

An astronaut in a white space suit with a gold visor is floating in space, arms outstretched. The background is a soft, pinkish-red gradient.

BOOK
CLUB
KIT

IN THE
QUICK
KATE
HOPE DAY

A Q&A WITH AUTHOR KATE HOPE DAY

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE THIS BOOK?

The book started with two seemingly disparate things, the idea of a novel based loosely on the plot of *Jane Eyre*, and the idea to set it in space. From the beginning, the heart of the project was June, not only her intelligence and her persistence but also the way she always seems to make things more difficult for herself. In that way she's similar to many of my favorite characters in literature, film, and television—the ones who are still present in my mind years after I first encountered them and who I go back to again and again. They are the characters who get in their own way, who create hardships for themselves simply by being who they are. They can't help it, and you love them and shake your head at them at the same time. For me, *Jane Eyre* is the quintessential example, but there are so many great ones: Becky Sharp, Lisbeth Salander, Arthur Less, *Fleabag*.

At the time I started writing *In the Quick*, my kids were obsessed with the International Space Station, so we were spending a lot of time watching videos of astronauts in their daily life up there—eating, bathing, doing science experiments, and performing space walks. I was drawn to setting the book in the physically demanding environment of space because I love to write active scenes, and because I wanted to explore the tension between the human body and the punishing physical conditions outside the Earth's atmosphere. I also liked the mind/body problem of the setting—the idea of characters who are driven by abstract scientific questions having to grapple with the intense physical challenges of zero gravity.

WAS WRITING YOUR SECOND NOVEL DIFFERENT THAN YOUR FIRST? IF SO, HOW?

I had very young children when I was writing my first novel,

If, Then. It took me six years and was written largely during my kids' nap times. It went through many, many revisions because of my time restraints and because I'd never written a novel and was learning as I went. By the time I started *In the Quick*, both my kids were in school or preschool. I also was under contract for the book and had a deadline, so the writing process was a lot quicker. But then the pandemic hit; I had finished edits on the book, but not copyedits and proofs. Suddenly, I felt like I was back to my old schedule, trying to complete my work while simultaneously supervising one kid doing remote school and homeschooling another.

I should also mention that the formal experience of writing these two books was very different. I think because *If, Then* has multiple points of view and takes place over a short period of time, I spent more time thinking about the ideas underpinning the book and the place it was set in than any one character. *In the Quick* is a first-person narrative and follows a single character over a span of eight years, so I had a deeper and more layered relationship with June as I was writing. Maybe because the novel opens with her at 12 years old, and because she shares some quirks with my own children, I also feel more protective of her than any other character I've written.

While *If, Then* and *In the Quick* are quite different, they have some common preoccupations. They are both concerned with science and scientific discovery, the tension between human beings and their physical environments, and the drive to understand the concrete world. They are both caught up with questions about the relationship between the human mind and the human body, how ideas can shape experience—and experience ideas. Both are

interested in exploring the power of human choice, and the capacity of human beings to change.

WHAT KINDS OF RESEARCH DID YOU DO? WHAT IS THE MOST SURPRISING THING YOU LEARNED?

In preparation for writing *In the Quick* I read a lot about the history of space travel and the U.S. and Russian space programs. I knew part of the book would be set in a scenario a lot like the International Space Station, so I watched YouTube videos from the ISS, read several memoirs by astronauts, and learned as much as I could about the fuel cells, gyroscopes, and water reclamation systems that run the station. But more important than the technology were the little details of how astronauts eat, sleep, go to the bathroom, and get along with each other in such a small space. I wanted to get the technical facts right in my book, but more importantly I wanted to know what it really *feels* like to live in space.

