

Finding Faith in Humanity:
Peace and Conflict Resolution
Individualist and Collaborative Narratives in Sf for Children and Teens.

Farah Mendlesohn.

I have been working on science fiction for a very long time. I have perhaps been working on ideas about peace and conflict resolution almost as long, but for complex reasons these ideas have never seen the light of day. I have always been interested in what science fiction has to say about this because for me, science fiction is a fiction whose *raison d'être* is the idea that human beings can fix the world. When I first offered this paper I wanted to focus entirely on peace and conflict resolution. I wanted to explore something that was critical to my own entrancement with science fiction when I was a teenager, that it seemed to offer a different possibility for the future, one in which we did not use weapons to resolve our differences, but instead used the new techniques of technocratic management of resources, of psychometrics, of diplomacy.

I could look back on my teenage years and laugh at how naive I was, but instead I look to the present and the collection of books I assembled for this paper and sigh for the narrowness of ideas about how one might resolve conflict that are relayed by so many of these books written specifically for the teen market. Over and over again, these books resort to conventional warfare, to conventional understandings of the origins of hostility, and to conventional responses to hostilities. Overlaying this is the realisation, and one that I decided to focus the paper around, that of the books I read, the overwhelming assumption was a narrative of individualism, of the lone and isolated hero and that this shaped—was perhaps fundamental—to the conflict responses that emerged. It is not absolute—
I have two individualist narratives that offer an alternative to conflict, but in doing so they intensify many of the arguments about individuals

versus the mass made by the other individualist oriented texts I intend to discuss.

This talk will be structured in to three parts: What is peace? Individualist narratives and how they respond to conflict. Collaborative narratives and how they respond to conflict. Before I begin however I want to talk briefly about my selection of texts, and my method as I am aware that many of you will not have read my work, and may not realise that what is distinctive about it, is less the content or the argument, than the approach.

I am originally a historian and for me, evidence has to come in as large a bundle as possible. This means that although I have engaged in close reading, I am mostly a practitioner of what Franco Moretti has termed “distant reading”, a process in which you read a very great deal of a selection of texts to see what patterns emerge. I have an ongoing (friendly) argument with my fellow sf critic Adam Roberts about this: he reckons this is simply a function of the human tendency to see patterns. He is not wrong, but I find those patterns fascinating. As we’ll see, some turn out to be meaningful, others not but they are every bit as valid as studying the entrails of metaphor. One way in which distant reading has to be controlled however is by restricting variables: selection of texts has to have a rhyme and reason. I cannot permit myself to select texts just because I like them and find them interesting (the exception of course is when I write on a single author, but even then I have confounded editors in the past and present by insisting that I have to consider every text, not just my favourites or the good ones). So I always begin by deciding first what my “category is”. In this case I’ve used one that I often suggest to students: every one of the books I will be discussing today was shortlisted for an award sometime in the past five years. Someone out there thinks these books good. Sometimes I have scratched my head and wondered what on earth they were thinking? But just as I did not choose books because I thought they were good, I have not excluded a book just because I thought it was bad (and in two cases, one British and one Australian, racist).

I began with around sixty books from these lists that looked as if they might be science fiction. I discarded all metaphor fiction, and also

one or two books that were about science (someone's love of astronomy for example) but were not about scientific speculation). I ended up with twenty-two. I shed some because of space, but added one or two older books (again all award nominated) that dealt with issues I could not find in other texts. I'd mark myself down for this cheating.

On to the paper.

The paper begins with a consideration of "what is peace?" In this section I have had to draw on some books that are not part of the paper's "collection" and I hope you will forgive me. All of them have been nominated for an award at some time and were collected in a similar manner.

What is peace?

What we mean by 'peace' changed dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century. For most of human history (a generalisation I usually would not permit), peace has meant simply the absence of war. Peace could encompass internal tyranny and the oppression of imperialism; a nation could starve through the exploitation of a conqueror or through the fiat of a dictator, but it was still 'at peace'. Lines could be drawn on a map, dividing families and cultures, creating new identities or appropriating old ones for new nations. People could be told to change their language, their religion, or their alphabet and not only would this be described as in the name of peace—reducing the reasons for conflict—the result would be described as 'peace'.

In the nineteenth century this began to break down, ironically because of the attempts of the new nation states to create homogenous cultures. In Germany Bismark's *Kulturkampf* actively reinforced Catholic, Communist and Polish identities as he attempted to subsume all of these into a neutral, liberal, and single language state. In Great Britain the Celtic revival was strongly linked to rise in anthropology and the growing interest in folk traditions that were somehow always just about to disappear, and which could be found only in those neglected and unassimilated areas of the kingdom, ie the Highlands, Wales, Cornwall and Ireland. By the twentieth century the strains were such that one consequence of the Great War was the collapse of the multinational empires of the Tsars and the Ottoman Emperors. These empires were distinctive in having permitted strong local identities to exist within the national identities. Their replacements all attempted in the inter-war period to do two things: to create meaningful national identities by claiming their borders through peoples who spoke the same languages and followed the same religions, and by reinforcing this through nationalistic education and nationalistic imagery. Woodrow Wilson's argument for national self-determination, the Balfour declaration, and

many other statements, all succeeded in arguing that peace was a trinity of lines on a map, homogenous populations, and 'self determination'. The difficulty of course is that populations are not homogenous and the lines on the map of Europe (and elsewhere) cut across them, leading in the period between 1900 and 1939 to endless border disputes among the small states of the Balkans. The difference in the inter-war period, is that suddenly borders were not the directly cited source of dispute. Instead the issue of what peace was, whether there could be peace if peoples were ruled by other peoples, was brought into the question.

