

Rogue Librarians, Episode 18

Looking for Alaska (Part 2: Close Reading)

Welcome to the 17th episode of Rogue Librarians, a podcast in which three librarians discuss banned books. We are your hosts, Marian, Dorothy, Alanna, and we are the Rogue Librarians. We would love for you to participate in our discussion. Please visit theroguelibrarians.com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter @RLibrarians.

If you join our patreon at patreon.com/roguelibrarians, you can hear our audio perks in the mini episode. We we released last time we discussed some favorite books that address grief and our other favorite John Green books. In today's mini episode, we discuss other books that we have read and loved recently. Please join our discussion of those and other books.

Today, we are continuing our discussion of Looking for Alaska by John Green. We wanted to give you a trigger warning that the book discusses questions about death and suicide. First published in 2005, Green's debut novel won the Michael L. Printz award in 2006. A mini series based on the book was released on Hulu in 2019, and you can buy or rent it on other platforms right now. Looking for Alaska is the fourth most challenged book from 2010 to 2019 and the fifth most challenged book in 2022. It has been challenged for being sexually explicit and unsuited for age group and for featuring offensive language and drugs, alcohol and smoking. Please listen to our 17th episode for a detailed discussion of why it has been challenged and banned. We also wanted to add that when John Green was asked if the book is autobiographical, he said, quote, yes, no, kind of. Certainly the physical campus of Culver Creek is very similar to the boarding school. I attended Indian Springs School and many of the characters are amalgams of people I knew in high school. That said, Alaska is a novel. It is well and truly made up unquote. So Dorothy, do you mind giving us your summary again?

I would love to in fact embedded in my summary since we didn't have the chit chat at the front. I'm gonna tell one of my favorite stories that John Green tells and I'm sure he tells it better. But uh it at the very opening of the book, um Miles, our hero um has told his parents, he wants to go to Culver Creek to the um boarding school and his parents throw him a party to which I believe two people show up. And uh I believe there's a line in there about how um just how awful it is to be at a party where two vastly uninteresting people are the only ones there. And the story that John Green tells is that, um, one of his early book tours for this, he was in a bookstore and he

was reading the first chapter to a room of about two people. He was he aware of the uh, of awkwardness of that situation. And I just, I love that story. So there he is, Miles uh wants to leave home. His parents are like, is it because you don't have any friends? And he says, no, no. Uh I, I want to seek the great perhaps which were Francois Rabelais' last words. So uh Miles loves that famous last words. They come up a lot in the book. Um So he goes to school where he finds the great perhaps uh in the form of his roommate, the Colonel, um who dubs him Pudge. And um he, he is hazed in a pretty intense way and uh then becomes fast friends with the rest of the colonel's friend group, Alaska and Takumi, who all swear to help him get revenge. And there's a big practical joking culture here uh in this book, um Alaska in, in particular uh is a, is a master of the craft. Uh The book is put together 136 days before an unknown event and it, you know, it ends 136 days afterwards. I don't know why it's 136. Uh, maybe that's just the midpoint of the school year. You'd think I would know that as I'm a teacher, but I don't count up the days. So, um, but I bet you there is some interesting reason. Um, we'll have to, we'll have to write to Dear John and Hank, see if he'll answer. Uh, so anyways, it's high school, there's high jinks, there's smoking, there's drinking, there's um an interesting religion class that helps Pudge and the reader navigate, navigate big thoughts about why we're here and how we cope with our own existence. There's young love, there's hormones and um put it all together. We have John Green's first novel.

Thanks, Dorothy. We are going to start our first segment by talking about characterization and there are many memorable characters in this book. We could go on for hours talking about them in detail. So we decided to focus our discussion on the three main characters. Miles, also known as Pudge, Chip, also known as the Colonel, and Alaska. And I'm going to start with Miles or Pudge. I think I'll call him Miles though. So Miles, as Dorothy told us, transfers from a school in Florida to this boarding school in Alabama where his father had gone to school and he's trying to figure out what to do with his life and um seeking this great perhaps. But as was very clear with Dorothy's mentioning his going away party. He did not have any close friends at his school in Florida. And one of the biggest things he gains from moving to Culver Creek is friendship for the first time. He becomes very close to these other characters, especially his roommate, Chip or the Colonel. And I thought Miles was very interesting as a character because he is quite naive at first when it comes to the culture at Culver Creek, and he is going there to study hard and figure out who he is. And uh he becomes very involved in this friend group and part of trying to get back at people who had hazed him and pranked them. And uh he just finally seems to fit in. So, um I didn't always understand where Miles was coming from in terms of his fascination

