

**NEW ENGLAND CHILDREN'S BOOKSELLING ADVISORY COUNCIL
FALL REVIEWS, 2009**

This list is our annual attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous July-December middle-grade and young-adult fiction releases. 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 NEIBA site, <http://www.newenglandbooks.org/necbahome.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

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)
Rebecca Fabian, Odyssey Bookshop (S. Hadley, MA)
Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop (Northampton, MA)
Katherine Ferguson, Bunch of Grapes Bookstore (Vineyard Haven, MA)
Pat Fowler, Village Square Booksellers (Bellows Falls, VT)
Kat Goddard, The Bookloft (Great Barrington, MA)
Amy Graham, DDG Booksellers (Farmington, ME)
Judy Hanley, Bookends (Winchester, MA)
Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books and Music (Rhinebeck, NY)
Kathleen "Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys (xx)
Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith (Wellesley, MA)
Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith (Wellesley, MA)
Val Tate, Village Book Store (Littleton, NH)
Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library (Bridgeport, CT)

TITLES REVIEWED

After, by Amy Efav

978-0670011834 / \$17.99 (Viking, August 2009)

Al Capone Shines My Shoes, by Gennifer Choldenko

978-0803734609 / \$16.99 (Dial, September 2009)

The Amanda Project, Book 1: invisible i, by Stella Lennon

978-0061742125 / \$16.99 (HarperTeen, October 2009)

Andromeda Klein, by Frank Portman

978-0385735254 / \$17.99 (Delacorte, August 2009)

Another Faust, by Dina Nayeri and Daniel Nayeri

978-0763637071 / \$17.99 (Candlewick Press, August 2009)

The Blue Shoe: A Tale of Thievery, Villainy, Sorcery, and Shoes, by Roderick Townley, illus Mary Grandpre

978-0375856006 / \$16.99 (Random House, October 2009)

Bobby vs. Girls (Accidentally), by Lisa Yee

978-0545055925 / \$15.99 (Arthur A. Levine/Scholastic, September 2009)

The Book of the Maidservant, by Rebecca Barnhouse

978-0375858567 / \$16.99 (Random House, October 2009)

Bug Boy, by Eric Luper

978-0374310004, \$16.99 (FSG, July 2009)

Camille McPhee Fell Under the Bus, by Kristen Tracy

978-0385736879 / \$16.99 (Delacorte/RH, August 2009)

Candor, by Pam Bachorz

978-16006840122 / \$16.99 (Egmont, September 2009)

Catching Fire, by Suzanne Collins

978-0439023498 / \$17.99 (Scholastic, September 2009)

Crash Into Me, by Albert Borris

978-1416982081 / \$16.99 (Simon & Schuster, July 2009)

The Day of the Pelican, by Katherine Paterson

978-0547181882 / \$16.00 (Clarion/HMH, October 2009)

Dragonbreath, by Ursula Vernon
978-0803733633 / \$12.99 (Dial, July 2009)

Eli the Good, by Silas House
978-07636-43416/ \$16.99 (Candlewick Press, September 2009)

Fire, by Kristin Cashore
9780803734616, \$17.99 (Dial, October 2009)

Flash Burnout, by L.K. Madigan
978-0547194899 / \$16.00 (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, October, 2009)

Forest Born, by Shannon Hale
978-1599901671 / \$17.99 (Bloomsbury Childrens' Books, September 2009)

The Georges and the Jewels, by Jane Smiley
978-0375862274 / \$16.99 (Alfred A. Knopf, September 2009)

Going Bovine, by Libba Bray
978-0385733977 / \$17.99 (Delacorte, September 2009)

Half Broke Horses, by Jeanette Walls
978-1416586289 / \$25.00 (Simon & Schuster, October 2009)

Hamlet, by John Marsden
978-0763644512 / \$16.99 (Candlewick, August 2009)

The Last Newspaper Boy in America, by Sue Corbett
978-0525422051 / \$16.99 (Dutton/Penguin, September 2009)

Leaving the Bellweathers, by Kristin Clark Venuti
978-1606840061 / \$15.99 (Egmont, September 2009)

Lockdown, by Alexander Gordon Smith
978-0374324919 / \$14.99 (FSG, November 2009)

Love is the Higher Law, by David Levithan
978-0375834684 / \$15.99 (Knopf, August 2009)

Lunch Lady & the Cyborg Substitute, by Jarrett J. Krosoczka
978-0375846830 / \$5.99 (Knopf, July 2009)

The Magic Elephant, by Kate Di Camillo
978-0763644109 / \$16.99 (Candlewick Press, September 2009)

The Magicians, by Lev Grossman
978-0670020553 / \$26.95 (Viking, August 2009)

Malice, by Chris Wooding
978-0545160438 / \$14.99 (Scholastic, October 2009)

Matisse on the Loose, by Georgia Bragg
978-0385735704 / \$16.99 (Delacorte, July 2009)

Maze Runner, by James Dashner
978-0385737944 / \$16.99 (Random House, October 2009)

The Midnight Charter, by David Whitley
978-1596433816 / \$17.99 (Roaring Brook Press, September 2009)

Nathan Abercrombie, Accidental Zombie: My Rotten Life, by David Lubar
978-0765316349 / \$15.95 (Starscape/Tor, August 2009)

Odd and the Frost Giants, by Neil Gaiman, illustrations by Brett Helquist
978-0061671739 / \$14.99 (Harper, September 2009)

A Pearl Among Princes, by Coleen Murtagh Paratore
978-0803733015 / \$16.99 (Dial, September 2009)

Pop, by Gordon Korman
978-006174228-6 / \$16.99 (HarperCollins, August 2009)

Purple Heart, by Patricia McCormick
978-0061730900 / \$16.99 (Harper, September 2009)

Season of Gifts, by Richard Peck
978-0803730823 / \$16.99 (Dial Books, September 2009)

Secrets of Truth & Beauty, by Megan Frazer
978-1423117117 / \$15.99 (Hyperion, July 2009)

Shiver, by Maggie Stiefvater
978-0545123266 / \$17.99 (Scholastic Press, August 2009)

Solace of the Road, by Siobhan Dowd
978-0375849718 / \$17.99 (David Fickling/RH, October 2009)

The Tails of Frederick and Ishbu: The Case of the Purloined Professor, by
Judy Cox
978-761455448 / \$16.99 (Marshall Cavendish, October 2009)

Undiscovered Gyrl, by Allison Burnett
978-0307473127 / \$14.00 pb (Vintage, August 2009)

Unfinished Angel, by Sharon Creech
978-0061430954 / \$15.99 (HarperCollins, September 2009)

Viola In Reel Life, by Adriana Trigiani
978-0061451027 / \$16.99 (HarperCollins, September 2009)

When You Reach Me, by Rebecca Stead
978-0385737425 / \$15.99 (Wendy Lamb Books/RH, July 2009)

Wild Girl, by Patricia Reilly Giff
978-0375838903 / \$15.99 (Wendy Lamb/RH, August 2009)

The Chittenden Rating Scale, revised spring 2008

10 A desert island book for all time: *Charlotte's Web*, *Frederick*, *Bridge to Terabithia*

9 One of the best of the season, and/or solid Newbery or Printz honor contender, whether I like it or not.

8 One of the best of the season, probably saleable in hardcover, can recommend with honest enthusiasm to customers, will have legs in paperback. Might be a solid Newbery or Printz honor contender, especially if kids were on the selection committee.

7 I will handsell it well in hardcover, but others might or might not.

6 An entertaining read of mixed quality. May have some fine points. Probably can recommend in paperback if not hardcover; OR kids will go wild for it but the enduring literary quality is mixed.

5 Will likely have a small audience. Or, suitable for some school library situations, but unlikely to sell in hardcover as a child's choice or as a gift.

4 An honest but unsuccessful effort, probably an editor's hope that better things will follow. Or: unlikely to sell in hardcover as a child's choice or as a gift.

3 Not a book I would want on my store's shelves if I could help it.

2 A book I'd have a hard time embracing even if a friend's child wrote it.

1 Waste of a good tree.

After, by Amy Efaw

978-0670011834, , \$17.99

Viking, August 20, 2009

Core Audience: Girls, age 14 & up

Notable Themes: Teen pregnancy, dysfunctional family life, juvenile detention system, court proceedings

Amy Efaw tells a powerful story of how a teenager can live in denial of her pregnancy, give birth in secret and in a state of panic throw the baby in the trash. The book begins hours after Devon has given birth. She is discovered by the police, arrested, hospitalized and brought to a juvenile detention center. When I read the description of the book in the Penguin catalog, I thought, ughhhh, I don't want to read about that, but I'm glad I did. Efaw creates a completely sympathetic and believable character in Devon. The reader is able to see into her anguished mind and understand how someone could deny the undeniable fact of pregnancy and through withdrawal from those around her, successfully hide it. Through Devon's experiences in the juvenile detention center and court proceedings, her memories slowly come back to her as she realizes the truth of what she has done and accepts responsibility. The book is a well-written, informative, and interesting treatment of a tough subject. Now I just have to figure out how to handsell it.

Reviewer: Val Tate, Village Book Store, Littleton, NH

Rated: 9

Al Capone Shines My Shoes, by Gennifer Choldenko

978-0803734609 / \$16.99

Dial, September 2009

Core Audience: boys and girls 9-12

Notable: for humor, suspense, family and friend relationships

I liked this sequel to the Newbery winner, *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. Moose, on 1935 Alcatraz Island, is having conflicts this time with nasty guard Darby Trixie and manipulative Piper, the Warden's daughter. Special-needs sister Natalie figures prominently and is the source of much of the tension. This is an entertaining stand-alone which moves swiftly from humor to tension to suspense-building as the prisoners we have come to know stage a break-out involving Moose and his friends as hostages.

Reviewer: Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 7.5

Additional review of Al Capone Shines My Shoes:

Core Audience: boys and girls 9-12

Notable for: sequel sure to please middle school-aged boys

Publisher info: It's 1935. Moose Flanagan lives on Alcatraz with his family, the other families of the guards, and a few hundred no-name hit men, con men, mad-dog murderers and a handful of bank robbers, too. And one of those cons has just done him a big favor. You see, Moose has never met Al Capone, but a few weeks ago Moose wrote a letter to him asking him to use his influence to get his sister, Natalie, into a school she desperately needs in San Francisco. After Natalie got accepted, a note appeared in Moose's freshly laundered shirt that said: Done.

