part of the way on her journey, and they're very caring of her and kind of guide her along her journey. There's, like, this country-western guy who has this hot air balloon. He's, like, the coolest character ever.

Rachel: (laughs) Sounds rad.

Melody: Yeah, his daemon is this rabbit. It's just really fun. And then there's also this community of bears—talking bears.

Rachel: Okay. Things have escalated into fantasy. (laughs)

Melody: Yes. And they don't have daemons, they're just talking bears.

Rachel: "Just" talking bears.

Melody: Right, that's it. And she kind of recruits one to come on and help him, because they...they help her because they need a bodyguard, essentially.

Rachel: Are they polar bears?

Melody: They are polar bears!

Rachel: Okay, because I've seen covers on books, and yeah.

Melody: There's also a movie. And so, that comes into play later, I won't give away spoilers, but the bears come into play later. It's a really fascinating story, and more things are revealed about the dust, and what characters are doing, and what her uncle is really studying. It's a really fascinating story. Book two takes a completely new turn that you wouldn't think, but it's really, really good. So, I do recommend this book. I recommend it for adults, young adults, too, but there are some very strong religious themes.

This is kind of a controversial book because Philip Pullman kind of ridicules the Church, in a way. Like, he's pointing out all of the flaws in this religious establishment.

Rachel: That's an interesting take.

Melody: It is, and if you look at his writing, there are some pretty heavy similarities to C.S. Lewis who did the opposite thing. He would create allegories based on Biblical stories and religious experiences.

Rachel: "Chronicles of Narnia," for you guys who don't know.

Melody: Yes, yes, so, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" is probably the most popular one. So yeah, that's...that's very interesting, too. And this is, like we said...very heavily leans on the fantasy side of steampunk. But it's a very good read, I highly recommend it.

Rachel: Are you going to read the third one?

Melody: Yes, sometime, someday. (laughs)

Rachel: At one point.

Melody: I probably should now because I have reviewed the previous two, and I really am interested to see how it ends, so.

Rachel: Yeah, you've got to...got to see the ending.

Melody: There's a lot at stake now, after book two. Yeah.

Rachel: Oh, intrigue.

Melody: Yes. So that's a good one, I would recommend that one, too.

Rachel: Awesome.

Melody: Yeah, so I had some other things that are non-book related, but I just wanted to talk about them.

Rachel: Go for it! Please do.

Melody: Okay. So did you ever finally see "Alita: Battle Angel?"

Rachel: I have not, but I still plan on it. But please, give spoilers if you want to.

Melody: Okay. Well, I'll try to save our listeners from spoilers. So, "Alita: Battle Angel" came out in theaters this year—it's 2019, if anyone's listening in the future. (laughs)

Rachel: Hello, future people! How's it going?

Melody: Hi!

Rachel: Is everyone dead now? Don't tell us. Shh.

Melody: (laughs) But, the DVD comes out in May, and the library will have copies of the DVD. So, if you've seen the trailer for "Alita: Battle Angel," it looks like a story about this, like, cyborg human slash robot who's kind of a warrior but is falling in love, and there's a lot of action. So, I went into this movie

with low expectations. This is going to be one of those stories...movies that really, like, it's high on the action and CG but low on story.

Rachel: I was going to say, it's that poorly rendered eye garbage we were talking about. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, and it tends to sacrifice the plot and story? I was very pleasantly surprised. This story was so good. It was really, really good. This also...this movie is based on a graphic novel series which I think...

Rachel: We have ordered for the library!

Melody: Yes!

Rachel: So, by the end of the year we hope to have every single volume.

Melody: Yes, and it's called "Battle Angel Alita." Again, I'll put everything in the show notes, so if something you hear interests you, you can find it in the show notes. So, I think that's why the movie is so good, because it's basing the plot on a lot of the storyline in the graphic novels. The main character, Alita, is so likable because she's...she's definitely enhanced by CG. I mean, she has, like, a robotic body, but her face, as well, her eyes are, like, huge. Very anime-esque. But she's like this sweet, innocent girl, she's trying to figure out where she is and, like, she doesn't remember where she came from. She's found in, like, a garbage yard and put back together by this scientist and then tries to figure out her place in this world with a bunch of cyborgs and robots and people trying to, you know, make it on the outskirts of the town. So, kind of like we talked about in our last podcast, there's this dichotomy of, 'Am I a human?' 'Am I a robot?'

