



Understanding the Stars

X. Culletto

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Between her father's terminal disease, high school graduation, and a job delivering pizza, Alexandra Blackwood's life is complicated enough. But when she leaves on another routine delivery and meets Ronan, a handsome stranger with an alien-entangled past, life goes from complicated to perilous. He warns that she's been the unwitting victim of an alien experiment gone wrong and sets out to help her escape looming abduction, and maybe win her heart.

Understanding the Stars Details

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From Reader Review Understanding the Stars for online ebook

Leo McBride says

I wasn't quite sure where things were going with this book at the start - which begins at a fairly slow pace. Hold on to your hats, though, things speed up pretty quickly once the introductions are done!

Alex is a pizza delivery girl whose whole world is about to change. She finds herself sent on a pizza drop that will end up changing her life... and changing everything she knows. The delivery brings her to meet Ronan for the first time, who reveals to her that she has been being observed by an alien civilisation - and that another alien race is coming for the technology, with her life forfeit if they get hold of it.

Caught in the middle of these alien rivals, and with the CIA getting in on the act, Alex and the handsome Ronan fight to find a way to avoid the alien menace - while falling in love along the way.

I honestly wasn't sure I'd be keen on this book to begin with, but it really grew on me the more I read. There are some really poignant moments in here, especially involving Alex's family.

Alex seems to take the world-changing revelations a little too much in her stride - but that aside, this is a delightful YA novel, which with its mix of alien cultures and human romance reminded me of the likes of Stephanie Meyer's *The Host*.

I tip my hat to author Xela Culletto, for confounding my expectations.

Faith Jones says

Understanding the Stars is to science fiction what *Twilight* is to horror. What I mean by that is you take a genre, any genre, describe a normal female student protagonist who would have had an ordinary life (this one delivers pizzas), then introduce a fantasy boyfriend figure who is fully immersed in a reality hidden from our own. The next stage is obvious, as boy draws girl in, her awareness increases, they get chased a lot and he demonstrates his protective qualities, he's hunky but sensitive, then admits his undying love and proves it by sacrificing his future, or life, for hers. It's a dream, fantasy dating, but this might be the first time I've seen this transferrable outline in a sci-fi setting. Generally, you have to admit that it is a very successful angle, with a huge potential audience of teenagers who'd queue up to date a bf with alien tech. It's fun, it's fantasy and, uh, then the girl lands kicking on the vivisection table.

Don't worry, there are a lot of last minute escapes, nothing horrific or off-putting within and only one human gets turned inside out. It's hard to feel sorry for all of the aliens who get zapped by the CIA but it would be a mistake to presume the CIA are the heroes either, as humans and aliens are all fairly flawed and compromised in this story. Generally, there are three races and two kids are getting bounced around between them.

In fiction, you've got to have a scary plot element for the characters to run from (and ultimately defeat), otherwise you'd never see your heroes panting, ripping their clothes and showing their full potential. The test of fitness is all. However, there are obvious cultural influences in the history of reports of contact with aliens, particularly surrounding abduction. People who have reported being snatched by aliens and operated on, dissected etc, are almost exclusively all from the USA. Other nationals report abduction but without this element. The British report polite manners and conversation, while Brazilians report abduction followed by inter-species copulation and the French report aliens who demand to worship French culture. Therefore, I'd see going under the scalpel as a signal that these themes are set not by supra-geographic extra terrestrial life but by ordinary terrestrial suggestion. If the aliens had wanted to do something else, something completely original for a change, that would have been more impressive.

The reason why the girl is important to the aliens, the author weaving the fantasy into her body, is that she's been tagged some years previously and that is not only evidence but rival aliens are interested in acquiring it too. This gives rise to the kidnap and dissection scenario, which suddenly becomes essential to the plot, and the scenario also has a voyeuristic thing going on where the boy can spy on the girl's life by seeing everything she sees; imagine a camera on an eagle, except this one mostly zooms in on pizzas. Yum.