By the end of the Second World War, the answer seemed to be a conclusive 'no' and the European empires collapsed in a welter of claims for self-determination that perhaps for the first time was framed in terms of the injustice of empire. Ghandi's contribution to the argument is less around non-violent direct action (successful because it confronted violence—it tends to be less successful, ironically, where the authorities maintain their own discipline), than his demonstration that the needs of Empire distort the economies and social structures of the conquered: that there is such a thing as an unjust peace that wreaks violence even as it constructs an absence of war. That key idea has fuelled arguments about what peace *is*, for the past one hundred years, even as we have added to it other ideas. Some of my favourite science fiction for teens tackles precisely the questions, *what is peace*.

There is for example **the peace of the grave**. The peace that understands conflict as a consequence of the lack of homogeneity in a population, and seeks to wipe that out. The peace that creates 'peace' by creating identity in opposition to other identity. Recent examples are LJ Adlijngton's *The Diary of Pelly-D*, Frances Hardinge's *The Lost Conspiracy* (original title *Gullstruck Island*) and Malorie Blackman's *Chasing the Stars*, In *The Diary of Pelly-D* a boy finds a diary and we discover how a resource war is reshaped at home by an attack on difference that leads to genocide. In Frances Hardinge's *The Island of the Lost*, there is a plot to obliterate a people who are seen as threatening: the threat they are held to represent obscures the true motive of

resource war. In each book, peace is secured by wiping out the irritant, by bringing people together to hate another group. Peace is built, brick by brick, over rubble and bones.

There can be no peace without resources. *The Island of the Lost* and *The Diary of Pelly-D* have as their subtext resource wars. In the first the amount of land for the living is pressured by one culture's desire for land for the dead. In *The Diary of Pelly-D* the resources are more nebulous but water is at stake. In Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* the seas are rising. In Adam Rex's *The True Meaning of Smek Day*, and Sophia MacDougall's *Mars Evacuees*, aliens come in search of a place to settle. In the last two, an amicable settling of the resource issues (in ways that remind me very strongly of an old story by Zenna Henderson, 'Subcommittee' in which alien and human housewives bond over a picnic) settles the problem and everyone gets on well together ever after.

This issue of **who is important when deciding what peace looks like**, is discussed in *The True Meaning of Smek Day* in asides about imperialism and false peace in Earth politics throughout the text; in the work of Oisín McGann [elaborate], and in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Shadow Speaker*. In all three, someone else's peace is the focal character's oppression. In *The True Meaning of Smek Day* the invaders are the classic colonizers who believe the land is empty because they recognise neither the people as people or the land use as land use. Peace for the Boov is a forced settlement of humans into reservations. Protest is illegitimate. In the book (but not the movie) regular reference is made to the experience of both Native Americans and Palestinians. Oisín McGann's rather frightening *The Gods and their Machines* is a rather frightening and honest account of colonial oppression and indigenous resistance. Although McGann does his best to construct a religion that is utterly different from Islam, the scenario is utterly recognisable as that between Israel and Palestine: on the one side a wealthy and industrialised nation under attack from terrorism, on the other an impoverished and exploited nation that dies in attack from the air. The oppressor cannot understand why the other hates it yet wants to work in its cities, cannot see that the need for work is itself a consequence of

imposed taxation, land grabs, the destruction of crops and cattle from the air, cannot see that every act of “peace making” intensifies the causes of war. In all three of these texts a **peace has been written**, the oppressors at least believe they exist in a state of peace. But peace has to be agreed on both sides. If it has been written by the winners, it is not a lasting peace. **Peace without justice is not peace**, peace without justice plants the seeds for war. Similarly **peace without respect is not possible**. In a very old book, Pierre Berton’s *The Secret World of Og*, the Ogs are invited to come to the surface and take their part in the world of men where there are ‘all colours’. They give the children a side long glance and ask (I summarise) ‘And how is that working out?’

What very few of the books in my collection do however is really *think* about how peace is achieved. With a tiny number of exceptions (Hardinge and McGann) they are all either locked into a very simplistic idea of diplomacy, or into an equally simplistic idea of rebellion. The more I looked at this the more I realised that to a great degree this could be traced to how these authors understood the role of individuals and groups as political cogs in the wider political wheel, and in general, a focus that I have observed elsewhere is now endemic in modern teen sf, to see the individual rather than the group as the agent of change. The next part of the paper will consider this.

Individualist narratives and how they respond to conflict.

