

ABSTRACT

Jave and Anthina: An Exploration of Young Adult Literature

Mallory LeCroy

Director: Elizabeth Dell, Ph.D.

Young Adult Literature is a fast-growing genre, with both diverse readers and content. However, YA Literature has no clear, universal definition to describe the criteria for a YA novel. The first part of this paper provides a coherent definition of YA Literature as a genre, as well as a literature review of the genre Young Adult Literature. The second part of this project involves the beginning of an original YA novel. The third section provides an informal catalogue of several Young Adult novels. My purpose with this paper is to define Young Adult Literature, examine what makes a book fit into that definition or not, and provide an original example of a Young Adult book.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Elizabeth Dell, Baylor English Department

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

JAVE AND ANTHINA: AN EXPLORATION OF YOUNG ADULT
LITERATURE

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Mallory LeCroy

Waco, Texas

May 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Part One: What is Young Adult Literature?	1
Literature Review	1
Part Two: Jave and Anthina	6
Chapter One	6
Chapter Two	30
Part Three: Young Adult Literature as a Genre	60
Catalogue of Young Adult Literature	60
Bibliography	85

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my most heartfelt thanks to Dr. Dell, who patiently and tirelessly guided me through the conception, creation, and completion of this project. Without her encouragement and persistence in keeping me accountable, I would likely have not completed this thesis, and it would have been held to a much lower standard of excellence. I would also mention Drs. Johnson and Choucair, who served on my defense panel. Their questions and observations helped make this project more focused and logical, and I have been so honored by their willingness to participate even during an international pandemic. Finally, I would offer my thanks to all my professors and teachers at Baylor who helped this project come into being through all the email chains, office hours, and thoughtful mentoring. I am humbled by the ways in which my project depended upon the competency and kindness of so many of my academic heroes. Thank you.

PART ONE

What is Young Adult Literature?

Who are Young Adults?

YA literature can be difficult to define, due to its wide range in reader age and genre. As Marc Aronson points out in his article on the development of young adult literature in America, “the term YA is an odd one; it refers to no clear developmental age group” (2). The first step in defining YA Literature therefore, would be to define exactly what age or developmental stage constitutes a young adult. Aronson points out that the term young adult seems like it should refer to “people in their 20s who are just leaving college, beginning careers and starting families,” but as Aronson continues, “though labeled YA, they have become the province of increasingly younger readers” (4). The demographic which YA Literature could refer to is younger than what we might think of as young adults: depending on the individual source, a young adult could range from as young as 12 or 10 years old, to as old as 18 or 20 (Aronson 4, Bean 1).

From a scientific standpoint, this age range refers more to adolescence than to adulthood. In Ian McMahan’s textbook on adolescent development, he points out that “adolescent” and “adult” come from the same root word, but the grammatical differences between these terms highlight the differences between the two concepts (4). Both of these words come from the Latin root word meaning to grow or mature: “adolesco, adolescere, adolevi, adultus” (Whitaker). But while adult comes from the perfect passive participle, indicating an action that occurred in the past and has been completed, adolescent comes

from the present active infinitive, indicating an action that is ongoing. We can infer then, that an adult has completed their growth, while an adolescent is still in the midst of this process.

Adolescence is not a specific moment that can be examined and defined, but rather a “particular segment of the lifespan” (McMahan 7). Coming between the more easily defined childhood and adulthood, the term adolescence “distinguishes this part from those that come before and after,” to help us “identify and think about what happens during these years” (7). McMahan also provides specific bounds for the ages that are considered a part of adolescence: “Early adolescence lasts from around 11 to 14. Middle adolescence goes from about 15 to 18. Late adolescence extends from around 19 to 22 or later” (9). Since the adolescent years, from 11 to 22, are a time of transition and growth, literature for this age range must reflect this.

The Purpose of Young Adult Literature

Next we will look at several different, occasionally contradictory, definitions of YA Literature. Though it confuses the issue somewhat, it is important to point out that YA is not technically a genre. Or rather, it includes and overlaps with a huge variety of recognized genres such as historical fiction, nonfiction, biography, poetry, fantasy, etc (Bucher 13). Katherine Bucher, an authority in the field of YA, especially as it relates to education, defines Young Adult Literature as “literature in prose or verse that has excellence of form or expression in its genre, provides a unique adolescent point of view, and reflects the concerns, interests, and challenges of contemporary young adults” (8). While it is tempting to define YA as any literature in which young adults are interested,

we must consider the book's content and the writer's intention as well as the adolescent appeal.

As Bucher claims in her definition, Young Adult Literature must relate to the adolescent experience. She looks to educators to choose "excellent, well-written books that deal with important adolescent issues and that reflect [young adult] interests and concerns" (12). In order for a book to be considered YA, it must be at least somewhat relatable to its target audience of young adults, and deal with some problem or struggle that a young adult would recognize or relate to.

More specifically in the context of education, Bucher argues that the purpose of YA Literature in the classroom is to help students "understand the craft of fiction so that they are better able to be read and to comprehend the messages and literary conventions of the classics" (12). However, as Bucher mentions more than once, the genre of YA must be of a certain quality to be worthy of its readers. If YA Literature must meet a standard of "excellence of form or expression in its genre," then surely it also has a value beyond the ways it can be used as a teaching tools for classic literature (8). Additionally, since "adolescents are capable of actively deciding what to do with their media time," of deciding what they read, the definition of Young Adult Literature must extend beyond what is read in the classroom (McMahan 277).

Another definition of Young Adult Literature comes from Thomas Bean in his article about YA and teenaged identity formation in Australia. Bean claims "contemporary young adult literature...offers a unique window on societal conflicts and dilemmas" (1). Instead of looking to a classroom context, Bean looks to the literature teens choose themselves to read. He continues on to say that "adolescent readers view

characters in young adult novels as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences as teens” (1). Because young adults are in a transitional time of life when their own identities are in flux and still developing, books that deal with “questions of character identity and values” are valuable to young adults (1).

Bean’s argument can be summed up in his claim that “because they deal with issues that are relevant to teens...young adult novels provide a roadmap of sorts for adolescents coping with these issues in real life” (1). However, this definition limits YA to contemporary fiction that involves current issues. Bean implies that only books that deal with real-world, concrete, common problems experienced by young adults can be considered Young Adult Literature. However, this definition is insufficient because it excludes both non-contemporary genres such as historical or science fiction, and problems beyond the typical for teens, such as specific issues of culture or identity. In addition, if YA were to be defined by how well it relates to a specific cultural moment for young adults, there would be a constant shift of which books can be considered YA.

What is Young Adult Literature?

The definition I believe best describes the hazy genre of Young Adult Literature comes from a blog post by Elizabeth Bluemle and Kenny Brechner. Their definition focuses on how the transitional nature of adolescence is represented in literature.

If youth was measured by a clock, and the end were to occur when both hands struck twelve, then YA stories are those that take place between 11:59 and a couple seconds after midnight. They end when the protagonist has a foot –or maybe just a toe –planted on both sides of the innocence/experience fence. First or third person, present or past tense can all be YA. What is important is the

immediacy of the story and the point of view of the teen. YA lit speaks to the teenager, current or past, in its readers, regardless of the protagonist's age.

Bluemle and Brechner's definition returns to the concept introduced by McMahan that adolescence, or young adulthood, is a transition. Many stories tell a 'coming of age' narrative, in which a character leaves behind childhood for adulthood through the events of the story. But as Rousseau suggested in the 1700s, "childhood and adolescence are life stages that should be valued for themselves, not simply as way stations in the journey to adulthood" (McMahan 11). Adolescence is a stage of life distinguishable from adulthood, that lasts for as long as 10 or more years in some cultures, including our own. The transition from childhood to adulthood is not an instantaneous moment, and can hardly be portrayed fully in a single book or story. But a story that shows even the briefest moment of this transition qualifies as Young Adult Literature.

Young Adult Literature, much like its target audience, is constantly in flux. It changes continuously "along with the students who read it and the society in which it is written" (Bucher 19). But despite the shifting nature of YA, it will always return to "its two initial forms: the direct expression of teenage experience and the invention of new worlds as wild, dangerous and profound as this one feels to the teenagers who are first learning how to master it" (Aronson 5). Young Adult Literature portrays the adolescent experience. That experience involves the personal growth and change that leads a young adult closer to adulthood. Though it covers a wide range of ages and genres, Young Adult Literature can be defined by the personal development of the protagonist, who will transition in some way, large or small, from childhood to adulthood.

PART TWO

Jave and Anthina

Chapter One

Jave swung the door shut behind him and swung his bag onto the kitchen counter, shutting out the echoing, mechanical noises of the street. He was finally done with school for the week, and the couch, though a little too short to be entirely comfortable for naps, was calling his name. He collapsed facedown dramatically, his cheek smushed against the fabric with one arm and one leg dangling. He had forgotten to lock the door—but he was too comfortable to get up now. Besides, his mom would be home soon enough. The couch was soft, the sun was warm, and it was finally the weekend.

The peace, and Jave's nap, were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a door slamming. Specifically, Jave's front door. He sat up, a little disoriented, and wiped a smear of tears from the corner of her eye and drool from the corner of his mouth. The front door had just slammed shut, and standing with his back to Jave and his eye to the peephole was a man.

"I think you have the wrong apartment." Jave took a few steps toward the man, who had spun around at his words. Jave stumbled slightly, still groggy but with a disorienting surge of adrenaline pressing his lanky teenaged self forward.

"Um, sir? This is my apartment, you need to...leave..." Jave trailed off as he noticed what was in the man's hands. With his back pressed to the door and his eyes wide, the man was holding a weapon. A gun. Jave had never seen a gun properly before,

only on display behind thick glass at the Museum of Human Artifacts. But this didn't look like the gun he had seen on his school trip. It was white, for one thing, and had a plastic sheen to it rather than the dark matte of the guns that had been so common ages ago but were now relegated to museum displays. It was also sort of shoddy looking almost handmade. And the most significant difference between this gun and the one in the museum was where it was pointed—directly at Jave.

“Stay back, kid.” The man's hands were trembling, but his voice was steady.

“No problem, staying back. Please don't—no problem, I'm not—,” Jave stammered as he raised his hands above his head, palms splayed open in an instinctive gesture of not-a-threat. The man lowered the gun slightly so it was still pointed in Jave's general direction, just not directly at his chest. Jave took in the man's appearance. He was wearing clothes that wouldn't have looked out of place on a schoolteacher, with shining shoes, a wilting button-down, and a tie. He was painfully normal-looking, like he could be somebody's dad. More than anything else, the wire-rimmed glasses sliding down the man's nose clashed with the gleaming weapon in his hands.

Above the pounding in his ears, Jave could hear the tell-tale hum of a bot. Was there a bot coming down the street? Maybe even just outside the door? He hoped fervently it was close. Jave had never before been grateful for the extremely thin, not remotely soundproof walls between his home and the street, but there was a first time for everything. Being held at gunpoint in his living room, for instance.

“Keep facing me. Walk to the window, slowly. Close the curtain.”

Jave obeyed slowly, moving backwards with tiny, careful steps until the heel of his sneaker hit the wall. He reached slowly to his side, fumbling for the curtain-puller

with a surprisingly steady hand, despite his terror. The curtain dragged across the window with an agonizing noise, the perfectly everyday swish of the metal track becoming like an action flick soundtrack. The man was still standing at the door, still holding his too-big, too-real weapon. The humming of the bots outside was getting louder, though, and Jave could feel the buzzing of their internal mechanisms and rolling treads in his teeth. The man apparently heard them, too, and leaned to the side of the door to peer through the peephole again. Even with the man's back turned, Jave didn't dare move. The buzzing was almost upon them now, and the man pointed his gun at the door, away from Jave and out at the true reason he was hiding here. Without turning around again, the man said quietly, "No harm will come to you."

Despite this reassurance, Jave's feet felt stuck in the ground, and his breathing was both shallow and far too quick. The buzzing was even louder now, pulsing—or maybe that was just Jave's heartbeat. The man lowered his gun completely to look through the peephole more closely, pressing his body flat against the door.

The bots' humming reached an unbearable level—surely they were just outside the door?—and was suddenly punctuated by another sound. A dry sound, like a hole-punch forcing its way through one too many sheets of paper. The sound came once, twice; then everything, including the humming of the bots, fell silent. The man didn't move, except for his hands, which fell slack at his sides. The weapon fell to the ground with a small clatter and bounced several feet away. It had never been discharged. He took a step back toward Jave, then another, staggering slightly to the side as he turned. One arm reached out, but finding no purchase on the smooth grey wall, the man continued staggering away from the front door, and the discarded weapon. Jave watched in horror

as the man reached the doorway to his bedroom and leaned heavily against the cracked door. He was facing Jave now, but his too-wide eyes weren't focused on anything but the air in front of his face. The man's chest, still partially covered with a wrinkled blue button down, had been changed into something that took Jave a moment to comprehend.

The man's shirt had been burned completely away in the center, with a charred edge ringing his sternum. And his chest—Jave didn't have the words to describe the injury. The wound was only visible for a moment before the man began a stumbling descent to the floor of Jave's bedroom, but a moment was more than enough to sear the sight in his mind. This man who had been threatening Jave's life only minutes earlier had collapsed onto the ground, gasping out wet breaths through ruined, cauterized lungs.

Jave ran towards the bedroom, finally breaking free of his horrified freeze for the more useful part of the "fight or flight" response. The man lay face down only a few steps into his room, between the long narrow bed and cluttered desk. He was dying.

"Sir? Are you—what do I do? Sir?" Jave knelt by the man, one hand hovering over his shoulder.

The man grabbed his hand suddenly, drawing a startled scream from Jave. He forced himself up, twisting slightly so his face was closer to Jave's. Jave did not lean down, but could hear the man's words, dragged out of his mouth like metal against concrete.

"Don't let them take it. Don't—the bots, don't let them—," Another shuddering breath, and then a final gasped phrase: "It's the only one."

As the man's voice trailed off, becoming weaker and weaker and then silent, Jave expected his punishing grip to loosen. But if anything, his fingers squeezed harder around

Jave's, a final desperate energy animating him. So focused was he on the man's hand on his and the disturbing, incomprehensible final words, Jave was caught by surprise by the sudden pressure on his shoulders, pulling him up and away from the man. There was a bot in the room with him, with a dangerous looking extra limb glowing with heat and pointed at the man. A peacekeeper-bot. It had the standard white carapace and two dexterous arms, one of which it used to begin its work. The bot forced the man's hand to release Jave's, and Jave turned away as it began inspecting the body.

