

NEW ENGLAND CHILDREN'S BOOKSELLING ADVISORY COUNCIL

FALL REVIEWS, 2010

This list is our attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous releases of middle-grade and young-adult fiction between January and June of the year. (We do another round-up of July-December titles.) The list was produced by soliciting reading copies from as many publishers as possible, sharing the contributed books among NECBA members, reading and reviewing and rating as many as possible.

From these titles a Top Ten list has been selected as a service to our general bookstore colleagues who are less familiar with the genre. The full text will be available on the NECBA site, <http://www.necba.net/necbagalleyrev.html>

As is ever the case, contributions are uneven, with some publishers supplying a very large fraction of the galleys, and a few reviewers supplying a very large fraction of the reviews. Such reviews are, by their nature, never soon enough or inclusive enough. Nevertheless, this list is bound to alert the reader to at least one or two — and probably more — excellent titles s/he otherwise might have missed.

REVIEWERS

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove (Hanover, MA)

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove (Hanover, MA)

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore (Shelburne, VT)

Kenny Brechner, Devaney, Doak & Garrett (DDG) Booksellers (Farmington, ME)

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers, Ltd. (Kinderhook, NY)

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford, NH)

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins (Falmouth, MA)

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop (Northampton, MA)

Pat Fowler, Village Square Booksellers (Bellows Falls, VT)

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft (Great Barrington, MA)

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books and Music (Rhinebeck, NY)

Mimi Powell, Baker Books (North Dartmouth, MA)

Elizabeth Reynolds, Norwich Bookstore (Norwich, VT)

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar (Waterville, ME)

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop (Hardwick, VT)

Janusz Sulanowski, Eight Cousins

Vicky Uminowicz, Titcomb's Bookshop (E. Sandwich, MA)

TITLES REVIEWED

Accomplice, by Eireann Corrigan

Bamboo People, by Mitali Perkins

Beat the Band, by Don Calame

Because of Mr. Terupt, by Rob Buyea

Bink & Gollie, by Kate DiCamillo & Alison McGhee

Brain Jack, by Brian Falkner

Clockwork Angel, by Cassandra Clare

Confessions of the Sullivan Sisters, by Natalie Standiford

The Danger Box, by Blue Balliett

Dark Song, by Gail Giles

Dirt Road Home, by Watt Key

The DUFF, by Kody Keplinger

Extraordinary, by Nancy Werlin

The Extraordinary Secrets of April, May & June, by Robin Benway

The Fool's Girl, by Celia Rees

Girl's Best Friend, by Leslie Margolis

Grimm Legacy, by Polly Shulman

***Half Brother*, by Kenneth Oppel**

***I Am Number Four*, by Pittacus Lore**

***I Shall Wear Midnight*, by Terry Pratchett**

***Immortal Beloved*, by Cate Tiernan**

***Jake*, by Audrey Couloubis**

***Jane*, by April Lindner**

***Justin Fisher Declares War*, by James Preller**

***Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz*, by Laura Toffler-Corrie**

***The Limit*, by Kristen Landon**

***Linger*, by Maggie Stiefvater**

***A Long Walk to Water*, by Linda Sue Park**

***Lost in Lexicon*, by Penny Noyce**

***Low Red Moon*, by Ivy Devlin**

***The Madman of Venice*, by Sophie Masson**

***The Magnificent 12: The Call*, by Michael Grant**

***Matched*, by Allyson Condie**

***The Memory Bank*, by Carolyn Coman**

***The Mermaid's Mirror*, by L. K. Madigan**

***Mindblind*, by Jennifer Roy**

***Mockingbird*, by Kathryn Erskine**

***Mockingjay*, by Suzanne Collins**

***Monsters of Men*, by Patrick Ness**

***Moon Over Manifest*, by Clare Vanderpool**

***My Life As a Book*, by Janet Tashjian**

***Nancy and Plum*, by Betty MacDonald, forward by Jeanne Birdsall, illus. Mary GrandPre**

***Ninth Ward*, by Jewell Parker Rhodes**

***On The Blue Comet*, by Rosemary Wells**

***Penny Dreadful*, by Laurel Snyder**

***Revolution*, by Jennifer Donnelly**

***Sapphique*, by Catherine Fisher**

***Saving Sky*, by Diane Stanley**

***Scorch Trials*, by James Dashner**

***Shadow Grail # 1: Legacies*, by Mercedes Lackey and Rosemary Edgehill**

***The Things a Brother Knows*, by Dana Reinhardt**

***Three Quarters Dead*, by Richard Peck**

***Thunder Over Kandahar*, by Sharon E. McKay**

***TimeRiders*, by Alex Scarrow**

***Touch Blue*, by Cynthia Lord**

***Toymaker*, by Jeremy De Quidt**

***Tyger, Tyger*, by Kerston Hamilton**

***What Happened on Fox Street*, by Tricia Springstubb**

***You*, by Charles Benoit**

***Zora and Me*, by Victoria Bond and T.R. Simon**

THE 2010 FALL REVIEW PROJECT TOP TEN PLUS ONE

***Dirt Road Home*, by Watt Key** 978-0374308636, \$16.99 FSG

At Hellenweiler, a reformatory for second-offenders, fourteen-year-old Hal Mitchell will soon be free if he can avoid the gang violence of his fellow inmates, but the real enemy may lie elsewhere.

“The plot twists and tightens as one exit after another is cut off, and a flashlight shines on the character of one inmate after another, the hopeless prospects of kids sucked into the criminal justice system. Readers won’t want to put the book down until they find out how Hal manages to resist the corrosive cynicism, the poisonous self-doubt, the punishing violence, and the urge for revenge – and to take some of the toughest boys along with him.” Carol Chittenden, *Eight Cousins*

***Half Brother* by Kenneth Opper** 978-0545229258, \$17.99 Scholastic

In 1973, when a renowned Canadian behavioral psychologist pursues his latest research project--an experiment to determine whether chimpanzees can acquire advanced language skills--he brings home a baby chimp named Zan and asks his thirteen-year-old son to treat Zan like a little brother.

"Funny, authentic, heart-rending & compelling." Kat Goddard of The Bookloft.

***I Shall Wear Midnight*, by Terry Pratchett** 978-0061433054, \$16.99 Harper

Fifteen-year-old Tiffany Aching, the witch of the Chalk, seeks her place amid a troublesome populace and tries to control the ill-behaved, six-inch-high Wee Free Men who follow her as she faces an ancient evil that agitates against witches.

"This, the last of the Wee Free Men series, is bittersweet. ... Dark characters and more mature themes (domestic violence) add to the sense this is a slightly different Pratchett. Of course, even a slightly different Pratchett is still head-and-tails above almost anyone else." Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

***A Long Walk to Water*, by Linda Sue Park** 978-0547251271, \$16.00 Clarion

When the Sudanese civil war reaches his village in 1985, eleven-year-old Salva becomes separated from his family and must walk with other Dinka tribe members through southern Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya in search of safe haven. Based on the life of Salva Dut, who, after emigrating to America in 1996, began a project to dig water wells in Sudan.

"A small but potent book. ... The story of Salva is one of courage, perseverance, love, faith, generosity. ... It's an amazing and inspiring story." Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

***Mindblind*, by Jennifer Roy** 978-0761457164, \$15.99 Marshall Cavendish

Fourteen-year-old Nathaniel Clark, who has Asperger's Syndrome, tries to prove that he is a genius by writing songs for his rock band, so that he can become a member of the prestigious Aldus Institute, the premier organization for the profoundly gifted.

"A genius is not just someone with a very high IQ, which he has, but someone who has accomplished something outstanding and contributed something to the world. This he achieves, in a very teen way. But what sets this story apart are his friends. Cooper, Jessa, Logan, Molly, Sam. They are great, and supportive, in completely believable ways.... it's wonderful to see teens at their best. I think that will resonate with them, too." Rondi Brower, Blackwood and Brouwer Booksellers

***Monsters of Men*, by Patrick Ness** 978-0763647513, \$18.99 Candlewick

As a world-ending war surges to life around them, Todd and Viola face monstrous decisions, questioning all they have ever known as they try to step back from the darkness and find the best way to achieve peace.

"At the heart of this series is an exploration of two issues, the power and nature of the human will and the power and nature of privacy. ... Emotionally riveting, structurally complex, and brilliantly executed, here we have a story as profound as it is exciting." Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

***Saving Sky*, by Diane Stanley** 978-0061239052 \$15.99 Harper Collins

In an America that has suffered continual terrorist attacks since 9/11, seventh-grader Sky stands up for what is right and helps a classmate of Middle Eastern descent, although doing so places her and her family at great risk.

“This story asks a lot of questions and provokes a lot of thought about where our society is going today, and it does so with heartwarming family values, believable characters and loads of hope.” Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

***Touch Blue*, by Cynthia Lord** 978-0545035316, \$16.99 Scholastic

When the state of Maine threatens to shut down their island’s one-room schoolhouse because of dwindling enrollment, eleven-year-old Tess, a strong believer in luck, and her family take in a trumpet-playing foster child, to increase the school’s population.

“If Goldilocks had found a pile of middle grade galleys on the table at the Bear’s house, rather than bowls of porridge, the returning bear family would have found her engrossed in *Touch Blue* rather than sleeping upstairs. ... Lord’s handling of foster care issues, and her rendering of remote island life, are both rich and authentic. ... [T]he legion of Lord’s *Rules* fans will be anything but disappointed in this gentle and profound second novel.” Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

***Tyger, Tyger*, by Kerston Hamilton** 978-0547330082, \$17.00 Houghton

Soon after the mysterious and alluring Finn arrives at her family’s home, sixteen-year-old Teagan Wyltson and her disabled brother are drawn into the battle Finn’s family has fought since the thirteenth century, when Fionn MacCumhaill angered the goblin king.

“This dynamic reimagining of the Irish mythos in modern-day Chicago is loaded with convincing romantic tension, intelligent, three dimensional characters, and atmospheric power. ... The story is also bolstered by a good number of intriguing minor characters, great evil doers, and lots dangling plot threads calling out for a book two.” Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

***You*, by Charles Benoit** 978-0061947049, \$16.99 HarperTeen

Fifteen-year-old Kyle discovers the shattering ramifications of the decisions he makes, and does not make, about school, the girl he likes, and his future.

“Powerful & un-put-down-able.... Kids like Kyle are found in every high school. He wears the right clothes: black hoodie, black jeans. He gets by without causing enough trouble or getting good enough grades to be noticed. When he meets the wrong person who shows him a different world, everything changes. I read this in one sitting.” Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

***Zora and Me*, by Victoria Bond and T.R. Simon** 978-0763643003 \$16.99 Candlewick

A fictionalized account of Zora Neale Hurston’s childhood with her best friend Carrie, in Eatonville, Florida, as they learn about life, death, and the differences between truth, lies, and pretending. Includes an annotated bibliography of the works of Zora Neale Hurston, a short biography of the author, and information about Eatonville, Florida.