That's how I ended up going to Space Camp (yes, adults can go!). While I was there I gathered a lot of little details I needed for my book: what it was like to touch the controls of a real Space Shuttle, what it feels like to move around in a bulky space suit, even what the toilet on the ISS looks like up close. One of the things I got to do there was a simulated space walk in a suit, which involved being suspended from the ceiling by a metal cord 30 feet above a decommissioned NASA Shuttle. Despite my huge gloves and awkwardly tethered tools I was able to successfully "repair" a broken control panel! A lot of details from that experience made it into the novel: what my breath sounded like inside my helmet, the vertigo of trying to create force with a tool while hanging suspended and "weightless," and the almost euphoric feeling when I managed to complete the task.

HOW DID YOU WANT *IN THE QUICK* TO FEEL DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PORTRAYALS OF LIFE IN SPACE?

I'm interested in the contrast between typical or archetypal depictions of space (in fiction, television, and especially film)

and the actual realities of human life there. In the movies we see the shiny, white interiors of spacecraft, and striking images of astronauts in bright white suits floating serenely against the black backdrop of the universe. These images feel otherworldly and alien. But the real details of life on the ISS, for instance, are a lot dirtier and smellier than these depictions would have you believe.

When I started writing I really wanted to get at some of these nitty-gritty details in a way that would make the novel feel more viscerally real, more embodied, and at times more uncomfortable for the reader.

THE BOOK IS SET IN A FUTURISTIC WORLD THAT RESEMBLES OURS, BUT ALSO HAS MAJOR DIFFERENCES—LIKE THE INTENSITY AND YEARS-LONG TRAINING OF THE PETER REED SCHOOL, AND OF COURSE THE EXISTENCE OF THE PINK PLANET. WHY DID YOU MAKE THIS CHOICE?

It was important to me that *In the Quick* felt grounded in reality—in the physical details of human experience—but at the same time the boundaries of our own world were a little too narrow for the story I wanted to tell. So while I hope the concrete experience of the characters feels very real, and not so different from the reader's own experience, the world the characters inhabit has some key differences. I imagined a world where the U.S. space program continued developing at the pace set during the Cold War, and that some of the milestones NASA is still working toward (a second mission to the Moon, a mission to Mars) had been accomplished long before June was born. This difference made it possible to imagine a school dedicated to preparing students for jobs in space, and a space program that had the capacity to send a womaned mission as far as Saturn.

I'm definitely someone who can get sucked into research and get so involved reading about the Moon or Mars that I lose track of my main characters and what they want and need. The idea of the Pink Planet allowed me to let go of the specific facts of a real-life planet or moon, and focus on what this place means to June: how she associates it with her uncle and the unique relationship she had with him, and later, when she arrives there herself, the ways this place represents what she's been looking for her whole life, both intellectually and emotionally.

WHILE THE CHARACTERS ARE CREATING SOPHISTICATED TOOLS AND MACHINES, YOU DON'T BOG US DOWN WITH MATH OR DATA—INSTEAD, WE LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THE CREATIVE PROCESS FEELS, HOW JUNE PUTS THINGS TOGETHER AND TAKES THEM APART IN HER MIND, AND THE OFTEN LENGTHY PROCESS OF PROTOTYPING. CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT PRIORITIZING THE “ART” OF THESE SCENES OVER THE SCIENCE?