Short, lively chapters. Lots of action and dialogue in 1930's-style adventure. Author's note at the back explains a lot about Alcatraz penitentiary and Al Capone. A fun read. The first book won lots of awards. I wish it were in paperback now.

Reviewer: Pat Fowler, Village Square Booksellers

Rating: 8

The Amanda Project, Book 1: invisible i, by Stella Lennon

978-0061742125 / \$16.99

HarperTeen, October 2009

Core Audience: 12+ girls (though boys would enjoy, too, if they can get past the pink cover)

Notable Features: Mystery, Series, Website Component (like 39 Clues for a more sophisticated set)

This new YA series certainly has promise. It centers around the vanishing of mysterious high schooler Amanda Valentino, whose sudden disappearance is made only stranger by the series of clues she has left behind. Our narrator, popular girl Callie, must team up with two less-than-popular classmates when all three are implicated in Amanda's disappearance. They each discover that their individual friendships with Amanda were linked in ways they did not expect and that Amanda gave them each a different back-story about her life. (When they try to go to Amanda's house, each of the three thinks it is in a different place. None of the three places seem to have any trace of Amanda... or do they?)

This is a good mystery, which will have an online component: <http://theamandaproject.com>. Teens will be able to share clues and ideas on the website, which I was able to get a sneak peak of from one of the creators. It looks great - there will certainly be a lot to do on it. Overall, I think it will sell well. It has an attractive cover and art throughout. I'll be reading book two!

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8.5

Andromeda Klein, by Frank Portman

978-0385735254 / \$17.99

Delacorte, August 2009

Core Audience: Teens--boys or girls--who enjoy quirky characters and mysticism.

Notable aspects: "realistic" magic (magical history, methods of divination, tarot reading, etc.), main character with an unusual medical condition, death of a friend

Andromeda Klein is devoted to the art and craft of magic--real magic. She's trying to hone her craft, but she's being assaulted by psychic messages that may or may not be from her deceased friend Daisy, and she can't figure out what they mean. Her research into the matter leads to a covert mission to save library books about magic from mass purging at the hands of the Friends of the Library. In the meantime, Andromeda is fending off pressure from supposed friends to start dating and entertain them with "wicker" (showy, fake) magic and doing her best to avoid her parents in a home that doesn't have any door knobs.

Long passages about magical history and tarot spreads sometimes found me skimming, but I adored Andromeda. She's a loner, an introvert, and doesn't seem to fit in anywhere; she practices long speeches to her cat; a rare bone disorder affects her hearing, so her vocabulary is peppered with misheard phrases that she's adopted as stand-ins for the real thing (for example, wicker = wicca; Spinach U-Turn = Finnish Lutheran). The book is funny and bizarre and wonderful. Portman writes honestly and unapologetically about the life of a teenager who - no matter how odd she might be - is just like every other teenager, wondering what, exactly, the point of it all is.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating: 8

Another Faust, by Dina Nayeri and Daniel Nayeri

978-0763637071 / \$17.99

Candlewick Press, August 2009

Core audience: Teens, both boys and girls

Notable aspects: Interesting theme, arresting writing,

Five children are stolen from their homes (though they forget that) and raised to teenagers by a tall blonde woman calling herself their governess. Madame Vileroy (none too subtle a name), bestows special gifts upon the children, magically amplifying what seem to be their natural abilities — athleticism, intelligence, ambition, beauty, creativity — but in truth preying on their greatest weaknesses and insecurities, all in the service of getting them to bargain away their souls. There is a price to pay, of course, for magic, and it's not a pretty one. An aura of decay and evil hangs around the teens despite their outer appearances and accomplishments. As the title says, this is a Faustian tale, and the authors make the most of it. They very cleverly show the small steps that lead to the slippery slope of the deepest sort of lost integrity. The characters and situations should resonate with contemporary readers, whose souls are tested and revealed daily by the choices — both big and small — they make. A fast-paced, suspenseful novel (by an especially assured debut writing team, siblings) in which *I*, *Coriander*, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, *Special Topics in Calamity Physics*, *Gossip Girl* (without the sex) and even—dare I say it?—*Twilight*, collide and find a kindred counterpart.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8.5

The Blue Shoe: A Tale of Thievery, Villainy, Sorcery, and Shoes, by Roderick Townley, illus Mary Grandpre

978-037585600 / \$16.99

Random House, October 2009

Core Audience: Ages 9-12, boys and girls

Notable: Characters, imagination, sympathy for oppressed people and creatures, subtle humor, narrative viewpoint

The story: Young Hap Barlo, whose father has been imprisoned in distant mines by a petty tyrant, goes to work for the kind shoemaker Grel. After Grel is commissioned by a mysterious stranger to make a single shoe encrusted with specific blue jewels, the stranger makes threatening remarks and disappears. Hap consistently gets into trouble because he longs to free his father, and because he helps one downtrodden misfit after another. Eventually Hap, too, is

sent to the dreaded mines, and things go from bad to worse. Finally Hap's perseverance, Sophia's ingenuity and good nature, and an alliance with the strong but cantankerous blue-skinned Aukis, all help to turn the tables on the evil Slag and his henchpersons, return the condemned to their beloved city, and send the nasty mayor and his greedy wife off to work the mines instead. The mystery of the stranger is cleared up in one blinding flash, and the world returns to a balance long missing.

The opinion: the tone and spirit of *The Blue Shoe* remind me so much of DiCamillo's *Despereaux* and *Edward Tulane*: an omniscient storyteller occasionally steps outside the narrative just long enough to provide a flash of insight or humor, but never distracts from the story. The hero is brave and true, the villains are stupid and cruel, but the minor characters are more nuanced, which keeps them interesting.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8.5

Bobby vs. Girls (Accidentally), by Lisa Yee

978-0545055925 / \$15.99

Arthur A. Levine (Scholastic), September 2009

Core audience: Ages 7-10

Notable aspects: Humor; terrific child appeal; a boys' *Ramona* that girls will also get a kick out of

Lisa Yee hits it out of the park again with this funny, cute story of a boy-girl friendship that goes awry. Bobby Ellis-Chan and Holly Harper have been best friends since kindergarten or first grade, but as they've gotten older, they understand that at school, their friendship has to stay under wraps. Girls have cooties, of course, and so do boys. They're in fourth grade now, and even their afterschool interests are starting to diverge. Somehow Bobby finds himself running against Holly in a boys-against-girls class election, and one mishap after another threatens to destroy their friendship altogether. Yee's world is above all things a cheerful one, so rest assured that Bobby and Holly find common ground. I love how Yee writes against stereotype; Bobby's dad is a stay-at-home ex-football player nicknamed The Freezer, who cooks abominably and whose laundry is plagued by static cling. Bobby's family is interracial and his friends are a multicultural medley in the true sense; they mirror the playgrounds of the country. My favorite scene might be the one where Bobby, on a field trip, hugs a lone rare tree that has gorgeous flowers but stinks to high heaven—and gets stuck to its sticky sap.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8

The Book of the Maidservant, by Rebecca Barnhouse

978-0375858567/ \$16.99

Random House, October 2009

Core audience: Older elementary and middle school students who like historical fiction.

Notable aspects: characters, historical setting

After Johanna's mother dies and her sister gets married, she becomes a serving girl to Dame Margery Kempe. Her life has totally changed and it changes once again when her mistress, a devout woman, decides to go on a pilgrimage to Rome and to take Johanna with her. They take a boat across the English Channel and then walk to Rome, with many hardships and adventures along the way. The story is told by Johanna, and she has a wonderful, irreverent voice and can see through the hypocrisy of many of her elders. The other characters on the pilgrimage include the nasty Petrus Tappester, the ineffectual Father Nicholas, the haughty Dame Isabel and the kind student John Mouse, and each of them is drawn in a lively and believable way. The book does a wonderful job of giving a picture of 15th-century life from the importance of religion to the physical difficulties of life, especially on the road.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 8

Bug Boy, by Eric Luper

978-0374310004 / \$16.99

FSG, July 2009

Core audience: Ages 14 and up, could be read by younger, as sex scene (end of chapter 25) is mostly implied

Notable: Horse book boys will actually like; great regional historical fiction (Saratoga Springs, NY, 1934)

Bug Boy is a lot like a close horse race. It gets off to a quick start, races through the highs and lows of Depression-era America, and leaves you slightly breathless at the surprise ending. Jack's rise from exercise boy to apprentice jockey (bug boy) brings fame, fortune and trouble, pretty much all at once. Luper doesn't shy away from the gritty realities — the poverty of Jack's family, the bulimia of many jockeys, throwing races for money, etc. — and the multiple betrayals are both sad and believable. Still, like any good horse book, the love of horses and riding is paramount, and the ending is hopeful. Adults play major roles, but main characters are all teenagers. Very well done.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer

Rating: 8.5

Camille McPhee Fell Under the Bus, by Kristen Tracy

978-0385736879 / \$16.99

Delacorte (RH), August 2009

Core Audience: Will appeal to girls 8-12

Notable: for character, humor, normal preteen issues

Camille is an irrepressible 4th grader who has been dealt more than her share of life's little problems. She did fall under the bus! She is hypoglycemic. Her best friend has moved to Japan. Her parents have money disagreements and have separated, and she is loaded with "big hair" that is the cause of much name-calling until Miss Golden, the new teacher, arrives with even bigger hair and makes it all popular! Camille's father has always said, "Don't expect life to be fair," and with much humor, and several heartwarming incidents, Camille shows us just what it is to be feisty, hopeful ("even when our brain feels hope, it might be lying"), and a tad tough. "I can lick this!" she says. She does and readers will be right behind her all the way. This was a delightful, poignant read and I hope Kristen Tracy has another book in the works.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 8

Candor, by Pam Bachorz

978-16006840122 / \$16.99

Egmont, September 2009

Core audience: Ages 12-UP

Notable: *Stepford Wives* scenario for kids

Candor is somewhat self-consciously a *Stepford Wives* for kids. A straightforward tale of the dangers of promoting Freedom From as opposed to Freedom To, Candor is a community in which the perfect adherence to societal norms is achieved through a barrage of subliminal messages. The story is narrated by Oscar, the son of the town's mastermind. Oscar has some natural resistance to the messages, which he bolsters by producing anti-messages on CD. He sells his services to new arrivals while they can still think. Oscar's father reserves the "Listening Room" for kids who are revealed as being out of line. The Listening Room is set up for a high-test message barrage that wipes out all prior character and memory. The theft of memory and identity is a powerful hook, but to really hit hard it requires a deep sense of identification with the character. The problem with *Candor* is that none of the characters is all that engaging or magnetic. Oscar is a self-serving, unlikeable kid, and though Candor is meant to be the story of an awakening on his part, when he finds

himself actually liking one of his customers, it doesn't hit nearly as hard as it would if we strongly identified with him. Alex's ultimate fate of a trip to the Listening Room is surprisingly flat. Nor are any of the adults really given any dimension. The despicable actions of Oscar's father are presented as a response of a control freak who lost control when his wife left, but come across as tepid because he has no depth as a character. In the end I found *Candor* to have been a lost opportunity for bringing its interesting precept to bear on its readers' psyches.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 7

Catching Fire, by Suzanne Collins

978-0439023498 / \$17.99

Scholastic, September 2009

Core audience: Ages 12-UP

Notable: It would be shorter to list what isn't notable.