What isn't essential and I don't think ever works well is the baddies persuading a victim by laying out their point of view and then asking for approval to do something nasty, which they're going to do anyway, then saying things which rile the victim and force them to fight back, which is surely counter-productive? If they are an advanced sentient species, why would they not take the most clean and direct route, i.e. laughing gas, pop the human down and get out the tool kit? Winding them up is just stupid. Then again, perhaps that's how the author demonstrates which species has morality on their side. Still, that jarred a little, although I can see the writer wanted to make the reader sympathetic to them and then go for the big reveal. Still, why go to all the trouble of A if you're just going to reverse all the good work with B and the listener will be dead in five minutes anyway so it's pointless?

Did I like the story? Yes, it was a good yarn and bubbled along in an easy going kind of way. It feels like the introduction to a series, presumably also in the young adult style. Older readers won't get as much from it if they're not into the first kiss stuff as it could benefit from a big idea or two, maybe a funny situation, insightful lines or a unforeseen surprise of some kind. I know it is dissimilar but War of the Worlds, for example, had humans outclassed all of the way through and then bacteria defeat the aliens, which I bet no one saw coming. In this case, the aliens gather knowledge seemingly for knowledge's sake. So, what's the real reason for that? They withhold knowledge. Why? This, to me, also suggests more books in the series to build the opera. That's it really – this book is like two or three instruments playing and establishing a catchy motif but you can see a fuller orchestra waiting patiently for their turn behind them. When the steady theme has been set by this book, not over-reaching, presumably the more complicated development follows in book two? Xela Culletto has constructed space in this opening adventure and now needs to ignite a few stars.

Bradley Spoon says

I was given this book from Audiobookworm Promotions, as I am a part of the Book Tour for X. Culletto's Understanding the Stars.

I was so excited to start this book. The summary hooked me and caused me to be invested into the story right away. When I began the audiobook, the plot was so quick--so much so that I felt swooped up and couldn't put it down!

I listened to the audiobook version, narrated by Lori Prince. I enjoyed this narrator. She had such positive intent in providing concrete and distinct character voices that really led the story further along.

One flaw of the narrator was sometimes when reading the "bad alien" dialogue, she sounds more pressured and the accent went in and out. At times, I thought she straining her voice too much.

Another minor flaw, for me, was the direction of the story. At times, I found it exhausting to be going back and forth with Alex--one minute shes being chased, the next minute she's abducted, the next minute she's saved, the next minute she's having a "nice day with mom." Not to mention several tragic things happen to Alex during her time in the novel, but none of those things are fully developed. I wish the audiobook was longer so that the author could have had more time to work out any slight plot holes the book may have had.

Overall, I really enjoyed the rest of the story. I like its originality and romance aspect to it. This is why I'm sticking with my 4 star rating. I hope there is a follow up!

Check out a more detailed review of this book on June 5th when @AudioShelfMe (twitter) releases this episode feat. This book to the world!!!! <http://AudioShelf.me>

Bibliophile Johnson says

Understanding the Stars is an enchanting novel that does a nice job of merging fiction and reality in an artistic manner that left me excited to return to the novel each day to find out how Alex would deal with her growing predicament. Culetto begins the novel demonstrating her skill at conveying the competing thoughts of a teenager, Alex, who is dealing not only with the heart-rending events at home with the illness of her father, but also with an emerging romance with a sophisticated and handsome boy named Ronan. However, the book rises to an entirely new level as the author vividly describes several alien races who begin to contact Alex. There are imaginative elements of science fiction added to the adventure as Alex gains knowledge of these other races, their capabilities, and exactly why they are so interested in her. I hope this will be the first in a series where Culetto can continue to showcase her writing skills with her captivating characters.

Najdat AlSoufi says

A beautiful, original, intelligent Sci-fiction/young adult debut novel.

The story was really well written. the introduction of the different characters was very well done, giving you enough information about what you need to know without making you get bored with irrelevant detailed (I found that to be very smart considering the fact that the book has different species from different origins who have their own colliding interests)

The beginning of the story is really remarkable, I am into Sci-fiction but not really into young adult books, which made me not very sure about it, still, the book starts off really well which helped me to go on and finish the whole thing.