“The swamp-green, watery light of magical realism suffuses this unforgettable tale of a young Zora Neale Hurston and her two best friends during a pivotal summer in their lives. Crocodile men, sorrowful transient musicians, and the ugliness of racism provide powerful counterpoints to the bright adventures of childhood. A gorgeously written coming-of-age story.” Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

THE FALL REVIEW PROJECT 2010 REVIEWS

Accomplice by Eireann Corrigan

9780545052368, \$17.99

Scholastic, August 2010

Core audience: 12-18

Review: Finn and Chloe are best friends. They are good girls who want to get into a good college. They have done all the usual things like get good grades & gather extracurriculars but they know they will need something else to get admitted to their dream schools. They decide that Chloe will fake being abducted and Finn will be the hero who rescues her. Chloe will hide out in the basement of Finn's vacationing grandmother while Finn acts the anxious best friend. Sounds simple. The story is told from Finn's perspective as she witnesses the fallout from their plan. I was carried along on this harrowing ride.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Bamboo People, by Mitali Perkins

9781580893282, \$16.95

Charlesbridge

July, 2010

Core audience: Ages 10-14, especially boys

Notable: Setting in Burma, guerilla warfare, civil war

Review: Baker & Taylor description: Two Burmese boys, one a Karenni refugee and the other the son of an imprisoned Burmese doctor, meet in the jungle and in order to survive they must learn to trust each other. The plot is very simple, and the characters are just right for the book's purpose, namely to illuminate an ethnic minority military rebellion against an oppressive majority military dictatorship. The city boy is forced into military service and pushed through brutal training, including brainwashing, in order to fight the Karenni rebels. When he's wounded and rescued by the Karenni, they have the opportunity to kill him. Instead, they recognize that with one leg missing he's no longer a threat, and they use up precious resources to nurse him back to health and return him to his home. The book would make a great vehicle for class discussion, as its themes of oppression and rebellion are played out again and again, from Burma to Bolivia, from Afghanistan to *Star Wars*.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8

Beat the Band, by Don Calame

9780763646332, \$16.99

Candlewick Press

September 2010

Core Audience: Boys ages 14 and up (mainly due to language)

Notable Aspects: Humor, bullying, friendships, relationships, high school rock bands

Review: *Beat the Band* is a great read and it's filled with characters you end up loving in spite of their own flawed selves. The book features three 10th-grade boys Calame introduced us to in his previous book, *Swim the Fly*. This time, however, the story is told by Coop, who is forced to do a class project with Helen, who has been endlessly teased and bullied by her classmates. Coop desperately fears a total loss of his own social standing if he's seen with Helen (though he's hardly at the top of the pecking order himself). His solution? Win a Battle of the Bands contest with his two buddies so he can attract girls and avoid social suicide. Like most of Coop's decisions, it's hardly well considered - the boys can barely play.

I loved the book! It's a darned good read and laugh out loud funny at times. Calame also seems to capture perfectly the typical goofiness and angst of 10th grade boys as they blunder through the intricacies of high school social life. Coop and his friends are wonderfully portrayed - lots of really dumb ideas, insecurities, mistakes and a big dose of acceptance of each other's flaws. Coop can be crude and selfish. He plows through life full of bravado and rarely thinks about consequences. Sex is very much on his mind, but pretty far from his reality, and peer pressure has a big hold on him. However, as Coop learns more about Helen, both at home and school, he grows increasingly uncomfortable with the way people treat her and he reluctantly finds himself attracted to her. This all sounds like a very predictable story, and it is, but the dialogue is great and I loved the way the characters unfold very much through Coop's eyes, which often have less than perfect vision. Coop's father, out of work and caught up in a musical fantasy life through his son, is much like his son. There is a hilarious scene concerning the basement when Dad is stunned by the realization that he's just messed up again big time and his wife will be home soon. Like father, like son.

The difficulty of standing up to bullies and taking responsibility for one's actions are important themes in the book, and they hit home in a way that could make any reader think, "If this doofus could do it, I could too!."

Thanks to Don Calame and Candlewick Press for writing and publishing a novel targeting a stereotypically tough audience - high school boys - with this really good read.

Vicky Uminowicz, Titcomb's Bookshop
Rating: 8.75

Because of Mr. Terupt, by Rob Buyea

9780385738828, \$16.99

Delacorte

October 2010

Core Audience: Ages 8-12

Notable Aspects: seven first-person perspectives

REVIEW: Told in seven first-person perspectives, the kids in Mr. Terupt's 5th-grade class chronicle the first year with their new teacher. When tragedy strikes, the kids lives are changed forever.

Without giving too much away, I can say that this book was simply wonderful. The kids are a diverse bunch - there's the new girl, the mean girl, the class clown, the loner, the brain, etc. Each starts the year in one place and ends up in another. They each must overcome a personal challenge, and the tragedy that befalls their class helps them do so. In the middle of it all is the beloved Mr. Terupt, a young first-year teacher whose energy and spirit serve to inspire his class immensely. A one-sitting read, Rob Buyea's debut is hopefully the first of many excellent books to come.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9

Additional review of *Because of Mr. Terupt*:

Notable aspects: Multi-character first-person narrative; classroom social dynamics

Review: Mr. Terupt's class management style is appealing, and the book raises a number of issues different children face in the course of a school year. I

especially liked the way each segment of the narrative overlapped the preceding one, from a slightly different viewpoint. However, reading time prevented taking it in at one sitting, and without that continuity, the characters lost their definition, the force of their motives clouded, and the ending became a sentimental tangle. While it will work well for some readers, and teachers will find merit in the social dynamics, I doubt the majority of children will find it absorbing and exciting.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 7.5

Bink & Gollie, by Kate DiCamillo & Alison McGhee

9780763632663, \$15.99

Candlewick, September 2010

Core audience: 6-8 year old girls

Notable aspects: Fun, contemporary illustrations by Tony Fucile

Review: I had high hopes for this book. I never seem to have enough gift-able beginning readers. Although the jacket copy reveals that Bink & Gollie are “marvelous companions” it will be immediately clear to most readers that this is a big sister/little sister relationship. For the most part Gollie seems to just tolerate Bink. Bink does not let repeated rebuffs keep her from adoring Gollie. I found little to smile about in this story and even less that could contribute to the promised “Laugh-out-loud bonanza.”

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 5

Brain Jack by Brian Falkner

9780375843662

Random House

9/28/10

Core Audience: Computer geeks age 12 & up

Notable for pacing, authenticity

Teenage hacker Sam Wilson accidentally crashes the Internet of the future and comes to the attention of both the good guys & the bad guys. The cyber defense division of the government overlooks his crime and hires him as one of a group of tech savvy young people. The group is tasked with preventing a neuro-virus from

wiping out humanity. Although the individual characters are thinly sketched and the issues of computer & privacy ethics are dealt only in passing, the overall story is compelling. It will have you looking over your shoulder and into your hard drive. The technical aspects are believable, even worrying, and the story moves from one tense moment to the next action packed sequence with alacrity.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 7.5

Clockwork Angel, by Cassandra Clare

9781416975861, \$19.99

McElderry Books

September 2010

Core Audience: Ages 12+, fans of Libba Bray or Clare's Mortal Instruments Series

Notable Aspects: prequel to Mortal Instruments series (but stands alone), Victorian England, strong female protagonist w/ major crossover appeal for boys

REVIEW: Last summer I devoured the first three volumes in Cassandra Clare's Mortal Instruments series. The books: *City of Bones*, *City of Glass*, and *City of Ashes*, take place in a modern day New York City, inhabited with demons, vampires, and all sorts of magical folk. Their story centers around the Shadowhunters, a chosen people tasked with keeping the demons at bay.

Her newest book, *Clockwork Angel*, is the first book in The Infernal Devices, a prequel to her Mortal Instruments series. This new series takes place in Victorian England and follows 16-year-old Tessa Gray, who unwittingly gets pulled into the world of demons and Shadowhunters.

This book is perfect for fans of Clare's earlier books, but it can stand alone just fine.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8.5

Confessions of the Sullivan Sisters: by Natalie Standiford

9780545107105, \$17.99

Scholastic, September 2010

Core Audience: 12 & up

Review: Someone in the Sullivan family has offended 'Almighty' (Grandmother & holder of the family fortune) and the entire family will be cut out of her will unless the guilty person confesses. All three Sullivan girls are sure they are the guilty party. They each compose a written confession. Told in parts by each girl this is a wonderful story of a close, loving family who come to realize that they are all keeping secrets. A sweet surprise ending adds to the fun. I loved this story most especially for the family dynamics.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8.5

The Danger Box by Blue Balliett

978-0439852098 / \$16.99

Scholastic Press

Sept. '10

Audience Grades 4-7

Notable for suspense, character (understanding special needs), awakening interest in Charles Darwin.

Balliett does such a nice job of bringing more to her stories than a good plot and believable characters. She previously awakened interest in Vermeer's painting, Calder's sculptures, Wright's architecture and now the natural science of Charles Darwin. The story is told through the eyes of young Zoomy, legally blind, who sees differently and understands things others miss. He has always lived with his loving grandparents. His ne'er-do-well Dad doesn't even know of his existence. The story involves a stolen box with a missing and very valuable notebook of Darwin's, Dad's scary return and ultimate redemption, a strange fire in the family's antique shop, a new friendship for Zoomy involving a lot of library on-line research, and a dangerous stranger.

Zoomy learns that positives and negatives can change roles and that sometimes you can't see what's right in front of you, no matter how you see. Good story, interesting ideas, great descriptions, and you've gotta read those "Gas Gazettes-a free newspaper about a mysterious soul" that appear between the chapters- clues and puzzles about Darwin's journeys.

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8.5

Additional reviews/ratings for *The Danger Box*:

Mostly listened to on audio (Scholastic). Tough book to do aloud, what with the Gas Gazette pages and the occasional voice of player 4. Multi-voice helped, but wasn't ideal. Balliett made Darwin more interesting than usual, but I'm still not really a fan. Zoomy and Lorrol a little too quirky for me. Let's do 7 for audio and 7.5 for book.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Ltd

Rating: 7.5

and:

Balliet's quirky, honest characters and her spare, concise phrases blew me away. This is her best yet!

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, Rating 8.75

Dark Song, by Gail Giles

Little Brown, September, 2010

9780316068864, \$16.99

Core audience: 16 and up

Notable: High test parental and societal failure to protect issues

Review: *Dark Song* explores the question of whether its okay to murder your parents if they're really awful, emotionally abusive people. Fifteen-year-old Ames' parents are neglectful of her needs, and verbally abusive. When they leave Texas and move in with her Grandparents in a boring neighborhood Ames meets Marc, who is 22 but looks younger. Marc hears the voice of the dark and pays Ames the attention she craves. She doesn't really like the sex with him, nor his gun collection, nor the bad rumors about him, nor Marc's father's concerns about her young age, but they share an attraction and a connection that trumps all. When Ames' father catches her having sex with Marc in his truck it comes to light that her parents may not be perfect but they do care about her engaging in statutory rape with a psychopath. She shares with them that Marc has offered to kill them so that he and Ames can truly be together. Ames and her parents contact the police who come up with a plan. She lets Marc know that she is ready to stand by his side while he kills her parents. They creep into her parent's bedroom, and find them sleeping in the bed. He raises his gun but then a

policeman hidden in the room orders Marc to stand down while the policeman and policewoman pretending to be Ames' parents in the bed pop up to help make the arrest.