It would be inaccurate to say that *Catching Fire*, the second book in the *Hunger Games* Trilogy, is a better book than its predecessor, for the heights to which it attains is only possible precisely because it is built so squarely on top of book one. Let us say rather that *Catching Fire's* remarkable success is built upon the integrity of its continuity. Its complex characters are broadened and deepened. Their conflicts have been sharpened considerably, and the interplay of dramatic themes more fully realized. As the tide of rebellion rises, the reader is both caught up in the current and sharply aware of the need to struggle against it, to assess Katniss' decisions and to try and interpret the meaning of all the surrounding undercurrents as they begin to surface in spectacular and violent fashion. The stakes couldn't be higher nor could the reader feel more like a stakeholder in this pivotal *tour de force*.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 9.97

Additional reviews and ratings of *Catching Fire*:

I would like to second this review and rate it a 10!!

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music, Rhinebeck, NY

Rating: 10

And I would like to throw in my own personal 10.

Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 10

Although I enjoyed *Catching Fire*, and thought it firmly maintained the trajectory set in *Hunger Games*, and though the abrupt ending didn't bother me (though it'll make the book harder to sell), I was annoyed at Katniss in ditz mode, when

she fails to twig to fairly obvious clues. If she's bright enough to figure out the other stuff, you'd think she'd catch the drift sooner (and I'm sorry, it's been months since I read it so I don't recall the details, just the taste). Feeling conflicted and ambivalent toward Peeta and whats-his-name is one thing, but failing to notice the mockingjay image in certain spots, for instance, seemed a little dim for a girl like her.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 9

I give it a 9. I found the rapid-pace ending a bit confusing, but I LOVED it otherwise -- more so than Book 1, in some ways. I loved that the politics of Panem finally took center stage here.

Alison Morris, The Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 9

I just have to add my praise for *Catching Fire* - I give it a 9.5. I agree that the ending felt rushed, but I didn't feel like I was left hanging in an unpleasant way (probably helped that I knew there would be a third book, and I read an interview with Suzanne Collins where she said that the book had a cliffhanger ending.) I've read a number of sequels that did not match up to the promise of previous books, but I felt completely satisfied with Collins's treatment of the story and characters in *Catching Fire*. I'm very much looking forward to the conclusion of this trilogy!

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating: 9.5

I would rate it a 10 or use Kenny's nearly-ten rating to reflect the few (and I mean FEW) issues. I thought that it was compelling reading and left the reader wanting more. NOW! To continue such a complex plot and character development is no easy task but Suzanne Collins rose the occasion with great aplomb and twists that we would not have guessed. Where will the third book take us? I'll bet there will be fan fiction sites filling the time until book 3 appears! There is a facebook page for those who read the book and want to talk about it freely!

Casting the movie is one topic. Lots of fun!

Bina Williams, The Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 9.75

Firmly agree with Carol. I found Katniss's inability to put together the signs not true to her character in *Hunger Games*. The first time she's shown the watch, I thought, duh, foreshadowing, a clue, and when she didn't get it, I kept waiting for her to, and when she still didn't get it, I found it annoying and disappointing rather than empowering as a reader who knows something the main character doesn't. She goes into the Hunger Games firm and strong and looking to survive, and in *Catching Fire*, I found her a little distracted, discombobulated, and inconsistent in her awareness of other people's involvement/motives. Despite that, I devoured the book in a day and can't wait for the next one, and will sell the heck out of it.

Rebecca, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9

Although I liked the book (and I agree that it is not as good as the first one) my main disappointment was the cliff hanger ending. A cheap trick IMHO.

Kat Goddard

Just to be clear.

1. I think book 2 succeeds in being an extension of 1 and thus that its high point of entry, along with the effect of having its narrative pace mirror the breathless course of social and political unrest, gives it the illusion of being better than its predecessor when in fact it has simply earned the right to be considered as a whole, at least thus far. I certainly don't mean to imply that book 2 is not as good as book 1.

Kenny

Crash Into Me, by Albert Borris

9781416982081 / \$16.99

Simon & Schuster, July 2009

Core audience: Teenagers with their own money for books

Notable: Well handled but pervasive suicide themes.

It won't have escaped your attention that YA novels with suicide themes have been on the rise in the last three years. Suicide is very squarely the subject of *Crash Into Me*. Narrated by a teenage boy, Owen, who has connected online with three other suicide-minded teens, the story chronicles a suicide-themed road trip book. The four of them—somewhat conveniently two boys and two girls—go off to visit celebrity suicide graves on their way to Death Valley, where they will all commit suicide. You will not be shocked to learn that they find relationships and reasons to live along the way. It is quite well handled and author Borris' background as a student counselor is readily apparent. For example, on a morning when Owen has every reason to feel great—he hooked up with Audrey last night, is in love and so forth—he's actually feeling particularly awash in suicidal impulses. His sense is that good feelings don't last, and that in fact they therefore trigger the impulses. In any case, this is a helpful book filled with the sort of maudlin material that many teens love to read. Obviously it won't be a book that lends itself to handselling to parents, or handselling at all really. Putting it out on the table for kids to find on their own will be the sensible choice here.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 7.5

The Day of the Pelican, by Katherine Paterson

978-0547181882 / \$16.00

Clarion/HMH, October, 2009

Core audience: Ages 9-12, especially girls

Notable: contemporary refugee story, immigration.

Competent, but not Paterson's insightful best. This is the story of 12-year-old Meli, the oldest girl in an Albanian Kosovar family. After multiple displacements from their middle-class life, they are forced into a refugee camp and eventually emigrate to Vermont. Though the hardship and longing are visible, there isn't enough emotional conflict to make reader feel them. For the most part the "good" people are all good, the "bad" are all bad, and Meli copes. The interesting exception is Meli's older brother, who longs to fight the Serbs, but is forbidden. The book was originally written as a newspaper serial, which may explain the weak emotional momentum. However, it would be an excellent resource for classrooms studying immigration.

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 7

Dragonbreath, by Ursula Vernon

978-0803733633 / \$12.99

Dial, July 2009

Core Audience: 7-10

Notable Features: Mixture of text and graphic novel

This is a fun, short (160 pages, large-type, small-format) book perfect for reluctant readers - a step before the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books. Our hero, Danny Dragonbreath, is the only mythical creature in his school of amphibians and reptiles. Danny is a dragon, but he's having trouble breathing fire, though his father tells him it will happen "if he applies himself." He's your standard underachieving, head-in-the-clouds fifth grader, who dreams of pirate adventures and samurai frogs. On a research trip for a paper he's writing on the ocean, Danny and his best friend, Wendell (an iguana), head out to visit Danny's cousin Edward, a sea monster. From there they go on a crazy underwater adventure and live to tell the tale. Plus, Danny gets an A on his paper! This book has just the right balance of full text and graphic novel pages to satisfy any concerned parent and excite any kid.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 7

Eli the Good, by Silas House

978-07636-43416/ \$16.99

Candlewick Press, September 2009

Core audience: Older middle school and high school--especially kids who think they're "weird"

Notable aspects: Coming-of-age story; effects of war on soldiers and their families

Eli is ten years old in the summer of 1976. His father is a Vietnam War vet who is suffering from the effects of the fighting but can't admit it. His mother spends her energy taking care of his father, fighting with his older sister, Josie, and mediating between his father and his aunt Nell (his father's sister) who was a war protester and has come to stay with the family for a while. And his best friend Edie is dealing with problems in her own family. It is a difficult and wonderful summer for Eli, with the joys of long days of bicycling and hanging out and the pain of watching the people he loves struggle with themselves and each other. Eli learns a lot about himself and friendship and family and learns to accept and like himself for who he is, as weird as that may be. This is a very well-written novel with important social content. There are some difficult scenes--an attempted murder and an attempted suicide--so even though the protagonist is 10, it is really appropriate for teens.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop,

Rating: 7.5

Additional review/rating for *Eli the Good*:

Having met Silas House—with his wonderful voice and accent—at BEA, I was able to hear Eli's voice all the much better. I loved this book. I would give it 8.5 to 9 for strength of the setting, the era, and the character of Eli, of his aunt and of his troubled father. This would be good to pair with *All the Broken Pieces* by Ann Burg for young adults pondering the effects of war on the people left behind and those who moved to this country for a freer society only to find it no so much so. Let's hope Silas writes more YA books!

Bina Williams

Rating: 8.5-9

Fire, by Kristin Cashore

9780803734616, \$17.99

Dial, October 2009

Core audience: Ages 12-UP

Notable: Strong fantasy and romance elements

Fire is set in The Dells, a land geographically adjacent but physically inaccessible to The Seven Kingdoms in which Cashore's first novel, *Graceling*, takes place. As far as being a "prequel" goes, the only connection is that the heavy of *Graceling*, Leck, figures in lightly as a child. Leck's time in the Dells is briefly mentioned in *Graceling*, so there was clearly preconception on the creative side, but one could certainly read *Fire* first with a clean conscience. The Dells are rather different from The Seven Kingdoms in that there are no gracelings, the fantasy element stems, rather, from 'monsters', exquisitely beautiful versions of familiar animals with strikingly unnatural colors, and odd mental powers. Most are harmless, but some are deadly, such as the raptors. Monsters in human form are rare and very powerful, due to their ability to read and penetrate the minds of other people. They often serve as councilors to rulers, with dubious bonding and power relations at work there. Fire is herself a monster human, whose father was a power-hungry libidinous terror in whose image Fire is determined not to be made.

