

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 3: Disaster

(Brief intro music)

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

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Melody: And we're librarians at the Oak Creek Public Library in Wisconsin, and on this podcast we love to talk about what we've been reading—and sometimes watching or listening to—and give recommendations. So, this month, we are going to be talking about disaster.

Rachel: Dun, dun, dun...which, I believe I've done the 'dun, dun, dun' for every episode of this podcast.

Melody: Now I expect you to do it...

Rachel and Melody: Every time.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah. Catch me out, listeners.

Melody: So, we're just going to give a really super-brief summary of the disaster genre, which I think is normally pretty self-explanatory. So, disaster usually covers things like natural disasters or accidents or, like, big calamities that happen. And you can have anything from a flood to a shipwreck to a zombie apocalypse—which is pretty popular these days.

Rachel: Mhm. "Walking Dead," anybody?

Melody: Right, and most of these stories are all about the aftermath of the disaster, and survival. How can you make it? And sometimes you get some disaster stories that are more historical or political, so, for example, "Titanic."

Rachel: Definitely one of the most well-known that actually happened.

Melody: Right—very historical. The...I don't know if anyone has seen "The Impossible." It's a movie that came out in 2012. It's based on the Indian Ocean tsunami that took place in 2004. It's a movie with Ewan McGregor.

Rachel: So, it's amazing that I haven't see it, then. (laughs)

Melody: Right? It's good! It's good. It's heavy material, sure. I think I watched it on an airplane, which was not a good idea.

Rachel: Uh-huh, must have been terrifying at 1,000 feet plus.

Melody: (laughs) Yeah. Right. Then another example I have is "The Day After Tomorrow."

Rachel: Right, that one I have seen.

Melody: Yes, and I would say that one is a little more political, because that is kind of...that's about climate change, which is a political topic these days. So, I'm going to get started and talk about what I

read, actually, a few years ago. I went back and did a brief summary just to refresh my memory. We know how well that went last week.

Rachel: (laughs) You'll do fine.

Melody: So, it's called "One Second After" by William R. Forstchen. Have you ever heard of this?

Rachel: I have not.

Melody: Okay, so it's a story about an EMP strike, which is...EMP stands for...

Rachel: 'Electromagnetic pulse'?

Melody: Electromagnetic pulse.

Rachel: Yeah, I've seen TV, guys. (laughs)

Melody: (laughs) So, usually, an EMP is a burst of energy, and it will damage pretty much every electronic equipment that it touches.

Rachel: Which is terrifying, considering how much people rely on technology today.

Melody: And you can plan an EMP strike—not you, don't do this. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) Disclaimer!

Melody: One can plan an EMP strike...one can plan one of these attacks, you can set off an EMP pulse in the atmosphere over...so, in this book, it happens in several strategic locations over the U.S. and it, like, essentially knocks out all electricity, anything that runs on electronic equipment. So, cars, any up-to-date...even, like, your laptop, even if it had battery wouldn't work. So everything is gone. The story's about our main character whose name is John Matherson. He's a retired U.S. Army colonel, so he has some experience, and he's a college professor now, and he has two daughters that he has to save. They're teenage girls—one's a teenager, one's a little bit younger—that he has to protect during this calamity. It's a really interesting story. I recommend this for sure. It's really fascinating what this town does, in this story. They...the mayor is, like, he doesn't...not really skilled in surviving without technology, but other members of the community really step up, like John Matherson, who know what they're doing and... So, with an EMP, there is a vehicle that was made, like, way back before electronic stuff happened in vehicles. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) I get you. I think everyone else does, too.

Melody: Yeah, and so that works. So, he has one of those and he's...he's a gun guy, so he's got lots of guns.

Rachel: Is he kind of, like, a doomsday prepper?

Melody: He's not a prepper, but he's very...very practical and no-nonsense, and he's not afraid to protect his family if he needs to. Yeah, so this town, they sort of establish a new authority rule. The mayor is still there, but he's...

Rachel: Figurehead.

Melody: Yeah, and they...they create this board in the community town, and they have to make these really scary decisions. Like, this is how much food we have, these are how many cows we have, we can't feed everyone, what should we do? So, they make some very strategic decisions about who will help us to continue to survive longer, so we should feed these people more.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, that's pretty dark.

