

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 21: Escapism Reads

(Brief intro music)

Rachel: Hello, and welcome to a new year of Not Your Mother's Library. For those of you who are tuning in for the first time, we are a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Rachel.

Leah: And I'm Leah.

Rachel: As most of our long-time listeners know, we are based out of the state of Wisconsin. Can I just ask...are any of you as sick of seeing snow as I am?

Leah: I sure am!

Rachel: For real. Winter was my favorite season for years—all sparkly and shiny and full of no-school-snow-days. Ever since I started driving, though, I have liked this season less and less. When it's not ice, it's slush. Gross. Luckily, the Streets Department here in Oak Creek is on point. They start up with their brigade of plows as soon as possible and are very quick to clear the streets. But the other thing I dislike about winter in Wisconsin? Shoveling. Taking care of my parents' driveway and sidewalk wasn't so bad when I was a kid living at home, mainly because I liked the idea of being able to help out. However, now that I have my own place, it just feels like a massive chore—one that I usually have to do far too early in the day. Ugh. Snow. How do you feel about it, Leah?

Leah: Oh man, snow. It is pretty, and one of my favorite things in the whole world is to curl up by the fire when snow is falling and read a good book. But the minute I have to go drive in it or shovel it, it leaves much to be desired. I really didn't miss it when I lived in Florida—not one teeny-tiny bit. To take our minds off of these horrible Wisconsin winters, we have decided to escape. Well, it's not an actual escape, to be fair, but we at least wanted to distract ourselves by reading some great books that can transport our minds—if not our bodies—to warmer, sunnier climes. So, close the curtains, switch on the table lamp next to your coziest reading

chair, and say 'no' to snow with these escapism reads. When thinking about books that help me escape reality, I tend to gravitate directly towards fantasy or sci-fi materials. Anything that gets my imagination going, you know? If you've heard any of my mini-episodes, you probably have heard about most of my favorite books and series, so I'll do my best not to talk about any of those in this episode. Keeping it fresh, you know? I'll let you know what I'm currently listening to, though. It's an old favorite. A part of the Arcane Society books by Jayne Ann Krentz and her pseudonyms Amanda Quick and Jayne Castle, it's second book in the series called "White Lies." I don't always listen to books in line, I usually like to listen to books within the same world building setting. So, I just finished all of her futuristic books as Jayne Castle, and previous to that I listened to her historical books under the name Amanda Quick. Her Jayne Ann Krentz books are contemporary fiction. All of them have a fantastical twist of special powers, and I adore them. I read them over and over again, whether in print, on an e-reader, or listening on Audible. Anyways, I believe I highlighted some of those in a mini, so I'll move on to a different book. Well, series? Multiple series? Maybe 'author' would be a better term. Okay. Nalini Singh writes multiple series and has a rather extensive amount of books out. Her most prolific series is called "Psy/Changeling," and that world is filled with humans, a race called psy, and a race called changelings. Psy have various special psychic powers, and changelings can change into different animals. All three factions really try to keep to themselves and don't have too much interaction with each other, especially the psy and the changelings. But in the series, you start to see cooperation and teambuilding and a change in the world and how everyone interacts with each other. There's conflict too, with evil factions set on genocide and other reprehensible things. I believe she's still writing in this series, so it'll be interesting to see where it goes!

Rachel: I love the idea of psychic powers. I always picture Professor Xavier from the "X-Men" comics making that super uncomfortable, squinty face whenever he tries really, really hard to read somebody's mind. (laughs) So great. Anyway, do carry on.

Leah: Her other series I've read is the "Guild Hunter" series. These are set in a world that is controlled by creatures named Archangels. They are an incredibly powerful, long-lived race who surround themselves with angels and vampires. This world also has humans who all live within the territory of one archangel or another. Angels, as they grow older, grow more powerful, and

some reach the heights to become archangels. Vampires are made by archangels and sign contracts to serve angels or archangels. In order for a longer life, they serve for a set period of years. If they break that contract, hunters are hired to retrieve them. Hunters belong to the Guild—hence the title of the series—and some have slightly special powers. Most are just highly trained and highly effective humans. The series mostly follows the story of one guild hunter and her adventures and love story. However, there's enough books that there are some offshoot spin-off books, and this series, too, is still being written. I'm even more excited about reading those.