Fire has two love interests, the tempestuous Archer, and her ultimate soul mate Prince Brigán, whose Father had been The King who linked up with Cansrel, Fire's father. Brigán shares Fire's burden of trying to make up for a father's crimes and nefarious legacy. Fire is loaded down with burdens in that the rank and file Dells male is completely straght of his wits around her and filled with lust, possibly of the violent kind, which she perceives mentally. Mind control is prized and nurtured in the Dells, due to the monsters, but Brigán is somewhat unique in being able to completely block out Fire's mental powers.

The book includes political intrigue, burgeoning romance, and lots of adroit psychological interplay. I found it to be very engaging on the whole, though the wheels came off a bit at the end, where a game of musical parentage, symmetrical revelations, and Archer's overheated death, made for an overly tidy ending. The number of women who took on the pregnant-but-still-badass persona seemed to get a bit too legion at the end. For a book which was so rooted in psychological perception, Archer's connection to Cansrel was oddly missing. The Leck angle felt pasted on and not vital to Fire's story. Finally, the romance got way too goopy for me, but that may very well play into Fire's strength with the *Twilight* crowd. Brigán gets excruciatingly sensitive at the end, which many readers may find enthralling but will likely make the legion of older men who read the book feel rather deflated. For example when Fire witnesses Brigán crash into a room in which she is about to be murdered, she observes with repressed horror the efficiency with which he smashes the pommel of his

sword into the enemy's face and then plunges the sword in for the kill. Brigan is pained at what Fire must have seen, but Fire communicates with her mind that while she feels the horror, she also senses that this is what he must be able to do, that it is lamentable but right. Personally, I reflected that this what my wife must feel seeing me viciously slicing onions and broccoli prior to executing a stir-fry, and that she must similarly reflect how someone must after all prepare dinner. Yet the manliness differential in smashing a sword pommel in someone's face and stabbing them, against efficiently mincing garlic and tossing it in oil can readily be calculated, and the experience is shattering, I assure you. These deficiencies aside I think *Fire* has great potential to both please *Graceling* fans and reach a much larger audience, as well.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 8

Additional review of Fire:

I agree with some of Kenny's points on this one. I was completely enthralled with the first half of *Fire*, then my interest dwindled a bit as the number of threads in the plot increased, then I felt quite disappointed by the ending. I loved Brigan, loved Fire, loved the complexities of all the relationships in the book, but... Only to a point. In the end there was a bit too much familial cross-pollination going on for my taste and the repeated discoveries of yet ANOTHER tangle in the romance web became tiresome after a while.

As for the bits about Leck, I agree with Kenny that they didn't mesh as well with the central plotline as I'd have liked, but to me it was Leck's involvement in the story that gave it an edge and made it scary and lent the book a necessary tension that I felt was completely lost when his part in this story came to a rather abrupt end. I actually wanted Leck to have MORE involvement in this book rather than less, because his threat seemed considerably more potent to me than did the rather abstract threats of war in the larger story. The battle at the end and the eventual face-off with Mydogg (who I didn't think was a fully formed character) bored me because it didn't feel personal, whereas Leck's story did.

Once again, though, I think the strength of this book lies in the cast of wonderfully complex characters that Cashore has crafted for this novel. I love the complexity of their emotions and the believability of their internal struggles and the fact that their relationships are often messy or at least hard to categorize. To me these things are what made this novel come alive and transcend the fact that it had a few too many characters and too many plot threads, making the story feel rather... "loose" in places. All in all, I liked it. But I was let down by my (overly) high expectations. I am wavering, then, between giving the book an 8 or a 7... I suppose a 7.5 it is!

Alison Morris, The Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 7.5

Flash Burnout, by L.K. Madigan

978-0547194899 / \$16.00

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, October, 2009

Core audience: Boys and girls 14-16

Notable strengths: Characters, plot, values, language, current culture, relationships, humor, including macabre humor, pacing, a touch of suspense, families, realistic ending.

With more hooks for the reader than a strip of Velcro, it's hard to believe this beautifully balanced work is a YA debut. Blake, age 15, is deep in the delights and puzzlements of first love with Shannon, and his smart, interesting photography classmate, Marissa, whose mother is a meth addict. Blake's mom is a hospital chaplain and social psychologist who reminds him periodically that actions have consequences; his father is a medical examiner whose grisly professional interests are fascinating to the older brother, Garrett. Garrett is a smart jock, leans on Blake in true big brother fashion – but comes through in a pinch. Blake's problems are ordinary (what to get Shannon for Christmas?) but genuine (why is Marissa absent from school?) and he relates them in the first person, with humor leavening his earnest concerns, including sex. One of the best YA fiction works of the last five years.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 9

Forest Born, by Shannon Hale

978-1599901671 / \$17.99

Bloomsbury Childrens' Books, September 2009

Core audience: 12 up

Notable aspects: Part 4 in Books of Bayern series but can be read as standalone. Coming-of-age story.

Publisher description: Newbery Honor-winning author Hale delivers an emotionally wrenching journey of self-discovery set in the magical and alluring world first encountered in *The Goose Girl*. *Forest Born* features Rin, younger sister of Razo, who leaves the forest in search of herself.

Review: Older brother Razo leaves the forest and becomes a soldier for King Geric. Rin accompanies him when he returns to the city after a trip home with his new girlfriend Ambassador Dasha. She becomes a waiting woman to Queen Isi, later a nursemaid to Tusken, the Queen's son. In the forest, Rin discovered that she gains strength and calmness from the trees. In an

adventure to save the kingdom, she finds that Isi, Enna and Dasha have the magical powers of fire, wind and water. She discovers and uses her own powers, of people-speaking, to understand and speak to her opponents and get them to do things they would not ordinarily do (which had started in the forest and scared her), and tree-speaking to gain strength and calmness, to save the kingdom. Adventure fantasy, pitting good vs evil. All ends well (except for the villainess, Selia). Rin returns to her family in the forest with new self-confidence. Her family welcomes her home, and she takes on a new role in family life, no longer her mother's helper or stand-in, but her own person.

Pat Fowler, Village Square Booksellers

Rating: 9

The Georges and the Jewels, by Jane Smiley

978-0375862274 / \$16.99

Alfred A. Knopf, September 2009

Core Audience: Mostly girls ages 10+

Notable: for smart female character, family relationships, horsemanship

The real main characters of Smiley's adult novel, *Horse Heaven*, were the wonderful horses. This, her first juvenile novel, shows the same understanding and respect for our equine neighbors. Abby and her family raise and train horses to be sold, many to young riders. All the geldings are called "George" and all the mares "Jewel," so there will be no forming attachments with them. For the most, part Abby is adept at handling the horses, but one new one, "Ornery George," is stubborn and doesn't want to be ridden. Her disciplinarian father insists that she ride and train him. Uncle Luke tries to "break" him for her. That only makes him more difficult. When her brother's cowboy associate, Jem, comes out to help her, she learns a lot about respect, patience, and horse psychology. Shades of *The Horse Whisperer*! It works. When she shares with her father what she has learned, his attitude towards both her "estranged" brother and the horses changes for the better. This is the real heart of the book.

Abby also faces challenges at school with the Big Four clique, whose nasty tricks on her and others seem so childish by comparison to the work on the ranch. Her parents are religious fundamentalists and Abby has problems with a school project concerning early Catholic missions. So, the story is not just for horse-lovers. Even non-equestrians will identify with Abby when she says horses need to understand each other...and that's rather like seventh grade. As an interesting enhancement, each chapter starts with sketches of equestrian tools and accoutrements.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

Going Bovine by Libba Bray

978-0385733977 / \$17.99

Delacorte, September 2009

Core Audience: 14+

Notable Features: fantastical road trip adventure

Libba Bray! You have impressed me! *Going Bovine* is a hoot. When 16-year-old Cameron is diagnosed with Mad Cow Disease, a punk rock angel appears to him and tells him that he must go on a quest to find the mysterious Doctor X, who supposedly has a cure. Oh, and he must take his hospital roommate, Gonzo (a midget). Along the way they befriend a lawn gnome and get into all sorts of trouble. This book is a delight, a fun romp with real moments of heartbreak. Plus, it's a great handsell for boys (girls too!).

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8.5

Additional review of Going Bovine:

What an amazing imagination Libba Bray has! I wonder at all the people she had to acknowledge in her forward, but on first reading, I had to laugh out loud copious times! She is a stand-up comedian, for goodness sake! The story hadn't even started yet, and I thought that part worth the price of the book! On second reading, maybe not-so-much, but who reads Acknowledgments more than once? The story was a hoot as well, with many poignant moments. I have conflicting thoughts about the language (do most intelligent and inventive teens talk like this?) and about the ending, but I'd better stop here. Guys, especially, will like the fast-paced road story and maybe see a bit of themselves in Cameron's thoughts.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford)

Rating: 8

Half Broke Horses, by Jeanette Walls

978-1416586289 / \$25.00

Simon & Schuster, October 2009

Core audience: *Glass Castle* readers, teens age 14 and up

Notable: Back story (*Glass Castle*); courageous, inventive narrator, Depression-era survival, humor, emotional traction.

Though not published as a young adult title, this fall release will be one of our picks of the year for teens, especially girls age 14, 15, 16. In short chapters, it

relates the life of Lily Casey Smith, the author's Arizona grandmother. We see her strength emerge and harden as she grows from childhood in a feckless rural home, tries out city life in Chicago, and returns to Arizona ranching as drought and the Depression grip the country. Late in life, hardiness sometimes prevails over strength. The short chapters give the book a staccato pacing, providing dots to connect along Lily's toughening arc.