Jave walked numbly into the living room, taking the seat on the couch that he had vacated only a few minutes ago. Several more bots entered the house, several having that dangerous-looking third arm that ended in a blade. The air around his head felt thick, and the clicking communication and humming presence of the bots turned to ambient background noise in his ears. He barely reacted as the now-ruined front door swung open, and his mother stepped into the room.

"Jave? What happened to—oh my—Jave!"

His mom rushed in, ignoring the growing collection of bots she was pushing past. She knelt in front of him and grabbed his hands, turning them over and over, looking for an injury. He realized only then that his hands, his shirt, and his knees were streaked with already-drying blood, more than he ever could have expected.

"It's not mine, mom. I'm not bleeding, I swear. It's his." Jave freed a hand to point at his bedroom, where a stretcher hung suspended between two bots, the man's body covered with an opaque plastic sheet. All but one of the hovering bots filed out after the stretcher, like a mechanized and slightly bloody funeral procession. One of the bots—one without a weapon-arm—approached the pair on the far side of the room. Jave's mom

placed herself more directly between her son and the bot, subtly squaring her shoulders and rising to her knees. It was an instinctive reaction to be wary of even the cleaning-bots with their long blunt-ended appendages, for all that they were only here to help.

“Damages sustained in the apprehension of the criminal have been noted. Compensation will be awarded. The City thanks you for your cooperation.”

The bot turned as if to go, but Jave’s mom interrupted its exit, saying, “Criminal? What kind of criminal? How was he able to get into our home? Somebody must be responsible for this mess.”

“The criminal’s actions are classified. Damages sustained in the apprehension of the criminal have been noted. Compensation will be awarded. The City thanks you for your cooperation.”

They watched the bot go on its way, humming its way to the hole-punched door, which it shut behind itself. Jave could see it clunk down the steps and move out into the street and out of sight. For what seemed like the first time in hours, the apartment was still, and as quiet as it could be with a hole in the front door.

“What *happened*, Jave?”

Jave couldn’t meet his mom’s eyes, though her grip on his hands was nearing a painful level. “I don’t really know, exactly. I was just on the couch, and then this guy busted in, and he had a gun—“

“How did he get in? You locked the door, didn’t you?”

“Um.”

“Jave, you didn’t *lock the door*? What if it had been someone more dangerous, someone—“

“Someone with a gun?” He winced, instant regret pouring over him.

“*Javen Costel Dama.*”

The full name. His mom only invoked his middle name if she was really angry—normally she avoided any reference to his dad.

“I’m sorry, mom.”

Her stare lost none of its heat, but her voice quieted to something approaching a normal speaking volume. “I just can’t believe this happened here, in our home. If I had gotten home just a little bit earlier—if it had been me here instead of you—”

“It’s fine, mom. You couldn’t have done anything anyway. He had a *gun*.”

“Yeah, you mentioned.” Her voice quietened even more, wobbling slightly. “I should have known living here was a mistake. If I had just chosen a different apartment this would never have happened. Maybe—”

“There was no way to know something like this would happen. It’s not—”

“—we should move. This is all my fault, I’m—”

“—your fault.”

“—a terrible mother.”

Jave almost wished she would go back to shouting. “I don’t want to move. We *just* finished my room. And yours.” They had lived in this apartment for less than a year, recently enough that they still had to go digging for misplaced or unpacked items occasionally. With its abundance of windows and a room that was all his own, this was by far Jave’s favorite place he had ever lived. It was much better than the small unit they had shared with another family until he was six, or the two-room fourth-floor apartment they had been in until he was fifteen. But he would never tell his mom how much he had

hated the other places, because then she would make that guilty, self-loathing face she always made when they talked about the less-than-fantastic parts of their lives.

His mom let go of his hands to gather him close to her side, as much as his gangly teenage frame would allow. It hadn't been that long ago since he had been able to fit comfortably under his mom's arm, though he was almost tall enough for the reverse to be true now. She held him tightly for what seemed like an uncomfortable eternity, until he pulled away and stood. He couldn't exactly escape to his room, but washing his hands, which were still covered in blood, was at least a reason to step away. If he had spent another second hugging his mom, he might have started crying, and that wasn't something either of them needed. He was sixteen now. He needed to be strong for his mom. He just hoped he could be strong for himself.

*

Jave burst through the door of his apartment building, careening down the steps. His feet hit the sidewalk before the still-battered door had a chance to swing shut behind him, and he was already off. He dashed to the end of the block, testing his newly gained height by leaping up to brush the street sign, then landing heavily at the corner. Sunlight, exercise, and escape from the apartment. *Yes*. He could finally breathe without inhaling the metallic scent of blood and home invasion. The broad street stretched out in front of him, with storefronts and apartment entrances lining the left side and a smooth expanse of wall on the right.

Regaining his balance, he set off again, at a slightly slower pace this time. Jogging lightly, he kept his right hand stretched out to the wall and his eyes turned left towards the storefronts, most of which were still covered with the sturdy, slightly see-

through plastic their owners used to keep insects and dampness out during the night.

There was no need for heavier protection, since any person desperate enough to gamble their life by stealing would hardly target one of the simple water-and-supply shops at the edge of the City.

There were few sounds this early in the morning, and the rhythmic sound of Jave's rubber-soled shoes on the pavement overshadowed the quiet conversations from early-risers and the hum of the charging bots. Between each storefront he passed was a white structure, taller than a person and rounded into a hollow, open-faced metal prism. The majority held cleaning-bots, which kept the streets clear of dust and sand, and occasionally cleared messes in individual homes. Jave shuddered and pressed closer to the wall. Normally the bots in their charging stations were just part of the landscape, but today was different. It might be a long time before he could see a bot, even innocuous cleaning-bots, without also seeing that man's face, full of shock and pain as his blood boiled within his chest. He kept his eyes facing straight ahead, but kept a wary eye on the still-sleeping bots in his peripheral vision. Every so often the charging stations held different kinds of bots such as structure-repair and waste-disposal, charging quietly and waiting for the day's work to begin. Jave had always liked the City best like this, when his only company was the occasional human and the air was full of quietness. And today, the morning after his home was invaded by the confusingly non-violent criminal and the disturbingly efficient peacekeeper-bot, the quiet of the streets was as comforting and peaceful as a winter holiday.

Jave continued walking around the curve of the wall, keeping his hand on the smooth concrete. His destination was on the other side of town, where he and his mother

had lived before moving to their current apartment. It was about a twenty-minute walk to the part of town with the mech shops if one took the long way around, following the curve of the wall, and while Jave normally would have enjoyed puzzling his way through the confusing town center, today he preferred to take the long way and get there quicker.

The building-bots' programming had been set years and years ago by the City founders, and they operated exactly the same as they had generations previous. When the population grew too large for the current housing capabilities, the bots would begin expanding, placing people in the homes as they went. There was never a building built that didn't have a person waiting to live in it. The result was a mess of buildings, streets, and small connecting alleyways crunched together within the tall protective walls, following the bots' programmed restrictions of size and form to the letter, but making no logical sense at all. Jave had walked through the City center to Mr. Sorcha's shop several times, taking a slightly different route and getting hopelessly lost in the mess of streets and bridges and buildings each time. But this morning he didn't want to risk losing his way—he didn't want to have to ask a bot to lead him to his destination.

Mr. Sorcha had been a friend of Jave and his mother for as long as he could remember. When he had been very small, they had been neighbors, living a few floors above Mr. Sorcha's shop. Jave had faint memories of sitting on the floor of Mr. Sorcha's salvage shop in a makeshift playpen, playing quietly as instructed. He would pretend to be a bot, because bots were quiet, but also big and strong. He would build cities of his own with blocks, and then destroy them gleefully. Mr. Sorcha had marginally more patience for Jave now that he was a teenager rather than a toddler, and he had become a

mentor of sorts to Jave. A slightly grumpy older friend at least, who usually had intelligent things to say about Jave's problems in between complaining about his own.

Jave let his hand off the wall for a moment as he passed by the wide entrance into another part of the City. His sphere only held about a half million people, but it connected to the other spheres by wide passages lined by the same walls that separated the spheres from the frequent dust storms. The walls were easily twice as high as the tallest apartment building, and received far more care from the repair-bots than any building occupied by humans.

Jave continued walking west past the passage, his fingers catching on cracks and sealed imperfections every so often. The structure-repair-bots checked the walls daily to ensure they were in good condition, and would spend hours mending them, looking like nothing so much as metal-and-plastic spiders clinging to the concrete. If all the wall repairs got done before dark, the repair-bots would move on to repairing apartment and shop buildings. Jave thought the wall on this side of town must need more attention than normal, leaving less time for the bots to clean storefronts and refit windows. The increasing state of disrepair in the buildings he passed let Jave know he was nearing Mr. Sorcha's shop, which somehow managed to be even sadder-looking than its neglected neighbors.

Finally, after passing several cleaning bots and ducking around a corner to avoid a patrolling peacekeeper-bot (it was unlikely he'd be stopped, but on this day especially he took no chances), Jave reached his friend's shop. The front was still covered, being so early in the morning, but Jave hardly let that stop him. He walked past the dingy storefront to the door set in the wall next to it. Jave began tapping insistently on the small

eye-level window panel. It was opaque from the outside, but Mr. Sorchia would be able to see who it was harassing him. Not that it would have been anyone else—Jave always came to Mr. Sorchia’s shop on Saturdays when his mom had work, and besides, as far as he knew Mr. Sorchia didn’t have any friends.

“Hey there, Mr. Sorchia,” Jave said calmly, as his friend opened the door just enough to peek out.

Mr. Sorchia went through a show of scanning Jave up and down suspiciously before letting Jave in with a half-hearted scowl.

“Good morning,” he grumbled. “Does your mother know you’re here this early?”

“Yeah, I told her before I left.”

Jave hadn’t told his mother anything, having left entirely too early on her one day off for her to even be awake. He had left only a note on the kitchen counter to let her know where he was, then had gone bounding off into the cool morning. The skeptical look Mr. Sorchia sent over his shoulder suggested Jave’s words were not entirely believed, but the moment passed uncontested.

“Tea?”

“Sure.” Jave said, more to be polite than out of thirst. He had only ever had the bitter drink Mr. Sorchia called ‘tea’ here in his home, but it was always a bit of a struggle to drink it without making a face. He had tried convincing him once to stock the flavored bottled drinks Jave preferred, but Mr. Sorchia had seemed offended at the very suggestion. He was an odd man.

Jave made himself comfortable on the couch, which was identical to the one in his own apartment except for the wear in the cushions. As he waited for Mr. Sorchia to return,

he looked around, scanning the room for any new additions. Mr. Sorcha was a detail recycler, and his home always looked somewhere between a museum and a trash bin to Jave. Various items covered the walls and surfaces, each with intricate metal whorls and geometric shapes built into the design. Some were practical items like clocks and light-sources, some seemed to serve no purpose other than looking interesting on the walls, and all were made from recycled bits of things. Mr. Sorcha had even bought scraps from Jave's mother in leaner years, paying far more than the broken items were worth. Even then Jave had understood Mr. Sorcha was supporting them.

“So what brings you here this morning?”

Jave accepted the small mug with the tips of his fingers to avoid getting burned. “I just wanted to talk, I guess. Yesterday was kind of...eventful. For me.”

Mr. Sorcha hummed, encouraging Jave to continue.

“Well, it's kind of hard to explain. I'm not even sure what really happened.”

Mr. Sorcha settled into his chair and cast a scowl at Jave, though his voice was soft. “Start at the beginning, and maybe it will make more sense in the telling.”

“OK, the beginning. Um, I went to school, which was pretty normal, and when I got home, I fell asleep on the couch. It was Friday, and it was normal, and then this guy came bursting in. He had a gun.” Jave all but whispered this last part, daring a glance up at Mr. Sorcha, whose facade of disinterest had faded slightly with Jave's words. Actually, he looked almost—concerned.

“Then what happened?”

“He pointed the gun at me to make me stay still, but I guess the bots were already after him. They managed to get in and he—well, the guy didn't make it.”

Jave remembered the man's tight grip on his shoulder, the too-hot, slick feeling of his blood—blood!—all over his hands, between his fingers and staining his clothes. Suddenly a hand reached out to catch Jave's wrist gently, steadying his trembling and keeping him from spilling the mug of tea. Jave inhaled shakily, covering the small hitch in his breath with a cough. The hand retreated, and Jave all but chugged the now-lukewarm liquid.

Instead of giving him a half-joking speech about not appreciating the finer things as Jave expected, Mr. Sorcha stared intently at him. His normally-mild expression was missing, and his face seemed to be attempting a genuine emotion. "The bots killed him?"

"Yeah."

"What happened after that?"

"Well, the bots were already there, so they started to clean everything up. And then my mom got home, and that was—yeah."

Mr. Sorcha's expression had returned somewhat to its usual scowling blankness, though something of that unnamed emotion still remained. "Is Zana alright?"

"Yeah, she's fine. She didn't even get home until after it was over. And then after the bots left, she lectured me for forever, like it was my fault or something!" Jave slumped back in his seat.

"You can't blame her for being worried, Jave—someone died."

"I know." Jave grumbled. He did not need a reminder of that.

Mr. Sorcha hardly waited a beat to allow Jave a brief brooding silence. "What did the man look like?"

“Um, he looked normal. He was wearing normal clothes, and he was maybe a little younger than you?”

“What did the gun look like?”

“Like a gun.” Did Mr. Sorcha know something about the invasion?

“Did the man say anything to you?” The intensity growing in Mr. Sorcha’s voice belied his poker face and was beginning to scare Jave a little bit.

“I don’t—I don’t really remember—“

“Did the bots take the gun?”

“I think so, I don’t know—“

“Try to remember!”

Mr. Sorcha’s voice had grown loud enough by this point that the final barked question had Jave flinching back into his seat. Why did Mr. Sorcha care? Why was he being so aggressive?

Apparently just now noticing his tense posture and the volume of his voice, Sorcha leaned back and quieted. “I’m sorry Jave. It doesn’t matter, really. The only thing that matters is that you’re safe.”