Melody: Uh-huh, and who should we, you know, give a little bit less food to...gradually.

Rachel: (laughs) Wow.

Melody: Yeah, it's terrifying.

Rachel: That actually reminds me—we talked a little bit about “The Walking Dead” earlier when we did the intro. They did a Telltale Games series, which is kind of like a choose-your-own adventure, but it's based in the “Walking Dead” world. And I remember watching some of...some walkthroughs on YouTube for it, because I'm too much of a scaredy cat to play zombie games myself. Full disclosure!

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: But in that, you have to, like, decide who are you going to give this food to? The little kid or the old man or these other people in your group? Who are you going to protect, and I would never want to face that sort of decision.

Melody: Right, yeah, it's very scary. So, in the story, the other fascinating thing which is also scary is to see the stages in which people die. So, obviously, anyone who's on any kind of life support equipment, or they need electricity to survive, they're going to go pretty quickly. And then anyone who's on medication. They have, like, a life-threatening disease that they need medication. Obviously, it can't be produced anymore.

Rachel: And that's going to be loads of people.

Melody: Yeah, so our main character...he has, I think an eight-year-old who has diabetes.

Rachel: Oh no! It's so dark!

Melody: So, you'd better believe his first step, when he realizes that it happens, is he just gets as much insulin as he can, however he can. Yeah. And then, I think the next wave of people, they die of disease and injury because antibiotics are not...they're a limited resource.

Rachel: I like how you call it ‘waves’ of people, because that's really what it's going to be. It's going to be one thing after the other, unending.

Melody: And then another one is—this scene is so sad—is the elderly. There's a scene in a nursing home where the electricity is gone and, you know, these staff members have families, so most of them go home to their families. It's really...

Rachel: Devastating.

Melody: Yeah, if you have a, you know, if you don't do well with gore and blood and gross things, maybe don't read this book. (laughs) But it is very realistic. And then, obviously, the next would be starvation.

Just because they have limited food. The cool thing about this story is they are located in the Midwest, which is where we here at this library are in the Midwest, and we have a higher chance of surviving.

Rachel: Hooray!

Melody: Yay! We have water—the Great Lakes—and we have a lot more crops and farms with animals. Yeah. And then, another thing that was really interesting that happens in this story is...there's kind of a gang that emerges of cannibals.

Rachel: Oh, great. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, and they're, like, traveling from town to town and just...

Rachel: Eating people up.

Melody: Yeah, taking advantage of no more government control.

Rachel: Horrendous.

Melody: Yeah, and that's, like, the big scene in this book, is they fight off the cannibals. It's scary, but it's a really good read. I listened to the audiobook while driving, which is a really bad idea because I would think, well, what would happen if my car...if this happened now. I'm, you know, an hour from my home.

Rachel: I mean, you see, like, zombie films—that's my go-to with this sort of thing, to reference—and there are always the highways with the abandoned cars, because once you're stuck, you're stuck, and you have to get out and walk. Yeah, that's pretty realistic.

Melody: And I think one of the keys is to act immediately if it happens, because the longer you wait the more dangerous it becomes.

Rachel: Take advantage of everyone else's panic. (laughs)

Melody: Yes, so there are actually...this is the first in the series. So, there are two other books. The second one is called "One Year After," and then the last one is called "The Final Day."

Rachel: Oh, wow. So... (laughs) That's a bit of a downward spiral.

Melody: Yeah, and I...I haven't read the other two at all. I've only read the first one.

Rachel: Would you read the other two?

Melody: I would. I actually went back and tried to relisten to this audiobook, and I would not recommend the audiobook, to be honest. I would just recommend actually reading the book itself.

Rachel: And why's that?

Melody: It feels a little slow. It can be boring. So, having listened to that, my interest has kind of gone a little bit downhill, but it's a really fascinating concept, and it scared me into thinking about, like, well, what would my plan be if something...

Rachel: We've all had those thoughts. I mean, especially the world the way it is. I think everyone throughout the centuries has had that thought.

Melody: What would I do? I also had some similar recommendations, I guess.

Rachel: Hit us with them.

Melody: So, "Bird Box."

Rachel: I have heard of that!

