

booklife

Debut novelist Young offers young readers a wild sense of wonder and adventure in this coming-of-age science fiction drama. At 16, Dayton Murdoch elevated himself through hard work to the rank of Survey pilot aboard the exploration ship he was born on, *Venture*. With only a handful of flying hours left until he earns a coveted Recon pilot designation, he finds his future bright. When *Venture*, supposedly still 4 years away from returning to Earth, undergoes an unexpectedly early re-entry, Dayton, his partner Zara, and the rest of the crew find themselves living in a very different world than the one they'd been living out amongst the stars.

What comes next is an exciting space-to-Earth coming-of-age story that relies on action to share a powerful message of adaptation and acceptance. Dayton is rudely introduced to Earth law and culture, stuck in Chuck Yeager High School until his 18th birthday. That means no more flying, and no more tight-knit camaraderie with his fellow pilots. The adjustment is difficult for the confident Dayton, who says, "A lot of you on the spacer side say I'm too much of an Earther. Then the Earthborn say I'm too much of a spacer." When his father is recalled to active service in space, Dayton finds he must contend with an aunt who has very different ideals than the ones he grew up with. To top everything off, he's head over heels for Allyson, a popular classmate.

With its stark focus on societal divides (with Griefer, neuros, and more), the novel shines a bright light on contemporary issues and plays on the classical literary themes of man vs self, man vs nature, and man vs other. The 1950's-esque plot calls back to Heinlen's Juveniles, and action-packed scenes will provide middle-grade readers with a delightful taste of science fiction without being overwhelmed by excessive character development.

Takeaway: Exciting coming-of-age SF story in space, on Earth, and inbetween.

Comparable Titles: Robert A. Heinlen's *Have Space Suit—Will Travel*, Jennifer L. Holm's *The Lion of Mars*.

Production grades

Cover: **A**

Design and typography: **A**

Illustrations: **N/A**

Editing: **B**

Marketing copy: **A**