I first became really aware that individualism and a Darwinian-Malthusian understanding of the world as an individualist struggle for survival played a very strong role in how texts belonged to and responded to conflict when I read the American author Susan Beth Pfeffer's *Life as We Knew It* in 2006. The book's premise is apocalyptic: a meteor strikes the Earth and the heroine and her family must survive in a world falling apart. To step back a moment, my PhD is on Quaker relief to refugees in the Spanish Civil War (and if you want to know the utterly unexpected connection to science fiction, ask me later¹). I have read a great deal on the survival of people in upheaval, holocaust and one thing that relief workers know is that communal rather than familial bonds are essential. It is the community that cares for widows and orphans. It is the feeling that there is community that encourages people to come outside, to seek help and to help others. The more people retreat into the family, or into isolation, the less chance they have to survive. I will return to this.

I am not particularly interested in the story of *Life as We Knew It* per se, but I am interested in the rise and rise of selfishness and individualism in this book and the way this blinds both author and reader to the reality of what I have just described. Francis Fukuyama argued that a liberalism founded in capitalism is inevitably associated with a weakening of community, because individualism is at odds with a notion of shared experience. (See Bradford et. Al). Rebecca Solnit, in her passionate account of communities and disasters explores the ways in which individualism and individualist behaviour not merely undermines the chances of survival but actively contributes to the disaster.

¹ I wrote my thesis primarily on the work of Alfred Jacob (American) and Norma Jacob (British). When I was lucky enough to meet Alfred Jacob, he looked at my bookshelves, noted the science fiction and asked, "Have you heard of my son?" This turned out to be the writer Piers Anthony, who in the 1980s was as well read as Terry Pratchett today. I had even read Anthony's *Bio of An Ogre*, including the appendix by his mother about their time in Spain. I had never made the connection.

In *Life As We Knew It* the fall of the meteor leads the mother to pull her children in towards her. She scours local stores for her family. She refuses to feed a neighbour, her children's friends, anyone but her own. Her boyfriend works at the local hospital and when he chooses to stay there to look after people she rejects him: he has become a danger, the family comes first. Bit by bit the family become more isolated and hunker down in their house covering the conservatory with plastic to conserve heat. By the end of the book, alone, isolated, they are dying. Then the army arrives.

I will repeat that.

Then the army arrives.

Mother is ecstatic. She has demonstrated that her brand of individualism has kept the family alive. She does not notice that her eventual survival is actually due to other people *not* being individualistic ie being part of a corporate entity called "the army" which sacrifices its own interests to those of others. Neither I suspect do most readers. Nor is there any real contemplation or grief over the fate of others. The boyfriend is less a martyr than a fool. The friends who went away are lost morally as well as physically. The death of a neighbour is seen as self-sacrificing.

There is a similar trajectory in the British author Paul Magrs, *Lost on Mars*. This is a transparent homage to *Little House on the Prairie* and it reflects the ideology (now well explored by Anita Clair Fellman, *Little House, Long Shadow*). Laura's family lives on Mars. They are homesteaders, in a colony that seems to have crash landed, and which is confined to a make do and mend culture dependent on scavenging from a crashed ship. Laura's family (naturally) lives outside the town and it is their greater independence that renders it easier to leave the area when the indigenous peoples begin kidnapping settlers. In this book all offers of help are deceptive, all communities passive to the point of being cattle. I should not have been surprised when the indigenes turned out to be cannibals. As Clare Bradford and colleagues observe in *New World Orders...* authors tend to replicate the prejudices of their own society's colonialisms (60) The original idea for this paper by the way would have spent more time specifically on the racism in many of these texts, but in

the end I am going to be confined to noting it when it comes up, and asking that you all start paying attention and complaining to publishers because I am quite appalled at some of what makes it through into YA literature. That it is mostly evident in these individualist texts however is, I think, not a coincidence.

Reading this book reminded me for some reason of the Gilded Age Success manuals. Can we see the YA dystopian tradition as an extension of these? Judy Hinkley notes, "The overall message was this: be stoic, and self reliant, work hard, earn, and save. Honesty and diligent, uncomplaining industry combined with frugality and modesty would bring success." (133) There was nothing in them at all of the importance of collective action or of community, they were very heavy on individualism, stressing "virtue was its own reward" and listing a set of virtues and vices that linked to 'successful' outcomes. (138)

Australian author Clare Zorn's *The Sky So Heavy* is on the surface less individualistic, in that three teenagers and a younger brother band together in order to survive after a nuclear war breaks out. The book seemed promising for my collectivist pile, but whereas in some texts I will consider in the next part of the talk we see a gathering in of people, in this one we see the stripping down to the reconstructed *nuclear* family. The core people are Fin and his brother Max. But he gathers two people two him, Lucy, his girlfriend, Arnold Wong the bullied, Christian, Asian Australian, and later Noll, the working class soldier. You can have a guess who doesn't survive if you want? Actually you get two given that neither Arnold nor Noll make it. Both of course sacrifice themselves for our nice white middle class heterosexual couple. Arnold Wong, who "everyone took to hating" in school "I don't know if it was because he had a funny name or because he had skin a few shades darker than everyone else and thick black hair that stood straight up like a Chia Pet's" is the magical Asian Christian, capable of ignoring the way Fin has treated him and prioritising Fin and his girlfriend Lucy's well being throughout. There are no mentions of homosexuality but in this book I was strongly reminded of the heavily loaded subtexts of the movie *Rebel Without a Cause*, and Wong Must Die if the heterosexual and white future of narrated Australia is to be secured.

