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Sharing space, and other things

Bengaluru joins the global celebration of science and technology with World Space Week, beginning today

Exploration is in the very DNA of human existence. Or what can explain our first race to the South Pole, first solo flight across Atlantic, discovering a sea route from Europe to the East, probing the Moon, Pluto and other galaxies, and dreaming to live on Mars? We are always gunning for the unknown. There's no stopping us, Earthlings.

'Exploring New Worlds in Space' is the theme of this year's World Space Week (WSW), which was constituted by The United Nations General Assembly on December 6, 1999 to celebrate science and technology, and their contribution to the betterment of humankind. It is celebrated annually from October 4 to 10. In doing so, it recognises two red-letter days in the history of space exploration - the launch of the first man-made Earth satellite, Sputnik 1, on October 4, 1957, and the signing of the Outer Space Treaty on October 10, 1967 that forms the basis of the international space law.

In a first, Bengaluru is hosting this seven-day event, and it kicks off today with a discussion on the evolution of sci-fi literature. Yes, it's not a conference, so you don't need to be a

scientist, a technologist or an astronomy student to partake in this space party. Instead, the activities, nine in total, have been curated to appeal to people of all ages and interests, who are either fascinated by the many mysteries of the universe or haven't had a chance to dive into the vast subject. So expect film screenings, drawing workshops, slam poetry, board games, talks, and more.

That is not to mean that the Bengaluru chapter is trying to dumb down the WSW agenda. Its curator Vidhi Kundan Jain says: "Our facilitators and speakers will of course talk about space exploration, but in a fun, engaging and simple manner. It's equally open to scientists and researchers. They might want to find out how people from non-technical fields such as authors, poets, painters, filmmakers, and game-makers interpret their technical work."

While Jain is not a science graduate herself, but she has always been fascinated by the night sky, by the endless possibilities in the universe, the gift of imagination, how humans have come so far in space research and how science and technology is helping mankind. "I have immense respect for those who spend their life doing this, and those who go out there knowing they'll probably never come back because they look at the bigger

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picture,” she adds. That’s why the 24-year-old decided to bring WSW to Bengaluru under the banner of Books&Brews, India, a community of booklovers.

Her first brush with sci-fi was in the form of cartoons. “Remember The Jetsons?” she singles out the animated sitcom of 1960s where one Jetsons family used to live in a world with elaborate robotic contraptions, aliens, holograms, and whimsical inventions. “That cartoon was so ahead of its time. It made references to gadgets that weren’t even invented then.” And, growing up, she learnt about human adventure from books, such as The Time Machine, and Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.

Are humans alone in the universe? Are we the only gifted space-faring aliens? The explorers will find out some day. But for now, we must celebrate the lives and we are endowed with on Earth, Jain hopes to send out this message.

For this, she borrows a famous quote by American astronomer Carl Sagan: “Every one of us is, in the cosmic perspective, precious. If a human disagrees with you, let him live. In a hundred billion galaxies, you will not find another. The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies, were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of starstuff.”