Melody: Which is a movie on Netflix. Have you seen it?

Rachel: No, I've been waiting to read the book, but...yeah.

Melody: Oh, I forgot that it was based on a book, yeah. So, I've seen the movie. It's...it's a pretty scary concept. But, again, really interesting.

Rachel: Mhm, kind of unique in the genre.

Melody: Yeah, so, if anyone hasn't heard of "Bird Box," it's about this kind of...I don't even know where it comes from, but there's a monster that—if you see it, you are compelled to kill yourself.

Rachel: Right, which...it's kind of like "A Quiet Place," where it has to do with your senses being limited.

Melody: Right, that was my next on my list.

Rachel: Oh, sorry! (laughs)

Melody: No, it's fine. (laughs) Totally fine. Yeah, so, like, the key in "Bird Box" is to not look at it, so how do you survive without seeing? And then, similarly, "A Quiet Place" is a movie about these monsters that hunt by sound. So, if you're silent, they can't find you. Again...

Rachel: That was an excellent movie.

Melody: Yes, very, very, good—highly recommend it.

Rachel: Unlike another similar movie called "The Happening" by M. Night Shyamalan which...it's similar in that something is going on where it's compelling people to kill themselves, like in "Bird Box," but, like I said, M. Night Shyamalan. Take that for what you will. (laughs)

Melody: Okay, I haven't seen that.

Rachel: It came out ages ago.

Melody: Maybe I don't need to add that to my list?

Rachel: No, probably not. But each to their own.

Melody: So, once again, after...if you're interested, it's available through the library system—the Milwaukee County system. It's available on OverDrive, and the audio, which I won't actually recommend, is available on Hoopla, if you want to take the risk.

Rachel: If push comes to shove and you're desperate to read it.

Melody: Yeah, you can listen to the audio on Hoopla. So, what have you been reading?

Rachel: Well, it's funny because you said, 'Hey, you want to do a disaster podcast?' and I'm like, 'Mmm, yeah...'

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: I have kind of a love-hate with the dystopian genre in general. Dystopian fantasy or scifi can be really fun to read, but for things that hit closer to reality, like postapocalyptic fiction or disaster, where bad things can happen on an ecological or viral scale...it can get really dark. And look, I can do dark, okay? I watch "True Detective."

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: But I also need some hope for tomorrow wedged in there to make it palatable, you know? I can't just have dark, dark, dark all the time. I mean, otherwise it's just scary, and depressing, and I already have enough to keep me up at night as it is, thank you very much. But that said, I think that fiction in particular is powerful because it can drive you away from reality, and it can allow you to feel those darker emotions. Even though it's not really happening, you can kind of reassure yourself of the fact that this is just fiction, and we can explore those emotions and immerse ourselves in the story without sacrificing anything.

Melody: Yeah, it's a safe place to get lost, so to speak, because you can remove yourself from it. You know it's not real.

Rachel: So, escapism comes in different forms, and you can do it for different reasons, so it definitely has merit. That said, I read...well, actually, I reread one of my personal favorites for this. (laughs) I didn't want to plunge myself into more darkness.

Melody: Good call.

Rachel: I reread "Station Eleven" by Emily St. John Mandel. The book hit shelves in 2014 and was crazy popular. Have you read it?

Melody: I haven't. I know nothing about this.

Rachel: It made a bunch of best read lists when it first came out, and it won a bunch of awards, too, and really prestigious ones. I picked it up a year or two after it came out, and I read it cover to cover in about a day, because—surprise, surprise—it really is riveting.

Melody: Wow. Wow, do you remember how big it was, like a 350 kind of a page...?

Rachel: I think closer to 400, maybe 500. But yeah, it's...it reads quickly. It very much propels you into the world.

Melody: You have...you need to know what happens?

Rachel: Yeah, absolutely. The characters. It's post-pandemic apocalypse fiction. Civilization's freshly collapsed following a flu virus that kills almost everybody in the world, so far as we know. The focus is on an actor named Arthur Leander and a select handful of other survivors including his first wife, his son, his best friend, a doctor, and a young woman named Kirsten who was just a child when the epidemic took place. She was pretty badly scarred in the first year following the flu, but she's since joined a

troupe of thespians called 'The Travelling Symphony', and they perform plays under the motto 'survival is insufficient'. So, they go around living life, pretty much, in a world's that has been utterly devastated.