I thought that real police would be very unlikely to act that way and called our local District Attorney and ran the scene by him. He reported that the police would never have done that for many reasons. For starters, they would have used dummies in the bed rather than let themselves be live targets for a killer with a gun. More importantly, they would never have allowed a 15-year-old minor to be endangered by actively participating in a murder sting. The liability involved, not to mention the bad judgment required, would be deal breakers there in real life. The idea that police would behave that way is revealing, however, of *Dark Song's* pervasive atmosphere of adult neglect and failure to protect at the expense of being realistic and of having any kind of real message.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 3.0

Dirt Road Home, by Watt Key

9780374308636, \$16.99

FSG, July, 2010

Core audience: boys 11-14; also teachers, police, social workers, and attorneys
Notable: Characters, suspense, setting, action, strong ending

Review: Hal, the bully-turned-buddy from Key's *Alabama Moon*, is the main character in *Dirt Road Home*, though the book stands on its own with or without reading *Alabama Moon*. It is a very different story, much more serious and suspenseful; it only increases our respect for the author's skills. Hal's wayward history has landed him in Hellenweiler Boys Home, a tough reform school run by two gangs and seemingly oblivious staff. Hal has made a deal with his dad: Hal will keep out of trouble and his dad will get sober. Hal longs for his girlfriend Carla, his dad, dogs, and truck as much as he hates being locked into a situation where he has to fight. But all Hellenweiler inmates are in one gang or the other, and neutrality is not an option. The plot twists and tightens as one exit after another is cut off, and a flashlight shines on the character of one inmate after another, the hopeless prospects of kids sucked into the criminal justice system. Readers won't want to put the book down until they find out how Hal manages to resist the corrosive cynicism, the poisonous self-doubt, the punishing violence, and the urge for revenge – and to take some of the toughest boys along with him.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 9.0

Additional ratings/reviews for *Dirt Road Home*:

Add my score to Carol's review. I couldn't have said it better and won't even try!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 9

and:

Just a quick note to say that the companion book to *Alabama Moon* (this one's about Hal, not Moon) is a one-sitting read. It put me in mind of Chris Lynch's *Who's the Man?* and Michael Northrop's *Gentlemen* (which I still think should have gotten more attention) and a touch of Jack Gantos, along with the referenced *Lord of the Flies* -- with Watt Key's particular brand of sweetness and optimism underlying a tense, gritty tale. It's not that the book is perfect, because I could quibble with a couple of things, including a little "neatness," but I didn't care because I was rooting hard for the kid. Can't wait to see what teen readers think of it.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8.75

The DUFF, by Kody Keplinger

978-0-316-08423-9 \$16.99

Poppy/Little Brown

September 2010

Girls, 15+

Notable for: blunt language, recreational drinking among teens, recreational sex, lack of adult role models, dangerous behaviors w/out any consequences...lots of talking points if parent and teen both read the book and discuss it

The message in this book, that "we are all D.U.F.F.s" is good. Lots of teen could benefit from that realization, but I'm not sure this is the way I'd like them to hear the message.

Having had her heart broken as a freshman, Bianca is cynical and war of boys. She is the wallflower when she and her two BFFs, Casey and Jessica, go out. Wesley Rush, the school's resident "boy slut," chats her up one night in an attempt to curry favor with her "hot" friends. He calls her "Duffy"...for DUFF, "designated ugly fat friend." Though she is neither ugly nor fat, the name stings

and she dislikes him even more fiercely. However, when things at home get especially stressful, normally sensible Bianca throws herself at Wesley and they have sex. Admittedly, she's using him as a distraction, stress relief, just as he's using her for casual sex. Hiding their relationship (if it can be called that) and still professing her disgust for Wesley, Bianca has less and less time for Casey and Jess. They are hurt and confused. One night, after an emotional dam breaks, Wesley and Bianca actually talk and she realizes that she has come to care for (not love, she tells herself) Wesley. Convinced he is still the "boy slut" and that he could never care for the DUFF, Bianca dumps him and gets on with her life. She reconciles with Casey and Jess, without ever telling them why she'd become too busy for them. She gets a boyfriend, a sweet studious geek. She tries to ignore Wesley. Predictably, of course, a reformed Wesley realizes that he loves Bianca and they end up together.

Characterizations in *The D.U.F.F.* are thin and clichéd. Bianca, her friends and incidental classmates cover all the major stereotypes but don't seem to have any real vitality. They seem to live in a world without adults. Bianca's largely absent mother has two walk-on scenes that are awkward and perfunctory. Her dad, an alcoholic who falls off and then hops right back on the wagon, is more fully, though the treatment of his drinking problem is very unrealistically handled. Teachers are little more than the "wa-wa-wa-wa" of the teacher in Peanut's cartoons. Though starting with a decent premise, *The D.U.F.F.* instead sends the message that they are no repercussions for misbehavior.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 4

Extraordinary, by Nancy Werlin

9780803733725, \$17.99

Dial Press

September 2010

Core Audience: Girls ages 12+

Notable Aspects: faeries in modern setting

REVIEW: Last summer, Nancy Werlin's YA novel *Impossible* caught my eye when it flew off our shelves much more quickly than I had anticipated, so I was eager to read her new book to see what the fuss was about.

In *Extraordinary*, we meet Phoebe and Mallory, two girls drawn together in a mysteriously strong friendship. Their friendship is tested when Mallory's brother appears from nowhere, and secrets begin to reveal themselves. Mallory and her

brother are not who they appear to be, and Phoebe becomes caught in the magical world they come from.

This is a decent faerie novel - not a subject I would normally be drawn toward, but compelling nonetheless. Though the book wasn't really my cup of tea, I can certainly see it being enjoyed by teens looking for a good faerie story.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music
Rating: 6.5

Additional ratings/reviews for *Extraordinary*:

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove
Rating: 7

The Extraordinary Secrets of April, May & June, by Robin Benway
9781595142863, \$16.99
Razorbill
August 2010

Core Audience: Ages 12+
Notable Aspects: sisters, magical powers

REVIEW: This fun book from the author of *Audrey, Wait!*, tells the story of three sisters who suddenly develop magical powers that help them make their way through the perils of high school. April can see the future, May can disappear into thin air, and June can read minds. As you can imagine, this leads to all sorts of trouble and hijinks ensue.

Benway doesn't really bother to take time explaining why the girls have these powers, though there is some allusion to their grandmother and her sisters having similar mysterious abilities. All in all, it's a fun read with good characters.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music
Rating: 7.5

The Fool's Girl, by Celia Rees
978-1-59990-486-3

Bloomsbury
August 2010 \$16.99

Girls, 12 +

Set in Elizabethan England with a healthy dose of history. Interesting “sequel” to Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* with a strong young female character. Familiar characters from the play encounter the playwright in a tale of intrigue, suspense, romance and some humor.

In spring 1601, Princess Violetta of Illyria has arrived in London with her companion, Feste the Fool. She plans to enlist the help of playwright Will Shakespeare to expose the villainy behind a coup that killed her parents and forced her into exile. The ambitious Jesuit Malvolio, who plotted with the usurpers in Illyria, has in his possession a stolen relic, sacred to the duchy, that Violetta intends to reclaim. Seeking only to regain her throne, Violetta finds herself embroiled in political plotting which will have consequences reaching further than Illyria. Malvolio, and his allies are planning to overthrow Queen Elizabeth and to restore the “true church” to England. Violetta is thrilled when she is reunited with her childhood friends Stephano and Guido, but Feste isn’t sure where their loyalties lie. Tangled in plots and counterplots, Violetta is no meek pawn. She, Feste, Will and his troupe devise a bold plan. In a dramatic confrontation with Malvolio, Violetta and crew regain the relic and thwart a plot to murder the Queen. Finale: in January 1602, a young Duke and Duchess (visiting England from a small country near the sea) are in the audience to see Will Shakespeare’s new play. In it, in a small country by the middle sea, a beautiful young woman is washed ashore after a shipwreck. Dressing herself as a young man, she makes her way to the court of the handsome young Duke. And, so the story begins...or ends.

Ellen Richmond, Children’s Book Cellar
Rating: 8

Girl's Best Friend by Leslie Margolis

978-1599905259 / \$14.99

Bloomsbury
October 2010

Core audience: preteen girls, especially those who like dogs and mysteries

Notable for quick-witted young female with a heart, friendship issues,

mystery

Maggie is one saavy young dog-walker. She figures out why pets have come up missing, why the local vet has so many "unsuccessful" operations, how to get along with an ex-best friend turned nasty, and figures out the secret compartments in her rented old brownstone apartment house. She also gets the guy she has been admiring from afar! Not a bad score for our newest Nancy Drew. Did I say Maggie is a true Nancy fan? Nancy better move over. Maggie says she considers every angle and weighs every possibility before she connects the dots. Good advice. Maggie's readers will be eager to follow the next trail.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Score: 7.5

Grimm Legacy by Polly Shulman

978-0399250965 / \$16.99

G.P. Putnam's Sons (Penguin)

July 2010

Core audience: teen girls

Notable for likeable, gutsy teen character, fantasy

Elizabeth, new to her school and rather lonely, takes a job at the New York Circulating Material Repository. What a place! It is stuffed with unusual and magical artifacts from Grimm tales. As a page, she has access to items like the Mermaid's Comb, which makes her hair look fantastic. She is quickly involved with mysterious disappearances of artifacts- and employees! This fast-paced story will especially appeal to fairy tale fans who will delight in literary references. the characters are real or really quirky. This is a whole new take on fairy tales. Imagine being reduced in size then sold as a figurine! Magical realism here makes for a thoroughly enjoyable tale. A departure from Shulman's first book, *Enthusiasm*, which was light fun as well.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Rating: 7.5

Additional ratings/reviews of *Grimm Legacy*:

Totally original, filled with intrigue and imagination. I would love, love , love to visit this library-- especially if I was allowed to borrow something.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 7

Half Brother by Kenneth Oppel

9780545229258, \$17.99

Scholastic, September 2010

Core audience: 8 & up (no sex, limited violence)

Review: When only child Ben's family moves across the country Ben has a lot of new things to deal with. On top of the expected new neighborhood & new school, he has to get used to a new member of the family. Zan is a baby chimp that comes to live as Ben's new brother. Zan lives in Ben's house and eventually goes to Ben's school! His parents are studying Zan's language acquisition & social learning but to Ben, Zan is just his little brother. He helps with babysitting, he reads the bedtime stories and sticks up for his little brother when the neighborhood bullies attack. When funding for the research project gets cut, Zan must go too. But you don't just give back your little brother and Ben tries to fight for Zan. Funny, authentic, heart-rending & compelling.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard

Rating: 9

I Am Number Four by Pittacus Lore

9780061969553, \$17.99

HarperCollins

August 2010

Core Audience: High school students

Notable Aspects: Plot, characters

Like most teens, the main character in this story just wants to be like everyone else--go to school, make some friends, fall in love. But he is not like everyone else. He is one of 9 children with special powers who escaped with their guardians after their planet, Lorien, was destroyed by the Mogadorians. They came to earth, but so did their enemies, who are tracking down and killing the Lorien children one by one. When the book starts, the main character and his guardian have been on earth for over 10 years and have just moved(for the 22nd time) to a small town in Ohio. John, as he is called in this town, is starting to build a new life, but eventually the Mogadorians discover where he is. They have already killed the first 3 children and he is number 4.

This is a gripping story. The characters have some complexity (for example, the

bully turns out to be an ally in the end) and the reader really cares for them. I think the book will appeal to teens for the fast moving plot, but on a deeper level it also speaks to any teen who's been bullied or felt like an outsider.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

Additional rating of *I Am Number Four*:

I loved reading this book. I read it aloud at a library readathon - to teens and adults. They enjoyed it too! Lots of action in the ending chapters.

Pat Fowler, Village Square Booksellers

Rating: 9

***I Shall Wear Midnight*, by Terry Pratchett**

9780061433054, \$16.99

Harper, October 2010

Core audience: 12 & up

Notable aspects: humor, language

Review: This, the last of the Wee Free Men series, is bittersweet. Tiffany is growing up and into her her job as the 'Big Hag'. She is also moving on after her relationship with the Baron's son changes. Pratchett is always fun and while this book certainly did not disappoint in the humor department there was a bit more introspection on Tiffany's part.

Dark characters and more mature themes (domestic violence) add to the sense this is a slightly different Pratchett. Of course, even a slightly different Pratchett is still head-and-tails above almost anyone else.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8.8

***Immortal Beloved*, by Cate Tiernan**

ISBN 978-0316035927 / \$16.99

Little, Brown

September 2010

Core audience: Ages 12+; fans of Twilight and Sarah Dessen

Notable aspects: Great voice, sympathetic flawed main character, interesting historical elements woven into the present-day story

I think Little, Brown has another big hit on its hands here. Like most booksellers (and many customers), I am sick to death of supernatural romances, but I really, really enjoyed this one. Nastasya, a jaded older teen whose recent life has consisted of parties and flashy clothes and fast friends, finds herself increasingly unable to hide from the gnawing emptiness within. That changes when her best friend, the handsome Inocencio (aka Incy), performs an act of cruelty that jars Nasty and makes her consider immortal rehab. When she arrives there, she discovers not only a precarious kind of sanctuary and the possibility of trust, but a surly handsome guy who sparks the darkest memories from Nastasya's past — hundreds of years earlier.