Jave nodded, still a little shaken by the interaction. He only relaxed once Mr. Sorcha left to man the front of the shop, leaving Jave to sit quietly in the back, thinking about bots. Just like when he was a kid.

*

Zana stalked down the street, wishing her rubber-soled work shoes would make more noise as she walked. The soft creak of each stomp just wasn’t enough to express her

frustration. Her anger that morning had several objects, the most pressing of which was Jave. Her son had left much earlier than normal this morning, heading out alone for his weekly walk all the way across their City sphere. At least he had remembered to lock the door behind him, she thought with another unsatisfying stomp on the dry concrete street. Zana had gone to check on Jave the moment she had woken up, but when he hadn't been on the couch where he had slept the night before, or in his room, she had been thrown into a panic. She had honestly been on the verge of running out the door in her sleepwear to look for him when she had spotted the note explaining that he had left early for Sorcha's on the kitchen counter. Was it a teenage-boy thing to make his mother stress so much, or was that unique to Jave?

The buildings lining the street towered today, stark and intimidating where yesterday they had been grand and protective. Zana had always felt safest when the world made her feel small—she had grown up on the edge of a City sphere, right up against the wall—but today it would have been a comfort to be the one looming for once. Life was considerably more complicated, and dangerous, than it had been when she was a girl staring up the dizzying expanse of wall to the pale indigo sky.

She passed a cleaning-bot sweeping the street with its long arm-like appendages, making an abnormal clicking noise, and found herself wondering whether it would cross her workbench today even as she cringed and turned away from the white carapace and round black eye-sensor.

She arrived at the tube station and leaned against the awning support, carefully avoiding eye contact with other commuters. The transport in this part of the City wasn't bad, taking the crowd of various human workers to their destinations in under an hour.

Zana wished her mornings didn't involve sitting in a metal tube and pretending not to notice the existence of the people sitting next to her, but there was no other way to the Foundry. Personal transports had been restricted decades ago due to the ever-increasing population density, before she had even been born. And it would have easily taken her a full day to walk to the Foundry, the large maintenance center three spheres away.

The tube finally arrived in all its dingy metal glory, gliding noiselessly on its magnetic rail. The waiting crowd filed slowly on, nobody enthusiastic to go to work on a Saturday morning, though it would be a different story when everyone filed off at the end of the day, ready for their Sunday off. Zana lingered at the back of the crowd and waited until the last moment to get on, enjoying the early-morning sun for as long as she could. Tomorrow would be a day off and she could enjoy the sunshine with Jave, but today, like every work day, she savored the glimpse of natural light on the short walk to the tube station. The warmth of the sun lingered in the concrete buildings and streets after the sun went down, but there was something so refreshing about walking into cooler air before the cycle began again.

When Zana arrived at the Foundry, her anger had simmered down quite a bit, but her stress levels were still making her teeth grind, though she had stopped stomping with each step. She stood still for the body-scan, taking several deep breaths, then stepped through the doorway into the Foundry. The word 'Foundry' might suggest a primitive space, full of open fires and a smoky haze and low ceilings. But the Foundry resembled nothing so much as an enormous warehouse space. The ceiling hovered fifty feet above the bare concrete flooring, and enormous panels of evenly-spaced lights shone from the ceiling and walls. Slowly moving tracks crossed the center of the space, bringing

damaged bots from the storage space next to the Foundry to be repaired, then out again to the transport station to be sent either back into use or to a recycling center.

At the far end of the space, the replicators were already being warmed up and checked over by recently-arrived workers. The replicators were responsible for making replacement parts for the bots, casting the pieces that would then be cooled and carefully filed down and inspected by human operators. Those parts would be installed by the mechanics, like Zana herself. Instead of working at a single station or workbench, Zana carried her supplies on her person as a sort of portable workspace. She retrieved her vest from its usual hook on the wall by the entrance and began buckling in. Her vest consisted of crisscrossing straps and enormous pockets, made of a thick woven plastic with metal buckles to keep it secure while she worked. Tools hung from the bottom where a belt would go, and the pockets lining the front and back were filled with tacks, patches, glue-pods, and other sundry items useful for repairing malfunctioning bots.

Zana finished buckling her vest on and began walking towards the conveyor belt littered with deactivated bots that snaked around the huge space. She kept her eyes lowered as she reached an activation panel and focused on the screen under her hands as she typed in the command. A few feet away, a section of the protective railing separating the track from the human workers swung open, shunting a bot onto a work-surface. She shot several glances at the inactive bot out of the corner of her eyes as she finished logging into the system, then approached it slowly. She clutched her hanging tools—her heavy, metal-and-plastic tools—tightly. Zana had just started working a hammer free from the loop on which it hung when she reached the bot. She forced herself to let go of the hammer, then forced her eyes up to the bot.

It was a stock-bot. They were rarely found outside of shops and occasionally homes, having been designed to lift and move objects too heavy for humans. Its multitude of front-facing arms each ended in a thin paddle, ideal for supporting and lifting weight. Zana breathed a bit easier, though the bot's white protective covering still made her shudder. Incredible how a single experience could overshadow a lifetime of interacting with bots without anxiety or fear for her own safety.

The specimen, the stock-bot, had either been in a truly unfortunate accident, or had been the object of human attack. A glue-like substance coated its eye-like sensor and the plastic around it, rendering it effectively blind. It shouldn't be too difficult to get off, but Zana found herself hoping the cause had been only an accident. Any human that caused this kind of damage to a bot, either intentionally or not, was unlikely to live to regret their mistake.

While there were several coded laws that all residents were expected to know and follow, they all boiled down to the same single law, a singular rule of living. Respect the property of others. Theft and assault were treated with the same severity, as was damaging City property. A person's things belonged to themselves, City property belonged to humans as a collective, and the humans?

Humans belonged to the City.

*

There was a distractingly red spot on Jave's bedroom floor. He could see it, just out of the corner of his eye, and he imagined he could feel it, as though it had a physical presence and wasn't just a bit of color. It hadn't even been a full twenty-four hours since that man, that criminal had broken into his home, and here Jave was, back at the literal

scene of the crime. He hadn't really been back in his room for longer than it took to retrieve an item and leave since last night. The bots had returned as promised to repair the front door, sometime during the day when Jave and his mom were both out. So the door was intact, the lock was fastened (he had already checked it twice since getting home from Mr. Sorcha's only a half-hour ago), and there was no one here but Jave.

He resettled into his chair and opened up his tablet, ready in theory to do his homework. He normally would never have touched his schoolwork on a Saturday, but it would at least keep his mind off other things. It was mathwork—Jave's most difficult subject—which would hopefully keep his focus well enough. Numbers and letters, shapes and edges, equations showing the flow of energy in a simple mechanism, a mechanism like a bot's arm, forcing its way straight through the chest of a man with too-wide eyes—

Jave dropped the tablet on his desk. So much for keeping his mind off last night's drama. He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands, hard enough that colors swirled and sparked behind his eyelids. Green and brown and flashes of yellow like stars, but no red. Red was reserved for the real world now, for uncomfortable reminders stained into the concrete of his floor. He glanced over, his eyes taking a moment to focus on the spot. Yep, there was the maroon splotch, darker where the two slabs rested together forming a seam, and faded lighter everywhere else. Jave and his mom had tried to scrub the color out the night before, but with the restrictions on chemicals leaving them without access to bleach their efforts were largely unsuccessful. But it had felt better to be doing something, and so they had spent the better part of an hour swabbing the floor with salty water persistently. The entire evening after the bots had left still felt dreamlike, like it had happened far longer ago than just last night. Once the apartment was empty of all the

bots, Jave and his mom had fallen into a shocked, tense silence, still reeling from the violence and shouting they had each witnessed and been a part of.

Jave began to pick his tablet back up, then found his eyes sliding again to the spot on the floor. Dark red stains, a brighter red streak of color along the seam in the flooring, and—was that green? What in his room (aside from the little triangle symbol on the bin under his desk) was green?

He crossed the room carefully, slipping a pair of shoes over his sock-clad feet first. He hadn't dared to go barefoot in his home, in case a shard or smear of something sharp or *organic* were left on the floor. There was something there, in between the two slabs of concrete, an actual physical thing, not just smears of color. He took a deep breath and resisted the urge to go check the front door lock again. The door was locked and had been locked the whole time he had been sitting here.

Keeping his eyes on the little whatever-it-was, Jave stepped into the hall and jiggled the front door handle. Locked. Of course. But he felt bold enough now to inspect the tiny intruder in the floor.

His hands were shaking slightly—from low blood sugar, he resolutely told himself—as he reached out to brush the thing with a fingertip. It moved with his hand, then sprang back up, once again straining upwards in a soft, waxy point. It was green, mostly, with a reddish tint streaked across parts of it and fading into several sharp looking points. It looked a bit like a fountain, if a fountain were made of shiny, flexible little stalks instead of water.

“What are you?” He prodded it again, feeling the texture. It was cool to the touch—definitely not alive—but it had no discernible manufacture marks. There were no

hinges or panels, and it didn't respond to his touch. But—it was just so colorful. Jave found himself smiling unconsciously, charmed into forgetting for a moment that this little thing was sprouting from the place where a person had died.

He jumped suddenly as the front door lock jiggled with a metallic jingle. Just his mom coming home from work, nothing to be afraid of. He stepped out of his room and pulled the door most of the way shut behind him, moving into the kitchen. His mom walked through the freshly-repaired front door, her keys bouncing against the doorframe with a clang as she juggled her overflowing bag. He smiled, hoping the tension that had been present in their last interaction would be gone, and was relieved when she smiled back.

He turned away, busying his hands with hands with filling a glass of water as his mom started pulling parcels out of her battered bag. He couldn't keep his mind from wandering back to the little thing in his room—less than a foot tall but so intriguing. He didn't know what it was yet, but he was certain that his mom would insist they report it to the bots, which would surely destroy it. He would tell her eventually, maybe, but for now it could live in his room until he decided what to do with it.

*

Awake. This was Anthina's first moment of awareness. She was awake, at last, after so long—how long?—that her root system was shriveled and thin, spreading far down into the dry dirt. But she was awake, and she was alive.

Alone. There was nothing near but the dry, dry dirt she lay in and the crumbling artificial stone above her. Where were the other plants, the saplings and vines and shrubs? Where were her brothers and sisters that never spoke, but were no less beloved for it? Her

roots felt stretched thin and cold without the entwining presence of all the other plants, the ones without words, but with such beautiful flowers and leaves and fruit. She didn't know what had happened, but she knew this was not right, to be alone with no others near.

Unsatisfied. The third thought in Anthina's newly regained awareness. There was something she had been unconsciously soaking up, something full of water and iron and fat. She recoiled, slightly. She was grateful for the nourishing water, but had no use for thick iron and choking lipids. Whatever this stuff was—and she didn't care to think about it too closely—it had awakened her, but she needed more.

As if in response to her thought, cool water slipped through the dirt, reaching Anthina's roots easily. She drank and drank, soaking in as much as she could and ignoring the dissolved mineral that came with it. Salt might have once been enough to deter one such as Anthina, but her adaptive nature had long ago corrected such an oversight. This wasn't a world where weakness was permitted to survive.

She rested, drifting in awareness but not slipping back into dormancy again. She soaked up a bit more of the water, still mixed with the disgusting thick, iron-rich liquid before stopping, feeling the mixture slip sluggishly through her veins all the way to the tips of her tendrils. *How long has it been,* she wondered, *since I was last awake?*

And *warmth.* Warmth like she had forgotten she had ever known. The sun, the nourishing, life-giving sun! She reached upwards, straining with every cell to access the glorious warmth. She was vaguely aware that she had reached through a gap in the artificial stone into an open space, but was too busy basking in the feeling, drinking her fill of the sun's rays to care. If she had been a being with muscles rather than turgid cells,

blood rather than chlorophyll, she would have been shivering. She didn't have a metabolism, but if she had it would have just been awakened after a long hibernation beneath the artificial concrete-stone. Frozen but filled with warmth, she waited, stretched out towards the sun and taking advantage of the energy flowing freely toward her. *No matter what happens now, at least I have felt the sun again.*

Anthina had been right to be wary, as subtle vibrations found their way through the artificial stone she was now partially supporting herself upon. *Footsteps*, some distant memory supplied. *The enemy*, a more recent emotion cried.

She remained still, feigning a lack of awareness. Perhaps she could remain unnoticed by the being, the human, and retreat back underground. She remembered how messy and unobservant humans had always been. She could remain aboveground a bit longer, and the human probably wouldn't notice. Even if they did, a few more moments in the sun after who-knows how long was worth the risk.

And then the vibrations came close, and she regretted her decision. The human was standing right over her. As reduced and weak as she was right now, the approaching footsteps sounded like they belonged to something monstrously large. Had she ever been this weak, this lacking in size and strength, before a human? Anthina kept completely frozen, even as she felt the human coming closer, and closer, reaching out an appendage. A hand, she remembered faintly. And then, the thing touched Anthina.

A shudder of fear made her leaves tremble, even as she fought to remain still. The hand was unexpectedly gentle—and warm. She almost regretted the moment that the human's touch ended and it left, thundering away and leaving her alone. Humans were a destructive force, her still hazily-remembered past told her, but this one had surprised her.

Chapter Two

“Hello?” Jave opened the door carefully, one hand on the doorknob and the other on the doorframe, ready to slam the door shut. There was a cleaning-bot in the street, the only hint of life the gentle whirring sound coming from its internal mechanism.

“May I come in. The human residence must be cleansed.” The bot’s monotone turned the would-be polite phrase into a threat.

“Maybe you could come back later? My mom’s not home, and I would rather she be—“

“The human residence must be cleansed. May I come in.” Bots didn’t understand courtesy, or human speech patterns. They were programmed to carry out certain phrases and actions and trying to reason with a bot was like trying to reason with the City itself.

“You know, I’m not feeling like my property’s being very respected right now,” Jave muttered, his tense stance belying his words. “Come in, I guess.”

The bot rolled up the few steps, its whirring internal processes loud as it entered the confined space. Jave left the door open.

“The human residence must be cleansed.” The bot rolled past Jave and into the apartment, missing the door to the bedroom and rolling into the kitchen. Its long, many-jointed arms swept along the walls and countertops as it went, its sensors searching for the mess to be ‘cleansed’.

“Hey, you’re in the wrong room. The mess is over here.”