Further pushing the novel towards the individualistic despite its early Scooby Gang structure is that the one model of group enterprise we see is Fin's mother and the military. Here we see a group of people helping as many as they can but unable to help everyone. This is portrayed as a terrible thing. I don't want to pretend it isn't. But it is deliberately set up that Fin can get help for himself and his brother only at the expense of his companions who he would have to leave behind. He chooses to stay with them in what appears a selfless act, but it is they who lay down their lives for him anyway. The individual hero is exalted even when he saves no one.

In extremis individualism can be so strong that the author can become utterly unaware that it may rest on the backs of the unacknowledged and enslaved. The most disturbing text I came across was TJ Woolridge's *Silent Starsong*. I think, or perhaps merely hope, that the author was inspired by Huckleberry Finn, and had no idea what a very bad idea copying that book would be. In *Silent Starsong* the child protagonist Kyra is Deaf. Her mother is a star singer as is her sister. Her father is from Earth. Her mother is impatient with her deafness, her father has learned ASL. Her father decides that the solution to her communication problem is to walk into the slave market and buy a sentient and telepathic creature to be her pet. As father is from Earth, he clearly understands what slavery is. But any issues with the enslavement of the alien Marne is justified because first Kyra "begs her father to buy him to save him" and "his own people would have killed him" (for being the wrong colour. This is Man Friday territory. And it is not even as if the alien then has a wonderful life: this sentient creature is treated as if he is a dog, or perhaps worse than a dog. He has to hide from the girl's mother for example because she dislikes him. Only when the family is out can he behave as a person. All the family bar the heroine are killed and the alien and child run off. I could see where it was going and declined to read further. But the key point for me here is the degree to which the child's autonomy and individualism in survival is unconsciously but graphically depicted as dependent on the enslavement of another.

In a very odd way we see this again in British author William Campbell Powell's *Expiration Day*. In this book Tania Deeley discovers that she is *not* a rarity in a world of android children, she herself is an android. One of the things I dislike most about modern YA fiction is the degree to which it argues that value is in uniqueness and specialness. This may seem a liberation from the approach common to the Juvenile genre in which the trajectory is to find one's place as a cog in the common wheel (sic), but it involves a dismissal of those around you, those who are *not* special. In *Expiration Day*, having discovered that she is a Teknoid, naturally Tania must discover that she is an extra special Teknoid, one who does not expire from a kind of super adolescent angst. Tania can have no peers because there are none (or very few) like her. She stands apart from the crowd. There are three seemingly unrelated incidents/scenes in this book however that really stand out and emphasise this lone individualism and the 'standing apart'. Each of them are incidents in which the book is flat out racist.

In the first, when Tania is in school, she is learning about Africa... "Mud huts and grass roofs. Dark-skinned babies, emaciated and dying." The teacher (whose colour is not mentioned) has a picture of herself and her husband "He was naked, except for a loincloth, but in his left hand he carried a short spear and an oval shield faced with hide". (30-31) Later she drives through London parts of which are 'a war zone'. Her friend John lives in a Yellow Zone, "rather close to one of them. So a lot of the houses were derelict, or were basic shells, the dwelling of those on the fringes of society." (115). He lives in Wood Green where there are "too many dark alcoves" "the up-escalator is broken". I happen to know Wood Green. I lived there until November of last year and did so for almost a decade. You want to know how it stands out in this book? Whereas Tania's rural suburb is completely white, Wood Green is overwhelmingly Black, Brown, Orthodox Jewish, Turkish, Polish etc. Her friend John of course is white. The final incident comes right at the end. Tania turns out to be special, she doesn't go mad or die at the age of 18 but matures into an adult, and makes a choice that lets her in on the secret. Some tekniks are turning "human". There is research going on in Africa, and note the way it is described: "the leaders of the world gave

him Southern Africa as his workshop. With Africa's mineral wealth, he was able to supply the world with the robots it needs to lurch along". Africa we are told is not as we've been taught—no mud huts or starving children apparently? It's not clear—but "The Sabine Wars left not one big city there. But in the Tswana people... Oxted found good hearted partners, willing to be foster parents of the new race." (324)

At this point I need to pause to clear the taste out of my mouth.

One reason I have been mentioning the nationality of authors is that the last time I worked on YA science fiction I started to become aware that the manifestations of racism differed from nation to nation—not greater or lesser, just different. This time through this issue was often stark but among a collection of books many of which encoded racism, Powell's book really shook me. I felt like I had had gone back to the future. This was the future of the world of the 1950s, and an understanding of Britain out of the ravings of the politician Enoch Powell [aside: famous for his Rivers of Blood speech on immigration in 1968, it was one of the great moments of this month's election when his old seat was taken by a black woman, Eleanor Smith}. It exposed something that crossed all nationalities: lurking in many of these books is a contempt for the that is deeply distressing.

