

Fear of Missing Out

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The novel “Fear of Missing Out” is set from the perspective of a 16-year old teenage girl from Boston named Astrid who has cancer. While she thought that she was in remission, she develops symptoms of her illness once again and she learns that her cancer is back. She has a recurring brain tumour called astrocytoma and is left with very few options, as chemotherapy is unlikely to work. She attends a conference of neuroscientists with her mother, hoping to be admitted to a trial study, but instead stumbles upon a display from a company in Arizona experimenting with cryopreservation. It would allow her to freeze her body and wake up some time in the future where there may be a cure available for her brain tumour. She becomes obsessed with this experimental technology and is determined to learn more. With the help of the Internet, some video blogging (vlogging) and crowdfunding, she is able to head off on a road trip with her boyfriend Mohit and her best friend Chloe to tour the facility in Arizona. Along the way, she visits her dad and his wife (as her parents are divorced).

Much of the novel is driven by Astrid’s fear of missing out. She is devastated by the thought that her premature death will mean she won’t have any more time to spend with her boyfriend, her best friend, her mother and so much more. Cryopreservation offers her hope and also a reason to road trip across the US with her loved ones and see sights she may never have another opportunity to experience. This novel is quite sad, as Astrid describes both the physical pains from her cancer and the mental suffering. She lists the many of the things that she will miss when she is gone, such as cheeseburgers, the view from the top of the Bunker Hill monument, the smell of sunscreen, Netflix, etc. It is both a coming of age story, as well as one that explores large questions around mortality and the choices that one has in the face of death.

What I liked most about this novel was Astrid’s distinct narrator voice and how it spins a unique take on the common “dying teenager” genre, with the addition of a futuristic technology. Readers who enjoy John Green novels and the “Fault in our Stars” will likely be drawn to this novel as well. It does a great job of exploring themes around love, friendship, death, and loss. What makes the novel most compelling is the focus on Astrid’s relationships (for instance, her relationship with her mother is very moving and it is clear she cares greatly for her). However, one aspect I was not as fond of was the relationship she had with Mohit. Mohit as a character seemed a bit self-centered, focusing on his saxophone, when Astrid had little time left. I would recommend this novel to readers 13+ because of the serious subject matter and the romantic relationship described. It is a classic YA novel which can be borrowed from the library.

Recommended titles:

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green

Six Months to Live by Lurlene McDaniel

Before I Die by Jenny Downham