Jave was soundly ignored, and the bot continued to sweep its appendages along the pale cement floor. The apartment was made up of cheap, but sturdy materials, much

nicer than their last home, and it had been scrubbed until the chipped countertops shone before they moved in. The only area that could possibly need ‘cleansing’ was the lingering bloodstain on the floor of Jave’s bedroom. Bots were only ever called to clean in extreme circumstances. The kitchen floor might not be up to a bot’s standard of cleanliness, having not been swept for a couple of days, but Jave thought he could be excused for neglecting his chores. He had been through a *trauma*.

“Look man, you’re not going to find anything to clean in there aside from some crumbs and dust. We basically just moved in. I promise there’s not any secret gunk hiding under the refridge.”

The bot seemed only to take his words as encouragement and extended its arms even further to probe under the edge of each counter. Jave would have rolled his eyes if it hadn’t meant taking his eyes off the bot. He was still standing by the front door with his arms crossed tightly in front of himself. It wasn’t enough for bots to be scary and intrusive; they had to be annoying and invasive as well.

“Discovery: unknown object. Analyzing unknown object.”

Jave pushed off the wall he was leaning against to step into the kitchen. The bot was stiller than it had been since inviting itself into Jave’s apartment, with only a softly pulsing light from its eye-sensors and its voice repeating that phrase to show it was active. Its appendages looked more like arms again, drawn back to a more reasonable length and holding something in one. Something white, and sickeningly familiar.

“Possible identification: weapon. Possible threat level: high.” The bot turned towards Jave and fell back into the approximation of human speech. “You will explain

the presence of this weapon. You will be taken to the City center for questioning. The weapon will be confiscated.”

“It’s not mine! The criminal that broke in left it here. It’s not mine!”

The cleaning-bot, looking so wrong with a weapon in its blunt appendages, advanced towards Jave. It didn’t even have digits with which to fire the weapon, but Jave’s brain was hardly in a state to recognize this fact. The bot was moving forward slowly, but all Jave’s mind registered was *danger*. He took several steps backwards, towards the still-open front door, and then, hardly thinking, he stepped out of his own apartment and shut the door, putting the newly-repaired metal between himself and the bot.

Jave stood there, frozen, his hands cramping around the doorknob that he was still pulling towards himself with nearly his full weight. Contrary to his efforts, he knew the bot inside must not have tried to leave yet, because Jave certainly would have lost in a tug-of-war match with a bot, even a cleaning-bot. His heartbeat was pounding in his ears, a rushing sound that blocked out everything except the awareness that the only thing between him and a bot holding a weapon, even a useless one, was a door. The same door that had been punctured so easily by a peacekeeper-bot not twenty-four hours ago.

“Jave?”

*

He jumped, whirling around at Zana’s touch on his shoulder. “Mom.” His hands flew up towards her before he caught the instinctive reaching and crossed them. He hadn’t initiated a hug in she didn’t know how long—something must be seriously wrong.

“Are you ok?”

“There’s a bot. In the apartment.” He glanced behind himself at the securely shut door. “It’s just a cleaning bot, but it found the gun, the one that criminal guy had. It was still in the house, but it thought it was mine, and—,”

Zana sucked a breath in. The man who broke in had had a gun? “We’ll figure it out, ok? Let’s just go see what’s going on in there.”

Jave nodded once, a sharp jerk of his head. Zana put one hand on his shoulder as she passed, partly to steer him aside and behind her so she could reach the door, partly to comfort her son who wouldn’t initiate a hug, and partly to have something sturdy to hold on to. She was feeling a little shaky herself.

She opened the door slowly, but there was nothing visible inside aside from a pair of Jave’s shoes and a stray hair tie on the floor. The apartment was quiet, and if she hadn’t seen for herself how shaken Jave was Zana might have doubted there was a bot here at all. She stepped carefully through the door, feeling Jave on her heels, conscious of the fact that this door was the only entrance or exit into the space.

“Hello? Where is the cleaning-bot in Apartment 7S65? Identify your unit.”

Zana could remember using the bots’ jargon to entertain Jave when he was little, while she was studying to become a mechanic. He had loved repeating the trigger phrases she had had to learn, the phrases and commands the bots were programmed to respond to. It was disconcerting, now, to know there was a bot present and not hear it respond to the trigger phrase.

“Identify your unit.”

“It was right here when I closed the door, I swear.”

“I believe you, baby.” They stepped further into the apartment, into the kitchen which was as empty as the hall. “Identify your unit.”

“Unit Thirty-Four—Thirty-Four—Unit Thirty-Fo—.” A strange stuttering was coming from Jave’s room, along with a sudden grinding noise. He and Zana turned around as one to peer through the half-closed doorway. Zana could hardly comprehend, much less believe what she was seeing, despite the disturbing events of the past couple of days.

The bot was standing in the center of the room, its head listing to one side and its eye-sensors flashing slowly, indicating that its systems were malfunctioning in some way. There was nothing in its appendages, which were splayed loosely over the floor, looking absurd. A small part of Zana’s brain wondered where exactly the man’s gun was, but most of her attention was taken up with not letting the half-hysterical laugh that was threatening to escape past her teeth. She refocused on the bot with an effort, noticing that the white of its out casing was mottled and striped with something—colorful. She could only gape as the bot tried again to answer her command and was cut off as the green mottling spread across the upper part of the carapace and covered its head.

“Identify: Unit Thirty-Four-Seven—Seven—Seve—.”

Something green, and sinuous, and sprouting from the floor of her son’s bedroom, was wrapped around the cleaning-bot, preventing it from moving or speaking.

Impossibly strong tendrils of green were wrapping around the bot as easily as winding string around a package, but with far more force. The bot’s white plastoid covering was beginning to bend where the green lines were, and less and less white was visible beneath the looping lines. Zana noticed distantly that a few of the bot’s

appendages had reawaken and were giving much the same treatment to the bulk of the green thing, looping and pulling at the tendrils, some of which broke with snapping sounds.

The distressingly organic sound broke Zana from her frozen shock, and she pulled Jave out of the room. She opened her mouth to speak, but had to swallow before any sound would emerge. “I don’t know what that is, but it does not belong in our home.”

*

Jave noticed his mom’s voice was tense but lacked the fearful shrillness that had been there two days ago, when there had been all those other bots in their home. Maybe even strange and scary events couldn’t be so frightening when they just kept happening, over and over. Then again, his mom’s grip on his arm wasn’t exactly gentle, or comfortable. She was holding on to him with panicked hands, at odds with her even tone, just like the other night. Had it really only been a day since their home had been invaded so thoroughly, first by the man with the gun and then by a wave of bots?

The man. The gun. Jave eyed the weapon, which was laying several feet away from the still-stuttering bot and the green thing that had seemed so harmless, but had turned out so not. If he could just get the gun and hide it, or give it up willingly, or even dismantle it, maybe the bot wouldn’t report them. It would be horribly unfair for them to pay the consequences of owning a weapon—especially his mom, who hadn’t even know the gun was there in their home.

Jave wrenched free from his mom’s hold suddenly, taking the mere four steps into the room to pick up the gun with both hands. He then backed quickly to the doorway, where his mom’s punishing grip returned to his upper arms.

“Jave! Don’t—get back—is that the gun?”

“Yeah. The man had it, the other night. I don’t know what it is, exactly, but it looks like a gun.”

Both of their voices were strangely quiet, as though they couldn’t bear to interrupt the strange scene in front of them by speaking too loudly.

“Why didn’t you tell me about the gun?” When he just stared for a moment, she added: “That night, I mean. After the bots left. Why didn’t you tell me?”

Not wanting to admit he had lost track of it in the hubbub and forgotten to go looking for it later, Jave stuttered out a less embarrassing answer. “The man—he only pointed it at me for a minute. And, and he said it wouldn’t hurt me. Or that he wouldn’t hurt me—something like that.” And then the man had been punctured like a balloon by the peacekeeper-bot. Jave knew that the image of that man’s face, eyes and mouth wide in surprise as the peacekeeper-bot’s appendage had pierced him straight through. He hadn’t even faced his death to look it in the eye. Well, eye-sensor.

“That doesn’t mean it’s not dangerous, Jave.”

He winced. She meant dangerous to them—dangerous to have in their home. He didn’t like to think of what exactly the bot would have done to him earlier if it hadn’t gotten distracted by the green thing.

“I know, mom. I’m just going to hold on to it until we can...figure out what...”

He trailed off, peering over his mom’s shoulder. She had placed herself between him and the drama happening in his room, unintentionally giving him a perfect view of the action behind her. The fight wasn’t going well for the bot, though it had managed to tear free several more strands of green and was now working sluggishly on the thickest

part, that looked like it was made up of hundreds of darker green tendrils forming a main stalk.

“U—u—unit Thirty Fooo—.” The bot seemed to be in its death-throes, its vocal box stuttering and its arm-like appendages twitching. There was something very disturbing to Jave about watching a bot look so distressed, so affected. Bots are not alive, not like humans are. They are machines programmed to act and react in certain ways, and they aren’t capable of independent action or thought. But to see even a machine in such distress made something in Jave’s chest wrench, as though his heart were beating against the inside of his chest, begging to be let out.

He considered the weapon in his hands. The man hadn’t used it, and Jave had no way of knowing if it even worked. And if it did work, there was no guarantee that it would work on a bot, or on whatever the green thing was. Could it be worth trying to use it? To either save or spare the two competitors from their violent struggle?

Jave refused to think too hard about it. He pushed past his mom, hardly hearing her protestations. He held the gun as steadily as he could, with one hand steadying the heavy device and the other curled around the rubbery button on the underneath. And then he just—pulled.

There was a strange humming that Jave could feel in his hands, as if the gun were charging up, getting ready to do something. The bones in his left hand ached where he was holding it, as if the vibration was shaking his hand right down to its atoms. And then everything happened so fast Jave wondered if he had blinked and missed something.

The bot, which had been standing upright, though jerking about, was suddenly limp. Its swiveling head was settled squarely back into its socket, and its appendages

were finally, blessedly, limp. Small sparks, more of a haze of blueish electricity more than anything resembling fire, danced up and down the bot's appendages and around its throat. Its eye-sensors were flashing randomly, as if the individual lightbulbs were firing behind the thick glass lens. It was still, so still, with only the lights pulsing behind Jave's own eyes to indicate that something had just happened.

Had there been a flash of light? There must have been, or Jave wouldn't be experiencing these whitish arcs when he closed his eyes. His skin felt over-sensitive, like the hairs on his body were all standing up at once.

"That was a nuclear pulse." Jave nearly dropped the gun in surprise, only barely managing to keep a hold of the weapon with still-tingling fingers. His mom sounded as shell-shocked as he felt, but she retained the presence of mind to gently take the gun from Jave and gingerly set it on the ground in the hall.

"Nuclear?" The strange surging he had felt from the weapon seemed like far too small an effect to be called nuclear. He remembered his history classes, when he had learned about the problems humans had had with nuclear power being weaponized centuries ago. Instead of using the technology to stop the decay of the Earth's surface, the people back then had used it to make enormous weapons. Those weapons had been able to wipe out an entire City in a single minute, but this blast had only taken out a single bot.

"How do you know?"

*

Zana tried not to let any hurt come through in her voice. "I work with bots, Jave. That was an electromagnetic pulse, and it was strong enough that it had to be nuclear power. Small-scale maybe, but that's definitely not just some archaic gun."

Stories would pop up from time to time, of some unlucky citizen finding an old gun from before the City was created. Guns used to be made from metal, and would project a variety of concentrated minerals, especially salt. That was part of the reason why creating the City had been so necessary in the first place: the Earth had been so saturated with salt that nothing would grow.

But this was no pre-City gun.

Maybe it should have been consolation to know that that man, that criminal that had broken into their home couldn't have used the weapon to hurt Jave beyond a bad shock, but it really wasn't. Zana couldn't feel anything but anger, closely followed by fear. Why did it have to be their home that the man broke in to? Why did it have to be Jave who was home? And why didn't the stupid bots find the weapon the night it all happened?

"I'm going to go look at it."

"Don't touch the bot. It still has a lot of static electricity around it with nowhere to go. You'll get a shock." Zana's tone was a bit sharper than she intended, but she couldn't deny that some of her anger was directed towards Jave. Teenagers had poor impulse control, but firing an unidentified weapon at a City-bot?

"Hey, I think the green thing's still alive." The thin green tendrils that had looped themselves around the bot were still now and looked slightly charred. Jave had obeyed her by not touching the bot, but was leaning very close to get a better look.

"What is it?" Zana circled around with Jave, and pulled on her thick work-gloves that were still in her pocket. At least she hadn't had a chance to change out of her work-clothes.

“I don’t know. It was just there suddenly, earlier today. I was going to tell you about it.”

They both continued watching as the green thing reacted sluggishly to Zana’s poke. Small flat extensions unfolded slowly from the smooth central support.

One of the flat things fell off the main trunk with a tremble, fluttering to the floor. Jave reached out carefully to pick it up, and Zana turned to the bot, still slightly unnerved by the lack of noise or light present. Even the lights on the front indicator panel were dark. Zana had only seen a bot with non-functioning indicators once and had removed the panel on the front of its body casing to access the circuitry behind. But even that bot had continued to whirr softly as she worked, showing it still had life and power.

Alternatively, she had fairly often seen bots come into the Foundry at critically low or even zero power that were dead silent, but they always, always had that row of emergency lights on their front panel to indicate the problem.

Pushing past her instinctive dislike of seeing a bot with no life-signs, Zana began to carefully wrestle a few samples from the green thing’s runs and limbs. She didn’t know what it was, and it honestly scared her, but she wasn’t going to pass up the chance to study it further. She wondered what the green stuff would look like under the microscope at the Foundry. Would it have tiny mechanisms visible beneath the smooth surface?

Setting the samples aside, she began working to untangle the quiet bot and its twining guest. It was unclear if the green thing was trying to help with the process or make it more difficult. It kept curling the ends of its tendrils into coils, and if it was anywhere near the bot, Zana’s hands, or another bit of itself, it would wrap around and

around whatever it touched. For every foot of it that she untangled, that foot of green would find something else to tangle around. She hoped she wouldn't have to resort to cutting it off the bot—Jave seemed oddly attached to the intruder. And she didn't know enough about it to know if her skills would be up to fixing it, if it could even be mended by her usual tools of hammers and solder.