In the middle of the novel, the story takes a different turn to explore an incident that the main character was dealing with. This part of the book is not directly related to the main story, but it's somehow helpful as it explains why the main character chooses to make certain decisions later on.

It's interesting how the writer created an interesting and original story about Aliens in a way that has not been approached before. I find this book worth reading and I am looking forward to reading the Xela's next work.

The Audiobook is narrated by Lori Prince, I consider it to be an excellent performance. Lori actually surprised me with the many different voices of different species that she performed very well in a convincing way. I considered it to be one of the better audiobook's narratives I have listed to recently. Definitely worth checking.

Dale Rutter says

This book was about a girl growing up in a teenage fashion and trying to graduate school but then her life is interrupted by aliens who have been monitoring her without her knowing. Her life is turned upside down.

I enjoyed the writing in this book, it flowed beautifully and really painted the scene. The plot is quick paced and draws you straight into it from page one and plus there is sci-if which I'm a sucker for so I enjoyed it thoroughly!

Overall, a great book with great characters and a lot of fun to read. I look forward to the authors next book.

Justin says

Alex is a normal young girl working hard at a local pizza shop, when the man of her dreams drops by. Unfortunately for her while he is tall, dark and handsome he is not a man, while he looks human he has just spent most of his life in the company of a race of highly sophisticated aliens. Now that their observation of earth has been completed and another, more vicious, alien race has taken an interest in the technology of the watchers, they have decided to flee.

Now for Alex this means nothing until she finds out that the man who peaked her interest has also been watching her for most of her life too. So, once she finds out that he's not leaving with the others and instead has decided to stay on earth and protect her from the invaders and worse. She can't help but be both attracted to her saviour and frightened at just what his presence means.

I enjoyed reading this book, it is well written and the characters are interesting and interact well together. The plot starts slow but quickly picks up as the action starts up, with several slower sections in between to catch your breath.

The book does not get bogged down with world building or the heavy use of too many "alien technologies" so is easy to follow and keep everything that happens straight in your head.

The only thing I personally would have liked to see was some more details around some of the action scenes. They started well, but concluded so quickly as you moved onto the next scene.

I recommend this book for people who like a nice drama and romance story wrapped in alien science fiction. A good afternoon read

Jess says

*** I listened to the audiobook version

This book starts by introducing us to Alex, your average high school girl working a crappy pizza delivery job that leads her down the path of discovering the reality of aliens and her strange and twisted history and future with them. I loved Alex and her dry sense of humor and just the way she responds to situations both in her head and physically. She is pragmatic and a realist and she struggles to find balance between the logical and her feelings. She is forced to make a lot of judgement calls, dealing with issues of ethics and morals, what is right, wrong or mostly "the least wrong" solution.

Ronan is completely enthralled and mesmerized by Alex and the intimate relationship they have reminded me of Twilight. A love full of gravity that's hard to comprehend but like a fairytale we romantics love to

indulge in.

I loved the reader. She definitely understands the main character. I thought it was fun the way she did unique voices for all the characters and really possessed their interesting quirks. The only thing that bothered me was her voice for Ronan. It was really hard at times to get past it, but luckily the writing and the voice for Alex made up for it and I stuck with the story.

Would I recommend others to read/listen? definitely yes. Alex is a great character and I just enjoyed following her adventure...

PS:

I'm dying to know more about the aliens. I would love a prequel or off shoot story to give more of that awesomeness.

PSS:

There is a twist you won't want to miss.

Kay Kuever says

So, being the voracious science fiction reader that I am, I've often found myself closing a book, sighing and telling my husband that I wish aliens would come visit me, or I wished that when we grew old I could go fight in space in my own Old Man's War. Often these musings aren't asked for by my husband, but he can deal. When it came to Understanding the Stars though, holy coyote, I am so good with this never happening to me. I really could do without one day finding out that I have some mystery alien technology stuck in my brain that if removed will kill me and OH! BT DUBBS, aliens are totally trying to find me so they can do just that.