Rachel: Was going to say, it very much sounds like "Ghost in the Shell."

Melody: Yeah! 'Am I an innocent girl, or am I...why am I really good at fighting?' You know?

Rachel: Right. 'How much is in my control, how much isn't?'

Melody: Yeah, so that was really good, too. There's also this kind of paternal relationship between her and her scientist who takes care of her, which was really sweet and...I mean, for me, at least. I thought it was great. And then also, the CG and the action, too, were very well done.

Rachel: So, not eye garbage.

Melody: No, in my opinion.

Rachel: Fantastic. Yeah, it makes all the difference.

Melody: It really does. It was really good. I hope that they continue the series.

Rachel: Did it do well critically, do you know?

Melody: I think it did fairly well, but now that I think about it, it may not be in theaters anymore, which means possibly not as well as it should have. But in my mind it did better than I expected.

Rachel: Better than "Mortal Engines," anyway. Hey-o! (laughs)

Melody: I think so.

Rachel: Sorry, "Mortal Engines." (laughs) I didn't mean it!

Melody: (laughs) We love you!

Rachel: You're okay in your own right. You exist as a thing.

Melody: Right! So, that I recommend. Go watch that. Go read the graphic novels. I will be reading the graphic novels.

Rachel: Same.

Melody: The storyline is just really good. And then, the other thing I wanted to talk about was "The Umbrella Academy."

Rachel: Yas.

Melody: Which is a new show on Netflix also based on a graphic novel series.

Rachel: Which we will be getting in this year, too, because it's all-popular now.

Melody: Yes, it's very popular, and it's also available on Hoopla. So, if you don't want to wait for it, it's there right away. So, in "The Umbrella Academy," I have finished the whole season.

Rachel: I have not yet, but I'm getting there.

Melody: How far are you?

Rachel: Episode eight, I believe.

Melody: What's a significant thing that's happened?

Rachel: Let's see here...it's been a couple weekends since I've watched it. (laughs)

Melody: (laughs) Okay, so I watched it in a weekend.

Rachel: Oh, yeah I...yes, I can see...it's a very binge-worthy show.

Melody: I'm actually rewatching it, so I'm on, like, season two for the second time. Or, episode two.

Rachel: Oh! You know what it was? Everyone had just gotten to somewhat happy endings, and then the time gets reset. Yeah. And I was very upset about it! (laughs)

Melody: Okay. Yeah, so, this story is...I was reading reviews about it, and they say that the graphic novel is weird.

Rachel: I remember reading the first issue. Not even the first volume, but when it came out in, you know, issues. So, way back in the day, back when My Chemical Romance was popular, which I mention because Gerard Way wrote it, and he's the lead singer from that band. I believe! If I'm wrong, don't kill me. (laughs) But I could not get into it. I wasn't as into comics as I am now, but it was really bizarre.

Melody: Well, and—from what I read—I think they toned down the weirdness for the show, the TV show. They've kind of...some of the plot they've changed a little bit to make it a little bit more accessible. But I would say that the show is weird.

Rachel: It's pretty bonkers, yeah.

Melody: It's delightfully weird.

Rachel: Enjoyable, yeah.

Melody: Yes. So the...kind of the general concept, you want to? Since you've watched it more recently than me, possibly...?

Rachel: Yeah, so there are basically...I don't remember how many kids there are, but there are...

Melody: Like, 38 or something? I don't know.

Rachel: Yeah, there are a bunch of kids who were all born on the same day.

Melody: And none of their mothers were pregnant that morning.

Rachel: Yeah, and suddenly, preggers! Surprise! (laughs) You get these kids, and they all have powers.

Melody: Yeah, as far as we know.

Rachel: As far as we know.

Melody: Well, we only know...so, out of, like, the 38 or whatever, we only know of, like, six or eight or something?

Rachel: Yeah, six or seven, and those six or seven were all raised by this eccentric adventurer-philanthropist, he's-actually-kid-of-a-jerk guy at a place called the Umbrella Academy, and they're brought up to be superheroes. But then, they kind of have to go their separate ways and, for a spoilery reason, they have to come back together and then try to stop the end of the world from happening. I think that's the basic gist. There's time shenanigans, and assassins.