Melody: That's fascinating.

Rachel: Mhm, and that's key to the story, really. The idea that for humans to be human they have to do more than survive. They have to actually live life and pursue beauty and art no matter the circumstance, which is something that I can definitely get behind.

Melody: Yeah! Wow, that's really interesting.

Rachel: Right, which, I don't know if, you know, an apocalypse were to happen, if that would actually hold up. (laughs) Because so much of your life would be focused on your survival.

Melody: Yeah, well, so, the next book I'm going to talk about, there's a point at which you know a certain character is going to survive, and then the character finally has space in their brain to think about, 'Oh, I am going to survive. Now I can think about other things', and it's such a big shift in the story.

Rachel: Because there's an 'after', you know? You don't tend to think about it when everything goes down the gutter.

Melody: No, because all you're...everything in your mind, all of your energy is going to survival. Yeah, that's really interesting.

Rachel: So, the story alternates between when the flu goes global to twenty years down the line when The Travelling Symphony comes to this town called St. Deborah By the Water, and they find out that it's been taken over by a cult with a leader who calls himself The Prophet, which is not a good sign. It's a lot of red flags.

Melody: Yeah, it's not new, though. You know you're surviving when there's a cult. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs) That's true! Silver lining. (laughs) And things definitely go downhill from there with child brides and missing people and yeah. So, it does get kind of dark. But there's actually another settlement of people living in an airport terminal. So, when the flu happens, they kind of get grounded there and they never really move on, just make, like, their own little colony there. And it...the way that's presented, from when the flu first hits to two decades later, it's fascinating and probably my favorite part. There's someone in the terminal who puts together a museum of civilization made up of, like, old appliances that that no longer work. Which I think is a cool idea to, like, kind of make a museum of modern humanity.

Melody: Right, that is no longer...now that we've backtracked several decades.

Rachel: Just think: 'And this, young girl, is a toaster! People used to burn their toast with it'.

Melody: "Burn their toast." (laughs) That's about right.

Rachel: That's the only thing I've ever been able to do with one. The author herself—Emily St. John Mandel—is exceptional. The way she creates her world in the story is probably best described as 'subtle'. It's realistic, for sure, and it's really the small ways in which things change following the disaster that makes everything so believable. After I finished reading, I wanted to know what happened not just

to the characters in the book but everyone else in the world who survived, because she did such a good job of creating this, like, microcosm with her characters. You're like, 'What's happening with everyone else in the world? Are they as human as these people, are they less human? What's going on?' And that says a lot, I think, because most people probably don't want to linger in a place with so much death and loss, even if that place only exists in your mind or between the pages of a book, you know? Mandel doses the story with hope, but it's not overbearing or saccharine in any way.

Melody: That's really a fascinating concept. Do you know what causes the flu and why the people who survive make it?

Rachel: Yes, but I don't want to spoil it, because that's kind of a big part of the plot.

Melody: Oh, okay. So, it is kind of like an ongoing mystery throughout the story?

Rachel: Yes, definitely, and like I said, the story focuses on Arthur Leander, but he's...by the time—20 years later, he's dead. So, the focus of the story is on him, but remember we're going back and forth between the two time periods. For a readalike, I would say try "The Gracekeepers" by Kirsty Logan. It's fantasy fiction set in a similar yet alternative world to our own, and it's beset by rising sea levels. So, it's not really a pandemic kind of thing but, again, we've got that global disaster going on. It's a haunting, dark, magical quality, that story, and I highly recommend it. Print editions are available for both "Station Eleven" and "The Gracekeepers" at Oak Creek Public Library, and both in eBook and audiobook on Libby. Got to love databases! (laughs)

Melody: Yeah! So, okay, my question is...so did you feel like you needed a vaccine afterwards?

Rachel: Afterward? Yeah, you know? But it's...the thing of it is, it's not a normal flu that kills everyone. There's something else going on.

Melody: That's very intriguing! You left me wanting more, which is...you've done your job well. So, the next book I want to talk about is called "Dry" by Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman.

Rachel: I've heard of them.

Melody: I'm assuming they're related somehow. So, I know...I knew about this because I had read a young adult novel called...what is it called? "Scythe?" I think that's...