The book's title, *Immortal Beloved*, conveys an epic-romance straightforwardness that doesn't quite do justice to the snappy pace and attitude of this absolutely delicious historical paranormal romance.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore Rating: 8.5

Jake by Audrey Coulombis

978-0375856303, \$15.99

Random House

Sept. 2010

Core audience: mostly, but not limited to, boys gr. 4-5

Jake's widowed mom falls on the ice just before Christmas breaking her leg, needing an operation and a hospital stay. The hospital calls Jake's Grandfather, who lives in another state, to come and care for him. They have never met, but spoken once a year on the phone. The gruff man comes with his faithful protective ("nightmare") dog and has a wonderful chance to make a connection with Jake. A dear older lady who lives across the hall in the apartment building steps in to help Jake and his Grandfather get used to each other. When Jake's two single aunts return from their trips they help make Christmas a special time for them all.

Thematically important is the thought that everything and everyone has a little light in them and it is important to reflect that light back and you will see the best of someone. This hopeful story is written in language that is both spare and

descriptive. Jake is a thoughtful young boy who realizes that "...well, some memories don't have anything to do with what's real" and works toward making the connection with his grandfather. This is a tale of friendship and family and connections that is perfect for younger readers, especially at Christmas.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Rating: 8

Jane, by April Lindner

9780316084208, 17.99

Poppy, October 2010

Core Audience: 14 UP

Notable: Modern version of *Jane Eyre* sans style and substance

Review: The visceral dislike I experienced upon encountering *Jane*, April Linder's modern retelling of *Jane Eyre*, made me consider Virginia Woolf's reflection on William Hazlitt. "Had one met Hazlitt no doubt one would have liked him on his own principle that 'We can scarcely hate anyone we know'. But Hazlitt has been dead now a hundred years and it is perhaps a question how far we can know him well enough to overcome those feelings of dislike, both personal and intellectual, which his writings still so sharply arouse." Woolf is never wrong about these things, and we must therefore conclude that *Jane*, despite its author's revelation that "Whenever I got stuck, I would open up *Jane Eyre* for inspiration and ideas," (which is a novel means of circumventing writer's block to be sure), and the author's further revelation that "the book practically wrote itself; I felt as though I was watching the chapters unfold in my head and simply taking notes," (which is a novel description of writing a new version of a book that has already been written), is so far removed from the soul and style of *Jane Eyre* that our sharp dislike is readily explained.

Jane Eyre is a masterpiece because it is truly gestalt. Its elements merge and grow in power. It is dynamic in every regard. *Jane*, in contrast, is inert. The declaration by a publicist that "Lindner's writing is lyrical and evocative of Bronte herself," is ill considered. The book has no style of its own, no life of its own, it is as though a model of *Jane Eyre* has been constructed with modern fashions, but that model is uninhabited, the genius loci of its original having declined to visit. Writing *Jane* was apparently a breeze, "The book only took a few months to write, and I had more fun working on it than on anything else I've written." This is not surprising. There is labor involved in original work. Revisiting classic works can be done with originality and success; just consider Polly Shulman's splendid *Enthusiasm*. One imagines, however, that Shulman took longer, struggled more,

and had less fun than Lindner. The differing result is evident to the senses. Listen to E.R. Eddison's Lord Gro explain his ability to tell phantasms from genuine terrors to the Sorcerer King Gorice. "As a child weaveth a daisy-chain, thus easily did you conjure up these shapes of terror. Not in such wise fareth he that calleth out of the deep the deadly terror indeed; but with toil and sweat and with straining of thought, will, heart, and sinew fareth he."

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 3

Additional reviews of *Jane*:

I'm in agreement. *Jane* can't make the claim of being a unique reinterpretation of *Jane Eyre*. And it didn't "practically wr(i)te itself".....Bronte wrote it. It's very telling when you inform your reader that "Whenever I got stuck, I would open Jane Eyre for inspiration and ideas." Changing the names and the setting does not make it a new book. If there are Bronte heirs around, they should sue for plagiarism. One good thing about the book, though, was the fact that it was a really quick read. It almost "read itself" for me. But then, if you already know the plot, you can zip through a book as fast as you can turn the pages. Ultimately, the hand shadow figure of a dog has no life, no bark, no bite. In the same way, *Jane* is the shadow image of *Jane Eyre*; all the parts are here, but there's no life, no bark, no bite. My rating: I'll stick with Kenny's somewhat charitable 3.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 3

Even without considering the crime of offending readers by the conceit that "Lindner's writing is lyrical and evocative of Bronte Herself," I hated it. It has no redeeming virtues.

Kat Goddard

Rating:1

Justin Fisher Declares War, by James Preller

978-0545033015, \$15.99

Scholastic

August 2010

Core Audience: Grades 4-7 (per Scholastic; I'd say 3 - 5)

Notable Aspects: Good school story; short, good for reluctant readers or as a classroom read-aloud.

Another middle grade winner for James Preller. This story takes place in the

same school as Along Came Spider; the main characters from that book, Trey and Spider, have walk-on parts in this one. It was nice to see them again, but in no sense is this a sequel.

Justin Fisher has been the class clown since an incident involving spaghetti in third grade. Over time the humor has come at the expense of others, costing him friends. This year he is the class troublemaker, trying (and often succeeding) to make life miserable for new fifth grade teacher Mr. Tripp. Lessons are learned, but gently, this is not a sledgehammer "message" book. The vehicle of a school talent show works well, with success and redemption for both Justin and Mr. Tripp. A fast, fun book.

Reviewer: Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers
8

Rating:

Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz, by Laura Toffler-Corrie

978-1596435803, \$16.99

Roaring Brook Press

August 2010

Core Audience: Girls ages 9-13 (I've been using it as a bat mitzvah gift)

Notable Aspects: Humor, friendship, Jewish character who is not having angst about her religious identity, story told in email (Fortunately for my mid 20th century sensibilities, this is presented on the page more as if they are letters), interesting class assignment on immigration

Review: Jacket copy absolutely spot-on, so here it is. "Amy Finawitz is having a rough year. Her best friend, Callie, has abandoned their awesome life in New York City to stay with relatives in Kansas. So now, while Callie is going for hayrides with boys named Bucky and getting in touch with her inner organic farmer, Amy is stuck hanging out with geeky girls who knit, eating Mr. Lee's Chinese food at a table for one, and crushing on hottie John Leibler all by herself. "Thankfully - or not - God decides to send Amy a replacement friend in the form of Miss Sophia, the little old lady who lives down the hall. Miss Sophia introduces Amy to a Hasidic boy named Beryl. Beryl is certainly no John Leibler, but perhaps he understands Amy and her problems better than she realizes?"

"Told in wry emails and brilliant one-act plays, this laugh-out-loud novel offers quirky characters, a tour around New York City, and an appealing story about what it means to be a friend."

This book is hilarious, and that's more than enough reason to read it. The friendship between Amy and Callie is beautifully done and you get a real sense of Callie, even though all the emails are written by Amy (in that sense, the book is more like a journal). There is also some interesting history lightly dropped in. Amy's school assignment, in which each student is given sections of an immigrant's diary, is to try to really relate to what that person is thinking and feeling, without using the internet. Her diarist is Anna Slonovich, a young Jewish woman from Russia. This project is what brings Amy, Miss Sophia, Beryl and John together, with a surprising discovery at the end (unless you've read Dara Horn's *All Other Nights*; then it's not so surprising). And did I mention that this book is hilarious?

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8

The Limit by Kristen Landon

9781442402713 \$15.99

Aladdin/Simon & Schuster

9/7/10

Core audience: Boys & girls age 8 & up
Notable for interesting scenario, suspense

Although this was a fast read that kept my attention, there were just too many things that were left unrealized. The reasons for the very premise of the book-- that families are held to a seemingly arbitrary spending limit and that the children of those families are punished if it is exceeded -- was never really explained. The mind-control aspects of that punishment were also left vague. There was far too much running and chasing. That said, many will be likely be entranced by the opening pages and carried along until the unsatisfying ending.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 6

Linger, by Maggie Stiefvater

9780545123280, \$17.99

Scholastic Press

July 2010

Core Audience: Ages 14+, girls and a few enlightened boys

Notable Aspects: Follow-up to *Shiver*, werewolves, teen romance

As a big fan of *Shiver*, I gasped audibly when this galley appeared on my desk. I'm relieved to report that *Linger* is a worthy follow-up to its bestselling predecessor. I quite literally could not put this book down. Grace and Sam are back with their first person narrations and there are also two new narrators. I don't want to give the plot away, but I can say that this one ends with another cliffhanger that makes you desperately want to keep reading.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books &
Music Rating: 9

Additional reviews/ratings for *Linger*:

Notable for romance, suspense, family issues
Will appeal to teens, mostly girls, loving *Twilight* books

This eagerly awaited sequel to *Shiver* will not disappoint readers loving this genre. Grace's parents are taking an active role in her life for the first time in years. They are not pleased with her intimacy with Sam and try to prevent their being together. Rock star turned wolf, Cole, trying to lose himself, finally finds new meaning for life as readers root for him to get control of himself. Isabel is trying to find herself and makes some small progress. Sam is happy to be fully human now, but he doesn't know how to go forward with his life. Grace is slipping away with a strange illness. For me there was a sense of foreboding all through the book. When it ended, I felt the plot had gone forward a bit, a continuation, but there was no sense of satisfaction. Readers will love the suspense of this story but be panting (pun intended) for the last volume.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Rating: 7

and:

One of my young reviewers, Brooke Morgan (high school freshman) loved the first two books in this series and we did a joint review for a local print publication (Columbia INSIDER). An excerpt follows. Review was presented from Brooke's point of view, my overall rating is slightly less enthusiastic.

"Trouble comes to the wolf pack with the new wolves. Sam and Grace strive to remain together and help guide the pack. It's a true sequel to *Shiver*; you need to read the first book first, but unlike many trilogies, the second book is just as good as the first. As the plot and relationships develop, so does the book.

Shiver was narrated alternately by Sam and Grace. *Linger* adds two narrators – Cole, a rock star who has become a wolf, and Isabel, a high-school friend of Grace's who knows about the wolf pack. The suspense really mounts. Frustration alert: the book ends with a cliffhanger as big as Mt. Everest. On a scale of 1 to 10, I give this book 10. I can't wait for the last book."

Reviewers: Rondi Brower and Brooke Morgan, Blackwood & Brouwer
Rating: 8.5

and:

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove
Rating: 9

A Long Walk to Water **Linda Sue Park**
978-0547251271, \$16.00
Clarion
November 2010

10+ both genders

A small but potent book. A very effective presentation of the struggles in Sudan: rebellion, starvation, disease, draught. The story of Salva is one of courage, perseverance, love, faith, generosity. There is violence but it is not graphically depicted.

The book is a dual narrative telling the stories of two Sudanese children, separated by over 20 years. The story of Salva begins in 1985. An 11 year boy, at school when armed men (rebels or soldiers?) arrive, Salva is forced to flee into the bush. He has no idea what has happened to his home or his family, but he cannot return to his village. If captured, boys are either killed or forced to fight in the brutal war between the Muslim government and the native tribes. Other refugees, desperate to save themselves, refused to let Salva travel with them. Finally a group of Dinkas allowed him to join them and Salva survived the grueling journey to refugee camps in Ethiopia. Later forced out of Ethiopia as well, many of the Sudanese died trying to reach camps in Kenya. Salva led a group of over a thousand boys to safety. Finally, after more than 10 years as a refugee, at 22, Salva moved to Rochester, NY as one of the Sudanese Lost Boys.