Melody: Which is...the time travel is done so well.

Rachel: It is, and it's interesting!

Melody: It's so interesting, and it's just, and their...their powers are really interesting, too.

Rachel: Yeah, they're not what you would expect from a superhero...thing.

Melody: So, I made notes about some of the...like, the key notes in this. It's...there's absurdity, there're superpowers, family dynamics, mystery, action, hitmen, apocalypse, romance, and it's just delightfully weird. The music is also great.

Rachel: Oh, it is one of the best parts of the show. You guys have to watch it.

Melody: Yes, and the characters are also really, really good, too. I'm loving the characters.

Rachel: They're well-rounded and thought out. Again, TV shows for the win when it comes to character development.

Melody: So, there's these two hitmen called Hazel and Cha-Cha. (laughs)

Rachel: My personal favorites.

Melody: They're...they're just, like, they bicker with each other.

Rachel: You can tell they're not from our time or world, really. It's an odd blending, but they work really well off of each other.

Melody: Yeah, so they're really fun, too, and then I really liked Allison, too. She has this amazing superpower. 'I heard a rumor'.

Rachel: She can...for those of you who don't understand... (laughs) She hears rumors and suddenly those rumors become true.

Melody: Yeah, so she'll say to you, like, 'I heard a rumor that you gave me an A on my test' to the teacher.

Rachel: And suddenly...

Melody: Lo and behold, she has an A!

Rachel: Which, who wouldn't want that? But, as we see in the show, things aren't always going to work out in her favor.

Melody: Mhm. That kind of backfires, a little bit. And then my all-time favorite character is Klaus.

Rachel: Yes, he is the bomb, guys. Ironically, he's played by...I say 'ironically', I mean 'coincidentally'.

Melody: (laughs) Uh-huh.

Rachel: That's where that English degree's going. He's played by Robert Sheehan who was also in "Mortal Engines" as Natsworthy. Again, the acting in the movie was great. Don't let what I've said about the film itself deter you—the actors are always great. And in "The Umbrella Academy," he is on point as ever. He is an amazing actor.

Melody: Yeah, he is fantastic. So, he plays this character who is...his superpower happens to be that he can see and talk to people that have died. So, of course, as an adult he's addicted to drugs and he's, you know, an alcoholic.

Rachel: Because who would want to see the deceased?

Melody: Right! So, he's, like, blocking it out with...but he's, like, this great character, he's...

Rachel: Very funny.

Melody: Very funny and cynical.

Rachel: Charismatic.

Melody: Yeah, he's just a fantastic character.

Rachel: Probably going to end up starting a fan club now given all this gushing we're doing.

Melody: (laughs) We love Klaus! Yeah, so "The Umbrella Academy" is only available on Netflix right now, unfortunately.

Rachel: Is it a Netflix Original?

Melody: It's a Netflix Original. It will probably only be on Netflix for a while, but if it does come out on DVD, which is not...not...

Rachel: Unprecedented, because...

Melody: I think they did that with "Stranger Things."

Rachel: And "House of Cards," which we shall not speak of. (laughs)

Melody: (laughs) I've never seen "House of Cards." So, if it does come out on DVD, obviously we will do our best to get it in the library system, but right now it's only on Netflix.

Rachel: We do have the comics coming.

Melody: Yes, so if you want, like, a little prelude, just remember that the comics are a lot more weird.

Rachel: And given how popular the show is, I believe they are now rebooting the comic series, or adding volumes, or something.

Melody: Well, this has been fun. Thanks for listening, everybody.

Rachel: Make sure you check out the show notes, because not only are we going to be putting the titles of everything we've been talking about but also a link to Oak Creek Public Library's steampunk booklist, which is pretty new. Check that out.

Melody: And then next month we're going to be talking about disaster books, like post...postapoc...I can't say it! (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) Postapocalyptic.

Melody: There you go, thank you! (laughs) Disaster stories. And, if you would, please remember to rate and review the podcast, and you can talk about the podcast, let us know what you thought with the #notyourmotherslibrary. Thank you for listening, happy reading.

Melody and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)