“Mom, come look at this.”

She dropped the section she had been wrestling with an exasperated sigh. The green thing immediately went back to curling and twisting unhelpfully, nearly obscuring the bot from sight once again. “Ok, show me what you've got.”

Jave scooted over, nearly vibrating with excitement. “So I was looking at this, which came off of the green thing. I felt it before, and I thought maybe it was like a bot. Alive, but not alive-alive, you know? But look at this!”

He held out the small, palm-sized object, and Zana carefully took it from him. She still had her gloves on—she honestly worked better with them on after so many years of practice—but the thick fabric made the delicate piece impossible to feel. It weighed nothing, and if Zana hadn't been looking at it, she wouldn't have known it was in her hand. It was such an intense color, a variety of greens from the intense brightness of the center to the dark, charred looking edges, which had crumbled slightly as she transferred it from flat on her hand to pinched between two fingers. Interrupting her study, Jave reached out and guided her hands up, putting the green thing between the overhead light and her.

“It has...veins.”

“Yeah, exactly!”

Instead of gears and wires, underneath the thing's skin were *veins*. Tiny rusty pathways branched off into smaller and smaller lines as they extended from the center base, unmistakably forming veins. Zana found herself remembering far-distant school lessons about the human circulatory system from before she had decided to specialize in bot mechanics. But the thing hadn't bled when she had pulled off those samples—how could it have veins if it didn't have blood?

“So this means it's alive, right? As in, like a person alive?”

“I don't know. I've never seen anything like this before.”

“Yeah, me neither.”

*

Jave and his mom turned to look at the green thing, which had, to his surprise, managed to mostly separate itself from the bot. It was moving more confidently now, the tremulous quality to its movements nearly gone. When not attached to a tall human-shaped bot, it was surprisingly small, with one thicker trunk coming from the floor—and had that crack widened?—with several thinner limbs that fell to the floor in a confused mess of tendrils. Was it right to refer to it with human terms, like trunk and limbs? Should he call the tips of the green **limbs'** fingers and the little flat bits hanging off hair?

Jave's musings were cut short by his mom's suddenly turning to the now-abandoned bot. Its stillness and lack of noise were as eerie as ever, though the green thing had left only minimal signs of the struggle. Jave hoped he hadn't damaged it irreparably by firing the gun...or whatever it was. The gun that was not a gun. And that was certainly difficult to wrap his mind around. Jave had never really been in danger from the criminal, if the weapon was just an EMP. The man could only have hurt a bot, and besides, it

wasn't like the weapon had *destroyed* the bot. Jave supposed the man had broken the first law of the City by owning such an item—the bots belonged to the City just like humans did. Having a weapon in hand that could disable a bot, even temporarily—Jave glanced nervously to his mom, carefully examining the cleaning-bot's dented plating—threatened the bots' authority.

But even as he justified the “criminal's” execution to himself, Jave couldn't help a flare of anger. He had fired the weapon himself, to protect the green thing, his mother, and himself. How could disabling a bot be a worse crime than executing a human for owning or even firing an EMP?

It had been an impulsive move, but not one he could really bring himself to regret, though a certain amount of fear was beginning to trickle past the high of excitement. The ‘weapon’ had been in his home, and he would be held responsible for it being there. And then he had assaulted a bot. Self-defense wasn't a defense when faced with the black-and-white law.

“Do you think you can fix it?”

She paused in her examination of the inactive bot. “I can definitely fix it. It shouldn't even take too long. I'm just worried about the memory banks. If I wipe it completely it'll look suspicious, but we can't exactly leave it as it is.”

Jave didn't have to ask what she meant by that. If the bot had been willing to punish him for having the not-gun when he hadn't even known it was there, it would definitely object to being fired on with said not-gun. When it eventually reconnected to the City server, there couldn't be a trace of footage that showed Jave or his mother tampering with a bot.

He managed to sit quietly for a few minutes (that felt like hours) with only a minimum of fidgeting. His mom was wrist-deep in the bot's side panel, carefully exploring where individual wires connected to a curved metallic circuit board. The bot was still quiet, though its eye-sensors had flashed twice when she accessed the hardware. Not completely dead then, just inactive.

This was hardly the first time Jave had seen his mom work—she'd had to break out the gloves and toolbox practically every week in their last apartment to fix some appliance or other. Her intense focus and precise posture were especially impressive this evening, however. Even sitting cross-legged on the concrete floor of Jave's bedroom, her back was perfectly straight, with her shoulders relaxed and her elbows close to her sides as she worked. Her hands moved quickly as she removed, examined, and replaced small bundles of wires and indicators in a smooth rhythm. In contrast to her intent focus, Jave's mind was spinning over the events of the day. Going to school in the morning, being threatened by a bot in the afternoon, and disabling a bot with an illegal weapon in the evening.

"Mom?" Jave's voice was small, though it didn't bother him as much as it might have normally to sound so unsure. "What are we going to do about *that*?"

She didn't look where he was pointing, but she clearly knew exactly what he meant. "We're going to move the bot into the hall and lock your room up for tonight. Whatever this is, I don't want it to go anywhere and I definitely don't want you sleeping near it."

Jave nodded, in complete agreement. If the thing wasn't sentient, if it couldn't think or make decisions about the world, then there would be nothing stopping it from

attacking Jave as it had attacked the bot. He didn't want to roll over in his sleep and wake up to green strings wrapped around his throat. But if it was sentient, which he really hoped it was, he needed to make sure it was trustworthy. He didn't know if it had been defending Jave or just protecting itself when it paralyzed the bot, but he was eager to find out.

*

Anthina stretched, reaching as far to the concealed sky as she could without falling over. Satisfied with barely brushing the ceiling caging her in, she reached outwards next. Trailing along the hard ground, she curled around the cold legs of furniture, then felt along until she reached the walls. Feeling her way around, she measured the space she was trapped in. About the width of three or four grown tree trunks on each side, boxing her in with artificial stone. *As soon as I can, I must find a way to be free of these walls.*

Earlier, after the human had left, she had felt vibrations in the artificial ground. She had still been awakening, confused and woozy from her long hibernation and strange wake-up call. And there had been that gentle contact, no more than a warm brushing sensation against her leaves.

The vibrations were returning, thundering this time rather than pattering as before. Something, or someone, was running about, close enough that she could feel the disturbance in the air as well. She gathered her tendrils and branches up frantically—she was stretched out all over the space and had no desire to show her size or ability to move to anyone until she knew what was going on. It may have been a long time—How long?—since she had been around humans, but she knew that most plants could not move

on their own, not as she could. And as far as she knew, no plants could think or feel either, except for her.

She froze just as the footsteps, which had faded slightly, returned with the same heavy tread and a strange humming. She still had one tendril wrapped around the leg of a piece of furniture when the door opened, the smooth echoing surfaces around her allowing her to feel exactly what was happening. It wasn't a human that moved into the space—humans had never been so round. Or smooth. Or loud. The thing that was sending out a regular clicking noise, so frenetic it blurred into a single sound that she felt from her smallest newly-sprouted leaves to her roots under the ground. *What are you?*

The human footsteps followed behind, staying well back, and she could hear chattering in one of those quick, barely-intelligible human languages. The voice was smooth, without the small rasps and moments of roughness that came with use. The pitch was moderate—probably too low to be a female of that age. A boy, then. A human boy who had invited a round, humming, shelled thing into the space where she was. The space that, she supposed, must have been his before she awoke.

The smooth humming thing drew closer, and she was baffled to sense it hovering several inches above the ground. She couldn't remember humans having machines that floated. Its curved body felt like the plastics that had once been so popular in human creations, before—

Well. Before.

The floating thing made a new noise that she could barely hear over its clicking, humming innards. It sounded flat, without the accusatory tone she expected. She tried to parse what it was saying, but it was hard without the tell-tale variations in vibration to let

her know the emotion and intent behind the words. It spoke again, something short and sharp, but she still could only feel an artificial lack of emotion, voice as smooth as its shell.

The thing drew even closer, and she became nervous. What could this emotionless, artificial thing want with her? A sinuous appendage, more like one of her own flexible branches than an arm, reached towards her. The smooth end touched her, a light contact that felt cool but non-threatening for an atom of a second. Then the jointed appendage started wrapping itself around her, pulling close and beginning to grab her branching limbs in a bruising grip.

She panicked.

She panicked as she had not for hundreds of waking years, for who knows how many more that she had been asleep. Her limbs whirled into motion, no longer caring that she had an audience. The thing had tried to hurt her, and she hadn't so much as moved. She had been still and non-threatening, and it had tried to tear her apart. Was still trying to tear at her, its limbs reaching around and pressing against her, leaves catching in narrow joints and newly-formed bark chipping away under the metal.

She fought back wildly, pressing limbs against and around the thing, desperation flowing freely through her veins as if every choking valve had been blown wide. She twisted and pulled, trying to force the thing to be still, to stop trying to hurt her. Slowly, so slowly, the thing became immobilized by her encircling vines. She strained against it, certain there was no way she could keep the thing still indefinitely. It showed no signs of tiring or stopping, and was still through her own immense effort.

Then lightning struck.

This was mostly literal, at least to Anthina, who had only been awake and present for the barest beginnings of humanity's forays into electricity. She remembered two hundred years or so of strangely fiery inventions that brought warmth and ease to some humans even as they brought destruction and pain to others. There had been enormous but oh so simple machines and tiny but increasingly complicated mechanisms that were all powered by the clumsy of electrical energy.

But this was no mere transportation or communication device. This was a weapon. The shock of energy tore through Anthina, sending the tiny filaments on her leaves standing straight up and singeing their thin edges slightly. And the sound of it—the vibration fairly shook the room, leaving everything seeming weak and unmotivated afterwards. Even the threatening machine Anthina was still wrapped around seemed less persistent.

But no, that wasn't just an impression. The smooth thing had stopped moving, stopped pressing against her fragile limbs with its ripping, angry ones. It had stopped doing anything in fact—the whole mechanism had gone entirely still and powerless.

She slowly released the choking pressure she had on the thing, allowing it to slump down over itself, finally resting on the ground instead of hovering above it. She hadn't noticed in the wake of the electric pulse, but the persistent humming from the machine had stopped, and the silence it left felt like a blessing settling over her overstimulated shoots.

Not even the tense conversation of the humans left in the room could put a dent in her profound relief. She had felt so powerless, for the first time in so very long. She couldn't even bring herself to worry too much about the humans—one of them had just

helped her after all. She wouldn't quite say the human had saved her, but it had definitely kept the situation from becoming any worse.

The humans were approaching her now, slowly. Each of them touched her lightly, and she could all but taste their uncertainty. One of them, not the one she had already interacted with, began trying to shift her tendrils aside. The human pulled softly at first, but then more boldly as Anthina refused to stay where the human moved her. Anthina was already trying to untangle herself from the machine she was hopelessly tangled around, and she didn't need some human getting in the way in an effort to help.

The other human was far less decisive in his movements. They exchanged a few words that let her know which was which—the young male and the older female—then each continued their chosen tasks. The boy seemed to be exploring and cataloguing her leaves and the ends of her feelers that had been singed by the electricity lingering on the machine after the pulse. The pulse that the human himself had caused.

*

“If you can hear me, say something.”

The thing remained disappointingly silent.

“If you can hear me, move something.”

Several thin tendrils bobbed gently in the soft moonlight coming through Jave's window, but nothing was moving that he could see.

“Come on, you were twisting around like crazy earlier, when the bot was here. I know you can do it, just move!”

Jave slumped down further, sitting cross-legged across the room from the thing. Its smooth green exterior looked more grey than anything else in the dim light, and each

of its dozens of limbs looked strangely soft. It had been several hours since the whole drama with the bot and the magnetic charge that had zapped it. Jave's mom had finally managed to edit the bots' memory enough that it should be safe to return to its charging station. Well, safer than keeping it from checking in with the City network.

The last few days had really done a number on Jave's view of the bots. He was more familiar with their internal mechanisms than he had ever wanted to be from watching his engineer mom play doctor on one in his bedroom. There was something so disturbing about a powerful, untouchable bot laying splayed out, its hover-power shut off and its protective panels pried off. He didn't regret firing that weapon, but he certainly had to live with the consequences. And part of living with the consequences was apparently interrupted sleep. His mom had made up the couch what must have been an hour ago, but his thoughts and his heartbeat had been too quick for sleep.

Were all bots so easily overpowered? That gun had been no toy, but it still seemed far too simple that the bots, the all-present, all-authoritative, all-terrifying bots could have an off-button like that. It made much more sense that the bots would have wanted that man dead, if he had made a weapon like that.

But then again, just making something dangerous wasn't technically against the law. Unless he had stolen the parts or hurt somebody to make it, the man wouldn't have been doing anything illegal. Jave thought of Mr. Sorcha's shop with his strange, only-occasionally useful creations of metal and plastic. Just because something had the potential to be dangerous didn't make it illegal—right?

Movement out of the corner of his eye made Jave freeze, his thoughts scattering. Had the thing just moved? He scooted closer, not taking his eyes off it. Yes—there! One

of the thin little tendrils had curled in on itself before uncurling again. There was a strange beauty to the thing—it was hardly symmetrical, and it was such a strange color—but there was an appeal all the same. It made Jave think of his mom’s hair right after she washed it, before she forced all the curls into submission. Each tendril was moving slowly, he now saw, swaying and twisting slightly to a hundred unique rhythms.

“Are you ok? You’re not hurt, are you?”

The thing kept moving at its own pace, as if it hadn’t heard Jave. He frowned. It had responded earlier when he touched it, so why wasn’t it...

He reached out slowly, feeling a strange gravity attached to the action. One finger gently brushed the end of a narrow tendril, which was surprisingly soft, almost like skin. The thing finally reacted, curling a bit of itself around his fingertip reflexively. It reminded Jave of when he had visited the nursery sphere in school a few years ago, and they had toured the newborn care ward. That had been the only time he had ever seen a newborn, and neither he nor his classmates had been impressed by the squished looking faces and all-too-fragile necks. But still, there had been something compelling about the way a baby only a few hours old would curl its fingers around whatever you put in its hand and refuse to let go. Jave couldn't help but compare this little plant with its twining hold on his fingertip to the grip of that random newborn. Small and weak really, but strangely strong for the size of the thing doing the holding.

"What a strange thing you are."