with Alaska, but I did understand his yearning to fit in and as someone who moved schools a few times when I was growing up, it can be so hard to do that. And when you finally find people who you relate to it, it's amazing. And I just loved seeing how Miles changed throughout the book and how he dealt with difficult situations. So, what did the two of you think?

Yeah, I uh one of the interesting things that, um, just jumped into my head is, you know, Miles was a nerd, right? He, he was an intense reader, loved to read books, hated sports, but he did love books. He liked biographies later about books versus like why biographies. That, that is, that is true. Yes, he definitely read biographies, which from which he got, uh, learned people's famous last words, if there were famous last words or just what their last words were. Um, it certainly, but, but the bottom line is he enjoyed reading, you know, where some people want to be out doing sports. Um, and, and so you get a sense that he's a good student that he's, you know, he's not looking to get an athletic scholarship, he's just more interested in, you know, I think he's a very smart person who just wants to be around other smart people and, and having, having that experience of going to a boarding school and being, you know, which his parents' dad in particular told him that it was gonna be a really tough academic school. Um, he was ready for that, you know, because I think to him, he, you know, it's like you said, um Alanna, he thought he was gonna meet and did meet people who shared more commonalities with him and who could truly become his friend in a deeper way um, than the people that were in his public high school. So, so I, I think that is, you know, I think there are situations in which, you know, certain schools, private schools, boarding schools can be safe. Um places for people who don't feel that they fit in, in the general public school so that it was kind of, I don't know, it just, that was just a connection that I made as I was thinking about him.

And you get a sense that being at this boarding school helped to save Chip or the Colonel and Alaska too because they're both there on scholarship and they're both very intelligent. We see over and over again how intelligent the colonel is and, and Alaska is obviously very gifted too. So, um, it, it becomes a safe place for them, away from their families and away from other difficult situations that they've been in. Yeah, for sure. And, and of course, you know, it's, it's hardly a perfect place, you know, it's not like peace and harmony amongst everyone. The, the characters that, you know, we're not going to go into detail about exist. But, um, but, you know, what did they call them? The weekend warriors, the, the rich people that they call them, the rich people who, um, because the schools in, in Alabama, you know, go home to their mansions in Birmingham every weekend and eat good food and, you know, whatever, um, that, you know,

are there because they're smart. But because also they come from well to do families that have a lot of money and a lot of sway where Miles, Chip, and Alaska seem to be the characters who are coming from. You know, I don't, I don't remember if Miles has a scholarship but I don't think he's a legacy, he's a legacy kid in the sense that his father went there. But, um, I feel like he's not a weekend warrior. I feel like he kind of hangs out in the middle between two. He has. He's also not poor. Right. Right. And so, but, but it lends itself to yet another, you know, there, there's their side and, you know, it's an us against them kind of a situation, um, which I think is also probably pretty common in just about any high school that you would go to, I think of miles as an observer. But he kind of goes along with people. Um, you know, he, he Alaska in particular, he'll do pretty much whatever she tells him to do. Um, you know, smoke a cigarette. Ok. You know, he, he'll just do it. Um, but he's also, you know, just really observing what's happening and thinking about how and why people are doing things which frames the story nicely. Mhm. I think that's absolutely true. That's a good point. Mhm.

Yeah, he's, he stands in for the reader often, you know, to observe these new characters and situations. Mhm. Yeah. So, Marian, do you want to take us to Chip or the Colonel?