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 9

Hamlet, by John Marsden

978-0763644512 / \$16.99

Candlewick, August 2009

Core audience: anyone looking for a cool introduction to Shakespeare's work, teens interested in psychological tales

Notable: for themes, character, Shakespeare introduction, imagery

Marsden has managed to keep the bare bones of Hamlet's plot, injecting his own sensitivity to the story within a modern setting and language. Hamlet is younger than the original, bored and restless. His father has just died, his best friend Horatio can't quite seem what to make of him, and his mother has early remarried to his uncle. Hamlet is going mad. Marsden's language is often poetic in his own right, but there are many quotes directly from the original. Recognizing these will be a boon for those familiar with the play and introduction for those who aren't. It would be easy to find fault with Marsden's book because he is following an icon, but if readers take the book for what it is, a wonderful introduction to the plot, characters, and language of the Bard injected with modern sensibilities, it will be an enjoyable and worthwhile read. I loved it! Be sure to show it to English teachers!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 10

The Last Newspaper Boy in America, by Sue Corbett

978-0525422051 / \$16.99

Dutton/Penguin, September 2009

Core Audience: Age 8+

Notable: for humor, great characters, topical themes

This is a story about a small town community triumphing over the forces accumulating to destroy it. Led by Will David (Will of Steele), the latest in the

long line of Steele paperboys, the town comes together to save local newspaper home delivery, local industry & community integrity. Along the way we get to know engaging characters, laugh at his older brother's spoonerisms, learn the history of the paperclip & the hairpin, and appreciate the love & respect that can form when people work together. A wonderful tale!

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 9.5

Additional review of The Last Newspaper Boy in America:

Though the book's scope is small, its charming, determined hero rallies forces one by one to overcome a perceived inequity. Much of the charm comes from his brother Sonny, who's handsome, dim, and always interested in food. Sonny's always a beat behind, which is welcome comic relief, as a sense of humor is not prominent among Wil's many fine attributes.

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 7

Leaving the Bellweathers, by Kristin Clark Venuti

978-1606840061 / \$15.99

Egmont, September 2009

Core Audience: boys and girls 8-12

Notable: for zany humor

VERY reminiscent of Hilary McKay's Casson family, where all parties pursue their own creative efforts with very little parental interference, except that the Bellweathers do not seem to have a great deal of warm feelings for each other! The family Butler, T. Benway, is looking forward to the termination of his years of servitude with the family. He has secretly written a very unflattering book about his experiences there and expects to be gone to retirement by the time his book-signing at the Isbn Book Shoppe is concluded. What experiences they were! The triplets manage to steal a Van Gogh on loan to their local museum so they can replace it with their own work of art. Fourteen-year-old Spider wants to create a reserve for endangered and very deadly animals and has already given asylum in their lighthouse home to an alligator. Sister Ninda keeps a family of ill-treated circus performers hostage in her bedroom in order to teach them about workers' rights. Mother spends all her time painting and repainting the rooms. Father is an inventor of sorts and keeps to himself, except when he is berating the butler at dinnertime. In secretly choosing his successor, Benway comes to feel he is the best one to care for these unruly people. When the kids discover that Benway is planning to leave, they begin to be a bit nicer to him. You can guess the rest. Farfetched fun makes a good read-aloud choice.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 7

Lockdown, by Alexander Gordon Smith

978- 0374324919 / \$14.99

FSG, November 2009

Core audience: Ages 12-up, primarily boys

Notable: *A Clockwork Orange* for teens.

I expect that it's not a coincidence that the narrator of *Lockdown* shares the name of the narrator of *A Clockwork Orange*, since *Lockdown* also shares the core backdrop of a society veering into totalitarianism in response to a sense of safety threatened by out of control teen gangs, ever more license being granted the government and the judiciary to deal with said problem. In *Lockdown*, events take place after *The Summer of Slaughter* in which teen gangs went on a rampage, leaving 59 people dead. In the aftermath, the concept of juvenile justice as a reformation process was replaced by something more resembling a garbage disposal. Teens convicted of violent crime are now sentenced to life without parole in a special prison buried deep underground called Furnace. The details of Furnace management are of no concern to the general public, and they are thus unaware that its Warden is in fact a diabolical madman carrying out horrifying experiments on his charges.

Lockdown's hero, Alex, was in fact a criminal, a burglar, prior to his being framed for the murder of his best friend by the Warden's agents. After his capture, Alex is railroaded through the courts and from there straight down into Furnace, where the bulk of the story takes place. Okay, so how strong a stomach will readers require to deal with *Lockdown*? If being locked in your cell and observing odd, gasping figures roam the corridors to mark a cell, perhaps yours, followed by a deformed powerful creature whom you recognize as having once been a friend of yours, led in chains and then let loose to enter the marked cell where he devours one of the occupants, bothers you, then *Lockdown* is not for you. I enjoyed it. What can I say? Alex's growth as a person, as he goes from bully to bullied, is very convincing, and I became quite attached to the key characters, particularly Alex's cellmate Donovan. Their escape from Furnace, which is left hanging, is absolutely nail-biting. *Lockdown* is virtually devoid of sex and female characters. The focus is kept squarely on macabre elements, suspense, and character development. I consider it a great book for many teen boys. *Lockdown* is the first of a three book series, which is a good thing because at least a dozen plot strands are left dangling.

Kenny Brechner: DDG Booksellers

Rating 7.5

Love is the Higher Law, by David Levithan

978-0375834684 / \$15.99

Knopf, August 2009

Core Audience: 12+

Notable Features: deals with the aftermath of 9/11

I'm glad that it was David Levithan, a well-known YA writer, who decided to tackle this difficult subject. His name will help bring this remarkable book the attention it deserves. In this concise novel told from three first-person perspectives, Levithan explores the events of 9/11 and the weeks that follow. If you are at all hesitant to read or handsell this book, just read Levithan's author note in the front of the galley. Here's a piece of it: "If you take that hesitation about reading a 9/11 book and multiply it by a thousand, you'll probably get the trepidation an author feels about writing a 9/11 book..." He goes on to discuss why he wrote it: "...if you were just a child - like most of today's teens were - you might only remember the facts of it, not the feelings. That's why I wrote this book — it is, at heart, my small attempt to convey the heartbreak, surrealism, heroism, mourning, and music of that time." What David has created is a work of historical fiction (as 9/11 is a part of our history now) and done so in a respectful and beautiful way. There is no over-dramatization or exploitation (none of the characters lose loved ones), just a window into a time that teen readers only experienced as small children.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

Additional review of Love is the Higher Law:

Core audience: Ages 10 & up, cross-over potential

Notable aspects: 9/11 issues & history

Levithan has written the 9/11 book I have been waiting for. The book looks at the day of the event and the days, months and years following through the eyes, hearts, and minds of three New York teenagers. He has been able to get at the range of emotions and reactions about 9/11 in a way that no other author or commentator has been able to do for me. Although I could have used a book like this had it been published right after 9/11, the delay has been worthwhile. Levithan is able to look back at those days through the filter of all that has happened since giving a richness to the story that would have been impossible earlier. I think this book will be eye-opening for today's younger teens, some of whom may have little memory of the actual attack because they were shielded from the immediate aftermath. For older teens and adults it will help to make it clear that however one reacted to the tragedy, you were not alone. A powerful book sure to touch all who read it.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 10

Lunch Lady & the Cyborg Substitute, by Jarrett J. Krosoczka

978-0375846830 / \$5.99

Knopf, July 2009

Core Audience: Ages 7-10

Notable Features: graphic novel

This great little graphic novel features the coolest lunch lady in the history of public schools everywhere. When a strange new substitute teacher turns up, Lunch Lady is on the case. Viewed through the eyes of three (middle school?) students, Lunch Lady manages to track the substitute teacher back to his lair and expose him for the cyborg he really is. It turns out he's really an agent of the school's science teacher, who was plotting to be more popular among his students. A very fun read, in the style of *Babymouse*, and appealing to both boys and girls.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 8

Additional review of Lunch Lady and the Cyborg Substitute:

Core Audience: Ages 7-10

Notable Features: Graphic novel, Humor, Unusual Superhero

Lunch Lady and the Cyborg Substitute is a fun, new graphic novel for the young elementary reader and also the reluctant reader. Lunch Lady and the Cyborg Substitute has everything: graphics, adventure, mystery, and an unlikely superhero, the lunch lady from a school. Lunch Lady, the superhero, has a host of awesome superhero gadgets including chicken nugget bombs; fish-stick nunchucks; a spork phone; rubber glove suction cups, which allow her to walk on the ceiling; a lunch tray laptop; and a spatu-copter, a helicopter-like spatula! All of these gadgets help Lunch Lady foil Mr. Edison, an errant science teacher whose goal is to be Teacher of the Year. Kids will love this book!

Judy Hanley, Bookends, Winchester, MA

Rating: 6

The Magic Elephant, by Kate Di Camillo

978-0763644109 / \$16.99

Candlewick Press, September 2009

Core Audience: Age 8+ (timeless tale)

Notable for: language, charming story, themes

Ten-year-old orphan Peter Duchene, training to "become a soldier brave and true," lives with Vilna Lutz, and old soldier who is not what he seems. Peter desperately hopes that the sister he once had is still alive somewhere. When a fortuneteller in the marketplace tells him that she is, and that he must follow an elephant to find her, he is filled with hope, although wondering if it is she or Vilna Lutz who is lying to him. Soon begins a wonderfully bizarre set of circumstances set off by an elephant's fall through the ceiling of the Bliffendorf Opera House during the performance of a possibly washed-up old magician trying to conjure up a gorgeous bouquet of lilies! Nothing much had been expected of him. The planet Venus was particularly bright that evening, as if winking on those below for whom whole new realms of possibility would open. Unforgettable characters are introduced and all sorts of improbable things happen. In the end, Venus is still a palpable presence, having been so important to more than one character. Readers are left to echo the old poet, "What if?" and "Why not?" People have found each other, unlikely connections have been made, and hopes and dreams have come full circle. With its lyrical language, it is a story all ages will savor.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 10

Additional reviews and ratings of The Magician's Elephant:

I agree with Sue on this one! A ten indeed. I can't wait to see the final art in the book...

Bina

Rating: 10

I read The Magician's Elephant and just loved it. I'll add my 10 as well.

Nancy Felton

Rating: 10

Core audience: depressed adults

Much as I appreciate her oeuvre, in the fullness of time I feel this book will be classed with *Tiger Rising* as one of DiCamillo's lesser works. It's as though the elephant fell through the ceiling, landed nearby, was terribly injured, and we're all trying to heal it by pretending. Pretending treads perilously close to pretence, and far, far away from the author's major works.

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 4

Core Audience: Ages 8-12

Notable Aspects: New book by Newbery Award-winning author, theme of hope prevailing over despair, miracles, fortune tellers, and an elephant

DiCamillo's prose is fluid and full of rich imagery: an elephant crashes through an opera house roof, a small dog makes an unlikely leap across a wide river, a father bleeds to death from a bayonet wound on a battlefield. The story deals with the vital importance of hope in dark times. Dark is the key here. The

atmosphere of the book settles over the reader like a storm cloud. When a ray of hope breaks through, it is brilliant in contrast to the gloom. Yet the grimness of the dark world stays with the reader long after the book is set down which may limit its appeal to its intended audience of 8- to 12-year-olds. Yoko Tamaka's shadowy illustrations are gorgeous but do little to balance out the darkness of the tale.