This is vivid in UK author JP Smythe's *Way Down Dark*: the novel is set on a space ship (or I suspect it will be revealed to be a space station) in which things have gone very wrong. The ship is being taken over by gangs. This is the future as violent ghetto. Chan is protected by her mother's influence but really her mother is just another gang leader and when she dies, Chan must impress others with her own speed, strength and astuteness. But the overall trajectory in this book is that only bad people are really good at collaboration (in the gangs) and that good people cannot lead other good people, but can at best only protect them in ones and twos and at worst can only escape themselves. The book is filled with hopelessness. When the protagonist finally leads a group to escape, it is a landing into slavery (note though that I have not had time to read the sequel). Particularly noticeable is the facelessness of the people around Chan. There are relatively few characters other than very close friends or very close enemies. There is very little sense of

community. Any justice that is sought is almost always what Oziewicz described as retributive justice, a game of scoring over the other in which victim and perpetrator can end up looking very much the same.

The same is true even of a book I very much like, from Finnish writer Emmi Itaranta. In *Memory of Water*, Noria Kaito keeps the tea ceremony with her father, entrusted with a freshwater spring that is kept secret in a world of water shortages. She has only one friend. The village is potentially hostile. There is no resistance to the control of the soldiers because the soldiers control and rain. Eventually Noria is killed and her friend Sanja survives to tell the tale to a university lecturer to whom she is able to pass on secrets. Noria is always set apart from the villagers, she is never of them. This means there is never any sense of the solidarity and co-operation of the poor or the ordinary. If there is one very distinctive difference in the individualist books compared to the collectivist books, it is in this. Chris Parks, in his book on fictions of social mobility, calls this genteel poverty, the middle class playing at poverty. It doesn't mean that the poverty is not real, but that it is always framed as separate from identity and thus the last thing one would do is to make common cause with "real" poor people, because that would be to redefine oneself.

Collectivism.

Most of us have grown up with an understanding of Darwinism as inherently linked to the individualist struggle for survival. But Darwin only argued for the “survival of the fittest”. He himself had undertaken his research in areas where life teemed and thus struggled to find a space, he wrote in a context in which Malthus was King. But as Daniel P. Todes pointed out in an 1987 article there are other ways to read Darwin, and other bodies of evidence. Crucially, when you apply Darwin to areas that are sparsely populated and where existence is harsh and competition is more likely to pit organism against environment rather than organism against organism, Malthus begins to make no sense. Thus in Russia Kropotkin—who spent five years as a military officer studying the geology and zoology of sparsely populated Russia, failed to find any evidence for the bitter struggle among animals of the *same* species and came up with an alternative theory in which struggle against the environment which can be both physical and social, promotes collaboration. In 2010, Rebecca Solnit wrote *A Paradise Built in Hell* in which she explored what happens in disasters: what she found was similar: when the struggle is less between individuals or resources, then individuals in the face of a hostile environment, left to themselves (for part of her argument was that American individualist politics often interrupted this), people collaborate to survive.

This is what we see in the following books.

I have seven books on the pile for this section. Philip Reeve’s *Railhead* and *Black Light* I am counting as one book for the purposes of this paper as it really is one story and not a story and sequel. The others are Paulo Baccigalupi’s *Ship Breakers*, Westerfield, Lanagan and Scott’s *Zeroes*, *Cinder* by Marissa Meyer, *Mars Evacuees* by Sophia MacDougal, *When We Wake*, by Karen Healey, and Melissa Landers’ *Starflight*. They are disproportionately not American, and I think that is relevant, but they stand out from the other set of books, in what I think may be a more significant way, which is that every one of the authors is

associated with the genre community as well as with the YA/Children's Literature Community.

Why do I think this matters?

It is because these books are much more questioning of the social order than the first set: they are more analytical of the social order as it is, and as it might be. They bring to the work one of the things sf brings to fiction: an interest in the bones of the world underneath the story. They do not simply replicate and extend the social givens of their own society into the future, and they are much more alive to how people in the world survive injustice on a daily basis. These books are all far less heroic in aspect, even when they have heroes. Far more collaborative, far more team-work oriented, and they are far, far more respectful of the poor and under educated, the very people who individualistic/privatised modes either dismisses or dreads. They also are more likely to recognise, as Bradford et. Al. note, that "sometimes resilience and determination are not enough". In strife, many children do not survive and if they do, it is often less because of their individual characters than because of the communities in which they are protected.

The first book I selected is a rather interesting example simply because Melissa Landers' earlier books *Alienated* and *Invaded* were on my other pile. In those books a girl hosts an alien, and finds her family under attack from local prejudice. I actually found the book rather offensive to the degree it fell into *To Kill a Mockingbird* patterns in centring white distress and appropriating the experience of black civil rights activists. It was highly individualistic. No one mattered other than the central character and the centring of the romance plot led to the classic girl on girl competition over a boy that prevents so much girl centred fiction from being feminist. *Starflight* (and its sequel) are quite different: first it's a gathering in book. It begins with one character, Solara an orphan raised by local nuns and a thief on the run, who finds a place on a space ship. With her is the young man she has kidnapped in order to expedite her escape. She is a scholarship student. He is a wealthy boy from the same school with a rather distant family. They end up on a ship where both have to prove they belong while figuring out

that although she is the initial fugitive, she may have just saved him from the law as his family's empire collapses. The book explores the social injustices Solara has experienced, the degrees to which the deck is stacked against her, the much greater latitude Doran has had in his life. It explores the degree to which skill sets can change in value according to context: Solara is a much more useful person on the ship than Doran is, until they need a negotiator. The trajectory of the novel is also away from individuality. Solara has been surviving on her wits, and falls victim to grooming. Here she learns what real team work looks like and the role of interdependence. Doran has to learn he is not special and that what he contributes is more important than what he has. Both move towards becoming cogs on the ship.