Nya's story starts in 2008, in a dusty village in Southern Sudan. She spends her

days getting water for her family. Two trips a day, every day. She does not go to school or even play; she has water to fetch. Her younger sister nearly dies from a fever spread by contaminated water, but the family has no other source of water. Then, one day, strange men come to the village and soon a “large, red, metal giraffe” arrives. The well brings abundant, clean, safe water. Freed from her daily chore of carrying water, Nya will be able to go to school. Overwhelmed by the wonderful changes in her life, she goes up to one of the strange men, the boss, to thank him for bringing water. When asked, she says, “My name is Nya.” He replies, “I’m happy to meet you Nya. My name is Salva.” A message from Salva Dut follows and concludes the book, which is based on his story. It’s an amazing and inspiring story.

Ellen Richmond, Children’s Book Cellar

Rating: 9

Lost in Lexicon, by Penny Noyce

9780984525003, \$12.95 (paperback)

Tumblehome Press (imprint of Emerald Book Co), Oct. 2010

Core Audience: Grades 5-7

Notable Aspects: Wordplay, language puns, engaging characters, "edu-tainment" aspect

Review: Following in the tradition of Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *Lost in Lexicon* follows the adventures of two tweens, Ivan and Daphne, who find themselves unspeakably bored during a week with their grand-aunt (sans cellphones, television and computer games). She suggests they explore a rugged cupola on her property, which magically transports them into the world of Lexicon, where abstract literary and mathematical ideas are given form. It seems every night the skies of Lexicon are filled with a wonderfully enticing light show that entrances all adults, who awaken in the morning to find their children missing. (The light show is said to be the work of 'Pixels', which is slightly preachy but I will accept it for the sake of the story) Ivan and Daphne travel from town to town, searching for both the source of the Pixels and the missing Lexicon children. Along the way, the two meet a Thesaurus (llama-like creature that regurgitates synonyms when spoken to), the wonderfully wacky Mistress of Metaphor (who falls into pits no one else can see called clichés), a swarm of bees that only sting when grammatically incorrect sentences are uttered in their presence and a host of other characters. The book is quick moving for the most part, and teens and their parents alike will enjoy most of the locales the children find themselves in, such as one village where each family speaks only using one part of speech (the Nouns use only nouns and the Adverbs only speak using

adverbs etc.) although some explanations are longwinded. (For example, all towns in Lexicon are given both a name eg. Falmouth and a number designation eg. 4,7. The number refers to the point on which the town can be found on a map of Lexicon, which is structured like a Cartesian plane.) By this age level, I feel that most children will have a basic familiarity with the coordinate plane system. Still, most mathematical explanations are accompanied by charts and illustrations, making the tangents (forgive the pun) less tedious. The book mixes humor, adventure, and educational content well (I was wondering if any action was going to happen, but never fear, the children must contend with a kidnapping about two-thirds the way through their adventure. Although well-written, the ending is stilted in my mind. Daphne and Ivan find the root of Lexicon's problem, but are lured into a cave where each experience a real-life rendition of either a video game (for Ivan) or a soap opera (for Daphne). They escape from this virtual entertainment trap by constructing a bridge which they make by linking together well reasoned arguments, which take the form of metal girders. (Easily the most pedantic part of the entire novel.) The kidnapped children are returned home and the source of the Pixels is revealed to be our world, which disseminates them through -- you guessed it -- children's minds that have been turned away from books and wholesome outdoor entertainment by the wonders of the internet and television. Fortunately, this motif is only evident very early and very late in the plot, and mostly ignored throughout the book, so I don't feel self-serving giving to a parent. All in all, a solid middle-school choice, one that I would give to advanced elementary school students and both avid and interested junior high students. I would shy away from giving this to reluctant readers, although if a parent bought it to read with a child, I think the parent might find the book more amusing than the offspring.

Janusz Sulanowski, *Eight Cousins*

Rating: 7

Low Red Moon, by Ivy Devlin

978-1-59990-510-5 \$16.99

Bloomsbury

September 2010

12+, primarily girls

Notable for: a good mystery, a handsome (aren't they all?) werewolf, romance, a touch of "back to nature"

A teen girl, Avery, barely escaped the brutal murder of her parents in their idyllic forest home. She has vague impressions, but she doesn't remember much about

that night, She desperately wants to remember something that will help solve the murders. She isn't allowed to go back home; and is, for now, forced to live in the small nearby town of Woodlake with a grandmother she hardly knows. Ben, a handsome new boy at school, holds a mysterious attraction for her; though, at the same time, she is fearful. She and her grandmother are trying to forge a relationship. There is danger in the woods for Avery. It might, or might not, be Ben, who is a werewolf. He, too, cannot remember what happened the night Avery's parents died. Despite her fear, Avery trusts Ben. The danger that she is in is not from Ben. Greedy mortals here are much more vicious than the supernatural beasts. In the end, the mystery is solved. Girl and werewolf are together and the equilibrium of the forest, which is almost a character in the book, has been restored.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 6

The Madman of Venice by Sophie Masson

978-0-385-73843-9, \$17.99

Delacorte Press

August 2010

Core Audience: Ages 12- 16, probably evenly split amongst genders

Notable Aspects: Swashbuckling, historical setting, Shakespearean connections, mystery, intrigue, danger, and romance

Review: Ned, a clerk living in London attempts to help his master solve problems of pirating in 17th century Venice. The problem arrives when Ned, Master Ashby, and his daughter Celia arrive in Venice after a calling from a stranger. There, they get drawn into yet another mystery; a missing girl. An interesting enough plot, with a few minor setbacks. Ned is a relatable kind of guy, and Celia is a strong example of girl power. Great for kids interested in Shakespeare, or in old cultures. The pace of the book is fairly good, however, the romantic stories twined into the background are rather jumpy. Some parts of the story happen too matter-of-factly, there aren't any reasons to back them up. Suitable for young teens, however, kids much older than sixteen may find the book a little too juvenile. Good for any kid who likes occasional swashbuckling, not non-stop action. May be a hit with some kids, but probably not one that will perpetually be checked out the library.

Reviewer: Jazmin Knapp (Mt. Abram High School DDG Booksellers), Rating: 6.5

The Magnificent 12: The Call by Michael Grant

9780061833663 /

Harper, September 2010

A cross between: Percy Jackson, Dave Barry's *Science Fair* and *The 39 Clues*, this new series will be a hit with reluctant readers. Action-packed and filled with humour, Grant's latest is fun and hard to put down. Mack, a medium-sized, medium-looking boy is forced to run off with his bully, Stefan, in order to save the world from the Pale Queen. I'll admit I laughed quite a bit, especially at the missives the golem taking Mack's place at home writes to him. And there were moments when I made everyone at home stop what they were doing so I could read-aloud a particular passage, or two or three...

But much like *Science Fair*, I found many of the hip pop-culture references a bit over the top. I could have done without the mention of Wal-Mart or *I am Legend*, a movie that's a bit mature for this intended audience. And enough with the illustrations that mention the website popping up every few pages. These kids are computer savvy, they get that they can extend their experience online. No need to shove it in their faces. Oh, and certain parts were a bit more graphically violent than maybe they needed to be-- such as giant bug arms being torn off and pus oozing everywhere. But what do you expect when a young hero, his bully and a young girl from Australia are forced to do battle? It's obviously in everyone's best interest if they save the world. If they lost and the world was destroyed how would I ever be able to read the next installment? If the author could just keep from ratcheting his graphic violence and pop-culture references up to 11, I think this series could do very well with the intended audience, and their moms.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, Rating 6.5

Matched, by Allyson Condie

9780525423645, \$17.99

Random House, October 2009

Core audience: Ages 14-UP

Notable: Intriguing application of probability science to totalitarianism.

Review: *Matched* posits a totalitarian state, The Society, whose control mechanism is built around the application of applied probability science. For example: if a group of 20 children were to bushwhack their way up a hill, the government could accurately predict the order of their arrival. In order to have sufficient data to achieve this level of predictability four things are necessary, omnipresent data collection, sophisticated processing, application toward goal-oriented results, and physical and digital correction mechanisms. *Matched* is intrinsically Orwellian in its reductive approach, and is filled with insightful totalitarian applications of psychology and technology: for example, the cessation of all production of literature and art, and the reduction of past production to 100 poems, 100 paintings, and 100 musical compositions. The society of *Matched* is governed by rank, and the book's narrator, Cassia, is teenager from the highest visible rank, that of officials. The Society she lives in is gradually revealed to be under attack from without, and under strain within. From a reader's perspective, despite the pleasant feeling of *Matched* being a toyshop full of clever details, there is a distinct sense of something missing, of a certain absence preventing the reader from suspending disbelief. This something is the nagging sense that the cost/benefit analysis of the Society's means of operation doesn't quite work. The level of resources applied to controlling the class of officials is staggering in its minutia. One feels that there are much, much easier, and less expensive ways to maintain control, and that no one is visibly benefiting from this colossal expenditure of resources, if there is a higher class wallowing in luxury and freedom we haven't seen them yet. The first book in a trilogy *Matched* is filled with potential, but it has a lot of work to do in terms of establishing a convincing explanation for the Society it depicts so well.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers
Rating: 8

Additional reviews for *Matched*:

Core Audience: Ages 14+ (though content is fine for 12+)
Notable Aspects: first in a dystopian trilogy

REVIEW: "Dutton Children's Books, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers Group, has acquired Ally Condie's highly-anticipated dystopian novel MATCHED in a heated auction that included seven major publishers. One of this year's most talked-about manuscripts, Condie's futuristic novel tells the story of a teen-aged girl who has waited seventeen years to find out who "the Society" will select for her ideal mate, only to find herself falling in love with someone else."

When I read that press release in December, my interest was piqued. Books that get a lot of hype don't always deliver, so when a copy of *Matched* appeared on

my desk, I took it home and hesitantly started reading it, skeptical at first. But only for about a second. I was instantly sucked into the world that Ally Condie created - a dystopian society reminiscent of Lois Lowry's classic, *The Giver*. Condie has done a brilliant job with this book, the first in a trilogy.

Reviewer: Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9

The Memory Bank by Carolyn Coman

9780545210669 / \$16.99

Scholastic, October 2010

Core audience: Ages 8-12

Review: Once I got over the impossible initial premise of the book (that parents—no matter how evil--could simply banish their own child for disobeying them by laughing) I really did enjoy the world that Coman created at the WWMB (World Wide Memory Bank). The fantastical machines & the Dahl-like food are fun and very nicely brought to life by Rob Shepperson's illustrations.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 7.5

The Mermaid's Mirror, by L. K. Madigan

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, October, 2010

9780547194912, \$16.00

Core audience: Girls 12-15; families dealing with drug issues

Notable: Setting, romance

Review: L.K. Madigan earned my respect with her *Flash Burnout*, and if *Mermaid's Mirror* is read as an allegory for drug involvement and recovery, it actually works quite well. Some of us aren't romantic enough to swoon over handsome vampires, and look where that got us. The half-human-half-mermaid thing doesn't wash too well either, but it probably has some market as a book, especially since *Emily Windsnap* paved the way. It will make one heck of a movie, and we hope that happens because we'd like to see this author keep working.

In the meantime: this is a book about 16-year-old Lena, who's drawn to the sea,

despite her father's reluctance for her to have surfing lessons. Of course she arranges it on the sly, is a natural, and reconnects with her long lost mother. About page 195 Lena goes into the sea, lives with her maternal extended family including a stern, forbidding grandmother; almost forgets her terrestrial life, falls in love with a handsome, passionate merman -- but suddenly retrieves just enough memory to rip the balance toward land, father, cool stepmother, adorable half brother, and fun friends.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 7.5

Mindblind, by Jennifer Roy

978-07614-5716-4, \$15.99

Marshall Cavendish

October 2010

Core Audience: Ages 12 and up

Notable Aspects: Appealing character with Aspergers; but also a coming of age story with girls, garage bands and alcohol. Way cool cover.