Right. That's what I was just about to do. Um, and Chip, you know, I, I love the name Chip in the sense, you know, I always think, oh, he's a chip off the old block. Um But Chip comes from, you know, just the, the toughest of upbringings. He comes from a tiny, tiny little town um in Alabama. He has, he lives with his mom in a trailer. Um They're very poor and um but but he's very bright and is, is here at Culver Creek because he is on scholarship. And so that to him is everything, you know, he's, he's got to succeed, he can't get expelled. He's, this is his ticket to college and the only ticket he's going to have to college. And his dream of course is to, you know, make money so that he can. The first thing he wants to do is to buy his mom a house and he's very devoted to his mom. Um, but so when, you know, so in the beginning, when Miles is dropped off at school, of course, mom and dad come in and there's the awkward, embarrassing moments of saying goodbye and, you know, there. So there's Pudge and or Miles at the time and then the Colonel kind of saunters in and, you know, doesn't have much stuff and very disorganized. He dumps everything in one drawer. Um, and, you know, he's, he greets, uh, Miles, his new roommate who's just come out of the shower and there, you know, it's a funny scene there. And, um, he basically, you know, he just immediately accepts Miles, which is Miles is not used to that. And, you know, he's like, you know, Miles gets his clothes on and Chip says, well, come on, you know, he walks out the door and he's like, come on. And so Miles is like, ok. And, you know, and

then he says to him, well, we're not friends, um, and Miles is ok, but they, they go off and, and he, and the Colonel bring all of the Colonel's furniture into the room. So there's a lot of physical labor going on. It's extremely hot and humid and uncomfortable. But, you know, it's like they, they just bond and there's no question. It's just, they bond over this. And then, um, and then they, the, uh, the Colonel, Chip, introduces Pudge to Alaska and, you know, and there's the story starting right there of this relationship and, um, and Miles, you know, like, like Dorothy said, is just the observer, the go along guy and, you know, just immediately becomes enmeshed in this culture. And, um, the Colonel and Alaska teach, uh, Miles everything there is to know about the boarding school, um, and the culture and, you know, you don't rat out and, and what happened last year and what's going forward, um, which teachers, it's funny with that, which teachers to watch out for. Exactly. Exactly where to go to smoke. So, you're, you know, how to smoke in so you're least likely to get caught all these things. Um, but it's, you know, the Colonel is a fascinating character because he's very smart. He's excellent at math, um, in particular and he memorizes things. So they all have their, their quirky little talents. Um, he's, he's just a fascinating character. Um, and he has a girlfriend and his girlfriend is one of the week Weekend Warriors. Or do they call him Weekend Warrior. Weekday Warriors. Yeah. And right. And, um, I think, you know, week, week, day Warriors. That makes, I think it is Weekday Warriors. Yeah. But, you know, and she's, you know, so that doesn't quite fit and, but so there's a lot to Chip. He's, he's not an easily definable character. He's, he's definitely multifaceted, interesting, intriguing, um, thought provoked. But also, um, you know, he's, he's in some ways kind of caveman, like, you know, like to be stereotypical. So, um, he's just a very interesting character and a very interesting contrast to Miles. And it's interesting because they, they have things in common but they don't have things in common and yet they, they bond and it's, it's just a really interesting character study um, of, of who can be in a friendship, you know, who, who can be friends and what, what is it that draws people together? You mentioned how close he was to his mother. And I thought one of the most interesting scenes that we get of Chip was when he takes Miles and Alaska home for Thanksgiving. And we see just how small the trailer is where he's been living with his mom and how much he loves his mom and how much she cares for him. And you understand why he's so touchy about certain things, especially poverty and why he cares so much about getting his mom a house and providing for her. And I thought their relationship was very sweet and, and it's, as you said, it's a big contrast with Miles's relationship with his parents, which is clearly loving but it doesn't seem like they're as close as Chip and his mom are. Exactly. Yeah. There's, there's that awkwardness of, well, I love them but I don't really want to hang out with them, you know, which is a typical teenage response, I think. Um, but II, I

did, I definitely found that very endearing with the Colonel because, you know, when, when you start to see the, the scenes with his, with, between the Colonel and the, and his girlfriend, you know, they, there's no, there's no, um, you know, I don't know, what's the word simpatico between the two of them? There's no connection to it, you know, but, but to contrast that with his relationship with his mom, which is just a, it's just a beautiful, sweet relationship. You see the potential of, of who you think the colonel is going to grow up to be.