You know, Alex takes the news pretty amazingly that her life is very much in danger. If that was me? Oh, I'd be the crazy person flapping their arms around like wings and running in a circle trying to figure out what the actual hell I'm going to do to get my ass out of this mess. Of course, I may have been a bit more calm about the situation if I was told this by some hot dude. Though, trust, I would have bitch slapped the crap out of him first. We can't all be Alex.

I really loved how fast paced Understanding the Stars was. Every moment I had to take a breather and try to think my own way out of the situation for Alex, she was getting herself into more trouble. It's not like she really had any choice, but she takes it in stride and goes with the flow, even being brave enough to straight up lie her pants off to aliens keen on killing her. Girl has got some steel balls.

For as fast paced as the story was though, I found her relationship with Ronan extremely believable. There was a slow smolder about them that I loved. While it was clear that he was incredibly important to her by the end of the book, she never quite lost her mind about the romance.

Lori Prince is an amazing narrator. I really loved the voice that she used for Ronan, she was able to convey a tone that was both human and alien enough at the same time. Her speech patterns really made me believe that English wasn't Ronan's first language.

I really loved this story. It was a captivating, quick read that was out of this world. Not to give too much away, there was a tidbit at the very end that had me rewinding my audiobook and going "IS THERE GOING TO BE A NEXT BOOK?!" So, Xela, I'm going to need an answer to that, please and thank you.

Stjepan Cobets says

My rating for the book is 3.6

As I read the book, at times I had the feeling that the action is much faster than would be expected. The main character Alex in certain moments decline in problems without thinking and so has Alex created problems for which she knew that she alone cannot solve. I feel as if the writer at times forced the action, although perhaps a little more should develop her character to act a lot easier to act on its own untangling. With a bit of profiling, the two main characters Alex and Ronan could be a lot more to achieve. The main story is solid but in my opinion could be further expanded, strengthen the relationship between the two main characters, because there is enough space to do it, but that's just my opinion. The premise of the book itself is very good and I like that. Alex has the age of eighteen years, when not at school she works at a pizzeria and drives away pizzas if someone ordered to the house. With one orders she must go into a house that is otherwise outside the neighborhood where she works, and there she meets a beautiful young man Ronan. But what she does not know, he was not an ordinary young man, and soon her life goes by on way which she had not even dreamed of. Ronan is not from Earth, soon Alex's life will be in danger, and only he can help her. All in all, this is a solid sci-fi book and I recommend to fan of the sci-fi genre.

"I received a free copy from the author without an obligation to review."

Julie says

I received this audiobook as part of my participation in a blog tour with Audiobookworm Promotions. The tour is being sponsored by Xela Culletto. The gifting of this audiobook did not affect my opinion of it.

Understanding the Stars is a sci-fi YA adventure, where our main character is literally on the run from aliens. Due to circumstances beyond her control and because an alien species selected her as one of their test subjects, another alien species wants to snatch her and cut some tech out of her head. Fun times. Not.

Alex is a spunky teen who's about to graduate high school when her life gets super scary super fast. Her life isn't all happy sunshine and rainbows with a father dying of the big C and her in danger of having her head cut open. But she doesn't hide from her troubles and looks danger right in the face (er, tentacles?) and stands up for herself and others around her. That's what makes Alex a character you can really get behind and root for.

The plot is fast-paced and there is even a bit of a romance, though not super developed in light of all the running from aliens. I kind of liked our male character, but the focus was definitely on Alex so I can't say I got to know Ronan that well.

The audio narration was excellent. I really appreciated all the creepy sounding voices for the aliens, which really upped their scary and grossness factor. I liked the intonations and how Alex really did sound like a teenage girl with the sentences that sound like a question and abrupt replies. This really helped the story be more believable and the character easier to connect with while the crazy plot was happening to her.

Overall a good read for alien abduction and sci-fi fans.