Review: Nathaniel is a likable 14-year-old boy with Aspergers syndrome. He has a fairly good understanding of himself. This, on his friend Molly: "Usually, I do not like to socialize with other Asperger's kids. We are all too self absorbed." He is very bright and wants to be able to consider himself a genius. A genius is not just someone with a very high IQ, which he has, but someone who has accomplished something outstanding and contributed something to the world. This he achieves, in a very teen way. But what sets this story apart are his friends. Cooper, Jessa, Logan, Molly, Sam. They are great, and supportive, in completely believable ways (only Molly has Asperger's). Nathaniel is home schooled (doing an on-line college degree), so their relationships aren't tested in the peer pressure cauldron of high school, but it's wonderful to see teens at their best. I think that will resonate with them, too.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 9

Mockingbird by Kathryn Erskine

978-0399252648 / \$15.99

Penguin Philomel

April 2010

Core audience: girls ages 10-13

Notable for strong female, issues of death, Aspergers, friendship, language

Ten-year-old Caitlin has lost her older brother to a school shooting. Her Mom has already died of cancer. Because Caitlin has Aspergers, she lacks the social skills to have friends and to help her father, who is enveloped in grief. She also has problems with figurative language (providing much-needed humor here), and with being very literal in her understanding of conversation. She often says inappropriate things (which do make sense to her). Her guidance counselor at school helps her make social progress, and even help her Dad, by helping Caitlin find

closure in the finishing of an old chest that had been her brother's much-loved scouting project. More than a simple story, there are layers to appreciate. The use of language is striking. There are many examples of symbolism in the story. An important one is the chest- he was killed by a bullet in the chest. There are parallels to Harper Lee's *Mockingbird* story. I really enjoyed this tale of a young girl with her head in the right place (even if some of the workings are very special), who helps her whole community heal and learns how to be a friend and help others.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

Additional ratings/reviews of *Mockingbird*:

I loved the references to the original—and what a way to open the door to Lee's work to a younger audience. I really came to care about these characters.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, Rating 8.5

and:

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

and:

Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating: 8

Mockingjay, by Suzanne Collins

9780439023511, \$17.99

Scholastic, August 2010

Core audience: 12 & up

Notable aspects: Strong social and political themes

Review: The concluding volume to The Hunger Games Trilogy does well with handling some of its themes, the love triangle, the intrinsically exploitative nature of political media, the devastating effects of reaction and counter reaction to war and repression, yet it is also rushed and jumbled when taken as a whole. Katniss' mad rush on Snow's Presidential palace is mirrored in the mad rush which takes hold of the narrative at that point, leaving dead central figures strewn in the book, and dangling plot lines strewn about the narrative. For example, Finnick's death carries no force, and the capital's pod defense structure feels strongly as though it was inserted in the book to create the feeling of a third hunger games fought in the capital's streets, despite making little sense as a sane and cost efficient means of defense or control. The rebel's framing of Snow via the killing of the children in the bunker is dramatic and horrific, and for Katniss her sister's death certainly represents a horrific coup de grace, but it was so transparently not done by the capital that it doesn't really stand up. In the end, while there is much to praise

about *Mockingjay*, there is a very real sense that the book should have been longer in both in its pages and in its making. "Less haste more speed," as the saying is. There is a pervasive hastiness to the final chapters of *Mockingjay* which is a real shame.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 8.5

Additional ratings/reviews of *Mockingjay*:

Let me add a rating to *Mockingjay*. I didn't want to be the reviewer, but I will add my two cents. I know I'm going against the flow here.

I still just "don't get it" (...that's the whole series btw).

Even with it being told first person, I don't feel Katniss is a real, whole, well defined character. I don't care what happens to her. Her sister's death didn't cause any amount of consternation for me; it was so obviously contrived, as I feel the whole series is. I don't think that the readers who've bought the book from me (and whom I've been asking about their reactions to the series) have picked up on the themes that Kenny mentions (the intrinsically exploitative nature of

political media, the devastating effects of reaction and counter reaction to war and repression). They have, however, been right into the violence, the gore, and (some) the love triangle.

This whole series strikes me like DaVinci Code. It's like a candy bar. Tastes good going down, but isn't satisfying like a real meal. It's a quick, entertaining read that won't hang by you.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 6

and:

I'll also add a rating for MOCKINGJAY: 9.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books and Music Rating: 9

Monsters of Men, by Patrick Ness

9780763647513, \$18.99

Candlewick, October 2010

Core audience: Ages 12-up

Notable: Re-imagining of New World colonizations in a science fiction setting employing riveting thematic connections to *Wuthering Heights*.

Review: *Monsters of Men*, which concludes the Chaos Walking Trilogy, continues the gradual expansion of the readers comprehension in terms of both theme and scope, by introducing a third narrator. From a reader's perspective the series began by being essentially being dropped into a half familiar, half foreign world, seen through a first person narrator, Todd, who assumed you were from his world and whose own knowledge of the world around him was both incomplete and incorrect. The experience is momentarily disorienting and then increasingly compelling, as we gain in comprehension through listening to Todd. In the second book a second narrator, Viola, a key character in book one, comes into play.

In *Monsters of Men* a third voice is added, that of The Return, a member of the planet's indigenous people. This sense of expanding perspective is brilliantly handled by Ness, and perfectly complements the culmination of powerful events which the book depicts. At the heart of this series is an exploration of two issues, the power and nature of the human will and the power and nature of privacy. These issues are explored both as a coming of age story and as a

detailed science fiction novel. The power of will is handled in a manner reminiscent of that found in *Wuthering Heights*, in which Heathcliff's darker side involves his willful subordination of everyone around him with the exception of Catherine, while its bright side is found in his single-minded determination to maintain his connection to Catherine, and to be reunited in their separate heaven. In *Monsters of Men* this theme, which has been building, is powerfully realized. In Mayor Prentiss we find a dark Heathcliff, whose use of will to control others is increasingly refined and out in open, but whose twisted tenderness for Todd, rather like Heathcliff's for Hareton Earnshaw, affects him unexpectedly. At the same time the absolute bond between Todd and Viola, their one mutual certainty, which strongly echoes the absolute bond of Heathcliff and Catherine, is the engine of a great deal of compelling emotional exploration and also the development of Ness's secondary theme of privacy. As Todd's noise is quieted, his bond to Viola is strained, as is his power. The broadcasting of thoughts, or Noise, initially presented as the curse of Men, is revealed as a source of power and intimacy, a blessing of this new world, not a curse. The tension between choosing one life, of choosing a private bond, over public welfare, is shown to be a false paradigm hiding a more profound unity. This unity is paralleled in the voice of the Land, which provides a third window on the relationship between will and the nature of privacy. Though the Land is one voice, and which apparently has no privacy, it does require a source of will, a Sky. The role of the Sky is very like what Mayor Prentiss has in mind for himself, though in this case benign, and the Land's voice, apart from being fascinating in its own right, provides a marvelous counterpoint to the other narrations. Emotionally riveting, structurally complex, and brilliantly executed, here we have a story as profound as it is exciting.

Kenny Brechner: DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9.25

Moon Over Manifest by Clare Vanderpool

9780385738835, 16.99

Delacorte, October 2010

Notable: Sense of adventure, recreating the past through letters and treasured keepsakes

Core Audience: boys and girls 10 and up

Young Abilene has been put on a train to go and live in the town where her father grew up while he is away working on the railroad. The year is 1936 and Abilene doesn't just get off at the station in Manifest, Kansas like everyone else—she

jumps! So begins a young girl's relationship with members of the community that reminded me in some ways of India Opal and her beloved dog. A list of the townspeople resides in the front of the book, and we meet them all, either in 1918 or 1936—some in both. As Abilene is used to starting new schools in strange places, she comes armed with a list of “universals,” otherwise known as types of kids she's seen before. But once she starts to get to know everyone she begins to realize that people aren't so easily classified. Her friendship with Lettie and Ruthanne marks the beginning of an adventure, one that involves uncovering secrets about the town's past, prohibition and the Klu Klux Klan. Yet even with these serious issues, there is a genuine sweetness to the story and Abilene in general. Unfamiliar words like “addlepate” and “thunderation,” crop up alongside newspaper articles, notices for healing spring waters and spirit readings. Vanderpool has clearly done her homework. Her research and clever writing has given us a novel way to share the past with the kids of today that is both thrilling and, in a way, universal for all of us.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 7.5

My Life As a Book by Janet Tashjian

978-0805089035 / \$16.99

Henry Holt July

Reluctant readers will really enjoy this. Similarities to Wimpy Kid books

Notable for humor, preteen boy appeal

Derek is a smart kid, but his ideas of fun will drive the adults in his life crazy. One such activity is to lob croquet balls at the satellite dish- from the roof! Rather than read about others' adventures, he is dying to have his own- and he does! When he learns that a former babysitter has drowned he is determined to learn more. He finds that she drowned trying to save him when he toddled into the water while in her care. A major appeal of the book is the clever illustration, in the book's margins, of his assigned vocabulary words- as he defines them. Tashjian has an appealing way of writing about teen boys and this new book will be a delight for the reluctant preteen boy.

Sue Carita, Toadstool Bookshops Rating: 7.5

Nancy and Plum, by Betty MacDonald, forward by Jeanne Birdsall, illus. Mary GrandPre.

Knopf, October, 2010

9780375866852, \$15.99

Core audience: Nostalgic great-grandmothers; girls 6-9

Notable: Setting, characters, language, innocent outlook, wish fulfillment

Review: Orphan-Makes-Good (OMG) stories were boosted in 1942 with Gertrude Chandler Warner's *The Boxcar Children*, written expressly for boy and girl emerging readers, and serving them well, if dully, ever since. *Nancy and Plum*, a livelier expression of the genre, came out in 1952, and faded away again, perhaps because it is so clearly a story for girls. Like Harry Potter and Dido Twite, sisters Nancy and Plum are orphans in the hands of awful adults. They endure a perfectly dreadful boarding home, using their wits to make the best of a hungry, unheated Christmas, a heartless, conniving headmistress, a wealthy but heedless guardian, a mean snitch, and assorted punishments and deprivations. At last the situation becomes unbearably humiliating and they run away, sleep in a haystack, a haystack that belongs, conveniently enough, to a kind-hearted childless couple. Within this well-worn frame, though, the character of the two girls is expressed with a charm and verve that deserves to live again. These aren't mean girls in training, nor baby seductresses: they're spunky, innocent little girls busily turning their bad luck into great good fortune.

Sermonizing to children seems to be as pernicious as dandelions – and considerably less attractive. According to Jeanne Birdsall's introduction, Betty MacDonald grew up telling her older sister stories about two sisters, and these evolved, with many modifications, into what eventually appeared as *Nancy and Plum*. Alas, the hand that edited out the bank robbers and stowing away on a boat to China didn't also see fit to edit out some of the preachy bits. But the best parts are too delightful to be spoiled by the needless moralizing.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 7.5

Ninth Ward by Jewell Parker Rhodes

#9780316043076 \$15.99

Little Brown

August 2010

Core audience: boys and girls grades 5-7

Notable for language, family issues, hurricane Katrina lore

Twelve-year-old Lanesha has been brought up in New Orleans's tough Ninth Ward by MaMa Ya-ya, the midwife who brought her into this world. Lanesha considers herself an interpreter of symbols and signs, having been born with a caul. The old woman's visions warn them of the terrible hurricane on its way even before they listen to the TV reports as it approaches. We are with Lanesha as neighbors pack up and drive away and others refuse to leave.