You know, that there's a good guy in there and I think it's hilarious just that you keep calling him Chip because they rarely call him chip in the book. Generally the colonel, colonel, the colonel. And he earned that nickname by being a planner and like coordinating all the pranks that they do and he's got all his timetables down to the minute, you know, who needs to be wear and what synchronize your watches using those math skills. Yeah. And uh so it like he and Miles are such a great kind of fit because he's in charge and Colonels in charge and Miles is happy enough to, you know, to be along the ride and to take direction. So, um yeah, I love the colonel.

I did too. I really, I, I really love the Colonel. Interesting note that uh in, in the adaptation, the Colonel is cast as black and I know John Green had been asked about that and he said it, you know, he certainly hadn't written it that way but that the guy uh who played the Colonel, which I would have to look up. I don't have that in front of me but was, was the colonel just was the colonel through and through. And it, I, I do like the color blind casting and I found when I read it this time I kind of imagined him as black too.

Did you like the adaptation was good?

I liked it a lot. Yes, I thought it was very good. All right. So I'm gonna talk about Alaska and then uh Alaska is um a scholarship kid like the Colonel and comes to a very poor home in a little place that she does not ever want to go back to if she can help it. Um, she's beautiful. She's smart and, uh, she has a lot of bad habits. Um, and really no discussion of Alaska would be complete without talking about the manic pixie dream girl. Uh, in fact, I believe Alanna, you said that when you typed in manic pixie dream girl, Looking for Alaska came up right at the top. So it was one of the suggested Google searches. Yes. Yes. So I just wanted to explore that a little bit because I have um I have always been a fan of characters that I later found out fit this manic pixie dream girl trope. Uh So the idea of the trope is that uh someone who's kind of kooky and weird, maybe troubled shows up to wreak havoc in the life of a man who's um normally pretty

staid and straightforward and has a boring life and they change that person by exposing them to all of these different uh ways of looking at the world. Um And she's often seen as fairly destructive and I think the main um critique is that she, the manic pixie dream girl. The problem is that they seem to be all about changing the guy and that they don't have their own sort of journey to be on. Um Does that sound like I know we were just discussing, you know, looking up different definitions. Does that sound about right?

Yeah, it sounds right. I mean, one source said that their role in the story is to be a catalyst for the male protagonist growth while remaining essentially a static character herself with no story arc of her own. So she's there to change the man but to stay the same herself. OK. See, I, I don't know if I agree that Alaska is that she certainly has a lot of elements of that. But I feel like from the get go, Alaska has not a lot of interest in changing Miles. I mean, yes, she tries to get him a girlfriend but she, I feel like she's, she's just being Alaska and he's just sort of in, in the wig, she has her own dreams. She has her own issues as we come to find out. And I don't, the reason that he likes her, I don't think it's because of her wildness. It's because she's smart and he, when he, typically, when he brings out his party trick of la famous last words, you know, people will quiz him on a couple and it's like, huh? That's cool. Alaska came back to him with a book that she's underlined to talk about. Someone's at least fictional, fictionalized. Last words. There's some question as to whether they were actually the person's last words. It was written in her book was a book of fiction. Um, historical fiction. But, you know, it was, it was about being able, she was so smart and he could talk to her about those things. So I feel like at the crux of it, it wasn't that he loved her because she was wild and crazy and moody. In fact, those things bothered him. Um, the moodiness and the sort of lack of discretion at times. Uh, but he was interested in how smart she was. So, I don't know. What do you guys think?

Well, I think I, I kind of agree and disagree with you, Dorothy, in terms of like whether or not she fits this because I agree that he's attracted to her intelligence. I think he's also very attracted to her beauty. He's, um, he describes how she looks multiple times at the beginning and he's very attracted to her. But I think with this trope, if I understand it correctly, that the character does not have to try to change the male character, but something about her causes him to grow or change whether or not she intends it. And I certainly think that's true. I think Alaska is a big part of why Miles changes through this book, but not the only reason. But I think she's a big part of that, but I would disagree that she has no story arc that she, I don't think she's completely static. I do think we see some growth in her. She opens up to her friends, she reveals that she had

ratted out on her friends and she admits to that and ask for forgiveness. And she also finally reveals to them the secret of her past and what happened to her mother and why she feels so guilty about it. So I think she does change a little bit throughout the book, but not as much as Miles does if that makes sense.