It reacted to his words, uncoiling itself from his hand gently and retreating slightly.

"What? Did I do something wrong?"

He reached with his other hand, brushing his fingers through another group of hanging tendrils. The thing seemed so much more alert now, if something as obviously non-human as this could be said to be alert. Jave felt a slight touch on his cheek and he started. He hadn't even noticed one of the thinner branches reaching towards his face. He kept still, allowing the exploration and trying not to shiver. "That tickles."

"Tickles?"

Jave jerked back, letting go of the tendrils he had been loosely holding. There had been a word, except it hadn't been a word so much as an impression of soft movement and laughter that his mind had translated into a word. No one else was there to speak, and it hadn't been real speech anyway. Had that come from...

"Was that you?"

The thing was back to relative stillness, only swaying gently and reaching out slightly as if it couldn't tell exactly where Jave was to grab onto him again. He scooted back another couple of feet, just in case. He had suspected the thing was sentient, even hoped that it was, but to have confirmation like that...

There was still no movement. Growing bold once more, Jave brushed the back of his hand against the thing.

"What are you?" He tried not to flinch as a tendril wandered its way through the air toward him again. It brushed his arm this time, as barely-there as before.

"I am myself."

Jave tangled his hands in several of the thing's tendrils, leaning forward slightly. Did this count as a handshake? Would it even recognize a handshake as a friendly gesture?

"Um, nice to meet you. I'm Jave."

"*Jave.*" The thing repeated back, sort of. It was more an impression of a warm hand, his own voice, and an echo of his own curiosity and wariness.

"What 's your name?"

The thing paused for a moment—was it thinking about what to say? Jave felt an impression of green, and tall branches stretching outward and upward in every direction but down, and the sensation of being deeply rooted in an unfamiliar space.

"Anthina. You are Anthina."

"*Yes.*"

Jave felt himself fairly vibrating with excitement and curiosity. This thing was alive, it was in his house, and she was named Anthina. What even was there to ask? Aside from everything, of course.

"Are you—uh, that is—um." Keep it cool, Jave. "How long have you been growing underneath my bedroom?"

Anthina hummed, and Jave got the impression she was thinking. "*I have always been here. I don't know how long your room has been here, but I have always been in this place.*"

"Huh. That makes sense, I guess. They must have built the building right over you. Wow, that would have been at least a hundred years ago—how old are you?"

"*I am as old as all the plants on this Earth.*"

Jave's brow furrowed. There had been a couple of words there that hadn't quite registered, or translated, or whatever. "Plants?"

"*Beings that grow from the Earth, nourished by water and sunlight. Like me.*"

“There are more of you?” Jave caught himself bouncing again and tried to sit still and straight.

“I am the only Anthina. But there are other, lesser plants. How do you not know of this?”

“I’ve never heard of a plant, sorry. You’re definitely the first one I’ve met.”

"Surely there are still other plants elsewhere. I can't be the only one left."

"Well, there's the algae farms. That needs water and sunlight to grow. But that doesn't look anything like you." And, he didn't say aloud, algae doesn't talk.

"I refuse to believe my only living relation is algae."

Jave caught himself before he laughed, startled by her snappish response. There had been a note of sadness there too, however.

"There are truly no other plants left?"

"Not that I know of." Jave gripped the handful of tendrils he was still holding tighter in a comforting squeeze. "I'm sorry."

Anthina was quiet for a moment, apparently shocked into stillness. Jave felt more uncomfortable in this grief-filled silence than he had been even when he was terrified of Anthina strangling him in his sleep. Casting about for something, anything to break the silence, he asked, "What was it like? Before, I mean, when there were other plants?"

"Beautiful. It was paradise, truly. There was a deep river that ran right by me, and I would dip my roots in the cool water." Her voice held a strange note in Jave's mind, like she was both cheered and saddened by her words. He decided it felt like nostalgia. *"It was home."*

*

Anthina waited, keeping her branches and leaves from moving too much. She had been in this space, waiting, for what could have been minutes or hours without interruption. She was growing tired of the continuous wariness as she waited for some new enemy to burst through the door, however, so she guessed it had been hours since she that metal-and-plastic thing had tried to harm her. Anthina didn't feel the passage of time, not really, except when the time was filled with some action or interaction. When she held still like this, to rest and to heal, she had no way to tell how long it had been--hours or days, it was all the same to her. She had slept beneath this human domicile for what had surely been years after all, but her last waking memory before that felt like only a moment ago.

Her reverie was broken, not suddenly and loudly as before, but quietly. Instead of another enemy, as she had been expecting, the young human had stepped into her space. The boy who had protected her.

"Are you here to harm me, or to help me?"

The boy didn't react, as if he hadn't heard her. She could have cursed herself for forgetting, if her language had lent itself to cursing. Humans couldn't hear, wouldn't hear her when she spoke. No human had heard her speak since those earliest days, before the world became the broken thing it was now. The human didn't move, simply sat there across from her, breathing. She had forgotten that humans did that—breathing. Such an inefficient system, she thought with a twinge of fondness.

The boy finally inched closer, sliding across the artificial stone floor and stopping a short distance away. It hadn't spoken yet, but she thought she could taste a muted

version of the fear that had suffused the air before, when he had saved her. Was the boy nervous?

The thought made Anthina relax slightly, unwinding several of her branches from around each other, uncoiling from the tight, tree-like stalk she had kept herself in defensively. She moved slowly, not wanting to alarm the human. Her branches stretched out gently before twisting back on themselves, some reaching up towards the limiting ceiling and some resting along the floor.

The boy was finally growing bold enough to approach her, even going so far as to reach out a hand to touch one of her branches. She rewarded his bravery, or curiosity, by gently taking hold of his fingertip with the end of the branch. Humans greeted each other like this, right? With a clasped hand?

"What a strange thing you are," the boy said.

She was a little surprised that she could understand it, but she didn't bother responding. Humans couldn't understand her kind of language, and a comment like that didn't deserve a response.

The boy said something else, but she had pulled her branch out of its hand, so all she caught was an offended-sounding phrase. She could feel the vibrations of his words, and the tone, but the meaning of them escaped her entirely. Interesting. He reached for her again, catching several branches this time. Anthina couldn't suppress a wave of vaguely fond exasperation. All humans were just the same, endlessly persistent and endlessly curious. The boy's boldness must have been catching, because she reached out as well, brushing his face.

"That tickles," he protested. She remembered that word from before, from parents playing with their children, from endless giggles floating through the air. It had been a cheerful word.

"Tickles?"

The human suddenly wrenched itself backwards, pulling free from her branches and leaning backwards. She tensed, preparing for some new enemy to burst through the door. How could the human have noticed before her that something was coming? But it didn't matter, as much as she had hated that violent conflict earlier, she was prepared to defend herself again. And, she was surprised to find herself thinking, to defend the human as well.

But nothing came. The only movement in the small space was the boy's puffing breaths, and her own unconscious swaying. She found one of her branches brushing one of the boy's branches—no, arms, humans had arms—and she couldn't help but pull closer.

"What are you?" He asked, his voice not sounding frightened as she had expected, just wondering, tinged with wariness.

Anthina responded without thinking, *"I am myself."*

"Um, nice to meet you. I'm Jave."

The boy... had responded to her words. She barely knew what she said after that, so shocked was she to have a human understand her. When the boy—Jave—asked for her name, she couldn't help but laugh as she gave it. He understood her.

"Anthina. You are Anthina."

"Yes."

The boy continued babbling, and she answered with half of her attention still preoccupied by the revelation that another living being, a human, could communicate with her. She remembered a time before, when she lived in her paradise, her home with humans who spoke to her, and who listened when she spoke. There had been a deep, cold river where she would sink her roots down until she could feel the chill in her leaves. There had been rich, dark earth that nourished her own growth and all the other plants there in their endless varieties, the ones she had watched over just as the humans watched over their animals. There had been peace then, and purpose.

But she had gone into a sleep, into a deep dormancy in a time when the cold seasons grew longer and longer until they leeched away all the warm seasons. She had chosen to sleep to protect herself, but when she awoke the world was different. The humans were different--louder to her hearing, filled with a wary defensiveness that put her on edge. They no longer heard her when she spoke, even when she clasped their hands. They began to fear her then, and she felt an equal mix of revulsion and reverence in their voices and hands. Her paradise was gone, no longer the haven it had been for so many generations of humans.

So she had slept. She burrowed deep into the earth, pulling her branches and vines around herself until she was small. She sent her roots down as far as they could reach, and only resurfaced rarely. The world was ever stranger with every foray, and she slept longer and longer between waking each time. Anthina didn't track the passage of time like the humans, but she got the feeling she had slept for longer than even she had intended this last time.

When the boy had chattered himself out, apparently unbothered by her absent-minded answers, she came back to herself. The silence was peaceful, broken only by the soft susurrations of the boy's monologue and the faint feelings of mechanical vibrations in the distance.

PART THREE

Young Adult Literature as a Genre

YA Catalogue

This part of my thesis project is intended to give a background on Young Adult Literature as a genre. Included is a brief catalogue of 15 books that can be called YA, though some are also categorized as being intended for children or for adults. Several of these titles have been controversial in their classification. Since young adulthood is a difficult period to define, the literature intended for this age spans a variety of genres and maturity levels. I have included a recommended reading age for each book, as well as attempted to answer the question: What makes this book YA? My prompts for how to consider the ways in which a specific book could be considered YA are below.

Questions for literature review

1. Does the novel seem to be targeted at a specific audience? What about the book makes it more or less appropriate for a specific age range? Do the style, prose, diction, etc fit in a YA novel?
2. In what specific ways are individuals characterized? How does the author use descriptive passages vs action or dialogue to flesh out the characters? What traits, values, or roles do the protagonist have/hold that would appeal to the target audience? Would the target audience see themselves in the protagonist—or not?

3. What themes or conflicts does the novel include that would potentially make it appealing to a teenaged reader? E.g. family conflict, development of personal morality, the desire for individual freedom, discovering romance, etc. Do these elements represent the central conflict of the story?

4. What about this novel makes it YA? Given that a good YA novel should include personal growth and development of the protagonist as well as internal and external conflicts, what distinguishes it from an adult novel in which similar explorations of identity are expected?

1. The Last Namsara, by Kristen Ciccarelli

YA Themes:

Discovery of romance

Inversion of learned behaviors and thoughts

Self-discovery, development of personal intellectual and emotional freedom

Darker/heavier concepts:

Unwanted sexual/romantic advances

Racism

Self-hatred

Death of a parent

Death of a child

Recommended Reading Age: 16-20

Question 4: What about this novel makes it YA? Given that a good YA novel should include personal growth and development of the protagonist as well as internal and external conflicts, what distinguishes it from an adult novel in which similar explorations of identity are expected?

This is not a coming of age novel, as the protagonist is already essentially an adult when the story begins. In this way, it is very similar to an adult novel in which the main character faces external and internal conflicts that lead to personal growth. However, the

main themes present in *The Last Namsara* are typical of YA fiction, and make it more appealing to younger, teenaged readers. For example, Asha, the main character, begins the story with a very clear understanding of how her world works, including religion, societal racial divides, and her purpose and role in society as a killer of dragons. These beliefs and understandings come directly from her father, who is the ultimate authority figure in her life. She follows his every word wholeheartedly, desperate to gain his approval. However, as the plot develops, she learns that many of the things he has taught her are false, and even morally wrong. She must then discover for herself what she believes is right, and act on that new knowledge. The development of personal beliefs is a common YA theme, as young adults, especially people in high school and college, find themselves questioning what they have been taught. Books in this genre often represent the struggle between authority figures such as parents or teachers and self-discovery leading to personal expression. Another subject in which *The Last Namsara* portrays the conflict between established structures and individual thinking is racism. While the fictional races of skrals and draksors are not an allegory for real world racism, it still raises the subject. Asha is a privileged draksor, and believes herself to be superior to the skrals, who are a race and class of slaves not even permitted to make eye contact with their oppressors. As Asha interacts with people she has always considered inferior, her beliefs about the societal structure begin to crumble. By showing a main character struggle with such firmly and long held beliefs, especially about the rights and freedoms of other people, the book encourages readers to question their own assumptions about the world.

2. *The Waterstone*, by Rebecca Rupp

YA Themes:

Coming of age

Self-discovery

Darker/heavier themes:

Personal loss, death of a parent and other adult characters

Violence to a child

Recommended Reading Age: 10-14

Question 2: In what specific ways are individuals characterized? How does the author use descriptive passages vs action or dialogue to flesh out the characters? What traits, values, roles do the protagonist have/hold that would be appealing to the targeted audience? Would the targeted audience see themselves in the protagonist—or not?

Tad, the main character, is characterized almost entirely by his relationship with Birdie, his younger sister. This technique is repeated throughout the book, with very little description of the inner experiences or thoughts of characters, but with the interactions between characters, positive and negative, revealing character. From the very beginning, Tad and Birdie are constantly bickering, revealing a fond, but sometimes jealous sibling relationship. Birdie needles her older brother, not out of animosity, but out of a desire for his attention that never wanes throughout the story. Tad however, is jealous of his sister, and what he sees as her easier, more privileged life. His jealousy, annoyance, and bitterness reveal him to be a very immature character, though he is never outright described as such. *The Waterstone* is written in 3rd person omniscient point of view, but focusing almost entirely on Tad and his inner life. Because of this, the author uses several interesting techniques to develop the other characters and immerse the reader in the world. While the story is told through Tad's eyes, there is relatively little description of his inner qualities and opinions. Instead, he and other characters continually quote proverbs and reference stories. These reveal certain implicit qualities about the world,

such as the characters' fragility in the continual listing of ways to avoid danger. Many proverbs are about the other tribes, revealing an insular, mistrustful culture in which each tribe is continually suspicious about the others. Even the childish stories that Birdie references provide depth to the world, giving a cultural context for the surprising revelations about the religion, science, and magic that Tad encounters and struggles to understand. YA readers, even those as young as the 12 year old Tad, must learn to reconcile their own observations of the world with what they have learned from authority figures. Developing an individual understanding of personal responsibilities, family ties, and morality within a specific cultural context are common and important YA themes.

3. *Inkheart*, by Cornelia Funke

YA Themes:

Coming of age

Development of personal freedom

Darker/heavier themes:

Loss of a parent

Violence to a child

Recommended Reading Age: 10-14

Question 3: What themes or conflicts does the novel include that would potentially make it appealing to a teenaged reader? E.g. family conflict, development of personal morality, the desire for individual freedom, discovering romance, etc. Do these elements represent the central conflict of the story?