Tension mounts as the winds howl and then the water climbs upwards in their simple home. This is one gutsy kid who survives along with a neighbor boy, who probably wouldn't have made it without her. Even as Mama Ya-Ya closes her eyes forever, and the water approaches the attic where they huddle, there is a sense that Lanesha has been given an extraordinary sense of hope and strength. There are bonds to natural things like trees, clouds, the moon, that connect her in a pleasant way with the Nature she cannot stop. This is a very beautiful and sensitive story despite the horror of the events. The gorgeous cover will draw readers to the book, and the wonderful little messages about how to live will satisfy those who are looking for something deeply felt and off the main track.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop My score:8

On The Blue Comet by Rosemary Wells

978-0763637224 \$16.99

Sept. 2010

Core audience:boys and girls grades 5-7

Notable for suspense, time travel, depression era details, gutsy characters, Rudyard Kipling's "IF" poem

Bring back the trains! Eleven-year-old Oscar falls into an old Lionel electric train set-up and finds himself actually aboard the Blue Comet train on his way to Chicago! Transferring there to The Golden State Limited, he is on his way to California to find his father, who has gone there to find work. Fast-paced but with more than a smidgin of charming language, stingy Aunt Carmen, repeated quoting from Kipling's "If" poem, a murderous bank robbery, fancy Hollywood dudes, and ten years of time travel, the suspense and humor kept me going to the very end. Wells has crafted a tale of courage during a time when dreams are about the only thing most people owned. Kids will be willing to suspend that

sense of disbelief with much of the plot's too quick (ludicrous?) resolutions. It was a heck of a ride!

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 7.5

I'd like to add a rating for *On the Blue Comet*. I wasn't really drawn in by it, but it's fun.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 6.5

Penny Dreadful by Laurel Snyder

9780375861994 \$16.99

Random House

September 2010

Core Audience- most likely girls 8-12
Notable for friendship issues, likeable characters

Penelope Grey, 10, has spent her life in a lovely brownstone in NYC with a cook, housekeeper and two very busy parents. Now that Dad has decided to quit his high pressure job and Mom seems to have inherited a great-aunt's house in rural Tennessee, they decide to move to a simpler way of life. That suits previously home-schooled Penelope as she is yearning for an adventurous life, like that of beloved characters in the books she reads. The Greys arrive to find that the rambling old house has been broken up into various apartments where several artistic and interesting families live, free, as dictated by deceased aunt. The house is also second-mortgaged as the debts are huge. Her Dad spends his time cooking and plans to write a cookbook, but doesn't get a day job. Mom

tries to work with the sanitation dept., but then finds she is pregnant. At the end the families chip in with checks to solve immediate money problems. Penelope learns a lot about friendship from the other kids who live there. There is a suspenseful segment as the kids spelunk in an old cave looking for treasure. I really liked Penelope, newly renamed "Penny" as "it suits her better", and her friends. Penny learns that problems don't always get fixed like they do in books. Sometimes you can't do anything about them. That's life. New friend Duncan learns there is lots to daily life he has missed due to overprotective parents. The kids here seem to hold the reins, but it's all good so far. Drawings by Abigail Halpin add to the charm.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 7.5

Revolution, by Jennifer Donnelly

ISBN 9780385737630

Delacorte Press/Random House

October, 2010

Ages: 14+ (some sexual references and drug abuse)

Notable aspects: Teen depression, loss of sibling, mix of historical and contemporary stories, romance, time travel

Review: I was hooked pretty quickly on this book by the voice of the troubled narrator, Andi. She's smart and funny and hurting inside more than she can or would say aloud. Two years ago, her younger brother was killed, and she blames herself for it. Therapy and drugs do little to dull the pain; only music offers her any comfort, and even that is not enough. Andi is always just one step away from ending it all, but that last step is one that she doesn't yet have the strength or desperation to take. While she battles her own demons, her mother also mourns and is losing herself in obsessively painting her lost son. When Andi's distant father discovers the state of things, he has Andi's mother committed to a mental hospital and drags Andi to Paris, where he is working to determine the identity of a preserved heart believed to have belonged to the young Louis XVII. Andi is expected to start work on the thesis that will allow her to graduate from her extremely prestigious private school back in Brooklyn.

When Andi discovers a journal written during the French Revolution, she becomes caught up in the story of the young woman who risked her life in an attempt to save that of the young, imprisoned, Prince Louis XVII. The suspense builds in both girls' stories until Andi suddenly finds herself swept into the past, right into the middle of the Paris of the Revolution. The time travel was a bit jarring, since the first two-thirds of the book are straight-forward fiction/historical fiction, though it could be left up to the reader to decide if the time travel is "factual" or a figment of Andi's anti-depressant addled mind. What was more jarring, for me, was watching the author stretch to create parallels between Andi's life and the Revolutionary period. (For example, the man who caused her brother's death was a man named Maximilien R. Peters, who stands on the corner shouting about starting a revolution--not so coincidentally like Maximilien de RobesPIERRE, a major leader of the Revolution who had Louis XVII placed in solitary confinement, at the age of eight, and kept him in prison until his death two years later.)

Despite some quibbles, I really enjoyed Jennifer Donnelly's novel and would recommend it to teens with an interest in historical fiction and slightly dark

romance.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating: 8

Additional ratings/reviews of *Revolution*:

Core Audience: Ages 14+

Notable Aspects: present-day with a historical twist, adult crossover potential

REVIEW: After reading *A Northern Light*, I knew Jennifer Donnelly was a good writer, but oh my gosh, she has blown me away with this one. Andi Alpers is an angry teenager - an outcast at her posh New York prep school who suffers from depression after the death of her younger brother. Her parents are separated, and her dad convinces her to come to Paris with him over winter break to get away from things and work on her senior project. But once she's there she discovers a hidden journal written by a girl during the French Revolution. Through reading Alex's journal, Andi discovers much about the city's history, and even more about herself.

This book is simply brilliant. I couldn't put it down. Jennifer Donnelly has previously written only period historical fiction, and it's wonderful to see her write excellent contemporary YA characters as well. This will also be perfect for adults - the writing is just so good that they might not even notice it's a YA novel.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9.5

and:

I'm not a historical fiction fan, but I found this book compelling, filled with well-drawn characters and a strong sense of place. The emotions were well-defined and ran quite deep; the feeling of pain and loss-- both in the past and in the present day-- was visceral. I've read everything Donnelly has ever written, and I find she just keeps getting better and better.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, Rating 8.5

and:

Mimi Powell, Baker Books

Rating: 9.5

Sapphique, by Catherine Fisher

9780803733978, \$17.99
Dial Press, December 2010

Core Audience: *Incarceron* fans

Notable Aspects: Highly conceptual and philosophical dystopia.

Review: This conclusion to Fisher's two-book exploration of dual prison worlds locked in different kinds of stasis is an excellent and highly conceptual conclusion. Readers will find that the author is more concerned with developing themes and ideas than in developing the central characters of book one, Finn and Claudia. They will also discover that the central character of book two is in fact *Incarceron* itself. *Sapphique* is rich in archetypal analogues, fallen angels, a war against Heaven, and so forth. These themes are handled in a fascinating and intellectually satisfying manner. The central theme of the book is a detailed exploration of gnosis versus self deception. There are some brilliant, unexpected, and compelling moments, as when *Incarceron* volunteers during the conjurer Rix's performance, when Jared takes on the role of *Sapphique*, and when the outer world goes Dorian Grey. Now the buyer's truth is that in a room with 100 readers who loved *Incarceron*, 30 will love *Sapphique*, 40 will like *Sapphique*, and 30 will be disappointed with it.*

Kenny Brechner, Devaney Doak & Garrett Booksellers

Rating: 8.75

Saving Sky by Diane Stanley

978-0061239052 \$15.99

Harper Collins

September 2010

Core audience: Ages 10+ girls and boys

Notable for issues of family, courage, honor, ethnic profiling

In a time of shortages, Sky's family has been living as "green" as they can. Making their world a better place is important. Celebrating "blessings" of what life gives them adds hope and optimism to their lives. When local squads begin rounding up people who look like the terrorists of Sept. 11, they courageously hide a classmate of Sky when his notable surgeon father and doctor mother are arrested.

Preparations for the winter solstice, a time of happiness and hope, reinforce the closeness Sky's family feels to the natural forces around them. "Even on the longest night of the year we can strike a match, and light a candle, and drive the

darkness away...we have beauty, and kindness, and courage, and fun...we know the light is coming soon..." is spoken by Sky's brother, Luke, and echoed by the rest of the family in their own moving words. Kareem decides he has had enough of hiding and turns himself in.

Especially moving and uplifting is the annual school program four months later where student winners of an essay contest present their written work along with computer generated illustration. Several winners presented essays and pictures of immigrant ancestors who had suffered terribly to come here and become very successfully assimilated in a land of many peoples. Sky told the story of Kareem's family, including the fact that her parents had to plead guilty for hiding the boy but the judge had courage too and refused to punish them, saying that would be wrong. Sky asked her audience, "What would happen if all of us acted like the judge did? If we stopped being afraid and just spoke the truth." This story asks a lot of questions and provokes a lot of thought about where our society is going today, and it does so with heartwarming family values, believable characters and loads of hope.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford NH

Rating: a whopping 9

Scorch Trials, by James Dashner

9780385738750, \$17.99

Random House, October 2010

Core audience: Ages 12-UP

Notable: Strong experimental/puzzle solving premise

Scorch Trials is the very entertaining bridge book in the Maze Runner Trilogy. The main thing here is that fans of book one will be thrilled with book two. Dashner has left all kinds of intriguing threads open. Were Brenda and Jorge deliberately part of the experiment, what's with all this stuff about looking for patterns and predictive role playing, is WICKED good? We have no idea, which will really build enthusiasm for the finale. The only thing we know is that the last book in the trilogy isn't set in Maine because if it was then the last line in The Scorch Trials would have read "Wicked is wicked good" rather than "Wicked is good." Can't have everything.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 8

Shadow Grail # 1: Legacies, by Mercedes Lackey and Rosemary Edgehill

978-0-7653-1761-2 \$9.99
978-0-7653-2707-9 \$18.99

Tor
July 2010

The Harry Potter crowd 12+

Notable for: suspense, adventure, twist from the familiar HP formula, touch of romance

In this book, Lackey and Edgehill give a nudge, nudge, wink, wink to *Harry Potter* and company and then create their own tale. Spirit White, recently orphaned, is surprised to learn that her parents' will provided for her to become a student at Oakhurst Academy, a combination school and orphanage in the backcountry of Montana. Her position at the school is guaranteed because she a Legacy; she has magical powers. Unbeknownst to Spirit, her parents were also Legacies and had also been students at Oakhurst. (There is a broad acknowledgement of the similarity to Harry Potter when Spirit is first learning about the school and seeing what it looks like.) Once at the school, she settles into the routine and makes some friends. She and her group realize that there's more than meets the eye at Oakhurst. When several students disappear from the school, Spirit and her friends realize that there are dark forces outside the school. The confrontation with the Wild Hunt is exciting and suspenseful. The book wraps up neatly, but with the promise of other adventures.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 6

The Things a Brother Knows by Dana Reinhardt

9780375844553, 16.99
Wendy Lamb Books (Random House)
September 2010

Core Audience: High school

Notable Aspects: Great characters, wonderful story about relationships and the effects of war.

Review: Levi's brother Boaz chose to join the military and fight in a war (unnamed but clearly the Iraq war) three years ago instead of going to one of the top colleges to which he was accepted. Levi has had to deal with the effects of this decision on his family. Now Boaz has returned, but he is not the same.

When Boaz takes off again, Levi decides to follow him to try to understand what his brother is doing and why. I loved this funny and moving book about family, friendship, war, road trips, first love and brothers.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 9

Additional reviews of *The Things a Brother Knows*:

Core audience: Boys and girls, ages 14-16

Notable: Characters, strong ending, contemporary social attitudes

Review: The first two thirds (14 of 21 chapters) of this book bored me, and I was getting as peevish as a sullen confused teen. The last third was thrilling, funny, and moved me to tears. I know Dana Reinhardt is a first class writer and storyteller, but damn! The payoff was a long way from the beginning.

The story: Boston teen Levi's older brother Boaz, an unlikely marine, is back from a tour of duty in Iraq, and has changed drastically, shutting out family and friends. Levi is puzzled, frustrated, sometimes angry at the loss of his role model. Levi makes it his mission, with the help of two very funny, hip friends, to work out Bo's identity shift and reconnect. The characters, including family members, are all so believable and distinctive that they keep the first portion breathing, and everything comes together beautifully and logically in the end.