Yes. Um Yeah, I, I agree with that too. I, I feel like she's from the author's perspective. She's, she was put in this story for us to watch Miles change and grow and, and it completely fits that story arc of miles going into Culver Creek because he wants to seek the great perhaps. And I think to him, Alaska embodies that great perhaps. Absolutely does. Yeah. She is and unpredictable and, but I also think she, you know, they, they connect to over the books. Alaska has this pile of books and she talks about, you know, she never has time to read them but she will when she's older, you know, but she collects these books and they're treasures of hers and, and she's read many of them and she kind of teases Miles because Miles knows all these last words and he's the author, he knows about the author's lives. He reads the biographies but he doesn't read the books that they wrote. And Alaska is kind of that missing piece filling in which helps Miles to truly come into an understanding of the great perhaps. Um So I do, I mean, and then you just look at the title of the book Looking for Alaska, which, you know, it could have been called The Great Perhaps. I mean, I don't know if John Green considered that but, but it kind of just brings it to, to me, you know, it brings it into more clarity that, that, that was the purpose of Alaska in my mind. Yeah, I guess for me, the manic pixie dream girl trope, I think of her more as a wise woman then, you know, I, I just, I'm defending the manic pixie dream girl I think is what I wanna say. And I don't know enough about the people who I think it's a bad kind of character to write, to make a really sound argument. And I would love to have that discussion if anybody wants to send us some mail about it. But um maybe because I like to, I like to be like, I, I could be that right? Like what I do and say is important enough to make other people stop and think differently about the world.

There are several themes that we thought about in this book, but we're going to focus on a few of them to start with. One of the themes that really struck me this time was the importance of true friendship and the importance of finding a place to belong. And we've touched on this a little bit already by discussing the friendship between Miles, Chip or the Colonel, and Alaska. And I think for all three of them, friendship is incredibly powerful for Miles, as we said, he didn't fit in at his school at, in Florida and moving to the school and being embraced so quickly by the Colonel and Alaska. And, um, I think made him a, a happier person and helped him figure out what he

really cares about. And he also learns how tough friendship can be when you feel rejected by one of your friends or when you um feel something as a result of something they do because it's not like everything goes perfectly as a result of their friendship. But um life becomes so much more meaningful and it seems like friendship helps all of them in different ways. But most especially when their family life is troubled and they don't have someone they can rely on at home like for Alaska. Um she is not close to her father, her mother died when she was young and she really seems to need these friends and her boyfriend to help her um feel better about life. I would say that the really the truest bonding in friendship happens in the second half of the book because they're navigating difficulties together and both giving each other space and trying to figure out how to be there for each other. So, uh so I think that's where it really becomes, you know, an important message.

Yeah, definitely. Yeah. And you also, what just popped into my head is their policy at the school of, um, at least among the students of not ratting each other out. Um, I, I feel like that somehow lends itself into this, this pact of friendship too that even, even when they're, they're not like super close friends, you know, this whole pranking system that's going to go on. It's expected and they're not gonna rat each other out. It's enemies.

Right. Yeah. There's still that, that respect of, I, I mean, I just call it friendship because they're, they're bonded and, you know, you could just picture, you know, in 10 years when they come back for their 10 year high school reunion, they're all gonna be grateful to be able to see each other. So, you know, there, there is that bonding that happens, even if they don't consider each other to be friends. I mean, maybe they're frenemies. Um, so, yeah, it's, it's, it's a deep theme and, and a lot to explore for sure.

Um, and then, um, if I can go ahead and, and jump into, um, the next theme, which is about guilt, um, guilt is a part of life and it's an awful part of life and, and something that we need to, um, that, that humans need to process and work through. Um, and for many humans it takes an entire lifetime to work through guilt from whatever they have, you know. But there's, it's, it's a theme I don't wanna give away too much, uh, detail from the book. But, um, it, it can be a deadly force and there's, there's their secrets that people are withholding, for example. Um, we've already alluded to that. Uh, Alaska feels tremendous guilt for having ratted out a friend, um, at, you know, that, uh, resulted in an expulsion And um we learn that in, in the book, um we learn that Alaska has some guilt from something that's happened in her past that you don't find out

much about it until later and perhaps that contributes to her moodiness, who knows? Um But it's definitely a theme and then it, it just keeps growing. And throughout the book, we learn a little bit more as the story unfolds about each individual's um guilts, you know, Miles has guilt and the Colonel has guilt and Takumi has guilt and Lara has guilt. I mean, just everyone has some of that and, and John Green just so expertly explores that um in the beautiful narrative. Um And, you know, the deadliness of guilt, it can be a figurative reaction in that, you know, I've known people in my life who are so consumed with guilt that they, they can't live their lives anymore. They just go through the motions. Um And then there are, you know, and then of course, there's the literal deadly force where people are so, um, guilt, um, you know, guilt-ridden that they literally cannot go on another day and, and they end it. So, um, John Green is just a master at this.