Inkheart, unlike most of the books on my list, is extremely plot heavy. It's also far longer than the typical YA book, at 534 pages. This is simply because so much happens in the book, with the plot taking off from the first chapter in which a stranger appears in Meggie's life, to the last when she finally returns home. Being so heavily plot-driven could suggest that this book belongs more to middle grade than young adult, but the

emotional development of the character places it in YA. Meggie is a young protagonist, at twelve, but also seems younger, due to her emotional immaturity and more childlike dependence on her father. Excepting a couple of outbursts, she speaks very little, and her thoughts about the adult characters are often clever, but petulant. When she is first forced to leave her home, she resents that decisions are made about her life without her input, and only manages to show the barest respect to her aunt, father, and the mysterious stranger Dustfinger. It frustrates Meggie that so many secrets are kept from her and that she has little autonomy over her own life, but she does nothing to try to improve her situation besides sulk and shout. However, as the story goes on, the way she responds to the world begins to shift. When she and her family are imprisoned by the villain, she initially is full of fear and despair, but begins to think about their situation and how to resolve it. Later on in the story, she personally defies the villain's wishes, leading to her imprisonment once again. However, this time she does not freeze, but begins planning immediately to free herself and others. She learns to function without her father's guidance, and is ultimately responsible for the triumphant climax of the story. While it is a sort of a coming of age book, *Inkheart* does *not* chronicle the transition from childhood to adulthood. Instead, like many YA books, it shows one step of this transition as the protagonist finds some independence and self-reliance. Meggie steps out from her father's protection and restriction to save the day, but does not step entirely out of childhood.

4. *Uprooted*, by Naomi Novik

YA Themes:

Coming of age

Development of personal motivation/freedom

Found family/sisterhood
Darker/Heavier Themes:
Human Trafficking
Fantasy body horror
Sex
Violence
Recommended Reading Age: 16-20

Question 3: What themes or conflicts does the novel include that would potentially make it appealing to a teenaged reader? E.g. family conflict, development of personal morality, the desire for individual freedom, discovering romance, etc. Do these elements represent the central conflict of the story?

Uprooted differs from the other books on this list in one specific way: it would be inappropriate for younger teenaged or middle grade readers. Many YA books, and I would argue the best ones, are written in such a way that any age, including adults, can find enjoyment from them while even mature children can read them safely. However, a true YA novel is not defined by its broad readership, but by a specific one: young adults. A YA novel, such as *Uprooted*, should include personal growth and development of the protagonist, leading them from a less mature state to a more adult one. In this book, the main character, Agnieszka, finds herself given by her village to the wizard who lives in a magical tower as tribute for their protection. She is not a child at the time, having just come of age, but certainly lacks knowledge and experience. Within the story, she gains confidence and knowledge in herself as a person as she learns skills, like magic, and has experiences, such as travelling to the royal court. At the beginning of the story, Agnieszka is completely dependent on others, like a child. She cannot fend for herself in the wild or domestic spheres, and is completely out of her element in a court setting. However, her determination to learn sees her master skills in these areas, contributing to

her independence and confidence in herself. Having developed in these ways within the first half or so of the story, the real plot begins once she has found this apparent fulfillment. At this point, she must choose what is truly important to her: her own ambition and skill or her relationships with the people in her life. Naturally, she chooses to value her loved ones above herself, and the reader has a chance to experience the beautifully timeless bond of sisters and the intensity of a romance. Since the book focuses on more adult issues in the second half of the book, it makes sense that the content would become less child or preteen appropriate, involving some violence, horror, and sex.

5. *The Book Thief*, by Marcus Zusack

YA Themes:

- Development of personal morality
- Development of personal identity
- Friendship/sibling relationship

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- The Holocaust
- Racism
- War
- Personal loss, death of a parent, parental abandonment
- Death of a child

Recommended Reading Age: 14-18

Question 1: Does the novel seem to be targeted at a specific audience? (style, prose, diction) What about the book makes it more or less appropriate for a specific age range? Do the style, prose, diction, etc fit in a YA novel?

When *The Book Thief* was originally published in Australia, it was categorized as Modern/Contemporary Fiction, a typical adult fiction rating. When it was brought to the US however, Zusak's book was published as Juvenile Fiction, intended for young adult or slightly younger readers. This wasn't a conscious choice on the part of the author or

publisher, but the result has been an incredible popularity among readers of all ages. When asked about this issue, Zusak claimed he had no intention of writing for a specific age—he wrote a story that was important to him without thinking of the audience. The prose is direct and easy to read for the most part, only complicated by the narration of the immortal, unnamed, deathlike narrator who speaks in asides and strange metaphors. The book is simple enough that it is used in high school curriculum, but has enough depth to be loved by even the most highbrow book lovers. While *The Book Thief* was not originally intended to be a young adult novel, I think it is valuable to young adult readers. The main character, Liesel, ranges in age from nine to fourteen over the course of the novel. While she is a child at the beginning, albeit a child who has endured scarring experiences, she gains perspective about certain issues and develops a personal morality by the end. When her foster/adopted parents decide to harbor a Jewish man in 1940, she is forbidden by her parents to talk about him, but she makes the decision for herself to speak to him and get to know him as a person, despite what she is taught in school. And in a less heroic example, she begins stealing books, first from the man who buried her brother, then from a pile of burning books, then from the mayor's wife's library. She steals, which is wrong according to society, but she steals books that society would say are wrong, because they do not follow the Nazi mold. In a society that values and promotes a story of Aryan supremacy while attempting to erase the Jewish story, Liesel chooses to write her own story, in which she defies society by helping a Jewish man hide and by stealing books. She develops her own personal moral code, in defiance of the version of morality society would force her into.

6. *A Monster Calls*, by Patrick Ness

YA Themes:

- Coming of age
- Rebellion against authority figures
- Increased adult expectations

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- Fantasy
- Violence to a child
- Death of a Parent

Recommended Reading Age: 14-20

Question 2: In what specific ways are individuals characterized? How does the author use descriptive passages vs action or dialogue to flesh out the characters? What traits, values, roles do the protagonist have/hold that would be appealing to the targeted audience? Would the targeted audience see themselves in the protagonist—or not?

A Monster Calls is the only illustrated book on my list. It is also the shortest. It is also, most interestingly, the one that deal the most with an extremely intense real-world issue. Most magical realism books use some magical element to explore a difficult aspect of reality in some way. In this case, it's quite literal: an ancient godlike Celtic being appears to the main character and tells him stories, helping him deal with his mother's terminal illness. The author describes this main character, Conor, very little. Aside from his age and family relationships, the readers are given very little direct information about Conor. Instead, Ness uses his actions to develop the character, such as doing a variety of chores without being prompted or submitting quietly to the intense bullying he receives at school. These actions show him to be a quiet, helpful, reserved person, with a maturity far beyond what a thirteen year old should have. He is somewhat idealized in this way, but as the story goes on, his brokenness is slowly revealed. A reader might appreciate a character who seems to face every hardship with strength and stoicism. A reader can *identify* with a character who seems to have it all together and is actually struggling just

to function. When the monster first appears, Conor has no fear for the being. He is not without emotion, nor even without fear, but in the face of his mother's terminal illness, everyday demons like bullies and supernatural opponents just aren't frightening. Parental death is a heavy topic, especially for a book with such a young protagonist, but it is a real topic that is a part of life for everyone eventually, and for young people tragically often. However, even a reader who has been blessed with not sharing this experience can identify with Conor as a character. His reactions to the genuinely terrible things in his life are honest, from blinding anger over feeling invisible to his crashing grief when he finally admits his desire for peace. The targeted audience, of teenagers and preteens, can certainly see themselves in the rather blank, but intensely relatable character of Conor.

7. *Bone Gap*, by Laura Ruby

YA Themes:

- Discovery of romance
- Sibling relationship
- Bullying
- Development of personal identity

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- Unwanted romantic/sexual advances
- Sex
- Parental abandonment
- Violence

Recommended Reading Age: 16-20

Question 1: Does the novel seem to be targeted at a specific audience? (style, prose, diction) What about the book makes it more or less appropriate for a specific age range? Do the style, prose, diction, etc fit in a YA novel?

Magical realism is an unusual genre, and fairly rare for YA novels. Essentially the genre just means an otherwise realistic story that incorporates magical elements. The

genre itself is unusual for its intended reader age, since magical realism is usually more adult fiction, and often associated with Latin American literature. In *Bone Gap*, the setting and a single character are out of the ordinary, and the rest of the story is essentially a combination of teenage romance and mystery. However, another unusual element of the book is the writing style, which is very poetic, and sometimes obscure. The style and diction of *Bone Gap* do not seem to fit the targeted audience, which would be readers no younger than 16. A younger reader might have trouble wading through the writing style to get to the story itself. Personally, I enjoyed reading it for both the plot and characters, and for the poetic writing style. Ruby's writing style reminds me a bit of Suzanne Collins'--not a word out of place and every sentence carefully structured for maximum impact, but in no particular hurry to rush through to the next piece of action. However, this way of writing so that the story, the plot, unfolds slowly as a result of the time taken to develop the characters and setting, can be frustrating for some. Especially in a story like *Bone Gap*, which includes dramatic events such as a kidnapping, midnight horse rides, a secret romance, and violent bullies, the slower pacing creates suspense, but is unusual for a YA novel. However, despite the unusual diction, *Bone Gap* is undoubtedly a YA novel. The main character, Finn, is 17 years old, and the majority of the story is told through his perspective. A Young Adult novel communicates a young adult character going through experiences typical of that developmental stage, such as finding independence from parents, discovering romance, and establishing a personal identity. Finn must assert his independence as he is told his memory and experience of a specific event are false and misremembered, and move away from his brother's authority as he experiences romance and intense bullying.

8. *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle

YA Themes:

- Coming of age
- Sibling relationship
- Development of personal identity

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- Parental abandonment
- Violence to a child

Recommended Reading Age: 10-14

Question 4: What about this novel makes it YA? Given that a good YA novel should include personal growth and development of the protagonist as well as internal and external conflicts, what distinguishes it from an adult novel in which similar explorations of identity are expected?

A Wrinkle in Time has stumped readers for decades, in that it refuses to fit neatly into an individual genre. It has elements of fantasy, with mythological figures such as pegasi, witches, and a medium, but it also could be called science fiction, for the space travel if nothing else. It includes a disturbing dystopia and compelling real-world issues, but it has also been called a children's book due to the age of the protagonist (12). However, because the book is relatable to a variety of ages, it remains popular among children, teenagers, and adults. Just last year, I was part of a very well-attended honors book club over this book, in which I was surprised by the rather philosophical discussion that arose from this strange, short book. Despite its confusing genre, *A Wrinkle in Time* is definitely appropriate for young adult readers. The protagonist, Meg, is refreshingly complex for her type, which is the young female character lacking in self-confidence. She is smart, but does poorly in school, she shouts at her brothers, but punches a kid for mocking one of them. She is angry at her father for disappearing, but is willing to

sacrifice everything, including her life, for a chance to bring him home. Like a children's book, there are literal obstacles to be overcome, and like an adult novel, Meg experiences intense personal growth that affects her relationships with her family and her beliefs about her place in the world. However, this book falls into the category of young adult literature due to Meg's development as an individual, independent person: a typical YA theme. Meg comes to a moment near the end of the book where she must choose between security, safety, and comfort and the life of her beloved five-year-old brother, Charles Wallace. Naturally, she chooses to sacrifice her own life (and possibly her soul depending on the reading) to save him. This moment is significant however, because she comes to the realization that her parents, as much as they might love her, cannot help her in this specific situation. She must go on alone to face the challenge. Meg does not depart entirely from depending on her parents, but does face a difficult moment where she must stand alone.

9. *Arclight*, by Josin McQueen

YA Themes:

- Social issues (bullying, cliques)

- First romance

- Sibling relationship

- Discovery of personal identity

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- Violence to a child

- Sci-fi body horror

Recommended Reading Age: 14-18

Question 4: What about this novel makes it YA? Given that a good YA novel should include personal growth and development of the protagonist as well as internal and external conflicts, what distinguishes it from an adult novel in which similar explorations of identity are expected?

Arclight, while certainly a YA book, plays with genre and reader expectations. Marina, the main character and narrator, has external struggles that are fairly typical for a YA novel. She lives in a dystopian setting, among a small enclave of humans ruled by militaristic structure for their own survival. She and the others may never leave the Arclight, which is an area protected by artificial light, including the stronghold in which they live. The light protects the humans from the Fade, zombie-like creatures that share a hive mind and have inhuman powers thanks to a host of supposedly parasitic nanites. In addition to the physical danger, Marina, as a newcomer, is an outcast among her peers for the losses sustained to bring her to safety. Finally, as the plot unfolds, a love triangle between Marina, one of her peers, someone from her unremembered past is revealed. These are all fairly typical YA lit plot devices, but the character's internal struggles and growth as a result are what really define *Arclight* as a young adult novel. Marina has no memory of her past when the story begins. From the start, she struggles to secure an identity for herself in a place that feels foreign, and frightening. She is alienated from her peers, and lacks purpose in her life. While her peers choose career paths they wish to pursue, she seeks only to form an identity for herself. Throughout the story, numerous identities such as outcast, hero, monster, and beloved are placed on Marina. However, she eventually chooses for herself what kind of life she will live. She accepts her origins, but decides to live a life with her found loved ones.

10. Ender's Game, by Orson Scott Card

YA Themes:

- Coming of age
- Development of social environment
- Sibling Relationship

Darker/heavier themes:

Violence against animals
Violence against children
Death of a child
War
Genocide

Recommended Reading Age: 12-20

Question 1: Does the novel seem to be targeted at a specific audience? (style, prose, diction) What about the book makes it more or less appropriate for a specific age range? Do the style, prose, diction, etc. fit in a YA novel?

The main character, Ender, is only six years old at the beginning of the novel, only eleven at the climax, and the novel ends with a quick summary of his entire adult life. However, despite the protagonist's extremely young age, this is definitely not a children's book. In fact, though originally written to be a young adult novel, Ender's Game has a readership ranging from middle school to all stages of adult life. The book focuses on Ender, a child soldier recruited by the Earth's army for his intelligence, ingenuity, and compassion. While he is only a child, the story is told in such a way that a reader of any age can identify with him. The language is in no way limited or stilted, instead flowing naturally in 3rd person limited perspective with occasional interjections of objective dialogue between Ender's instructors.

