

## Visions of the future

Imagining a bleak or frightening future world is not new. Fritz Lang made a silent movie about a futuristic city called *Metropolis* in 1927. Rich people live in the beautiful city, and the poor workers live under it. Five years later, Aldous Huxley wrote the novel *Brave New World*, which is set in London in the year 2540. In the novel human life is dominated and degraded by technology.

### Why are dystopian novels and movies so popular with young adults?

So why are dystopian novels and films popular today? Why have books like *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Maze Runner* been made into films? Judd Harker, a film critic, and Megan Coombes, an editor of young adult fiction, try to answer these questions.

MC: Why do young people like dystopian stories? One answer is that these stories look at what is going to happen in the future, and it is young people – not old people – who are going to live in that future. That's why they are interested in what might happen.

JH: Teenagers are growing up in a world that is getting warmer. Animal and plant species are dying out. Sea levels are rising. Things like that are unsettling. They are bound to raise worries about the future.

MC: *The Maze Runner* is about a damaged planet. A group of boys live in a place called The Glade, but the place starts to fall apart. Later, we find out that the whole Earth is falling apart.

JH: That story resonates with teenagers because it is about leaving the safe, predictable world of the Glade. It is a like leaving childhood. Teenagers must venture out into the scary adult world.

MC: Yes. The same thing happens in *The Fifth Wave*. After an alien attack, heroine Cassie has to face a harsh and unforgiving world. That world is the opposite of her secure childhood home.

JH: But I think these stories are not just about growing up. The adult worlds that the teenagers face are morally repellent. In *The Hunger Games* adults have created a society which exploits young people. The thing I like in these stories is that the young heroes refuse to accept the status quo. They rebel. Like Katniss Everdeen, the main character of *The Hunger Games*. She is taken to a big arena to fight and die. But even in that dog-eat-dog environment she finds a way to defy the rulers.

MC: And that's true in real life too. It's usually young people who change things. For example, young people are changing attitudes to the LGBT community.

JH: Yes. *Divergent* is about a society frightened of people who are different. Everyone must join a socially accepted group and follow its rules. If you are divergent, you are dangerous.

MC: I like the book's insight that we are all divergent. I remember feeling like a freak when I was a teenager. I felt like a fish out of water. I didn't belong anywhere. It never occurred to me that it was good to be different.

JH: I think dystopian fiction explores our fears and worries. It explores the dark side of life.

MC: So do you think this surge of dystopian books and movies is more than a passing fad?

JH: Yes. Dystopian fiction talks about problems like climate change, over-population, and exploitative media. As long as we have problems, we will have dystopian fiction.

MC: I agree. These stories show us what might happen if these global problems get worse.