I'm really interested in thinking about scientific and philosophical concepts not as unchanging abstractions, but as ideas that originate with real human beings and evolve with collaboration between thinkers and over the course of time. But the way ideas come about is often so intangible, especially for intuitive, conceptual thinkers like June. I wanted to get at what it feels like to have a scientific epiphany—but focusing on the math or data wasn't going to get me there. Characters talking to each other at an entirely conceptual level didn't work either. As I revised, I found my way to a third option: visually depicting how June builds things in her mind, how she feels about these imaginary inventions, and what they spur her to do. To dramatize this, I needed the tools of literary art rather than science, like imagery, metaphor, and personification.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The story begins when June is a 12-year-old girl living with her aunt and cousin. What does June want more than anything? What did you hope for her as you were reading?
2. Why is it difficult for June to connect with the other students at the Peter Reed School for Space Preparation, or other astronauts on the Sundew? What gets in the way of her finding lasting friendships?
3. Why does the Inquiry explorer mean so much to June? How does its disappearance shape both June's life and the arc of the novel?
4. How would you describe June and James's relationship? Does June find what she's looking for in James?
5. Where do groundbreaking ideas come from—the mind of a solitary genius, or collaboration? How does *In the Quick* dramatize these questions?
6. What does “in the quick” mean? How does the word “quick” characterize June in multiple ways?
7. In a moment when many are experiencing hardship—challenges that wear us down and sap us of our hope, resilience, and creativity—there is a deep interest in stories of human perseverance. June is intelligent, resourceful, and above all else, persistent. She faces incredible challenges but doesn't give up. When in the novel does she persevere? Where do you think she gets the strength to keep trying even after she's failed? Have you faced similar challenges in your life? From where did you draw your strength?
8. The novel focuses a lot on the physical experience of life in space. How is this different from other depictions of space and astronauts in books or film?
9. Humans have always sought to stretch the limits of our bodies. How is the exploration of space the ultimate challenge for the human body? How does *In the Quick* explore the tension between our ambitions and physical limitations? Have you had an experience in your life when your aspirations strained those limits?

10. The next great hurdles in space travel—a mission to Mars or beyond—will require incredible sacrifices from astronauts. For example, a mission to Mars might require that some astronauts never return to Earth. Do you believe human beings belong that far from Earth? Is it right to ask astronauts to risk their lives for scientific knowledge that could benefit our planet as a whole? Is it healthy—mentally and physically—for an astronaut to want to go on such a mission?
11. How does June change over the course of the novel? What are her key moments of learning and transformation? Which of these moments do you identify with most?
12. If you've read *Jane Eyre*, what connections did you see between the two novels? How are Jane and June similar?
13. What has June gained by the end of the book? What have you gained as a reader?

RECIPE: ASTRONAUT ICE CREAM Makes 15 servings

Get a taste of space—and return to a childhood field trip favorite—with this delicious astronaut ice cream recipe.

INGREDIENTS

4 large egg whites, at room temperature

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon flavoring extract (not oil), like vanilla (reduce amount for more concentrated extracts, like peppermint)

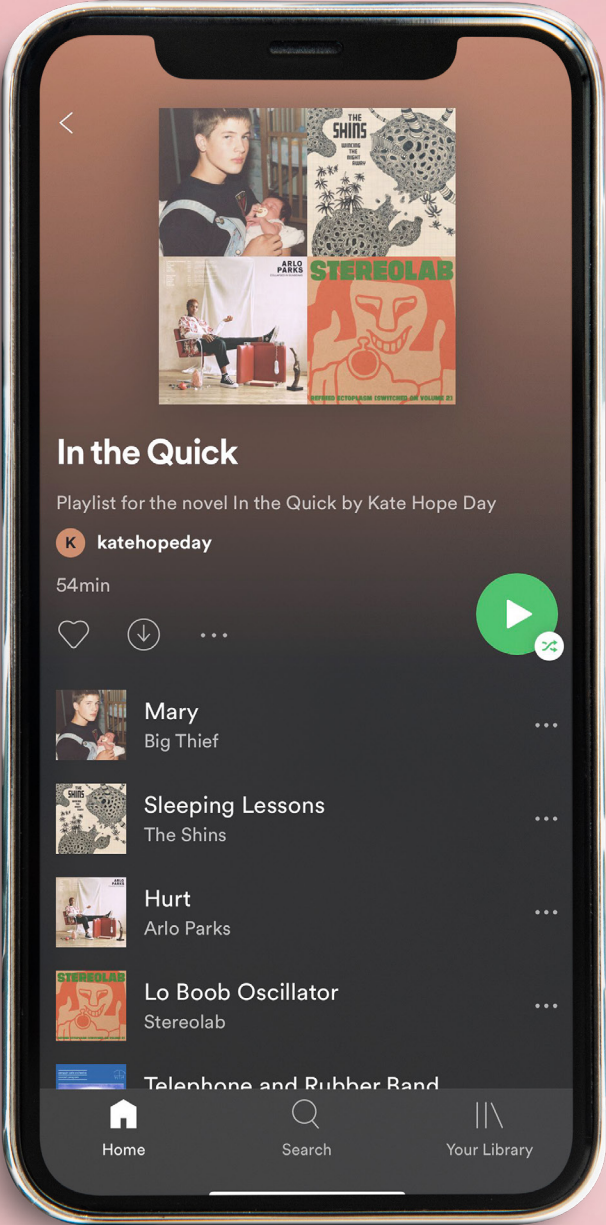
Gel food coloring (optional)