Rachel: Sure, the one with the really cool book cover? Yeah.

Melody: Yes, so I read "Scythe" by Neal Shusterman before, which is a fantastic book which I will talk about some other day. Not today.

Rachel: Sounds good.

Melody: But I heard about this book that came out by the same author, and I was very intrigued. So, the premise is that all the running tap water in California is almost out, and it finally goes out. And they are without water. And it's terrifying. It's very scary.

Rachel: Does the rest of the world have access?

Melody: Yes, but everything that takes place in this story takes place there, so you don't really see the other parts of the U.S. or other parts of the world dealing with it. It's very central to California. And, they are not really given much aid when it happens.

Rachel: That's why I asked, because I figure...okay, well, I mean I guess we saw what happened in Flint, Michigan, IRL. (laughs)

Melody: I don't know...what happened in Flint?

Rachel: The water crisis? You don't know about Flint, Michigan?

Melody: No. (laughs)

Rachel: Okay, well, there's a water crisis going on, and it has been for years.

Melody: Really?

Rachel: Yeah. And it's weird, because you'd think, you know, a town in the U.S. that's been suffering, the government or other states would try and help, but that is probably what makes this so terrifying, the fact that it might not come, the help that you need so desperately.

Melody: Yeah, I mean, that's kind of what I walked away with having read both of these stories, is the idea that I probably should be prepared not to have help. You know? Because if it comes down to me, alone. (laughs) You know, chances of me surviving are kind of low.

Rachel: (laughs) I don't know about that.

Melody: So, maybe I should do something about that. So, anyway. In this story, they don't have water anymore, and there's...the story focuses on this group of teens. This is a young adult book, so, when I first started it, I was a little frustrated by the YA feel of the writing. Felt like it was a little bit less advanced than I wanted it to be.

Rachel: Especially for the subject matter.

Melody: Right, and some of the teens were infuriatingly frustrating. So, there's this one character who—she's I don't know, 17, 16—and she's a sweet girl. She wants to help people. But in an apocalypse, you cannot be kindhearted, because...you know what I mean?

Rachel: (laughs) You really can't.

Melody: So, the story focuses on her and her neighbor, and her neighbor family happens to be preppers, so they have...

Rachel: Oh, lucky!

Melody: Yeah, they have a big wall around their house, and a generator. They have food and water, and they're ready to go. And the boy happens to like this girl who lives next door, so he gives her some water. And the town is out of water, and she goes to a town meeting and gives them a backpack with water bottles, which is a bad idea. Like, just don't be compassionate in a survival situation.

Rachel: Especially at a town meeting, because those always go horrible!

Melody: Yeah, and she just leaves the backpack and the water with them, because it's already...things are already getting crazy. And her neighbor's name is on the backpack.

Rachel: Oh my gosh.

Melody: And now they know where it came from!

Rachel: (makes strangled noise)

Melody: Yeah! It's just so frustrating. I was so angry with her but, thankfully, there is some character development. She finally learns to just look out for herself.

Rachel: And not leave incriminating backpack evidence all over the place!

Melody: Yeah, things go really bad. So, I also had some, like, physical reactions to reading this book. If you're reading "Dry," you really want to have a glass of water next to you. (laughs)

Rachel: (laughs)

Melody: Makes you really value water. And again, like I said, I was very frustrated. This I got through a little bit faster than I normally do, again because I wanted to know what happened. Another thing that I noticed was different groups of people have different responses to crisis, which pretty much happens in every disaster novel, but it's really fascinating to see how this group of people work together, and they're a group of teenagers, and they're...they try to take power based on whatever they can. So, if someone grabs the car keys—they have one car—and they're not going to give them up, because now I have the power to be the one driving. So, that's really interesting. And then they come across this kind of community—like you were saying, that airport community—that's living on the highway with abandoned cars everywhere. And this older woman they call 'the water angel'. (laughs)

Rachel: She's air quoting, for you guys who can't see. (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, sorry, I forgot this is a podcast. So, the water angel, quote-unquote, has found a way to find water in cars. And these kids are like, 'What? How is that possible?' Turns out, some of—not all of the cars, but some of the cars—some of these more lazy drivers are not filling their windshield wiper fluid things with windshield wiper fluid, they're putting water in it. So, this community is living on the highway and going out and looking for water, and then this woman is deciding who gets it based on how healthy they are.