Rachel: I think it's interesting that the vampires in the "Guild Hunter" series serve under the angels rather than fight against them. It's definitely a fresh take on the lore! I, too, enjoy that genre. Of late I have been really into what some call 'urban fantasy', which is just fantasy that takes place in the 'real world'. And, of course, that appreciation bleeds over into other types of media. Early on in the winter season when the days grew shorter and the nights started stretching out, my husband and I decided to binge a few TV shows. One of these was "Gravity Falls," an animated Disney Channel series that first released in 2012. I know that some of you listeners might be groaning right now. "Urgh, animation is for kids!" First of all, not exclusively. Second of all, hear me out! "Gravity Falls" has some really clever writing and humor, and even though the main characters are a couple of preteens, the adventures they go on are high stakes. The show has a mystery-thriller "X-Files" vibe, with supernatural monsters and aliens. It takes place in the Pacific Northwest, where...you know, it tends to rain a lot. But that's fine. Rain is just fine. It's better than snow, that's for dang sure!

Leah: Yeah, I'd take rain any time, too. Unless it turns into freezing rain and gets the roads icy. I don't like that.

Rachel: Yeah, that is awful stuff. Anywho, twin siblings Dipper and Mabel go to live with their eccentric great-uncle for the summer at his kitschy 'Mystery Shack', which seems to be nothing more than a roadside tourist trap. The twins soon find out that some of the shack's mysteries are all too real. "Gravity Falls" only has two seasons, so it doesn't require long-time dedication like a lot of other animated series might. I'm thinking along the lines of "Pokémon" or "The

Simpsons,” which have gone on for what seems like absolute eons. Enjoying the show as much as I did and wanting to experience more of the lore, I picked up a copy of the graphic novel continuation. “Gravity Falls: Lost Legends” is written by showrunner Alex Hirsch and features four new stories within the same universe. The art is bright and beautiful just like what you see in the show, and I definitely enjoyed being able to revisit that strange little town in Oregon, see all my favorite characters, and solve some new mysteries. If you are in the mood for an animated comedy series and have not watched “Gravity Falls” yet, I recommend it for children and adults alike. Then, when you inevitably fall in love, pick up “Lost Legends” to continue the adventure. There’s a copy available in Oak Creek Library’s graphic novel collection, or you can check it out using the digital Hoopla database. See the show notes for a link.

Leah: I tried something new lately too! My next pick is actually a little outside of my normal reading genre, but probably in line with a lot of people who like general fiction. I picked up a book up on a whim entitled “Big Summer” by Jennifer Weiner. I don’t typically read dramatic mystery type novels filled with inter-personal drama. I usually stick to fantasy, sci-fi, or romance for fiction materials. But something about it interested me, so I spent a morning reading it. That’s right, I was so enthralled that I read it in one sitting, in a few hours. Which isn’t totally unusual but only happens when I get pretty caught up in a story...which I think makes it a prime book to talk about for this episode! Boiled down, the book is about friendships, betrayal, reunions, and complexities that arise with all of that. Intrigued yet? It’s pretty new, just published in May of 2020. As of the time of this recording, there are pretty long holds lists for it, so I’ll give you a pro-tip! If the holds queue is ever really long for the book, see if there is a large print or audiobook version. Often the queue is much shorter.

Rachel: That is a pro-tip, librarian-style! (laughs)

Leah: Anyways, this book has it all. Drama, intrigue, friendships, enemies, romance, and family. A semi-normal girl—and I can only describe her as semi-normal because she’s a ‘small’ social media influencer with tons of followers and gets sponsorships. She has this old friend who reconnects with her after a huge falling out years past. This friend belongs to the world of ultra-rich folks, the type who have mansions in Cape Cod as summer homes. She begs our main

character's forgiveness for the trouble that caused a rift in their friendship and pleads with her to be a part of her wedding. To be her maid of honor, in specific. The book is constructed of the present day as it leads up to the wedding and also flashes of the girl's childhood past. I'm not the biggest fan of timelines that jump around, but I certainly understand why that technique is used in this case. I liked this book enough to fire off a few texts to my friends and recommend it. They were all pretty interested in it, as well, and were pretty surprised it was my recommendation...as I said, not my usual reading material. But good enough that I might try another of Jennifer Weiner's books. At OC we carry quite a few of hers, so you're definitely in luck there if you also want to try them.

Rachel: She is definitely a popular author. Can't say I've read anything by her, myself, but don't let that put you off. My excuse is more along the lines of 'so many books, so little time', a plight which I am sure plagues many of you, dear listeners. Anyway, my first pick for this episode of the podcast was a graphic novel. It's true, they're some of my favorite media. It makes sense, then, that my next pick *also* comes from a crate of comics. "This Was Our Pact" by Ryan Andrews is what I would label as 'magical realism', although some might consider it flat-out fantasy. On the night of their annual Autumn Equinox festival, a gaggle of boys make a pact to find out where, exactly, the candle-lit paper lanterns the town sends down the river end up. The generally accepted belief is that they go out to sea before floating up to join the Milky Way as stars, but this gang wants to find out for sure. Armed with nothing but Rice Krispies Treats and determination, they ride their bicycles to the edge of town and beyond. Most of the boys turn back...all except for two. They aren't friends, but for their mission to succeed they need to trust one another. If you're a fan of Studio Ghibli films like "Spirited Away" or "Kiki's Delivery Service," you will greatly enjoy this graphic novel's story and art style. It's a thick volume, but it reads quickly. I was motivated to finish it in just one night, turning page after page to see what secrets would be revealed next. The boys' journey is fantastical and beautiful, one that will transport you far away from the harsh winter and into a land of talking bears, sky cities, and witchy brewmasters. I sincerely hope that Ryan Andrews creates more fiction in the future. We have a copy of this work here at OCPL, as do other libraries in the Milwaukee County Federated Library System.