One of the characters aboard the ship is Cassia, who is actually a princess accompanied by her bit of rough Kane (this novel in particular is so obviously Star Wars fan fic it would be painful if it hadn't been so good). In *Starflight* she is just part of the crew, another misfit and runaway. In *Starfall*, Cassia and Kane end up back on the planet trying to repel an invasion of her country by a neighbour. I really did not much like this book. It is focalised through Cassian and it seemed to valorise a very conventional narrative in which only the True Born Princess can Save the Country. I was completely onside with the rebel General who was working against her, using her as a front with plans to push her aside. And then Landers threw me a blinder. The leader of the resistance is not the rebel General but the quiet unassuming mother of Cassia's "I refuse to be in love with him because he's the son of a servant" Kane who has been living as a housekeeper on a farm, quietly co-ordinating collective survival and resistance. Cassia, for all her time on the ship, has continued to underestimate the skills, abilities and even the existence of complex lives of those she regards as her social inferiors. She has fallen on the ship into the trap of regarding her companions as exceptions to the rules she knows, only back home does she question the rules and begin to see the way her society really functions below the slick level of diplomacy.

Philip Reeve's *Railhead* and *Black Light* are, in these terms, the obvious books to move on to in that they share some structures and

premises. Like *Starflight Railhead* begins with an individual who thinks he can survive as an individual—the thief Zen—and recruits others who think they can survive as individuals including a “princess” Threnody, and another older thief who has travelled through time via prison sentences of cold sleep, Chandni. But there are some significant differences in that the story is told from the bottom of society. Zen and Chandni are the dominant characters and Threnody is a marginalised figure in her own family—the second daughter, relegated to the background until she shows herself to be a useful pawn. Both Zen and Chandni show us what survival in this society looks like and it is far more cooperative and collaborative than it seems. Zen has family and although his sister is a minor character, she helps embed us in a wider society of workers and unions and resistance. It is her connections that will save Zen’s ass when he needs to run. Zen and Chandni exist in a network of favours, and in part, Chandni’s punishments have precisely been about cutting her off from those networks (though I do wonder why she would not seek out other sleepers). Threnody fails when she becomes Empress because she does not really understand how this works: she has no family allies and no one outside her immediate circle—she is a pawn of the soldiers who put her on the throne. The four of them survive because they construct an alliance and also ally with machine intelligence in the form of both androids and the intelligent trains that span the galaxy, and with alien creatures, including the Hive Monks, themselves a collaborative intelligence. And this proves to be the metaphor that provides the solution to the conflict at the heart of the second book, and the secret behind the first book. The key driver of the novels is that this is an Empire built on a trading network through the stars along the galactic railways. In the first book it seems like a closed system: if the system is threatened there is nowhere for the unseated families and firms to go. They must fight to the death or retreat. Instead Reeve opens a new gateway to new trading partners.. the invaders can keep what they have because there is a new market to explore. There are of course issues around that not explored here, but there is a clear sense that there is another way to go, and it relies on

making ever more connections, ever more collaborations. Neither individuals nor planets, nor empires can go it alone.

The same is true in Marissa Meyer's *Cinders* and Karen Healey's *When We Wake*. I have not read the entire Luna Chronicles (although Meyer manages the notable achievement of having made me want to and they are safely downloaded on the kindle for on the way back) but I was rather charmed by this sf take on the Cinderella story. And it really is sf, not just a set dressing. Cinder is marginalised because she is a cyborg and on this planet any kind of cyborgisation robs the person of citizenship. She was taken in as a child, but her "father" has died and his wife and one of her daughters hates her. When the other daughter dies of plague, it is blamed on Cinder. But Cinder is a mechanic and when she fixes a robot belonging to the prince it brings her into royal politics, and eventually she discovers that she is a missing heir to throne of potential invaders who are spreading the plague. But the book stands out because Cinder understands her marginalisation as a wider problem of the way a set of people are treated, and her route out (and not to the prince) is by figuring out the ways in which she is related to and involved with other people. I am hoping the sequels emphasise this. Similarly in Karen Healey's *When We Wake* Tegan Oglietti who has been in suspended animation for several hundred years until she can be fixed after she was caught up in an assassination attempt. But what she discovers is a country that has continued with the exploitation of other countries in ways that happen today and are not well advertised: the refusal of patented drugs, the locking out of migrants, the disparaging of other cultures in ways that are economically damaging. Tegan allies with Abdi, a visiting student from one such country, but it is Abdi using Tegan, not the other way around. Behind him is an entire network of resisters. The individualist narrative that is the point of view is not the actual story.