Elena Alvarez Dosil says

I received this audiobook as part of my participation in a blog tour with Audiobookworm Promotions. The tour is being sponsored by Xela Culletto. The gifting of this audiobook did not affect my opinion of it.

Alexandra Blackwood is just a normal teenage girl on her last year of high school, and she works part time delivering pizzas. During one of her errands she meets a mysterious man who seems to eye her with what she interprets as fondness. Later on she discovers the he is a descendant of some ancient people taken from Earth by aliens thousands of years ago. They are doing some research on Earthlings, and this man has been watching Alex very closely for the last three years. But something goes wrong and both have to escape from an imminent danger.

I found the premises of this story very interesting, and I was decided to plunge into it right away. It is an easy listen and fast paced book. Sometimes too much. I missed some descriptions and introductions to new places. It was like 'Alex is here, and then she was there'. I think it would have helped to create the right atmosphere if this part would have been more polished.

The same happens with characters. They are not very developed, and what we know from them is very little. I also missed descriptions here, since I did not find out until I was half way through the book that Ronan was also eighteen. We get a couple of details when we first meet him, but from this brief description I would have guessed he was much older. He was described as a man, but I would have called him a boy, like Alex was a girl.

I was bothered by how perfect Alex was. It is not that we get a lot of information about her, but everything was so perfect that it was unrealistic. Alex's relationship with her parents did not ring true either. She came and went as she pleased and her mother did not have a lot to say about it. I just missed some of the family drama that we all have. Apart from this issues with the characters, I found the conversations forced and not mirroring real conversations. People just do not talk like that.

There is a second race of aliens in the story. They are evil, ugly and stinky. I think a story increases its value when there are nuances to the characters. The good ones are not so good, and the bad ones are not so bad. I just hate when writers simplify things and make the main character too perfect and the bad ones evil and ugly. Life does not work like this.

There is a bit of romance between Alex and Ronan. Not too much to make it annoying, but I think it is something almost mandatory in a YA book.

Lori Prince's narration was correct, and delivered a good interpretation for Alex. I missed some more voice range for the other characters, which spoiled the story a bit. I think Prince has great interpretation skills but she needs to work a bit more on her voice. There is a sentence repeated at 3:20:05, but no other audio production issues were found.

It was an okay story but, in my opinion, it should have been much more polished before releasing the book. Characters, places and events would have needed more work.

Katherine Paschal says

****4.5 Out Of 5 Stars****

Alex has enough on her plate with graduation looming close, her job at the pizza place, and taking care of her father with terminal cancer. When she is told to deliver a pizza to the middle of nowhere, she never expected to have her customer be a very attractive guy who acts like he knows her. After a second night of delivering him pizza, Alex decides regardless of how he looks, he was a little crazy and a potential stalker. When he shows up out of nowhere to talk to her, she hesitantly listens to his story about how he watched her for the last three years for an advanced alien species he was raised by. Alex has no idea what to believe, but this is just the beginning of her own personal crazy.

This was a non-stop crazy ride. The story itself took place over a few weeks tops, but there was so much action, adventure and danger crammed into the pages that I was instantly caught up in the world right along with Alex. This was also fairly dark, with natural and unnatural death as well as loss a possibility for the characters. I have read my share of alien books and I can honestly say this was nothing like anything else I have read and I liked it even more so for being so different.

Sure there were moments that had the potential for romance, but Alex and Ronan were never really given the opportunity, what with running for their lives and all (not to mention the multiple escapes...). This I think would be better classified as a science fiction adventure with small hints of romantic tension added in for flavor. You do not know how many times I wanted Alex (or even Ronan for that matter) to just grab the other and kiss the bejesus out of the other. But, not that kind of book.

?I will admit that when I got to the last few chapters in the story I was about to through my ipod down and have a tantrum. The ending is not at all what I expected and I was ready to turn my 4.5 star rating into a 3 in my disappointment...but then the last chapter happened, all like 30 seconds of it and again I had hope. To say I was surprised by this book would be an understatement. I have no idea if this is a standalone story which it technically could be, or if this is the first in a series, but I really hope there will be more to come.