Amy Graham, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 6.5

The Magicians, by Lev Grossman

978-0670020553 / \$26.95

Viking, August 2009

Core audience: Ages 15-adult

Notable aspects: Vivid world-building, memorable characters, page-turning pace

Brooklyn teenager Quentin Coldwater is at odds with himself. He's uncertain about his post-high-school direction and plays third wheel with two cooler friends, on one of whom—Juliet—he's had a longstanding crush. A bizarre turn of events leads him to a college examination that results in an invitation to study at Brakebills Academy, a school of magic. Though Brakebills is no Hogwarts, its courses and requirements have as much internal logic and suspension-of-disbelief-ability (if that makes sense) as Potions, Charms, Herbology, etc. (One of Grossman's major achievements in *The Magicians* is to make readers almost believe that magic is possible, though tedious and nearly impossible both to study and to master. When a deadly creature breaches the safeguards of Brakebills and it's Quentin's fault, the real work of the students begins. Quentin's childhood obsession with a fictional Narnia-esque world gives him a special ability to take on some of the dangers that emerge.

Harry Potter comparisons are inevitable, given the subject matter, but *The Magicians* is not a charming romp suitable for younger readers. It's darker, more bitter and complex and melancholy, and the young adult characters (true young adults, not teens) drink and have sex (the latter mostly off-camera) and deal with the consequences of love and betrayal and loss. It's also romantic and real and absolutely un-put-down-able. This is the book I was hoping *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* would be; in other words, it's a sophisticated book about magic and magicians where something actually occurs. (Excuse the snideness, but I waded through 22 unabridged CDs waiting for something, anything, to occur in JS&MN. Beyond a well-drawn faery netherworld in that book, nothing else stays in my memory. To me, that's telling.) Happily, *The Magicians* not only creates atmosphere, but tension and plot and characters that ring true.

Think of it as Donna Tartt's *Secret History* meets *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* with a heavy dollop of homage to C.S. Lewis. The critics loved *The Magicians*, and after reading it, I understand why. Although the story resolves, I really, really want a volume two.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 9

Malice, by Chris Wooding

978-0545160438 / \$14.99

Scholastic, October 2009

Core Audience: 12-up, boys and some girls

Notable Features: Part novel, part comic; action-adventure; 3D cover image

The new title from veteran horror/fantasy writer Wooding (*The Haunting of Alazabel Cray; Poison*) starts with a great premise: kids stumble upon taboo comic books that invite them into a crazy, disjointed world of horrors, giving them a recipe for spell casting and a chant to repeat six times: Tall Jake, take me away—if they dare. Seth and his friend Kady have heard rumors about this comic book series, but until one of their friends disappears, they don't believe it. Soon they are sucked into a cat-and-mouse game with the scary comics store owner and his cohorts, and Seth finds himself entering the comic-book world of *Malice*, a place of machinery beasts and clockwork towers and desperate survivors and a multitude of realms, each with its own hazards.

Middle-grade boys and early high-schoolers should be drawn in by the danger and the inventions and the action, but may be disappointed by the quality of the comics pages, which render action confusingly; it often isn't clear what's happening to whom and why. This will be a small hindrance, however, in an otherwise exciting adventure with just enough creep factor.

An earlier book with a very similar premise—comic books can be compelling, powerful, and dangerous, and they are written/drawn by mysterious artists who seem to be able to observe the protagonists even in private moments—is Diane Stanley's wonderful *Mysterious Matter of I.M. Fine*. It aims at a slightly younger crowd (ages 10-14), pokes fun at the Goosebumps phenomenon, and its comics panels are clear, well-drawn, and easy to follow.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 7.5

Matisse on the Loose, by Georgia Bragg

978-0385735704 / \$16.99

Delacorte, July 2009

Core Audience: 8-12

Notable Features: Adventure, Humor, Matisse

An 11-year-old art thief??? This is the premise of the young-adult novel, *Matisse on the Loose*. Matisse is a budding artist who spends his afternoons at the Geraldine Emmett Art Museum where his mother is the head of security. At the museum, Matisse paints remarkably good copies of the artwork at the museum, including the Portrait of Pierre by Henri Matisse, his namesake. One day when the security system is broken, Matisse does the unthinkable—he substitutes his copy of Portrait of Pierre with the original just so he could see what his work would look like framed and hung. Unfortunately, Matisse is unable to make the switch back again before the security system is working, making Matisse an art thief at a very young age! This book not only details Matisse's hilarious attempts at returning the original painting, and his quirky family, but also teaches the reader about the great painter, Henri Matisse.

Judy Hanley, Bookends, Winchester, MA

Rating: 6

Maze Runner, by James Dashner

9780385737944 / \$16.99

Random House, October 2009

Core audience: Ages 12-UP, primarily but not exclusive boys

Notable: Strong experimental/puzzle solving premise somewhat reminiscent of Frank Herbert's classic *Destination Void*

The task of an author of heroic fiction parallels that of her central characters, however many hurdles they pass through, however far along the road they travel, the analogy of Odysseus' return, of Frodo's casting the ring into the fire, can always find a parallel in the author's achievement of a satisfying and truthful culmination. Few books offer a closer parallel of author and narrative than James Dashner's *Maze Runner*.

A group of bright teen boys, whose memories have been altered to retain analogous memory but to remove all personal memory, have been placed in a large glade surrounded by four towering walls. Each wall opens during the day and closes at night. Beyond the walls is a shifting maze patrolled by deadly creatures called Grievors at night, at least for the most part. The boys are aware

that they are in some sort of experiment, being monitored by unknown persons they refer to as the Creators, who send them a metal box of supplies daily, and a new member once a month. The boys run an otherwise self-contained agrarian society, with a council of keepers, and a select group of maze runners, who attempt to solve the puzzle and find an escape. The first two-thirds of the book is tightly focused and very interesting. Most readers will be hooked indeed.

The gladers have concluded that there appears to be no solution to the maze, no way to solve the puzzle, and the author seems to have come to the same conclusion about the book. Two telepathically connected characters appear in the glade on successive days, announcing that the endgame has come. The result is that all the old rules have been thrown away and the gladers will be forced to find a solution or perish one at a time. They are pushed along this new helter-skelter path by their two new citizens, one being a boy, Thomas, who is the lead character, and narrator. the other is a girl named Teresa who starts off in a coma after making a dire pronouncement. Once Teresa awakens and the endgame begins, the whole narrative construction of the book is thrown aside in favor a mad jumbled dash to the finish. Thus, after stoutly carrying the narrative load for two thirds of the book, the load is abruptly dropped, leaving author and characters to make a wild run for it.

This is a shame, as the book is loaded with potential. The use of an inventive language by the gladers really works, and the cohesion of their society is very persuasive and compelling. It is the first book in a trilogy and I certainly want to see what in the world is going on, what book two will bring to the table, I mean to say. Still, it's hard to see how a story line that's already been tossed over the cliff can be rescued from its own abandonment. Aragorn isn't always following behind to retrieve your brooch, particularly if the brooch isn't tossed with deliberate or sensible purpose.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 7

Additional review of Maze Runner:

Core Audience: Boys — 13 and older.

Notable: Science Fiction, Survival, Friendship

The Maze Runner opens with a boy in a dark moving box. He possesses practical knowledge but remembers nothing personal, except his name, Thomas. His journey in the box comes to an abrupt halt, the top opens and Thomas meets his new companions, a group of boys of varying ages, sizes and color. The first words he hears are "Welcome to the Glade." The Glade is a large enclosed area where the boys live and work. It is a self-governing community led by a council of "Keepers." The Keepers are the leaders of their unit, and each is responsible for some portion of the community's survival. It

could be agriculture, building, maintenance, etc. There is an elite group called the Runners. It is their mission to try and solve the riddle of the maze. "The Maze," is located directly outside of the glade. The task is so difficult because each night the configuration of the walls changes and because lurking in the maze are the "grievors," menacing animals that are part organic and part machine. These hybrids are nasty, weapon-bearing multi-armed slugs that produce deadly venom. Once stung, the victim needs a serum to save his life, vials of which are included in a box of supplies regularly sent in the same box that sends the boys, by an unseen group the boys call the "creators." The arrival of a girl two days after Thomas really sets the group on edge, particularly when she is carrying a piece of paper that reads "She's the last one. Ever."

The colony has been in existence for two years. The mission they have created for themselves is to find a way out of the maze, and the boys collectively support the goal. They hope that by finding an escape route they will return to their homes, which they assume has to be better, although they have no recollection of it being better. Like Thomas, all of their personal memories have been cleansed. The arrival of Thomas and Teresa provokes change in the well-ordered community. Unusual things begin to happen, events that will forever alter the group.

I liked the original characters, the unusual setting and the suspense that Dashner has created. I was disappointed in the dialogue. I felt there was a lot of "shut up and don't ask questions," which became tedious. Putting this negative aside, I think adolescent boys will enjoy "The Maze Runner."

Kathleen "Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys

Rating: 8

The Midnight Charter, by David Whitley

978-1596433816 / \$17.99

Roaring Brook Press, September 2009

Core Audience: 10-14+

Notable for: Themes of consumerism & profit vs. compassion; a male and a female main character = broad appeal

In the city of Agora, where everything and everyone has a price, Mark wakes up from an illness to discover that his father has sold him to a doctor who is searching for the cure to a mysterious plague. In the doctor's household, Mark meets Lily--an orphan and a servant to the doctor's grandfather, a powerful astrologer. When the astrologer and doctor have a falling out, Lily offers to go with the doctor, allowing Mark to become an apprentice to the astrologer.

This is where their paths take sharp turns in opposite directions--Lily becomes

a champion for the poor, who have nothing considered of value to trade for food or shelter; Mark is drawn into a scheme to discredit the astrologer's rival and, in the fallout, becomes an overnight sensation in the city.

As Mark bargains his way into more and more wealth and power, Lily becomes more discontented with Agora's foundation in trade. While investigating the murder of a friend, Lily discovers that she and Mark have been named as opposing forces that will decide the future of their city. By the end of the book, the two are poised at the brink of the unknown, on the way to finding out how they will fulfill their destinies.