And um, uh, obviously this, yeah, I, I it was interesting for me to process all of the guilt because I somehow have managed to escape the, the guilt trained as it were. Um, I tend to find it a fairly useless emotion. Um Remorse is fine, but, you know, guilt tends to be twisted somehow. All right. So let's go on the letter note, uh which is the importance. Uh The last thing we were going to discuss, the importance of forgiveness and hope, uh which is very much how we culminate the book. Um with a sort of realization of a part of Miles that forgiveness is how you move on and you heal from guilt in particular. I mean, the two are forgiveness and guilt are so closely related because you can actually relieve someone's suffering, the, the suffering that they're feeling through guilt by forgiving them for whatever it is, they feel that they've done. And um and just it, you know, the hope for how the future is gonna go. And I know John Green talks a lot about hope and how important it is. Uh So that I feel like it mostly culminated towards the end where this discovery sort of happened about forgiveness. Uh can you guys trace it through the beginning of the book at all or are you with me on that? I think that I agree with that, that it is something that is more, more towards the end. I, I feel like it's, it's a catharsis in a sense. Yeah, it was kind of a light bulb moment for Miles. It felt like to me as a reader. Um It felt like a, a like parting words, like a parting message to take with me as I closed the last page of the book.

Yeah, I think earlier in the book, there seems to be a rejection of forgiveness. They, you know, the, the people who are doing these pranks to them keep saying like, do we have a truce? And the Colonel keeps saying absolutely not, you know, we're still at war and that no one seems to forgive each other because they're still angry about what happened to Alaska's old roommate and no one knows why she was found out. Um And so I think the lack of forgiveness earlier in

the book drives a lot of the plot and people hold grudges and um there's a lot of conflict as a result. So it, it seems like once this big event happens and there's even more guilt and more questioning, then it's finally possible for them to start forgiving themselves and each other a little bit more. But uh it takes a long time to get to that point. Yes. So there is an arc kind of reaches throughout. Very good.

Uh Now we had talked, you know, off mic about the difference between themes and topics. Um I had suggested that uh one of the themes of the book were big questions of theology. Why are we here? How do we deal with being here? What happens after we're gone? And these are discussed a lot um in the book, but apparently, I have not quite stated it as a theme. So Alanna, could you tell me what, how we, how are we teaching the youth about themes these days?

Sure. So in school, at least we tell the students that a theme is a message or lesson that you've learned from the text and it should be widely applicable. So it is a general statement like the importance of true friendship or um guilt can be a deadly force. It's something that you can find in lots of different texts and it's not just specific to this one text. So a single word like love is not a theme, it's a topic, but then you can take a theme from that topic. So we teach the students when they're younger, you can think of it as a tree if you want. So the um we often start with a single word if that helps them or a single topic. And then we say like, what sentence can you write that comes out of this topic? What is the author trying to teach you about this topic and that is your statement of the theme and then we, the leaves are the evidence to support the theme.

So, what if the author is simply exploring this topic? We call it a topic.

Yeah, I would call it a topic but I think you could still come up with a thematic statement from that topic. So, for example, what? Oh, yeah. So your question of like what happens after we're gone? You know, if you wanted to rephrase that as a sentence that you think the author wants us to take away from that, that would be, I would say a theme, right?

I just don't think that he wants us to take away any one lesson about it. I think he just wants us to think about it because it's one of those questions that you don't really ever get an answer to. Right. Right. Why are we here?

And that's why I think their religion teacher keeps asking them these questions and that's why they're using these different religions to try to answer them. And that's why he has them write this essay because we don't know.