Though the subject matter touches and even focuses on several intense topics, there is nothing graphic or obscene in the actual content of the book that would make it inappropriate for younger readers. Terrible things happen, such as a child torturing animals, children being forced into violent and stressful situations, and even one child murdering another, but the language itself does not provoke horror or disgust. Sections of the book feel a bit like *Lord of the Flies*, if it were written with enough circumspection and gentleness that a mature twelve-year-old could read it. In this respect *Ender's Game*

fits the YA genre very well. It deals with real, intense, important topics, but in such a way that a reader who is still developing intellectually and emotionally could read it without becoming overwhelmed. Ender, as a character, is thrust into new and challenging situations continually throughout the book. This tactic, of gradually raising the stakes for the character, eases the reader into the conflict of the book as well. Just as the challenges faced in reality increase in complexity as a person ages, so do the moral and logical challenges Ender faces.

11. Cinder, by Marissa Meyer

YA Themes:

- Sibling relationship
- Discovery of Romance
- Development of personal freedoms
- Development of personal identity

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- Mild sci fi body horror
- Death of a loved one
- Parental abandonment and abuse
- Racist/othering rhetoric

Recommended Reading Age: 12-18

Question 3: What themes or conflicts does the novel include that would potentially make it appealing to a teenaged reader? E.g. family conflict, development of personal morality, the desire for individual freedom, discovering romance, etc. Do these elements represent the central conflict of the story?

Cinder is (obviously) a Cinderella story, retelling the classic fairytale in a futuristic, science fiction, Eastern-influenced world. The Cinderella trope has a universal, timeless appeal, especially to young women. Teenagers or young people who may feel unsatisfied with their life are drawn to this type of story, in which a person is taken from

their less than ideal (or even flat-out abusive) circumstances and given a life in which they are desired and valued. In *Cinder*, the reason the main character, Cinder, is valued by the prince has refreshingly nothing to do with her physical appearance, but rather for her personality. The slowly developed, charmingly innocent romance would be very appealing to a young adult reader. But beyond the romantic plot, the story involves several challenges and obstacles that force Cinder to grow as a character. She faces persecution from her stepmother and others in her life for being a cyborg, with prosthetic, mechanical limbs and organs. This could be seen as a metaphor for any real-world circumstances in which a person is treated differently based on something out of their control, such as skin color, economic status, or a physical difference as in the book. The themes of feeling that one has been treated unfairly, as well as the familial conflict, would naturally be appealing to a teenaged reader. Teen years are often marked by a feeling of wanting more out of life than is available, and of feeling misunderstood by loved ones. Cinder not only breaks away from her dissatisfying life, but uses her newfound confidence and powers to protect others, going to the ball to save the prince rather than be rescued by him. I appreciate that Meyer's book includes themes and concepts that are appealing to her intended audience, as well as positive messages of self-respect and the inherent value of a person. The aspects that would be appealing to a teenage reader, such as the romantic plot, are far from the central conflict, as the book contains a more sophisticated plot and message than the average teen novel.

12. Uglies, by Scott Westerfeld

YA Themes:

First romance

Discovery of personal identity

Rejection of flawed societal standards
Body image issues
Darker/Heavier Themes:
Body dysmorphia
Mild sci-fi body horror
Recommended Reading Age: 14-18

Question 2: In what specific ways are individuals characterized? How does the author use descriptive passages vs action or dialogue to flesh out the characters? What traits, values, roles do the protagonist have/hold that would be appealing to the targeted audience? Would the targeted audience see themselves in the protagonist—or not?

Westerfeld uses the technical way he tells the story to support the development of the main character and the message of the story. Tally Youngblood, the protagonist, is an “Ugly”, or a person under 16 who has not yet undergone the intensive cosmetic surgery to become a “Pretty”. She wants nothing more in her life than to become a Pretty at 16, even sneaking across the river to the part of town where the Pretties live and using digital software to design potential future versions of her face. There are characters who flee the city in order to avoid the surgical transformation, but for the first half of the story Tally is willing to do anything, include betray her friends, to become a Pretty. *Uglies* is about issues of self-image and the value of a person beyond their appearance, and the way Westerfeld tells the story supports these themes. When reading, we hear all of Tally’s inner thoughts and opinions as the main character and protagonist: the story is told in 3rd person limited. She thinks almost entirely in images however, and sees the world as a dichotomy of ugly and pretty. She represents her culture, which is equally appearance-obsessed. However, as the story goes on, she begins to drift away from her visual, judgmental way of seeing the world. Part of this is simple experience: she sees sights such as the wilderness of nature that simply do not fit into her ugly/pretty mindset. She

also meets adults later on in the story who have not had the continuous surgeries to keep them Pretty. While initially disgusted, she learns to see past their appearances to respect them as people and hear what they have to say in criticism of her society. Even the way she thinks shifts, and her thoughts become less about what a person's appearance must mean about their personality or value, and more about what their actions indicate of their character. Westerfeld uses a sort of flawed narrator at the beginning of the story, and shows her internal transition to a healthier mindset about appearance. Especially in a culture that places heavy pressure on young women to look and act a certain way in order to be respected, this book has a positive message about the insignificance of beauty when compared to personality, morals, and character. The forbidden romance subplot and creative worldbuilding would make the book appealing to young readers, who might then benefit from the positive messages of the book.

13. The Giver, by Lois Lowry

YA Themes:

- Coming of age
- Emergence of sexual awareness
- Development of personal beliefs/moral code

Darker/Heavier themes:

- Infanticide
- Euthanasia
- Violence against animals
- Suicide

Recommended Reading Age: 12-14

Question 3: What themes or conflicts does the novel include that would potentially make it appealing to a teenaged reader? E.g. family conflict, development of personal morality, the desire for individual freedom, discovering romance, etc. Do these elements represent the central conflict of the story?

The main conflict of *The Giver* is between Jonas, the main character, and what he believes and knows to be true about the world. When the story begins, Jonas is about to enter the adult world, and he expects his life to proceed in a certain way based on what he has been taught by his authority figures and what he has observed about the world around him. He expects to be assigned a certain career, which he will find moderately fulfilling, to later be assigned a spouse whom he will raise two children with, and to eventually be “released” when he has lived a full, useful life. However, Jonas’ assigned career, “Receiver of Memories” causes him to begin questioning why his world functions in the way it does, and more importantly, if it should somehow be different.

By experiencing second-hand other parts of the world, new experiences, and aspects of life such as grief and pain that were previously foreign to him, Jonas’ personal beliefs begin to shift. He gradually begins deciding a personal moral code for himself, one which is different and even contrary to the world in which he has been raised and still lives. For example, he learns what death is, and is then horrified to realize that the death of infants and the elderly is a standard, normalized, disguised part of his society. While euthanasia is an extreme example, the general concept is one that is true for many young adult readers, who are just beginning to develop their own personal beliefs and moral codes by which they will live their adult life. This development of personal beliefs may contradict what they have been taught or influenced to believe up to that point, so the growth of their own opinions may result in a rebellion or objection to authority. Jonas is an appealing character then, because he develops his own beliefs as he grows closer to adulthood, and bases his actions, no matter how extreme, on what he believes is right, such as saving a child intended for “release” from his ignorant society.

14. The Hunger Games, by Suzanne Collins

YA Themes:

- Sibling relationship
- Societal pressure/rebellion
- First romance

Darker/Heavier Themes:

- Violence
- Violence to children
- Disturbing sci fi concepts/imagery
- Suicide

Recommended Reading Age: 16-20

Question 2: In what specific ways are individuals characterized? How does the author use descriptive passages vs action or dialogue to flesh out the characters? What traits, values, roles do the protagonist have/hold that would be appealing to the targeted audience? Would the targeted audience see themselves in the protagonist—or not?

The Hunger Games is one of the few books on my list told in 1st person rather than 3rd. Katniss, the main character, describes the events as if they are currently happening, giving the reader an intensely small distance between themselves and the story. This style of writing makes it almost impossible not to be pulled into and entranced by the story, and the quick pacing and action-filled plot only add to this effect. This is probably the most popular book on my list, and while a host of similarly-plotted books were written after The Hunger Games was published, Collins' skill at drawing in the reader with simple, but devastating narration contributed to its success.

Because the story is told in first person, the reader enjoys vivid descriptions of sights and memories Katniss finds important. She describes the verdant meadow outside her district that allowed her to feed her family, the offensively colorful and opulent capitol wardrobes, and the unrecognizability of herself when she is dressed in preparation for her

presentation. However, while the reader enjoys an accurate, intense view of the world's appearance, Katniss is an unreliable narrator when it comes to the people she interacts with. She alternatively laughs at and despises the capitol residents, for their over-the-top mannerisms and excessive waste of food and wealth. She admits to having issues trusting people after her mother entered a depressive episode and Katniss was forced to step up and care for her family at the age of eleven. However, she does not see that this event causes her to mistrust everyone, and see the worst in people. She wars with wanting to and being unable to trust her fellow tribute Peeta, who has been kind and self-sacrificing for Katniss' sake since they were children, but who she believes would kill her if he needed to for his own survival.

An unreliable narrator forces the reader to examine every interaction carefully, to determine each characters' motivations. On the surface, Katniss' motivation seems to be protecting her family, and surviving so that she may continue doing so. Admirable, yes? Her trust issues, while making her a more relatable character, keep the reader from knowing her motivations when she does ally with others. Has she grown as a character enough to trust Peeta or does she only pretend to do so for her own survival? Or does she mean to rebel against the system entirely? The way Collins uses a mix of direct narration, detailed description, and ambiguous motivations allows her to populate a compelling story with even more compelling characters, while adding an uncertainty that only makes the reader more invested.

15. Scythe, by Neal Shusterman

YA Themes:

First Romance

Development of personal morality

Familial conflict
Darker/Heavier Themes:
Suicide
Violence to children
Murder
Recommended Reading Age: 16-20

Question 4: What about this novel makes it YA? Given that a good YA novel should include personal growth and development of the protagonist as well as internal and external conflicts, what distinguishes it from an adult novel in which similar explorations of identity are expected?

This story is challenging to read, because of the way Shusterman manipulates the reader to root for a character that out of context would seem evil. When the story starts, the reader is naturally horrified at the concept of scythes, which are the only source of death in a “perfected” society. Without sickness, old age, or faulty technology, humans could live forever, but to prevent excessive population growth, scythes must “glean” a certain quota of people each year. However, as the story develops, characters who do their violent job out of a sense of duty and with respect for the lives they take are contrasted with characters who kill for the enjoyment of it. By the end of the book, the reader roots for the characters who kill “right”, with reverence, because despite being murderers, they appear to be good in comparison to the others. However, despite the intense moral issues the characters and ultimately the reader faces, and the gruesome events, *Scythe* is very much a YA novel.

Scythe does have some typical YA themes such as romance, complicated family interactions, and conflict with friends. The two main characters, Citra and Rowan, find themselves in competition for their future careers at first, then later for their very lives. But despite or perhaps because of the intense rivalry, they fall in love. However, while

these YA themes, the romance included, are present in *Scythe*, they are not the main focus of the book. The moral conflicts Citra and Rowan both face, as dictated by the political plot and dystopian setting, are the most important aspects of the book. These characters' dilemmas have to do with murder and blackmail rather than real-world teen issues such as petty crime and social drama, but are still relatable. They endure the agony of trying to do the right thing in a world that gives them few, and mostly terrible options, just as in reality.

The moral dilemmas that Citra and Rowan face could easily be present in an adult novel, but the way these characters react to those obstacles makes the book YA. The characters, which are 16, have no frame of reference for the atrocities they witness and are taught to commit, and only an enigmatic mentor to guide them. When their mentor dies, they are cut adrift, unable to trust those in authority over them but still expected to continue their training to become scythes. Citra and Rowan both face decisions and conflicts that are entirely new to them, without the guidance of a parent figure or even a trustworthy friend. They must step into an adult position of moral decision-making, and develop a personal code of morality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aronson, Marc. "Coming of Age: One editor's view of how young adult publishing developed in America. (Spring 2002 Children's Books)." *Publishers Weekly*, vol. 249, no. 6, 11 Feb. 2002, p. 82+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/A83296527/AONE?u=txshracd2488&sid=AO NE&xid=2c6ef612>.
- Bean, Thomas W., and Karen Moni. "Developing students' critical literacy: exploring identity construction in young adult fiction." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 46, no. 8, 2003, p. 638+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/apps/doc/A101679710/AONE?u=txshracd2488&sid=AO NE&xid=41e2a915>.
- Bluemle, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Bluemle. ShelfTalker, September 27, 2013. <http://blogs.publishersweekly.com/blogs/shelftalker/?p=11760>.
- Bucher, Katherine Toth, and KaaVonia Hinton. *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation, and Appreciation*. Pearson, 2014.
- Card, Orson Scott. *Enders Game*. Tor Books, 1985.
- Ciccarelli, Kristen. *The Last Namsara*. New York: HarperTeen, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2018.
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. London: Scholastic, 2009.
- Funke, Cornelia, and Anthea Bell. *Inkheart*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.
- Hall, Lynn. *The Giver*. New York: Collier Books, 1987.
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle In Time*. Ariel Books, 1962.
- McMahan, Ian. *Adolescence*. Pearson Education, Inc., 2009.
- McQuein, Josin L. *Arclight*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2014.
- Meyer, Marissa. *Cinder*. New York: Square Fish, 2012.
- Ness, Patrick, Siobhan Dowd, and Jim Kay. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2011.

- Novik, Naomi. *Uprooted*. Del Rey, 2015.
- Ruby, Laura. *Bone Gap*. Aarhus: Turbine, 2017.
- Rupp, Rebecca. *The Waterstone*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2005.
- Shusterman, Neal. *Scythe*. NY, NY: Simon & Schuster BFYR, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Childrens Publishing Division, 2016.
- Westerfeld, Scott. *Uglies*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2005.
- Whitaker, William. *William Whitaker's Words*, University of Notre Dame Archives, archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/wordz.pl?keyword=adolesco.
- Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Alfred A. Knopf Pub., 2006.