I felt like the author was a bit heavy-handed, at times, in pushing the anti-consumerist theme, and there were several issues that seemed important when brought up that faded to nothing in the end (as well as some plot motivators that seemed to drop into the story quite suddenly). Overall, though, I thought this was a solid debut, and I look forward to reading the next installment of the story.

Sandy Scott The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

Additional review of The Midnight Charter:

Core Audience: Ages 11-14

Notable Aspects: Clever premise, fantasy

The dystopian world of *The Midnight Charter* is a highly regulated, tightly controlled culture. The city of Agora is fashioned after a wheel. The districts, named after zodiac signs, are the spokes and the huge edifice, in the center, the Directory, is the hub. The government regulates everything, and everything is a commodity; even the emotions we feel can be bartered. In this cashless society, currency is a contract and your seal is your license to trade. Seals are presented to children when they turn twelve. On the special "Title Day," children are presented with their seals and nothing can be given away, only exchanged or bartered.

The story opens at the home of the very famous and wealthy astrologer Count Stelli. There are two servants, Lilly and Mark. Lily, who recently turned twelve, negotiated her contract with the Count. Mark was exchanged for medicine by his father and now works for the count's grandson. The count and his grandson have a disagreement. The count throws his grandson and Mark out of the home. Lily, who always had an eye to the outside world, barter with Mark to switch places. With this simple exchange, their lives are forever altered and a prophecy is fulfilled, the one foretold in the Midnight Charter. Whatley introduces "new values" to the system of barter and trade.

The selling of emotions fascinated and repelled me at the same time. Known

idioms, "a little more gumption," "needs more backbone," assaulted my mind, and conversely, qualities like patience and understanding whose importance are better appreciated with age, caused me to tremble as I reflected on their value to my adolescent self. What would I have cast aside and what would I have purchased? Then there is the mystery of the The Midnight Charter: its secret origin and purpose. There is a lot to think about and mull over in this debut novel.

I really liked the idea of the story and the characters; however I thought the ending was rushed. A few of the story lines were left unresolved, probably with an eye to a sequel.

Kathleen McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys

Rating: 8

Nathan Abercrombie, Accidental Zombie: My Rotten Life, by David Lubar

978-0765316349 / \$15.95

Starscape (Tor), August 2009

Core Audience: 8-12 year olds, particularly boys, who will enjoy the gross details of becoming a zombie

Notable for: humor (gross-out and not), themes of friendship and loyalty, coming out in time for Halloween

Nathan Abercrombie is having a really bad day. He's mostly okay with being grouped with the "Second Besters" (the kids who are always runners-up for any superlative, whether it's Smartest, Skinniest, or Funniest) at school. But today, pretty, popular Shawna embarrassed him at lunch, he got picked last in gym, and then everyone in class picked on him for his lack of video game skills — well, Nate just wants to stop feeling bad. When an experimental serum is spilled on him, the problem is he can't feel anything at all. Now Nate, his best friend Mookie, and the odd but smart Abigail must find a cure before Nate becomes one of the living dead - for the rest of his life!

This is a quick read, and a fairly goofy take on the zombie genre, complete with jokes about gas, puke, and detachable fingers. I really liked the growing friendship between Nate, Mookie, and Abigail, and the fact that the divide between school cliques is discussed but not the focus of the story. Even though Nate isn't one of the popular kids and sometimes wishes he were, he's not intimidated by that group. He stands up for his friends and himself without it coming off as a Major Lesson about Being Yourself and Being True To Your Friends.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating: 6.5

Additional review of Nathan Abercrombie, Accidental Zombie: My Rotten Life:

Core Audience: 8-12

Notable Features: hilarious, goofy sci-fi, great for boys, first in a series, paperback original (catalogued as hardcover)

What would happen if a mad scientist accidentally spilled a mysterious potion all over you? This is exactly what happens to our hero in David Lubar's new book. The first in a series, this book is hilarious. Nathan is a pretty average kid before the accident, but once he starts to get zombified, he no longer has to sleep or eat, so he can stay up all night practicing video games to impress the kids at school. Since he doesn't have to breathe, he's the best in his gym class. But Nathan really doesn't want to be dead, so he enlists the help of his friends to find the cure before his zombie transformation is complete.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 7

Odd and the Frost Giants by Neil Gaiman, illustrations by Brett Helquist

978-0061671739 / \$14.99

Harper, September 2009

Core Audience: 6-10

Notable Features: Fable, Read-Aloud, Handicapped Boy Protagonist, Talking Animals, Quest

In this slim chapter book, we meet a small, crippled boy named Odd. His Norwegian village has been in a state of mysterious endless winter. One day he meets three strange creatures: an eagle, a fox, and a bear, whom he soon learns can talk. They tell him that they are Gods and that they need him to help stop the Frost Giants who have taken over. This is a lovely story and a perfect read-aloud. The jacket copy puts it best: it's a "charming fantasy adventure."

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music **Rating: 8**

A Pearl Among Princes, by Coleen Murtagh Paratore

978-0803733015, \$16.99

Dial, September 2009

Core audience: girly girls, ages 8-12

Notable aspects: a happily-ever-after fairy tale

Book description from Penguin: "Gracepearl Coal is the cook's daughter on Miramore, the island all princes visit for their summer program in the Charming Arts. Each year, the princes-in-training arrive on gallant seacraft, guided by captains trained to navigate the island's treacherous waters. Passage on one of these boats is the only method to leave the island—thus betrothal to a royal is the only way for Pearl to find her far-off destiny, the one that's started haunting her dreams. Luckily, this year's crop of princes include some promising prospects, but how will Pearl leave behind her ailing father or—hardest of all—marry a boy other than her long-time beloved, Mackree . . . who now finds it too painful to even speak to her?"

This is a fun and fluffy fantasy. No issues, no depth, no real malice. Gracepearl gets her boy, keeps her best friends, turns out to be a princess, and may live happily ever after. Coleen has a light touch that keeps the sweetness from being cloying. It's a lovely escape.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer

Rating: 7

Pop, by Gordon Korman

978-006174228-6 / \$16.99

HarperCollins, August 2009

Core Audience: Girls & boys age 12 & up

Notable for: Alzheimer's disease, football, family loyalty issues

Marcus Jordan loves football. He and his mother have just moved to a new home in a town where the school football team is coming off an 11-0 season with all their starters are back for the new season. Practicing his passes in the park he meets ex-NFL player Charlie Popovich and the two begin an unlikely friendship based on grueling football drills and childish pranks. Before long Marcus realizes that Charlie doesn't just act like a teenager -- he thinks he still is one and that Marcus is his old friend Mac. Alzheimer's disease, possibly brought on by the multiple head injuries he suffered as a football player, has disrupted his memory. Charlie's family is protective of his reputation as the town's quirky celebrity. They don't want anyone to know about his condition. The story never mentions Charlie receiving treatment for the disease.

Korman has created a believable character in Charlie. The scenes of football practices and games should please football enthusiasts but the story is so powerful and interesting for other reasons that even football haters (like me) will be pulled in.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 9

Purple Heart, by Patricia McCormick

978-0061730900 / \$16.99

Harper, September 2009

Core audience: boys 13-15

Notable strengths: Realistic treatment of military life, Iraq war, characters, plot, strong ending

For those who feel adolescents should be shielded from profanity this book will be a problem. All others will find a story well worth reading, one that will come to mind with each newscast, each soldier in an airport, each recruiting ad. Matt, a recent high school graduate, is in the infantry, serving in Baghdad. He's in the infirmary recovering from a traumatic brain injury, and trying to remember what happened. He and his buddy Justin followed someone into an alley, where Justin covered him as he pursued a suspected combatant. Just before a rocket-propelled grenade exploded nearby, Matt saw the little Iraqi boy Ali whom they had befriended, blown away in a blast of gunfire. Matt's clouded memories are troubled: could he have accidentally shot Ali himself? Did Justin go berserk and do it? The infirmary is both medically and emotionally sterile, and Matt forces his body to look good enough, ignoring headaches and covering up a limp, that he can return to his squad where there's gritty companionship, routine, distraction, and possibly an explanation. When the explanation comes, it's entirely believable and sorrowful. Without grandstanding, it's as forceful a statement about what war does as such classics as *Johnny Got His Gun* and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. McCormick includes telling details of Baghdad and military procedures that must come from unusually candid sources close to her.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8.5

Season of Gifts, by Richard Peck

978-0803730823 / \$16.99

Dial Books, September 2009

Core audience: girls and boys age 10+

Notable for: humor, family values, fifties lifestyle

Grandma Dowdel lives! The very funny grandma of *A Year Down Yonder* and *A Long Way From Chicago* (Newbery winners) lives next door to newly arrived eleven-year-old Bob and his adorable younger sister, Ruth Ann, his trouble-prone (spelled b-o-y) teen sister, Phyllis, and parents. Dad's a preacher with lots to do to get himself a congregation, but he does, and

becomes famous for his weddings and funerals. Bob is beset by bullies early on (until their leader becomes enamored of his sister!) and Grandma's outhouse comes into play (not so ha-ha this time). Every chapter has funny moments, mostly instigated by Grandma's eccentric will. The real meaning of Christmas is demonstrated by Grandma Dowdel (who doesn't believe in celebrating Christmas—there's inflation to consider!) and some surprises at the end. This is a delightful and charming book to read aloud.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 9

Additional rating of A Year Down Yonder:

I didn't read *A Year Down Yonder* and didn't like *A Long Way from Chicago*, so I'm glad I can recommend this on its own.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer

Rating: 7

Secrets of Truth & Beauty, by Megan Frazer

978-1423117117 / \$15.99

Hyperion, July 2009

Core audience: 12 & up, mostly girls

Notable for: Body image issues, family history, gay/lesbian themes

New author Megan Frazer has done a very good job of weaving together several seemingly disparate themes. Portland, Maine, high-school junior Dara is assigned to write her autobiography for English class and she decides to use the opportunity to make a statement about the body image issue in general and, more specifically, her own experience with it as a toddler beauty queen. Her teacher is not happy with this approach to autobiography and refers her to the guidance counselor who calls in her parents, and the whole thing gets blown up into a suspension from school and the requirement that Dara redo the assignment more correctly.

