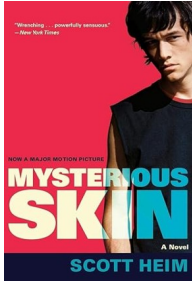




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Mysterious Skin By Scott Heim

Discussed January 2006

Characters (POV indicates there are chapters written in their point of view)

Brian Lackey - POV
Deborah Lackey (Brian's Mom, a guard at the local prison) - POV
Neil McCormic - POV
Ellen McCormic (Neil's Mom)
Coach Heider
Avalyn Friesen (alien abductee)
Wendy Peterson
Eric Preston - POV

Discussion Questions

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Would you consider this book a SF novel? What did you think about the UFO sighting in the first chapter with Brian, his sister, mother and her drunken friend? Do you think this influenced Brian?
3. When did you first realize that the story wasn't about alien abductions?
4. Why did Neil torture Steve Zepherelli? Why did he tell Wendy the first time he called her in fifth grade that he was Steve Zepherelli? Neil blows Zepherelli as a bribe not to tell, while telling Wendy what Coach had done to him. What does this say about Neil?
5. At this moment in the book, both Neil and Brian become men as witnessed by Wendy (Neil) and Deborah (Brian when his father leaves). What is the significance of this?
6. Discuss the transformation of Neil's perceptions of his abuse by Coach from the beginning to the end of the book. What were the stages of Brian's understanding of what happened to him, and how did he change? Are there parallels between the two boys' stories?

7. Avalyn talks about abductions, "The first time they take us we're tagged, they track us, and they come again and again. We're part of their experiments." Is abduction a good metaphor for child abuse? What do you think happened to Avalyn?
8. Avalyn separates Brian from others, tells him he is special and chosen, and that only Avalyn can understand what he's been through. Does Avalyn's manipulation of Brian mimic abuse? What about her attempt to have sex with Brian?
9. The book is divided into three parts: Blue (1981, 1983, 1987), Gray (Summer 1991), and White (Autumn-Winter 1991). Why did the author split things this way?
10. Discuss the differences in home life for Brian and Neil taking into account the mothers and the friends. What do you think about the reactions of those around the boys considering Brian's line later on where he says, "It's amazing what people know. They just never say anything, they deny it because they don't want to believe."
11. What does Neil's abstinence from sex for 29 days say about Neil when he first arrives in NYC? How does this play into his next series of exploits?
12. Discuss Neil's NYC run of sexual encounters before he comes home for Christmas. Does he come home for Brian?
13. Brian and Neil deal with the abuse in different ways. Are they healthy? Why don't they exhibit guilty feelings? Should they? Are they better off that they find their way to the truth on their own?
14. The tension in this novel builds right to the very last sentence. How do you feel about the ending? Would it have been different if told from Brian's point of view? How did the change in Neil's perspective at the end affect you? How do you think he sees Coach at the end?
15. Is Neil gay? Is Brian?
16. In the movie, Neil and Brian are found holding each other. In the book, they jump up from the couch as if caught at something. A nuance, yes, but which ending do you prefer?