Group work powers Scott Westerfield, Margo Lanagan, and Deborah Biancotti's *Super Zeroes*, about a group of teenagers with powers. In the story they lurch from disaster to disaster and they begin to find their feet only when they realise their inter-dependency, that each can support and enhance the other. The same is true in Sophia McDougal's *Mars Evacuees* in which when the children of military

personnel evacuated to Mars are attacked by the invader, they survive by banding together. Unlike in *The True Meaning of Smek Day* this is again a collaborative project including a robot teaching goldfish and a young alien. I rather wish the alien had alien companions. In the sequel, *Space Hostages* (bad title by the way as there is a Nicolas Fisk novel of that name), the same group of children are kidnapped by a different again group of aliens and they and Thsaa have to work out how to get away. A small but crucial scene at the end, sees the bully of the previous book join them if only briefly. Her father, after whom she had modelled herself, has worked out a deal for himself only, selling out two other planets. Her decision to betray him is for both the group and the wider group of her planet and brings her into the group undoing her own individualist stance. These are clearly linked.

I want to conclude this section with Paolo Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker* which brings together the collaborative mode, the understanding of the bones of the world, and a respect for the decision making abilities and the survival strategies of the poor. In doing so it demonstrates a Faith in Humanity that I so often look for and fail to find in modern sf for teens, and demonstrates Solnit's thesis that it is communities that survive disaster, and individuals survive in communities. Not optimism or utopia you understand, but just a faith that we are mostly very clever monkeys who have survived as a species because we are actually quite good collaboration as well as competition.

Ship Breaker is set in a far future scarcity collapse. The wealthy roam the world in ships, some countries still have resources, and they tow wrecks to the off shores of countries mired in poverty where they are stripped by gangs of workers made up mostly of children small enough to crawl through pipes, ducts and barriers. It is a world—much like ours actually—where poverty and filth and disease is outsourced and the well off—us—complacently assume we are helping overseas. But far from panic and riot, people organise to survive. The main character is Nailer. Nailer is part of a crew that strips copper wire from tankers. He is getting too big for the work and it doesn't look as if he is going to be big and strong enough for an adult crew. He is a modern chimney sweep, vital yet dispensable. Eventually he will get off the beach

when he finds a salvage and instead of claiming it rescues the girl on it, and ends up helping her to get home to her people and survive during a turf war. But as with *Railhead* Nailer is not a loner: he is embedded in crew and family and while Zen runs from both of those and has to recreate it, Nailer shows us just how vital they are. When a fellow crew member abandons him because she thinks she can leave him to die and make his claim, she ends up ostracised not just by her crew but by every crew on the beach. She is literally outcast...cast out to die. When Nailer decides to rescue Pima, he is helped by his friends and family, by the networks around him and the ones that reach beyond into the nearest city. Unlike Zen, Nailer is never alone. When Nita and Zen end up back on the beach it is Zen's crew and family that protect them. Only Nailer's father is not part of his protective circle, a man who has chosen to live on the margins he becomes a threat through his very marginalisation: without familial connections he can succeed only through brute force. Whereas in *Way Down Dark* family and community falls before individual brutishness, here family and community hold out and overwhelm it.

Similarly in the second novel set in the world, *The Drowned Cities*, while communal collaboration is under intense pressure, everyone everywhere seeks it whether in the refuge of the army or in family. Mahalia may be stranded alone but she does not want to be. There is no virtue in being alone, it renders people vulnerable not strong. What Bacigalupi explores here is the toxicity of collaboration bought by fear, and a fear of the other that leads the army to deliberately break up communities (as it did in New Orleans, and as the council is now trying to do in Kensington and Chelsea), as contrasted with collaboration bought through hope, common cause and love. The first may rumble on and regenerate endlessly but it is, Bacigalupi argues in this book, a branch that burns brightly but burns through its fuel. Only the latter offers the chance of growth and eventual life. In order to achieve this, Bacigalupi uses what Oziwicz has identified as a restorative justice script, in which there are constant renegotiations as the three characters with whom the books conclude find a way to work with each other that

restores to each a justice they have lost (Mahalia, Ocho and Tool—need to expand on this).

Matters arising.

We live in a world in which for decades now popular culture, of which YA fiction is a part, has taught us that in a crisis we hunker down, reject all borders and regard those around us as a threat. The result, as Solnit demonstrated, is people dying in their homes for fear of being killed outside; and worse, those who are Othered by the dominant group routinely being shot and massacred because when they source resources for survival they are seen as looters, when they create community they are seen as a threat. I have not spent much time on race and class issues but there is no question that this is a factor. In the UK right now we are having what I can only call a Let Them Eat Cake moment; horrifically we have learned that the government's othering of the poor, the brown, the not-Christian, is fundamental to a major catastrophe. It probably isn't very safe right now for the PM to walk the streets of London. In contrast in this, and other incidents this past month, the communities have come together not just to give but to organise. Yet even now, in the face of such a visible demonstration of what we as individuals can do when we come together there are people who actively wish to atomise and other us in order to preserve the social order.