1¾ oz. cookie scoop

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Position the racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and preheat to 200°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Using an electric mixer, beat the egg whites in a large bowl at medium-low speed until just frothy, about 45 seconds. Add the cream of tartar. Increase the speed to medium-high, and beat the egg whites until they are white and thick (the consistency of shaving cream), about 2 minutes. Slowly sprinkle in the sugar and flavoring extract, beating until incorporated. Then beat the whites until they form stiff peaks. (Turn the beater upside down: if the peaks do not droop, they are ready.)
3. Drop individual meringues onto the parchment-lined baking sheet using a cookie scoop. To keep meringue from sticking, dip the scoop in room temperature water and shake off excess. Scoop a healthy heaping of meringue mixture (roughly 1 tablespoon over the top), and invert it onto the baking sheet. The meringue should balloon out over the side, resembling an old-fashioned scoop of ice cream. Smooth any peaks using a spoon dipped in water.
4. Bake for 2 hours, let cool, and serve.

IN THE QUICK PLAYLIST



CLICK HERE TO PLAY

SPACE CAMP DIARY DAY 2

5:30 AM - 6:30 AM: Wake up and get ready at my hotel. I'm pretty tired because we had a full afternoon and evening of lectures, activities, and mission preparation when I arrived at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama yesterday, and I didn't get to bed before midnight. I grab my backpack, which holds my Space Camp manual and the notebook I've been using to write down details I could use in the current draft of my novel *In the Quick*. I realize with panic that the Starbucks in the hotel lobby isn't open yet and ask my cab driver to stop somewhere to get coffee on the way to campus.

7:00 AM - 8:00 AM: Breakfast with my Frontier crew. We are a group of ten adult campers, widely varying in age, background, and the reasons we've come to Space Camp. For a lot of the people attending it's been on their bucket list for a long time and several others got it as a gift from their spouse. There is a woman in attendance who asked for Space Camp as a retirement gift, and she convinced her brother to come with her (even though he didn't have any interest in space himself). There is also a reporter from the TV network Telemundo who is doing a story about Space Camp, and he has brought along a cameraman. Some of my crew know a lot about aviation and aeronautics, engineering, or computing, because they work or worked in those fields. Some of us (like me!) have very little firsthand knowledge of the kinds of things we are going to learn about today.

Our crew leader Erin "Clover" Shay (she's like a camp counselor but with an encyclopedic knowledge of space history and aeronautical engineering) gives us our schedule for the day and we read it while we eat our cafeteria breakfasts. Most of my crew look tired and a little wary of what they've gotten themselves into. Our schedule for the day is packed until 9:30 p.m., with breaks only for lunch and dinner.

9:00 AM-10:00 AM: Launch the model rockets we constructed in small groups the day before. My group's rocket doesn't go that high in the air, but it doesn't explode like some others do. A win!

10:00 AM - 11:00 AM: Teambuilding activity involving planks of wood and a pretend scenario in which the ground is lava. I am not very good at this.

11:00 AM - 11:30 PM: Only a half hour break for lunch. I'm kind of dragging and start scanning our schedule for a coffee break.