Rachel: Oh, wow.

Melody: Yeah. Fascinating. And they're, like, a happy community, they get along together. It's really interesting.

Rachel: You know, both of the books you've talked about—"One Second After" and "Dry"—are actually reminding me of a podcast I just started. It's a fiction podcast called "Blackout" by...I don't know who wrote it, sorry, but it stars Rami Malik...Malek?

Melody: Oh, he's from...

Rachel: From "Bohemian Rhapsody" and "Mr. Robot."

Melody: Yes. I was going to say “Night at the Museum.” (laughs)

Rachel: Sure! Yeah, I’m sure he love being known for that movie. (laughs)

Melody: I’m sure he does.

Rachel: Oh, Rami. But it’s very much the same in that it focuses on one community, and we’re not sure if it’s an EMP that happens—like you were talking about earlier—or something else. But the power grid goes down, and it keeps staying down. It’s episodic, and they’re in the middle of it right now, so you could catch up and get to the middle of season one. It’s really good.

Melody: I will have to look into it. Sounds fun.

Rachel: Very well written. It’s full-cast voice acting, so...”Blackout” with Rami Malek, or Malik. I don’t know how to pronounce your last name, sir, I’m sorry.

Melody: (laughs) You’re a great actor, though.

Rachel: You won an award. It’s great.

Melody: So, I...after reading this, I made a list of pro-tips, because obviously I am now experienced in surviving.

Rachel: Can we do an intro for that? (sings) Melody’s survival pro-tips! Thumbs up!

Melody: (laughs) Find water in cars. There’s also...there’s a part where one of the characters...her friend is almost dead. Can’t move. And there’s...she found a little bit of water, but it’s, like, yards away, and she has nothing to carry the water in.

Rachel: Oh my gosh.

Melody: You can carry water in your mouth.

Rachel: (gasps then whispers) That’s a good point.

Melody: Yes. It was a really cool moment. Kind of weird, but, you know.

Rachel: Survival.

Melody: Yeah. The other...my other pro-tip is not to flaunt your resources, because the prepper family keeps their generator on and all their lights on when all of the power is out around the neighborhood. They just did not handle it well.

Rachel: (makes high-pitched noise) That’s so dumb.

Melody: So, it was a really good story. I would recommend it. It kept me reading and wanting more. Makes me kind of want to do a little prepping.

Rachel: That’s great. Oh, for sure, yeah. That is the thing with this genre in general.

Melody: It is. It really is. So, the book that I had mentioned—“Scythe”—by the same author—Neal Shusterman—I would...I would suggest that as a readalike if you liked the feel of this story. It’s an actual

series itself, so the series is called “Arc of Scythe.” Very fascinating story, which...the basic premise is that technology has solved the problem of death, but now there’s a problem of overpopulation.

Rachel: Of course.

Melody: So, the people are chosen to control the population by killing certain people.

Rachel: Now, I own a copy of this book, but I haven’t read it yet, and now I really, really want to.

Melody: It’s very good. It’s really, really good. I’ve read the first two books. I think the third one isn’t out yet, but it’s good. And the other book I recommend is called “Landscape with Invisible Hand” by M.T. Anderson. These are all in the young adult kind of vein. This one is about a group of aliens that have taken over the world, and this teenager and his girlfriend figured out how to make money by recording a reality show about their relationship that the aliens enjoy watching.

Rachel: Oh, interesting! That’s pretty unique.

Melody: It really is, and I haven’t read that one but it’s been on my to-read list for a while, so that’s another read-alike, as well. So, if you’re interested in reading “Dry,” it’s available through the Milwaukee County system. You can request it, and it’s also on OverDrive as an audio or an eBook.

Rachel: Mhm. Usually, unless we say otherwise, these things are pretty much available on the databases.

Melody: We try to mention them just so that you can find them.

Rachel: Well, yeah, and again, we’re flaunting them because they’re great. (laughs)

Melody: They’re really nice, yeah. So, you want to finish up with the last book?