Discovering that she has an older sister who has run away from or been banished from the family, she finds her and sets off to visit her (on a goat farm in MA originally founded as a place where gay/questioning girls and women could find refuge) and forge her own escape from her current problems.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Shiver, by Maggie Stiefvater

978-0545123266 / \$17.99

Scholastic Press, August 2009

Core Audience: 12+

Notable Features: werewolf romance with incredible *Twilight* fan potential

Shiver is the closest a new book has come to quenching the thirst of a *Twilight* fanatic, and it does so without feeling copycat-ish. The story centers around Grace, a girl with a very special connection to the wolves that watch her from the woods outside her house. One night, one of these wolves shows up on her deck, only he's not a wolf anymore, he's a man. Grace and her wolf are soulmates (their romance fulfills the Bella-Jacob fantasy of *Twilight* fans) and I loved every minute of their story.

This will be my go-to book for *Twilight* fans, both YA and adult. Most of my staff (and my mom) have read it, and they all loved it.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

Additional ratings of Shiver:

I am adding my two cents to the review of *Shiver* by Suzanne Hermans. I enjoyed the book, but wonder about the twelve-year-old reader. The protagonist's parents are rarely home and she "sheltered" the werewolf / young man in her bedroom for many nights without their knowledge. At some point sex is enjoyed, although without much explicit detail. It is truly the next good book for *Twilight* fans, though. The romance is just what they are looking for! Great cover, too.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

I'm about half way through it and am also loving it--it's very compelling and I think very well done (and I never thought I'd like a werewolf romance!). Based on what I've read so far, I'd also give it a 9.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 9

Solace of the Road, by Siobhan Dowd

978-0375849718 / \$17.99

David Fickling (RH), October 2009

Core Audience: 12 & up

Notable for: language, positive experience in foster system, authenticity

In this, the last book finished before her death, Dowd has created the character of Holly, a 14-year-old girl angry at everyone. The story is told in a shifting chronology that works to let us in on Holly's past as she works through her present. Holly is in foster care because her mother abandoned her so she is loath to allow most people to get close to her. When she is placed in a home with a kind, childless couple who have problems of their own she runs away but not before shaping herself into a new persona -- Solace -- aided by a blond wig she steals from her foster mother's drawer.

Holly thinks that she will go to Ireland to find her lost mother so she begins cadging rides westward from London on trains, buses and eventually hitch hiking. She wears the wig when she needs to be Solace, an older, braver, wilder version of herself. Her experiences lead her to the knowledge that her mother is not the answer to her problems.

The book deals with this in an unsentimental, authentic manner. Holly is witty in her disparagement. The adults are shadowy but sensible & sympathetic when they enter the tale. A solid story told in Dowd's seemingly effortlessly fresh language.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 9

The Tails of Frederick and Ishbu: The Case of the Purloined Professor, Judy Cox

978-761455448 / \$16.99

Marshall Cavendish, October 2009

Core audience: Ages 8-12

Notable: Fun inclusion of educational tidbits from Robert Burns to badger behavior, would make great read-aloud

Publisher description: Frederick and Ishbu live in Miss Dove's classroom, where they learn—and eat—to their hearts' content. But one fateful evening Natasha arrives with disturbing news: her father, a famous professor and

scientist, has gone missing! For the second time in their lives, the rats embark on a worldwide journey. They travel the globe to save their friend and meet such colorful characters as a secret clan of badgers, two vicious rat terriers, and a stuffy English show mouse. It's another whirlwind adventure they'll never forget!

Review: James Bond with mice! Great cloak and dagger as Frederick and Ishbu travel from San Francisco to Scotland (and not just anywhere in Scotland, it's Loch Ness) to Switzerland trying to rescue Natasha and her father. It's definitely a sequel, as a major plot element in the first book is given away (just a guess, I have not read), but can certainly stand alone. Natasha speaks English in the same goofy way as all the femme fatales in film: "I am coming to beseech you, please. You must be helping me." The criminal mastermind is the Big Cheese, an albino opossum. The badgers are great, and two of them are named for characters in Shakespeare. Someone even says, "Lead on, MacDuff." The final escape from Zermatt involves an avalanche (of course!) Its fun, fun, fun.

Quibble: I may have missed it, but I didn't see where "keckering" was explained. It turns out to be a badger noise—see <http://www.badgerland.co.uk>—and that may be obvious from context, but it wasn't in my dictionary.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 8

Undiscovered Gyrl, by Allison Burnett

978-0307473127 / \$14.00 pb

Vintage, August 2009

Core audience: Older teens, mainly girls; Crossover title published as a paperback original in the adult trade

Notable for: Humor, honesty, frank discussion of sex, suspense

One of the publisher's marketing lines aptly captures the timely theme of this book: "Only on the internet can you have so many friends and be so lonely." Katie Kampenfelt is a slacker. Sort of. Untethered by ambition, to put it kindly, she has decided to defer college for a year and find a job. After one significant false start, she lands a job as a nanny to a couple who seem perfect but—of course—have problems that aren't helped by Katie's sexy youthfulness. Initially a reluctant blogger, Katie discovers that her uncensored thoughts and sharp-tongued insights bring her a (not always positive) fan following. Katie's teenage dismissiveness, scorn, arrogance, and utter vulnerability ring truer than most adult attempts to revisit older adolescence and young adulthood.

"Mystic Pizza" meets a wilder, "lost"-er Georgia Nicholson in this gripping novel that progresses inexorably from funny to unsettling to downright disturbing as

Katie gets herself in over her head with the boyfriends, adult men, and internet fans in her life. Impossible to put down. Katie is a memorable character.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8.5

Unfinished Angel, by Sharon Creech

978-0061430954 / \$15.99

HarperCollins, September 2009

Core audience: girls and boys age 10+

Notable for: language, culture, humor, orphans

I really enjoyed this new offering from Sharon Creech. It takes some time to get used to the dialect of the angel narrator, but Creech uses the angel's lingual missteps and misunderstandings to her advantage. The angel watches over and reports on the dynamics of a small town in the Swiss Alps including feuding neighbors, a group of orphans and towns people that have forgotten how to give.

Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8.5

Viola In Reel Life, by Adriana Trigiani

978-0061451027 / \$16.99

HarperCollins, September 2009

Core audience: teen girls

Notable for: character, teen issues

Adriana Trigiani has a way with making readers really care about her characters. Her adult titles, *Big Stone Gap*, and the more recent *Very Valentine* are crowd pleasers. Now she has entered the teen field with a character girls can identify with.

Viola is an incoming freshman at a boarding school in South Bend, Indiana, sent there from her hometown of Brooklyn, NY because her parents are going to Afghanistan to work for the year. With all the usual qualms about the "boonies" locale, getting along with three roommates, and feeling alone, especially without her texting best friend, Andrew home in Brooklyn, Viola is a smart and sensible girl and very easy to like. Her adeptness and natural talent for photography and videography are put to good use as she chronicles her year of adjustment and even enters a contest, winning second prize for her

video about a local historical figure. Her roommates have each taken a major assignment in its production. The four of them have truly bonded. Too bad her new boyfriend, Jared, who went home with no contest prize, couldn't accept her win! Viola learns she will do what is right for herself and the best job she can do. She tells Jared he knows nothing about feelings, "and feelings are what make art". There's insight here about parents, their feelings and problems as well. It's almost the end of the school year and Andrew texts that he can't wait for her return. Yup, teen girls will like this one.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead

978-0385737425 / \$15.99

Wendy Lamb Books (RH), July 2009

Core Audience: 9-14

Notable Features: historic New York City locale, friendship issues, just the right amount of magic

Oh, how I loved this book. Why did I love it? First, the choice to set it in 1979. By setting the book in the past, Stead has done away with the distractions of internet and cell phones, and allowed the characters to be the most important part of her story. Don't worry - the book certainly doesn't have a 70s feel, except for a few references to "The \$20,000 Pyramid" TV show and Bit-O-Honey candy. The second thing I loved about it was how she took a fairly simple story about friendship and growing up in NYC and turned it into magic. There's just the right amount of magic in this book. (I won't give away the secret in case you haven't read it.) It makes this book perfect for kids who don't like fantasy (because there's just a little hint of it) and perfect for kids who do love fantasy (because there's just enough of it that they'll get totally into it). The third reason I loved this book is it's constant references to Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. If a kid hasn't read it yet, reading this book will make him or her run out to pick it up.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

Additional reviews and ratings of When You Reach Me:

Suzanna, you and I must have the same piles! I agree with your review of *When You Reach Me* and am grateful to you that I can get to the next book on my pile instead of writing a *Reach Me* review! Although I thoroughly enjoyed *Reach Me*, my score is 8.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

Additional reviews and ratings of When You Reach Me, continued:

Going to chime in on the *When You Reach Me* love. Love.Love.Love. One of those great books where the author treats kids like they are intelligent, and patient enough to stick with the story and follow through the ideas even when they aren't super-action-page-turning. (But it was a page-turning one-sitting book for me). You spend 3/4 of the book not quite knowing what's going on, but then it all clicks. And it talks about Einstein and common sense as habit of thought, and has these great concepts, but is still at the heart a story about a girl and her friends and her mom. I hope everyone reads it because I think it will probably require a handsell, but is then a super easy handsell, especially to kids who liked *A Wrinkle in Time*, but if they haven't read AWIT, it's still great.
Katherine Ferguson, Bunch of Grapes Bookstore **Rating: 9!**

I also really liked *When You Reach Me* for all the reasons mentioned. I'll split the difference and give it 8.5.
Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookse **Rating: 8.5**

This book failed to make a mark on either myself or two other readers at Eight Cousins. One didn't finish it, and the two others who did couldn't remember much of anything about it two weeks later. But since others have felt so positive toward it, I'll carry the book in hopes that I'm all wrong and readers will love it.
Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins **Rating: 6**

Wild Girl, by Patricia Reilly Giff

978-0375838903 / \$15.99

Wendy Lamb (RH), August 2009

Core Audience: ages 8-12, especially horse lovers

Notable Aspects: immigrant issues, single father household

Lidie has been left behind in Brazil with her aunt & uncle for several years as her father and older brothers establish a new home in New York. When she is finally sent for, she is excited but apprehensive about the new life. She is just beginning to learn English and finds many cultural differences when she arrives in America. Even with those challenges, she is most disturbed that her brothers and her father still think of her as the toddler they left behind. Now grown out of the pink and princess phase she has become an accomplished rider and is trying to find a way to let them know that. Giff handles her difficulties with humor and sensitivity.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8