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM: We receive our binders for our first simulated mission, which is to keep four members of our crew alive inside a replica of the International Space Station. I'm part of the group in Mission Control. We have a half hour to prepare; the binders are thick and I've barely wrapped my mind around what we need to do when it's time to start. We do all right with the first four items on our checklist. We are able to communicate with the crew in the ISS, and they complete the first part of their mission. But then a simulated emergency happens. The ISS is losing oxygen and we have to figure out how to stop the leak. In mission control we flip back and forth in our binders, trying hard to keep the crew alive, but they die of oxygen deprivation before we can direct them to repair the leak.

1:00 PM - 1:30 PM: It's time for a mission debrief. I'm surprised when I look at my watch and see that the mission took only an hour. It was intense and a lot harder than I thought it was going to be. I am sweaty and feel like I've run a marathon. Those of us in mission

control apologize to the crew in the ISS for killing them and we all laugh a little. Erin talks with us about what we did right and what we could have done differently, and we feel a little better.

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM: Next up we have practice time in the multi-axis trainer and moonwalk simulator. The multi-axis trainer is like being strapped inside a gyroscope and spun really fast in every direction. I almost immediately start to feel sick and only last a few minutes inside it, but I do better with the Moonwalk simulator. With a harness attached to the ceiling I sort of half float, half hop across the floor in a way that's meant to feel like walking on the Moon.

2:30 PM - 3:30 PM: Tour of the rockets housed in the U.S. Space & Rocket Center museum with an engineer who worked on some of them. This feels like a break after so much activity today. It's also peaceful to be in this hushed, cathedral-like space full of the rockets that sent astronauts to the Moon.

3:30 PM - 5:30 PM: It's time for our second mission, which for my group is a spacewalk. This is the part of Space Camp I've been looking forward to the most. I'm thrilled to be chosen as the astronaut who will suit up and perform a simulated repair of a broken control panel on a decommissioned NASA shuttle. To simulate zero gravity I'll be suspended thirty feet from the ground by a metal cord. My heart is beating really hard as I pull on my bulky suit, gloves, and helmet. My breath is loud. I look at my crewmembers, far below me, and push off into the air. It's awkward at first. My senses are muffled by my thick helmet and heavy gloves; it's strange to move in mid-air without my feet under me. But I figure it out; I sort of half crawl, half swim the length of the shuttle, and manage to take the wrench that's Velcroed to my suit, keep ahold of it, and complete the repair. I have an almost euphoric feeling as I swim back.

5:30 PM - 6:00 PM: A half hour to tour the rest of the museum. I take hundreds of pictures of equipment that was used on the ISS—the sleeping sacks, the water reclamation unit, the galley, the toilet. I start to get excited about incorporating these details into my current draft of *In the Quick*, along with the experience of my spacewalk.

6:00 PM - 7:00 PM: Dinner. We try to get Erin to let us go somewhere with alcohol (the Space Camp campus is dry) so we can celebrate our successful missions, but she says we don't have time before our next activity. Over dinner I tell some of my team members about my spacewalk and how I plan to incorporate the experience into the novel I'm writing, and I take notes while they tell me the most interesting details from their own missions that afternoon.

7:00 PM - 8:00 PM: We still need to complete a small group challenge to construct a heat shield out of various household items, with the goal of protecting the "space capsule" within. None of the people in my group have aeronautics or engineering experience, but we have fun choosing the materials and creating the heat shield. Once we're done Erin takes the capsules outside to test their shields with a welding torch. I'm still on such a high from my successful spacewalk that I don't mind when our capsule almost immediately erupts in flames.

8:00 PM - 9:00 PM: The frontier crew convinces Erin to let us do our mission debrief across the street at a hotel that serves alcohol. Everyone is exhausted but happy. We toast Erin and the team whose heat shield lasted the longest.

9:30 PM: I go back to my hotel to get some sleep before I need to be up to do it all over again, starting at 7 a.m.