Rachel: Yeah! For my second book, I also reread this one. It’s “Oryx and Crake” by Margaret Atwood. She’s an amazing author, I’m sure you’ve heard of her.

Melody: She has written “The Handmaid’s Tale.”

Rachel: Mhm, yeah. She’s very prolific. This...“Oryx and Crake” was actually assigned reading during my high school days. I was, ah, they type of student who always did her homework. (laughs)

Melody: Rachel, I am so there with you. (laughs) I’m sorry, to everyone listening.

Rachel: Uh-huh, putting in too much effort. I read every novel in English lit. from grade school onwards, which...I’m not bragging, guys. I know it makes me sound like a nerd. (laughs) And there were definitely some titles that were worse—much, much, much worse—than others, but I can confidently say that “Oryx and Crake” was in a class of its own. See what I did there? Ba-dum tch!

Melody: (laughs)

Rachel: It’s bad when I have to do my own snare drum.

Melody: Yeah, I should have done it. I’m sorry.

Rachel: That’s okay, it’s okay. Much like Mandel and “Station Eleven,” Atwood splits the story into two different timelines. One again, the human race has been wiped out, also by a plague. And we have been

replaced by these genetically modified fellas called 'Crakers' who are able to survive pretty easily, but they're also pretty dumb.

Melody: What do you mean "replaced?" Are they humans?

Rachel: Well, we're dead, so they're kind of filling our shoes. There is one human left, named Snowman, and he watches over the Crakers and tells them false stories about the world as it used to be. And Snowman himself has flashbacks to his life before, to when he was a boy named Jimmy. And we learn that the world was already pretty much a dystopia before the apocalypse. Everything used to be run by corporations and scientists, but they were corrupt and didn't really adhere to morals when it came to genetic engineering. Also, loads of animals were already extinct by the time Jimmy was a...was born. So, clearly not in the best of shape. And Jimmy has things particularly rough. He only has one childhood friend named Crake. Sound familiar? He's basically a genius, this fella named Crake, but he's also a jerk who likes to play god. And they do some super dubious stuff together throughout.

Melody: Okay, I feel like those two things go hand-in-hand in stories a lot: being very smart but also kind of douche-y.

Rachel: (laughs) Yes, absolutely. I really like how this novel explores the idea of the humanities versus the sciences. The debate over whether studies like art, music, writing, and philosophy are worth pursuing crops up again and again in our own world. Hint: they definitely are worth pursuing! Atwood tackles this head-on. Jimmy ends up attending a humanities school, which is a place for people who aren't quote-unquote clever enough to deal with numbers. And the attendees are frowned upon by others who see them as 'less than'. Because of this—at least, in part—he grows to be a super depressed guy. I mean, I would, too. You have all these people surrounding you who say you are dumb. But then Crake resurfaces in his life and offers him a job at a super suss place called the 'rejuvenescence center'. Which... (laughs) He's been working on a project to end human suffering, which again, super dodgy, right? I mean, what...even define 'suffering', first of all.

Melody: Little scary.

Rachel: Yeah. Anyway, Crake wants a world where people don't feel romantic attachment or sexual desire, where they don't practice religion or philosophy, or make art. It makes sense from, like, the coldest logical standpoint, but the dude's pretty messed up. Obviously.

Melody: Yeah, that seems like a boring life.

Rachel: For sure. I won't spoil the ending, because it's a doozy, and everyone needs to read this book. But yeah, what I will say is, just like in "Station Eleven," survival isn't sufficient, guys. For readalikes, I would say try the othertwo novels in this trilogy if you end up liking "Oryx and Crake." The second book is called "The Year of the Flood" and the third is called "MaddAddm." Margaret Atwood also wrote another dystopian novel that Melody mentioned earlier, and I'm sure plenty of you have heard about. "The Handmaid's Tale," which has become a Hulu series, I believe?

Melody: Yeah, but I haven't' seen it.

Rachel: I have to watch it.

Melody: That seems really heavy for me right now. (laughs) Maybe someday, later.

Rachel: Yes, put it on the queue. All these titles are available at various Milwaukee County Libraries as well as digitally through Libby. And we at Oak Creek actually have an adult fiction booklist from the dystopian genre with plenty of disaster titles on there.

Melody: Yeah, and we'll put a link to that in the show notes for today.