To whom can we recommend this book? Probably a sensitive fast reader, male or female, age 14-16, will find it worth the time, though more will hazard the gable in paperback, of course. In her acknowledgments, the author expresses strong gratitude to Wendy Lamb for editorial guidance, through long re-writings. These two smart people surely have their reasons for the book's pacing and this reader would love to know more.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 8.0

and:

Core audience: mostly teen boys, girls who need understanding of brothers returning from the war

Notable for family and friendship issues, trauma of war

Levi has always worshipped his older brother. Now Boaz has returned scarred from wartime service that has made him a hero in his community's eyes. Boaz plays the hermit in his room to the great disappointment of family and friends. Levi delves into the computer use by his brother and discovers plans for a long

walk to Washington, DC, even though Boaz has said he is going to hike the Appalachian Trail. On one of the most earnest road trips described in teen books recently Levi shows what a brother can do with what he knows! The boys find a new understanding of each other when Levi catches up to Boaz and they hike the last days together. The power of family love is central to this moving story about the effects of war on our young, and the importance of retribution cannot be underestimated. A worthwhile handsell to people grappling with these issues.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 7.5

and:

Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating: 8

Three Quarters Dead, by Richard Peck

978-0-8037-3454-8

Dial

October 2010 \$16.99

Girls, 12 +

Ghost story with some meat...the issues of peer pressure, popularity, and self-perception. Entertaining and thought provoking.

When the three coolest girls in school take lowly sophomore Kerry under their wing, she's sure that she's "made it". Though a member of their clique, Kerry still feels as if she's the ugly duckling, their special project. But thrilled to be part of the group, she overlooks mean comments and bitchy behavior from her new friends. Tanya, Natalie, and Makenzie are amused by Kerry's innocence and coach her along the path to "coolness." Duped by the others into committing a Halloween prank and getting caught, Kerry is afraid the girls will shun her. She's more afraid of disappointing them than of making her mother angry. What price is she paying for her new found popularity? When the others are killed in an accident caused by texting while driving, Kerry feels as if her life is over, too. Then she gets a text from the dead girls asking her to meet them in the city. The coolest clique in school has something to finish and isn't about to relinquish its hold over Kerry. Death isn't going to stop them, but can Kerry? Can she discover her own identity and thwart the ghost girls' plot? There are some real chills in *Three Quarters Dead* and there are some serious issues raised.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 9

Additional review of *Three Quarters Dead*:

Core audience: teen girls

Notable for suspense, supernatural elements, peer pressure issues

After great success with stories about Grandma Dowdel (*Year Down Yonder*, *Long Way From Chicago*, *Season of Gifts*) and a few historical novels, Peck has returned to his earlier interests in the supernatural with a suspenseful story about the horrors that can arise from peer pressure. Kerry feels very alone at her high school where she is a sophomore. Feeling invisible, she goes around in such a fog that she is surprised to see herself in the bathroom mirror. After being invited to join a clique of three mean older girls, she will do anything to please them and stay with the group. The other three are killed in a car crash, but reappear later for a wild time in New York City after calling Kerry to take the train and join them. Readers will enjoy the "delicious horror" and hopefully see through the clique's nastiness before Kerry does. Of course, revenge for "boyfriend-snatching" plays a big role here. Near the end, Tanya, the clique's leader, says that "People would rather be ruled than be alone." Kerry herself is "3/4 dead" as an individual until the very end, when she has to take action to survive.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH My score: 7

Thunder Over Kandahar, by Sharon E. McKay

978-155451-266-9, \$12.95

9781554512676, \$21.95

Annick Press

July 2010

Core Audience: Ages 12-17, probably more girls than boys, but helicopters on the cover will help

Notable Aspects: Setting - Afghanistan; lots of violence, a powerful black and white photo starts each new chapter; useful list of terms and timeline in back. Simultaneous hardcover and paperback editions.

Publisher description: "Best friends Tamanna and Yasmine cannot believe their good fortune when a school is set up in their Afghan village; however, their dreams for the future are shattered when the Taliban burns down the school and threatens the teacher and students with death.

"As Tamanna faces an arranged marriage to an older man, and the Taliban targets Yasmine's western-educated family, the girls realize they must flee. Traveling through the heart of Taliban territory, the two unaccompanied young women find themselves in mortal danger. After suffering grave injuries—Tamanna from a fall and Yasmine from a suicide bombing—the girls are left without the one thing that has helped them survive—each other.

"Reunited years later in England, Tamanna and Yasmine discover that, despite the horrific events of the past, they are both driven to return home by memories of their families and a longing for their country.

"The book features stunning photographs by award-winning photojournalist Rafal Gerszak (The New York Times, BBC World News) that bring readers an immediate sense of the faces and landscape of Afghanistan."

Review: For a slightly older audience than Deborah Ellis' Breadwinner. I don't remember that book well, but I think Thunder Over Kandahar has more of the actual war in it. Also, it's more up to date, as Breadwinner was written before 9/11. The politics are more complicated now and that comes across. The girls are both very appealing. Yasmine was born and raised in England until her Afghani parents felt they needed to return to Afghanistan and help, and she spends the early part of the book homesick for England. Tamanna's father is dead and her family is ruled by a cruel uncle. This is a powerful story that doesn't really take sides. I found the extended ending a little sappy, but overall, well done.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8

TimeRiders by Alex Scarrow

978-0-8027-2172-3 \$16.99

Walker

September 2010

SF fans and history buffs, male and female, 12+

Notable for: thought provoking time travel story, some history

Three teenagers, from different times and places, are saved moments before certain death and wake to find themselves in NY in Sept 2001. Foster, the man who saved them, explains that they have been carefully chosen for their special abilities to be TimeRiders. Though time travel technology has been banned, time travel is no longer hypothetical. Assuming that there is an illicit market in the technology, TimeRiders is an agency responsible for monitoring and preventing

shifts in history. Liam, Maddy and Sal are training as a new team of TimeRiders; but even before their training is complete, they find a anomaly and they have to fix it. Liam is sent back in time with a computer-enhanced clone, named Bob, to undo the shift and fix history.

TimeRiders is an exciting trip through time. The time travel and changing the course of history is interestingly handled. Liam and Bob are first sent back to the wrong point in time with disastrous results. The implications of going back in time and altering events are always intriguing. The added complication of arriving at the wrong time to make the correction is an interesting twist. Scarrow has added other twists and turns and some juicy warfare that make *TimeRiders* a compelling read.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 8 (I've already had to reorder it!)

Touch Blue, by Cynthia Lord

Scholastic, August, 2010
9780545035316, \$16.99

Core audience: Middle grade readers of all persuasions

Notable: Interesting and realistic handling of foster care issues, and remote island living in a larger context

Review: If Goldilocks had found a pile of middle grade galleys on the table at the Bear's house, rather than bowls of porridge, the returning bear family would have found her engrossed in *Touch Blue* rather than sleeping upstairs.

This tale — set on a Maine island whose families with school age children takes on a few foster children to keep their school from being shut down by the state — is the epitome of being just right, its themes of belonging, loss, isolation and perseverance conveyed by metaphoric elements, such as a blue lobster and a sailor's headstone, in a way that opens doors for readers without locking them in. The main characters, ten year old islander Tess, and her new 13-year-old foster brother Aaron, stay firmly in age and character, diverging from each other at points and overlapping in others in a manner which both establishes and endears them to the reader. The book's ultimate message, that living in an imperfect environment the best way possible is the stuff of life, and that a person can belong in more than one place, and have more than one home, is subtly counterbalanced by the unredeemed character of Eben, an ugly minded island

boy, whose obstinacy gives meaning to the hard steps Aaron takes and Tess' charming relinquishment of her belief in luck. Lord's handling of foster care issues, and her rendering of remote island life, are both rich and authentic. Indeed, the legion of Lord's *Rules* fans will be anything but disappointed in this gentle and profound second novel.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 9.0

Additional reviews/ratings of *Touch Blue*:

I give *Touch Blue* a 9, too.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 9

and:

Review: Though there is much in *Touch Blue* to engage a young reader, I was drawn in less than expected. There were moments when the story sang and my hopes lifted, but they were brief and few. Would it be possible to keep the book short enough for the intended audience and still develop the characters and emotional layers more fully? Not sure, but I wanted more.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8

and:

I totally concur with previous reviews. Add my vote!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Rating: 9

Toymaker, by Jeremy De Quidt

9780385751803, \$17.99

David Fickling, October 2010

Core audience: 12 & up

Notable aspects: Elegant, old fashioned horror story

Review: This is a wonderfully creepy tale of a toymaker who puts the living hearts of birds into his toys. Aaaaah. It's brief, but elegantly written. Its rich language will not work for reluctant readers, but this book is just right for strong middle grade readers who like a good scary story.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 8

Tyger, Tyger by Kerston Hamilton

9780547330082, \$17.00

Houghton, November 2010

Core audience: Ages 12-UP

Notable: Creative and succesful projection of Irish mythology surviving into the modern world.

This dynamic reimagining of the Irish mythos in modern-day Chicago is loaded with convincing romantic tension, intelligent, three dimensional characters, and atmospheric power. Hamilton does a great job extrapolating the Finnian cycle into latter day descendants of Finn and the Children of Amergin and Maeve. Lots of surprises and interesting twists and turns, along with some real depth in the relationship between the half high born Goblin Teagan, and the young Goblin hunter Finn, will hook young readers of both sexes. The story is also bolstered by a good number of intriguing minor characters, great evil doers, and lots dangling plot threads calling out for a book two.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9

What Happened on Fox Street, by Tricia Springstubb

9780061986352, \$15.99

Harper, September 2010

Core audience: 8-12

Review: This is a book about best friends & little sisters, neighbors & neighborhoods. Mo Wren has lived on Fox street her whole life. She fights against the many forces that seem to want to change her neighborhood. It seems to her that change is always bad. She finds refuge in the ravine at the end of Fox street where rumor has it, once lived a red fox. This is a sweet story with strong emotional content subtly interwoven.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

I did read *What Happened on Fox Street* and loved it! I would give it an 8.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

You, by Charles Benoit

9780061947049, \$16.99

HarperTeen, September 2010

Core audience: \$12 & up

Review: Powerful & un-put-down-able, *You* tells the story of 15-year-old Kyle. Kids like Kyle are found in every high school. He wears the right clothes: black hoodie, black jeans. He gets by without causing enough trouble or getting good enough grades to be noticed. When he meets the wrong person who shows him a different world, everything changes. I read this in one sitting.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 9

Zora and Me, by Victoria Bond and T.R. Simon

978-0763643003, \$16.99

Candlewick

October 2010

Primarily girls, 10+

Notable for: realistic presentation of segregation in historic context, power of imagination, strong friendships

Though endorsed by the Zora Neal Hurston Trust, this book would stand on it's own without that connection. The story, involving segregation, prejudice, imagination and mystery, takes place in the small black community in FL. where Zora grew up. Zora is a born story-teller with a vivid imagination. In her imagination, a quiet neighbor, who keeps to himself, is really a murderous gator man who can change shape at will. But, Zora could never have imagined the real dangers and terrifying secrets of Eatonville and Lake Maitland (the nearby white town). When a young man, whom they'd befriended, is murdered near the railroad tracks in Eatonville, Zora and her friends unravel the mystery. In the process, they learn a lot about people and reach a new understanding of themselves and the world.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 8

Additional review of *Zora and Me*:

The swamp-green, watery light of magical realism suffuses this unforgettable tale of a young Zora Neale Hurston and her two best friends during a pivotal summer in their lives. Crocodile men, sorrowful transient musicians, and the ugliness of racism provide powerful counterpoints to the bright adventures of childhood. A gorgeously written coming-of-age story.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore Rating: 9