Right. Like, uh, and I think maybe if you were coming up with a theme is that like, we don't know what happens after people are gone, but different people explain it in different ways or people have different ways of dealing with it or something like that, you know, I'm, I'm gonna swear in a way that I don't normally, but I love people who do so. So I'm just going to say it, I fucking love John Green.

I agree. Yes.

I, I love the depth of his writing and I love how he makes you think and, and I love the tightness of it that there's nothing like everything that happens is significant.

Yes. And I, this time I was really aware of the foreshadowing earlier um in the book and I don't want to give away exactly what that was without giving away. Like the big thing that happens.

But um there's a lot of beautiful foreshadowing. It's lovely to read it a second time and it is just noticed so many, so many different things.

Uh It makes me really want to go back in and read *The Fault in Our Stars* again because I, I loved that one a lot, but not a big re-reader because there are so many books to read and I'm slow.

Exactly. And, and I'm not either. I am not a big rereader, but there are books that I want to own. And this is why, because, because I want to be able to go back and reread them and, and I'm, I'm grateful to the two of you for um doing this podcast with me so that we have the opportunity, excuse me to go back and reread some beautiful works.

Mhm. So we were gonna move on then to the significance, uh some of the significance, you know, things that we got from the book or just digging into its significance a little deeper. And uh because we always want to go back to the text. And, um I had a question for us today, which was uh at, at a point in the book. Um The, there's a slumber party of sorts and Alaska suggests

that they play a game called Best Day, Worst Day where everyone tells the story of their best day. Uh It's a drinking game. So whoever's story is, you know, the the best everyone else has to drink, that person doesn't have to drink. Um And in so doing, uh she reveals something that becomes very important later on. So my question to you guys, if we can do this without, without spoiling the big event, um Why do you think? I mean, it seemed like a hard thing for her to say uh her story uh about her mom. Why do you think she came up with that game for people to play? What, what was her motivation there? Because they never really, it's never really discussed.

I thought she finally wanted to reveal the source of her guilt. I thought that it's been weighing on her for years that she felt partially responsible for her mother's death and she knew that no one would be able to match her worst day. But I think her motivation for playing this game was so that she could reveal it without just dropping it out of the blue. Right there, there has to be a reason for her bringing up such a traumatic event in a way though. I feel like, you know, she definitely kind of did a mic drop at the end. Yeah, she did. And it's almost like she wants to prove that her suffering is real. You know, like I, I'm suffering more, you know, I, I don't know, there just seemed almost something self aggrandizing in it. Yeah. I, I don't know if I saw it that way. I saw it. First of all, they were drinking. Um, and they'd already had a significant, or at least, I think Alaska had already had a significant amount of, a lot of, um, they started playing the game in order to slow down the drinking. Right. Right. Right. So she'd already had a significant amount of alcohol in her system by the time she came up with this, um, I feel like Alaska never wanted to be vulnerable and, you know, she's the one who said to Pudge at one point, Miles. Um, you know, suck it up, buttercup essentially is what she said. You know, we, there's no crying here and, yeah, life's hard and, and we know from the little bit that is revealed about Alaska throughout the story that, you know, she's come from some tough stuff. Um, we don't know what it is. We can guess, but we don't really know, but we know she's come from some tough stuff and she's tough as nails as, as a character. She's not gonna make herself vulnerable to anyone. And yet in this moment there's, I think a connection between, amongst all of the characters who are part of the said slumber party and she's drinking which lets her guard down a bit and there's almost like a purging because as I recall, there's also a literal purging that happens later on in that scene when the alcohol comes up and that she's too drunk to go into the woods to do it. So it's all right there in front of them. All I could think about was the smell. I'm like, yeah, you at least got to get away from where you're right. Right. But I found that to be very symbolic of the purging of, of her guilt. Um, uh, you know, I wish it had been purging. I don't think that she

gained a lot by saying it and maybe it was because nobody else really kind of knew how to respond. Well, and she's up until then she's built such a wall of, don't ask me, don't ask me and she's so moody. You know, they, they have all commented on her moodiness and, you know, they're just like, well, that's just how she is. You know, that's, that's our Alaska. That's how she is. Um, refresh my memory. We're, oh, when, when they were pulling their prank. Alaska had done something against, against plan. Yes. And she sent out more of those, uh, partner supports and, and the Colonel was mad almost in a way. Feel like, I don't know, it was a defense. It was like you guys don't think I'm deep, I don't think about stuff. I'm freaking deep. Listen to this. No. Um, or maybe it was in some kind of a, um, a way to explain herself a little bit. I don't know. It just occurred to me. Uh I'm exploring this idea as I'm speaking. So I haven't decided anything yet. I believe you both have passages from the book that we want to discuss. I realized we've digressed a lot and our episode's getting lengthy.