I was hoping this would be a romance, but I don't really think it could be classified as such. Sure there was moments of sweet romance here, but for the most part the book was an action adventure, full of danger and twists.

This review is for the audio version of the book which I listened to. The narrator did a great job in my opinion of bringing the book to life. Through her voice, the story unfolded like a movie in my mind, with all the characters being so unique and full of personality. She had the perfect inflections called for in each dangerous and awkward situation, as well as accents (such as Ronan who speaks completely different as well, and the narrator keeps it up the entire book). And the way she gave the alien species life was perfect, each species was different and specific, making sure I had no confusion as to who (what?) was talking. The start of each chapter was a small tidbit into a random character's interaction with the plot, helping to create a more involved picture behind the scenes from what Alex saw, and the narrator kept the voices concise and consistent so as not to bleed into the chapter. I enjoyed what she was able to bring to this story.

I received this title in return for my honest review.

Visit my blog for more review <http://smadasbooksmack.blogspot.com/>

Susan says

This X-files-like tale is set in Colorado. Alex Blackwood is just about to graduate high school when her life takes an unexpected turn. Ronan drops a stunning revelation on her involving three alien races, the CIA, and some secret surveillance. In the midst of all this, Alex's dad is suffering from cancer and she has her pizza delivery job as well.

Ronan was the most interesting character for me. He's a human descended from a group of humans that left Earth ages ago to co-habitate with an alien race (Salurians? My spelling is probably off since this was the audiobook version). I would have liked to get to know him more in this book and what his life in space is like. Now the Salurians are back and have been watching Earthers for a few decades, simply learning about current cultures and such.

Now the creepy part is that Ronan was assigned to watch Alex since she was 14 (she's 18 at this point in the story) and this involves an implant in her. Yep. He knows every time she went to the bathroom, had the stomach flu, or suffered growing pains. On his part, I can see the insta-love that we stumble into later. I didn't really care for the insta-love stuff, but Alex seemed pretty happy with it. Setting aside the beginning of the romance, it later grows into something meaningful as these two develop a friendship.

The Salurians need to leave ahead of schedule because the aggressive Kema'dor are on their way. Initially, they are portrayed as these violent tech thieves. Later on, Alex meets some of them and has to form her own opinion. Much later in the story, a third alien race (the Meddas – again, spelling?) come into play. I really liked that not all aliens are created the same and each race has their own ethics and goals.

I did feel that Alex was a little too easy going about these bigger revelations but freaked out a bit over small things (like the first image she saw of a Kema'dor). This didn't work for me in terms of character development but it did move the plot along swiftly. I did like that not everything turns out OK for everyone. Alex has to deal with some sadness and loss. This added some seriousness to the story and gave Alex a little depth.

I received a free copy of this book via The Audiobook Worm.

The Narration: Lori Prince was a really great Alex. She sounded young but right there on the cusp of adulthood. She gets an A for effort when it comes to the alien voices and accents. I realize this is a difficult thing to pull off but I have heard better. That said, I did like her voice for the alien Malsoar. She did great with Alex's feelings.

G.G. says

I loved the premises. For someone who loves aliens and everything related to aliens, this was like being in heaven...until I reached about 2/3 in the book and Alex had to be stupid. I have no idea what she was thinking. I just wanted to grab her arm, and slap her a few times so she would wake up and understand how stupid her idea was. That led me to love Ronan and to admire his patience with her. Alex though? Not so much. Sure the author showed her empathy for others and that might (or should have at least) explain her behavior but still...I'm sticking with my belief that being eighteen doesn't make for an excuse. She didn't think and what happened next is all on her.

I didn't start hating the book because of what Alex did. It is just that I slowly came back to Earth. I understood the need for something to happen. I just wished well...shall I repeat myself? I just wished that Alex wouldn't have had that stupid idea. *Shakes head*

That said I believe this is a great book for all ages, from MG to Adults and everything in between. Quick, fun, and easy read.