[sun headline]

YA Fiction is fiction. But most of us are here because we think fiction is powerful. I remind you that all of these novels were on someone's shortlist. It really is time to start asking.... What kind of world do these novels ask us to make?

Reference Works Cited

- Bradford, Clare, Kerry Mallan, John Stephens, and Robyn McCallum. *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature: Utopian Transformations*, Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan, 2007.
- Hilkey, Judy. *Character Is Capital: Success Manuals and Manhood in Gilded Age America*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Oziewicz, Marek C. *Justice in Young Adult Speculative Fiction: a Cognitive Reading*, New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Parkes, Christopher. *Children's Literature and Capitalism: Fictions of Social Mobility in Britain, 1850-1914*, Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan, 2012.
- Todes, Daniel P. "Darwin's Malthusian Metaphor and Russian Evolutionary Thought, 1859-1917." *Isis* 78, no. 4 (December 1987): 537–51.

Finding Faith in Humanity: Peace and Conflict Resolution Individualist and Collaborative Narratives in Sf for Children and Teens. I have been working on science fiction for a very long time. I have perhaps been working on ideas about peace and conflict resolution almost as long, but for complex reasons these ideas have never seen the light of day. I have always been more. I have been working on science fiction for a very long time. This fantasy, more clearly than any other, demonstrates a tie to traditional mythic narratives, including myths, legends, and folktales. The stories shared by cultural groups that not only describe a world's creation but that also narrate expected behavior within that world (cf. Eliade; Malinowski; Bascom). Find out more about the International Peace & Conflict Resolution master's program at the School of International Service. Building a foundation and future for children. Kiangana Dialungana (Makaya Revell), SIS/MA '17. President & Founder, Marie Mambu Makaya Foundation. Where will a degree in International Peace and Conflict Resolution take me? IPCR graduates go on to exciting peacebuilding careers in nonprofits, government, and business. The top employers of recent IPCR graduates include U.S. Department of State, U.S. Institute of Peace, World Bank Group, Chemonics International, and Human Rights Watch. Within six months of graduation, 77% of graduates earn \$40,000 or more. Looking for more information or help? Children often learn about people such as Cinderella, Tom Sawyer, George Washington, and Rosa Parks in the context of a narrative. However, these protagonists vary in their status. Cinderella and Tom Sawyer are fictional characters, whereas George Washington and Rosa Parks were real people. When children hear about such protagonists, do they grasp that some are make-believe, whereas others are real? Correspondence should be sent to Kathleen H. Corriveau, School of Education, Boston University, 2 Silber Way, Room 240, Boston, MA 02215. E-mail: kcorriv@bu.edu. K. H. Corriveau, E. E. Chen, P. L. Conflict resolution skills are something all teenagers must learn. And you need to be the teacher. Why Does Conflict Occur? Conflict is part of life. No matter how much you want to protect your child from it, she has to face this reality. Conflict can occur within the family, with siblings and parents, with friends, and with society in general. But teenagers are stubborn. When you find yourself losing patience, take a deep breath. Remember, you too were a teenager once. It is important to start early. Teaching conflict resolution to teenagers before adolescence turns them into rebels. How did you deal with conflict resolution among teenagers? How are you teaching your teenager conflict resolution skills? Tell us your tried conflict resolution skills for teens in the comments section below. Peace Tales includes a pairing of stories from Eastern Europe about two goats who meet at the center of a narrow bridge. The folktale appears once in the section on war, and once in the section on peace, with the two versions presenting different resolutions to the conflict. In one, the two goats try to push each other out of the way, but end up pushing each other off the bridge into the water. In the other, the goats carefully balance and squeeze past each other to cooperatively and effectively continue on their way. MacDonald describes peace as a choice that requires constant maintenance: œ

Often, conflict resolution for kids comes about when an apology is given. You must ask each child or the one who needs to apologise to do so. Likewise, the injured party should be encouraged to accept the apology. 4. Find Solutions Collectively. Once peace is restored, ask your child to find a solution to their problems, or guide them towards one so that the same issue doesn't arise again. Parents can sometimes become tempted to find conflict resolution strategies for kids. However, encouraging them to find solutions themselves helps them develop critical thinking. For example, if the conflict was regarding a toy, the solution can be to take turns to play with it. You can guide them towards this decision, but don't point to it directly. 5. Follow up. For children between the ages of 11 and 14. A message of peace and love towards others is at the heart of all of the major world religions. This is called The Golden Rule. It is the principle that you should treat others as you would like to be treated yourself, and it is found in one form or another in every major religion. Most religions prize forgiveness as a strength, and discourage people from taking revenge on those who have wronged them. Pacifism. Gatka was developed as a way to defend Sikhs as well as people from other faiths from aggressors. Is it ever right to take up arms and fight? Why or why not? 6 of 7. Non-religious beliefs " A Humanist bus campaign. Peace and conflict studies is a social science field that identifies and analyzes violent and nonviolent behaviours as well as the structural mechanisms attending conflicts (including social conflicts), with a view towards understanding those processes which lead to a more desirable human condition. A variation on this, peace studies (irenology), is an interdisciplinary effort aiming at the prevention, de-escalation, and solution of conflicts by peaceful means, thereby seeking "victory" for all...