It is. Yeah. So um I'm gonna jump in first if that's all right with you, Alanna. Um Since the passage that I wanna mention is kind of earlier on in the book. Um and it's in my copy of the book, my edition, which is a paperback copy, it's on page 75. Um And it starts, I'll just start, I woke up half an hour later when she sat down on my bed, her butt against my hip, her underwear, her jeans, the comforter, my corduroys and my boxers between us. I thought five layers and yet I felt it the nervous warmth of touching a pale reflection of the fireworks of one mouth on another, but a reflection nonetheless. And in the almost, I love that. And in the almost of the moment I cared, at least enough, I wasn't sure whether I liked her and I doubted whether I could trust her, but I cared at least enough to try to find out her on my bed. Wide green eyes staring down at me, the enduring mystery of her sly, almost smirking smile, five layers between us. And that's just a beautiful example of John Green's writing where Alaska has sat down next to Pudge on his bed and you know, we already know um that he has a little crush on her and you know, she becomes his manic pixie dream girl as we've discussed or not as we've discussed. But um you decide and let us know. But um but that's, it's just so beautiful. It just gives you such a depth of who Miles the character is, but also who John Green is. This is not a gross, gross um over sexualized moment. It's a, it's just so beautifully tender and respectful and, and it hides, it highlights the importance of touch as opposed to sex, right? He's not thinking about, he does not mention sex at all. He or even wanting it. He just mentions the electricity of touch of touching. Yeah, and the, and the attraction. And I'm thinking of the, the love languages since I recently had a discussion of the love languages and, and the love language of touch is definitely one of those um and an important one I think. But, but yeah, it just anyway, so it, it,

you'll find the reader will find that, that um that description of how many layers are between um characters comes up again and again. And I think it's always, it's always him in Alaska. It is notably absent. I think I cannot swear because my memory is very, very bad, but I don't think it ever comes up with Lara the very, the very first time she, when she's on his lap, it does, it does, it's like only four layers, but for the most part, it's Alaska, right? But not exclusively. And that and that also I think is an interesting, an interesting observation. So um so I'll leave that there for um contemplation. But I it's just an incredible piece of writing.

Well, I thought we could end with the very last paragraph in the whole book. This is the final exam that Miles writes for his religion class. And the way he puts it is he wrote his way out of the labyrinth by writing this. And um at the very end, you know, we don't want to give away exactly what happens here, but it does seem like he is able to process what happened and find some peace. So he says, so I know she forgives me just as I forgive her. Thomas Edison's last words were, it's very beautiful over there. I don't know where there is, but I believe it's somewhere and I hope it's beautiful and I thought that was such a lovely way to end the book because it comes back to these big themes and ideas we were talking about earlier, forgiveness, hope the afterlife and him trying to process um what happened and to be able to move on for the future and to ultimately be ok with not knowing. I really like that.

Yeah, and there's, there's that sense of hope in there that that is just, yeah, I just John Green knows how to write a story. He does, he does. We love you, John Green. Thank you John Green.

Yes, that about, I think that about wraps it up for looking for Alaska. Um If you haven't caught on yet, we think there are far more pros than cons and encourage, encourage you to read along with us and we'd love your, your comments and thoughts on some of the the questions and uh themes and topics that we've discussed today. Um In the next two episodes, we will be discussing New Kid by Jerry Craft. Um So please uh think about leaving us a question or comment. Um You can visit us at the rogue librarians dot com or follow us on Instagram or Facebook at Rogues @roguelibrarianspod or on Twitter @RLibrarians if you're enjoying this podcast and we certainly hope you are. Please subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you find your podcast and please leave us a rating and review your ratings and reviews, help other people to find our podcast, um, as does spreading word of mouth. So if you listen and you think there's value in what we're doing, please tell people, um, we're trying to get

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