

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Mini-Episode 6: Watchmen

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I am co-host Rachel. Co-host Leah has recorded a separate episode as part of the pact to keep ourselves social distant from one another and everyone else in the world. It isn't really a pact so much as common sense, since we're in a world where Coronavirus is running rampant. Plus, social distancing is easy enough. Just picture everyone around you as a zombie intent on devouring your brains and you'll feel more motivated to maintain a safe distance.

Right now, OCPL's in-person programs have been canceled through to the end of April. It's a fluid situation, and we'll see if more events need to be pushed back depending on how this pandemic pans out. Hmm. Luckily, Not Your Mother's Library is uploading mini-episodes to fill the vast void in your heart. And, if you haven't noticed, over on the library's Facebook page the children's department is releasing weekly Online Story Times. The first video was recorded and is available forevermore, since everything featured is in the public domain. The subsequent Story Times are live and only available upon premiere, as per publisher permission guidelines. So, seek those out before you miss 'em. The children's department is also hosting Family Fun Night at Home every Thursday from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. That's Central Standard Time. Simply visit the library's Facebook page—link in the description—and tune in to the featured activity. We'll be asking patrons to comment with pictures of their creations, so the more participants the better. And who knows? If they're really popular we may keep them going until after the pandemic is...not as pandemic-y? No longer a pandemic. Yeah, let's go with that wording. Right, let us continue to combat boredom together. Are you sitting comfortably? Maybe grab your preferred beverage of choice as you join me on this journey into my mind. That's right, we're continuing on with the trend of our favorite media—go-to comforts in a time of so many unknowns. My pick for today is the graphic novel "Watchmen," created by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. "But Rachel!" I pretend to hear you cry, "'Watchmen' is, you know, super dark and apocalyptic, and how do you find it comforting?" To which I respond: it's...just...really...good. I get it, I truly do. A lot of the time, the world around us is a scary place, and people might choose to surround themselves with things that make them happy in the face of all that despair. I just happen to think that if something is dark, or messed up, or whatever, it doesn't necessarily benefit anyone to avoid it, especially when a lot of those messed up things make you think, or force you to experience some strong mix of emotions. I don't know enough about human psychology to talk about it with any sort of coherence, I simply understand how I personally react to things. And yeah, reading "Watchmen" makes me cry internally every time, but I think that means it achieved its goal. Not to make me cry, obviously, but to make me feel. Besides, this isn't "We Happy Few." Pushing away the bad isn't going to solve anything. So yeah, "Watchmen." For those who aren't familiar, this series was published by DC Comics in the late '80s. Alan Moore is a creative giant in the world of comics. His other famous works include "Swamp Thing," "The Killing Joke," and "The League of Extraordinary Gentleman." With "Watchmen," Moore takes the superhero genre and turns it on its head. The 'heroes' in this fable exist in an alternate universe and have been outlawed. They rose to the height of their power in the mid-nineteen hundreds, helping to win the Vietnam War. But the people eventually turn against them—with the help of the government, of course, which becomes fearful of

their growing influence. Cut to the 1980s, and America is now on the brink of World War III with the Soviets. A retired superhero known as the Comedian is murdered, and another hero-turned-vigilante named Rorschach starts to investigate the crime. The bulk of the story is about a handful of these ex-superheroes as they struggle with the failing world, their own morality, and the discovery of a plot that will change human life forever. But you can't talk about "Watchmen" without talking about its story structure. There are flashbacks and time jumps and interwoven stories, but while it's nonlinear, it's played out very precisely. There's also a lot of symbolism and recurring imagery not just panel-to-panel, but character-to-character. It is a masterpiece and, rightly so, one of the most renowned graphic novels of all time. I didn't actually read "Watchmen," not at first. When I was a fresh-faced 15-year-old, I saw the animated motion comic. I cannot recommend this version enough, because it really brought the story to life. The narration is perfect, too. The motion comic is abridged, so I also recommend fully reading the comic itself. There is also a film adaptation, which has its merits, but in my opinion simply doesn't do justice. The same can be said for the prequel graphic novel series called "Before Watchmen." I haven't read the limited series sequel called "Doomsday Clock," nor do I really plan to. However, HBO recently made a TV series—also called "Watchmen"—and it acts as a sequel to the original story. Even though I went in skeptical, it...was...excellent. The TV show is in no way a reboot or spiritual successor: it takes place in the world created by Moore and Gibbons, moves the plot 34 years into modern day, and goes from there. Truth be told, I've never been a fan of either prequels or retellings, but this sequel was surprisingly good. I grew as a person after being exposed to "Watchmen." It's difficult to read at times, yes, but it moves you. So, that's why it gets a five-star recommendation from me. I don't really plan on using star recommendations in the future, just FYI. For readalikes, try "V for Vendetta" or "From Hell," both of which are also by Alan Moore. These are super dark, too, if not as widely recognized as "Watchmen." If you want more works out of the same era, go for "Hellblazer" or "The Sandman." If you like the tone, try Frank Miller's ultra-gritty "Sin City" or Warren Ellis's dystopian "Transmetropolitan." These titles will be listed in the podcast's shownotes, as per always. You can browse our online graphic novel collection via the Hoopla database, also linked in the shownotes. We've reached the end of the episode, folks. Leah and I have a few more mini-episodes in store for you, so check back at this feed sometime soon. Subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. Remember, you can reach us through the library's website or Facebook page—just use the #notyourmotherslibrary. Thanks for listening! Until next time, happy reading, and as Rorschach said, "Never despair. Never surrender." Wait...wasn't that "Galaxy Quest?"

(Brief outro music)