

Red Star Rebels

By Amie Kaufman



From the NYT bestselling co-author of *Illuminae* and *Aurora Rising* comes a high-stakes, high-chemistry sci-fi romp filled with witty banter and clever high jinks about a stowaway girl and the richest boy in the galaxy, racing the clock to outwit a gang of mercenaries.

RECOMMENDED FOR

12–18 (Lower and Upper Secondary)

THEMES

Space, adventure, romance, privilege, loyalty and betrayal

ISBN (AUS)

9781761182556



SYNOPSIS

It's 2067, and the Graves family has transformed Mars from a lifeless rock into a chaotic patchwork of settlements. You can buy a one-way ticket to a new life – if you're rich.

Enter Hunter Graves: handsome, ambitious, and with spectacularly bad timing. He shows up unannounced at the United Nations base just as an emergency evacuation sends everyone scurrying for safety. And he's left behind. Uh-oh.

Also stranded: Cleo, a sharp-tongued stowaway with no intention of dying today, and even less patience for overconfident trust fund boys. But the enemy of your enemy is the jerk who might just help you survive, so here we are.

Now, Hunter and Cleo have one shot to stop the explosion, escape alive, and deal with the inconvenient fact that they're falling for each other.

The clock is ticking.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR ON SUBSTACK

'Back in 2016, on a visit to NASA, I ended up talking to some scientists and engineers about Martian dirt. As one does, in a perfectly normal way. It's called regolith, and it's so much lighter than Earth dirt. More like talcum powder. It hangs in the air, and the dust storms can completely wipe out visibility. I started wondering what kind of things you could get up to, when nobody could see.

'I've done a lot of thinking in the years since about what's going to happen as we head to the stars. Do we go together, "for all mankind", or do we let rich individuals and big corporations slap their logos on the nearest planets and call it progress? This question feels ten times more relevant after watching what rich individuals got up to in 2025.

'Sci-fi is about taking today's questions and then heading into the future to see how various answers will turn out. *Red Star Rebels* is my answer to what happens if we let money and power lead the way. My choice of characters was influenced by that lens.

‘So, we have the grandson of the man who settled Mars – a literal billionaire who has everything money can buy (except healthy family relationships, alas). And we have a girl who stowed away and came to Mars illegally, on the run from some friendly folks who wanted to break her kneecaps. They each represent what the other dislikes the most – but when they’re trapped together at a base and hostile mercenaries start to arrive, they’ll have to work together. Feelings then may or may not occur. (I’m kidding, it’s me, there are so many feelings.)

‘This book was so much fun to write. The super-compressed timeline (the whole thing takes place in just eight hours) meant that although the characters never really have time to process their emotions, or make good choices, the challenge I set for myself was to make sure that my reader still felt the story deeply.’

Amie Kaufman

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amie Kaufman is a *New York Times*, *USA Today* and internationally bestselling author of science fiction and fantasy. Her multi-award-winning work has been translated into nearly thirty languages, and has been described as ‘a game-changer’ (*Shelf Awareness*), ‘stylistically mesmerising’ (*Publishers Weekly*) and ‘out-of-this-world awesome’ (*Kirkus*). Several of her series are currently in development for film and TV. Raised in Australia and occasionally Ireland, Amie has degrees in history, literature, law and conflict resolution, and is currently undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing. She is the host of the podcast *Amie Kaufman on Writing* and the co-

host of *Pub Dates* with Kate J Armstrong. Amie lives by the sea in Melbourne, Australia with her family and an extremely large personal library. You can keep up with all Amie’s news and new releases by signing up for her newsletter at amiekaufman.com.



IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the Timeline create the mood and setting for the novel to come?
- Why do you think Amie Kaufman chose to start every chapter with an exact time *remaining*? What does the use of the word '*remaining*' suggest here and why might it be more effective than using '*8 hours to go*'?
- What expectations does a countdown create for the reader, and how does it encourage them to read the novel differently from a story without a fixed time limit?
- If the purpose of an opening chapter is to draw the reader into the story and make them want to read on, how would you rate this chapter, and why did you assign that rating?
- How would you describe the tone of the first chapter? Does this tone continue when we are introduced to Cleo in Chapter 2?
- Define the terms 'dual narrative' and 'omniscient narrative'. Why do you think Amie Kaufman chose to use a dual narrative in *Red Star Rebels*? How might the story have differed if she had used an omniscient narrative? Which narrative do you prefer to read in general? If you had to choose to read *Red Star Rebels* from only one POV, whose would it be Hunter or Cleo's, and why?
- Compile a character profile for Hunter and Cleo. Note what we discover about each when they first appear in the story, and what we discover about each as the story progresses. Do they end up sharing more similarities than differences in terms of their world view? Did you relate to one character more than the other?
- Would you say that Amie Kaufman constructs an underdog narrative in *Red Star Rebels*? Why do you think this form of narrative is so popular in YA novels?

Discussion Questions

- Amie Kaufman says, 'Sci-fi is about taking today's questions and then heading into the future to see how various answers will turn out. *Red Star Rebels* is my answer to what happens if we let money and power lead the way. My choice of characters was influenced by that lens.'
- Hunter describes the United Nations-controlled Pax compound as '*...all shabby, no chic – buried underground for cheaper radiation shielding, and apparently held together with spit and good luck*' (page 10) and the Graves UP compound as, '*... all gleaming metal and sleek*

white lines' (page 9). What do you think Amie Kaufman might be saying about fairness and democracy when private wealth is more powerful than public organisations like the United Nations?

- Hunter also comments that the United Nations comes off '*...like a tired parent who's going to turn this planet around this minute if these kids – these countries, these corporations – don't quit pulling their sister's hair. Except none of the kids are listening.*' (page 10). Do you think this might be a fair description of how the United Nations is seen today? Can you give any specific examples of real-world events that might have influenced Amie Kaufman here?
- What meanings or associations do the names *Pax* and *GravesUP* carry, and how do these names help the reader understand the contrast between the UN's and the Graves family's motivations to settle on Mars?
- '*My grandfather Michael Graves was a visionary who built a pile of businesses, ...Then we'll talk about whether their kind can contribute.*' (pages 61–62). Who do you think Amie Kaufman might have been thinking of when she wrote about Michael Graves, and why do you think that?
- '*Mars For All says Mars should be open to more people. They think corporations and countries should have to sponsor more people who can't self-fund...If maybe we should look for ways to broaden the criteria for getting a seat on a ship. That maybe there was talent we were missing. Ways that everyday people help create the culture of a place...*' (pages 84–85). In what way does this excerpt reflect real-world debates about privilege, access and fairness in immigration policies, and how does it show the potential of people who might be overlooked under restrictive systems?
- "*Wasting what they've got," she replies. "These are resource rich areas, and we can extract a lot more value from them than these little operations..." This is the argument we've been having about Mars since before Grandpa Michael's time. Resources are scarce. Sites like that have to go to the ones who can make the most of them.*' (pages 202–203). What connections can you make between the way resources on Mars are being claimed in the book and historical examples of colonialism on Earth?
- Do you think that settling on Mars is a worthwhile project for mankind?



Just for Fun

- Who would you cast in a movie adaptation of *Red Star Rebels*?
- If you could ask Marguerite Graves three questions, what would they be?
- If you were travelling from Earth to the Pax station for an extended period of time, what five things would you take with you?
- What do you think would happen to Cleo and Hunter in a sequel to *Red Star Rebels*?