Rachel: For sure. So, if you like your disasters natural or manufactured, check it out.

Melody: (laughs) Yeah, reading these really made me—I mean, I'm sure it does to everyone—really made me evaluate my own situation and wonder, like, would I?

Rachel: Could I survive?

Melody: What would I do?

Rachel: Would I eat people? No, probably not. Probably.

Melody: Would you eat your pet?

Rachel: No, probably not.

Melody: Really?

Rachel: For sure. I love my schmookums. (laughs)

Melody: (laughs) If it was you or the animal...

Rachel: I would die with her in my arms.

Melody: Wow, okay. See, I didn't grow up with pets, so...

Rachel: There you go. Oh, Melody. (laughs)

Melody: It's sad.

Rachel: You are a monster. (laughs)

Melody: But so, thinking about this, lead me to this fun quiz that we both took called "The Ultimate Zombie Apocalypse Survival Quiz," and it tells you what percentage your chance of survival would be. So, it had all of these really interesting questions. Some logistical questions like, 'Can you operate a firearm?' 'Are you skilled in...' I don't remember the things.

Rachel: 'What would you do in this specific situation where you have, like, a piece of bread and you have to feed three people?'

Melody: That was a weird question. 'What kind of medicine would you need for this kind of an injury?'

Rachel: Yeah: 'What would you take if you had a cut? Would you take this medicine? It might kill you!' (laughs)

Melody: Right, yeah, so it was really fun to take, and I was hoping I would get, like, you know, like 80%, because I wanted to survive.

Rachel: Uh-huh. Again, overachievers here.

Melody: I got a 64.

Rachel: I took it, as well, and I got a 68.3.

Melody: Well, I'm sticking with you, then.

Rachel: Yeah, don't eat your cat! (laughs) That is my advice.

Melody: (laughs) But what I wish they had done at the end of this quiz was told you what their recommended answers were and what you should work on.

Rachel: Yeah, they didn't give you anything, just the number. And I think I scored kind of high because my parents own a lot of, like, sledgehammers and things for projects around the house that you could also use as weaponry. So, I lucked out there.

Melody: Well, and I also...I don't. I live in an apartment, so that puts me at a disadvantage, too, because it's...you can't protect yourself from an apartment, really.

Rachel: You can't have a bunker in an apartment. Which I'm sure other people have been told, and they're like, 'Watch me try!' (laughs)

Melody: Yeah, so it was really fun, so I'll put the link to take that quiz, too, if you guys want to take it. I think it would be fun to check out.

Rachel: Another aspect of all this is yeah, you would have to survive, but would you want to? Because, I mean, if you do, there's...chances are you know loads of people who won't survive and, after they're gone, what's the point, you know?

Melody: Once you kill your dog and eat him...

Rachel (sighs) Bringing that up again, Melody! Do we need to talk about something? Are you hiding things from me? (laughs)

Melody: I'm just so much more practically minded. I say that now but, you know, if it happened...

Rachel: Oh, I mean, I don't know how to kill an animal to...or dress it to, you know, eat it.

Melody: You have to, yeah, be a little bit more practical about it. Anyway. It's a very fun thing to talk about.

Rachel: Obviously!

Melody: Yeah. I feel like I need to up my skills a little bit more and knowledge, maybe plant a garden or something. In my apartment complex.

Rachel: That's a good start. (laughs) They have those hydro-planters.

Melody: I think you can rent garden plots.

Rachel. Mhm, but then it's a matter of getting to the plot once the zombies are after you.

Melody: That's true. I mean, whoever gets there first is taking everything. Yeah, well anyway.

Rachel: Be sure to look at the show notes for titles and links to the books and resources we've talked about today. Next month we'll be having a special guest, one of our Access Services Librarians here at Oak Creek Library, and we'll be talking about LGBTQ reads. Remember to rate and review and subscribe to the podcast, which is something I've never ever said before and have always hated on YouTube videos, but hey! We need the likes to keep going, guys. (laughs)

Melody: I'm sorry. (laughs)

Rachel: You can let us know what you think using the #notyourmotherslibrary. Thanks for listening. Happy reading!

Melody and Rachel: Bye!

Melody: Stay alive!

(Brief outro music)