Leah: Oooh, talking bears and sky cities! I'll have to check that one out. For my final escape that I'd like to tell y'all about is one that immediately caught my attention due to the main character being a librarian and also involving magic. I mean, what combination could be more up my alley? I stumbled across it via Audible and gave it a listen. The book is called "Make Mine Magic" by Shanna Swendson. Now, I'm sorry to say that this particular book is an Audible original, which means you can only—at least for right now—listen to it through Audible. I will say it was included for free with my Audible membership, but it is a book that you'd incur a cost to listen to. While I'll talk about this book, I'll also include some readalikes that you might be lucky enough to find on our shelves for yourself, too. So, the major premise of this book is our lovely main character gets jilted at the alter—which I certainly hope doesn't happen to me at my wedding this summer! And she decides to go on the honeymoon she'd planned all by herself. After all, she's wanted to visit New York City for her whole life, and she realizes she's not so upset about the end of her relationship after all. She makes one major mention of not wanting to be a spinster librarian, which I do have to say I had some feelings about.

Rachel: Ugh, it's such a stereotype.

Leah: Regardless, on her trip she assists an elderly lady and invites her to join her for tea. After that, nothing will be the same for our heroine. She's swept into a world of magic and mystery, and it all comes down to whether she can figure it out and save the day. I won't give spoilers, but I will mention the book does fall into the category of a 'cozy' mystery and does include a little bit of romance. I enjoyed it, and should there be a sequel I'll certainly pick it up. As far as readalikes you might be able to access for free, I would steer you perhaps toward authors like Juliet Blackwell who writes a whole cozy mystery series called the "Witchcraft Mysteries," or maybe even to Joanne Fluke or Katie Carlisle if you're looking for something more along a non-magical cozy mystery. And if you're not sure about the term 'cozy mystery', it basically means you don't directly see violence or (clears throat) romance written about, the sleuth is an amateur, and usually you have a small community or cast of characters.

Rachel: Cozy mysteries are incredibly popular these days, and a wide range of series are available to read. Some are edge-of-your seat compelling while others can be sillier or have

what I consider to be a somewhat strange focus on anything from recipes and house-flipping to sleuth-y felines. (laughs) It's a diverse selection, though, so there are definitely some gems hidden behind the bizarre. You just need to find what you're interested in. All right, I am going to go ahead and blow everyone's mind with my next pick. Not only is it not a graphic novel but it's not even fiction. I know, right? Who'd have thunk, me reading non-fiction? With the pandemic going on, we're all longing for travel to exotic locales. So, I started perusing some travel literature. Call it wishful thinking, if you will. "Vanishing Cornwall" by Daphne du Maurier is all about the southern peninsula of England. This is an ancient place steeped in Celtic history and known for delicious, flaky pasties. The author lived in Cornwall for most of her life, and many of the fictions she penned over the years take place there. This is sort of a love letter to the region. Du Maurier is clearly very knowledgeable of its history, and even though the work itself is now a bit dated, her blatant admiration of the land's natural geography kept me reading. She draws on local myths and legends of yore to discuss their influence on literature through the ages. More of a reflection on the feel of the place rather than a helpful guide to local breakfasts, I recommend you read this book during the bleak midwinter, all the better to imagine the rugged coast and the cries of gulls.

Leah: Oh, that sounds really interesting! I do love a book about incredible cliffs and amazing pastries. Though I'd rather be enjoying that view and treat in person.

Rachel: Yes! I've been lucky enough in my life to have travelled there myself, and it's truly an enchanting part of the world. If you are ever interested in making the trip, let "Vanishing Cornwall" convince you the rest of the way.

Leah: Ah, I adore non-fiction, and travel literature is such an amazing way to put your mind in a different place. What a great pick for this episode, Rachel! We really hope these escapism reads help you imagine warmer and different worlds during this cold Wisconsin winter. Be sure to check out the show notes for titles of everything we've talked about. Please remember to subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what we hear so that more listeners can find out about the show. You can reach us through Oak Creek Public Library's website or Facebook page. Just use the #notyourmotherslibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Rachel and Leah: Bye!

(Brief outro music)