

NECBA REVIEW PROJECT -- FALL, 2011

This list is our attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous releases of middle-grade and young-adult fiction between July and December of the year. (We do another round-up of January-June titles.) The list was produced by soliciting reading copies from as many publishers as possible, sharing the contributed books among NECBA members, reading and reviewing and rating as many as possible. From these titles a Top Tier list (twelve titles in this case) has been selected as a service to our general bookstore colleagues who are less familiar with the genre. The full text will be available on the NECBA site, <http://www.necba.net/necbagalleyrev.html>. As is ever the case, contributions are uneven, with some publishers supplying a very large fraction of the galleys, and a few reviewers supplying a very large fraction of the reviews. Such reviews are, by their nature, never soon enough or inclusive enough. Nevertheless, this list is bound to alert the reader to at least one or two — and probably more — excellent titles s/he otherwise might have missed.

REVIEWERS

Isabel Berg, BookEnds
Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove
Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove
Kenny Brechner, Devaney Doak & Garrett
Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer
Sue Carita, Toadstool Books
Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins
Jill Crowley, Concord Bookshop
Kaley DeGoursey, RJ Julia
Lisa Fabiano, Wellesley Books
Nancy Felton, Broadside Books
Kat Goddard, The Bookloft
Suzanna Hermans
Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop
Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books
Sarah Nixon, Westwinds Books
Marilyn Racette, Book Ends
Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore
Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar
Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes
Sandy Scott, Galaxy Bookshop
Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books
Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Books
Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

TITLES REVIEWED AND RATED

12 Things to do Before You Crash & Burn, by James Proimos
After Obsession, by Carrie Jones & Steven E Wedel
Amplified, by Tara Kelly
Around the World, by Matt Phelan
Ashes, by Ilsa J. Bick
The Beginning of After, Jennifer Castle
Bluefish, by Pat Schmatz
Breadcrumbs, by Anne Ursu
Charlie Joe Jackson's Guide to NOT Reading, by Tommy Greenwald
Circus Galacticus, by Deva Fagan
Cleopatra's Moon, by Vicky Alvear Shecter
Dead End in Norvelt by Jack Gantos
Death Cure, by James Dashner
The Eleventh Plague, by Jeff Hirsch
Every You Every Me, by David Levithan, photographs by Jonathan Farmer
The Fingertips of Duncan Dorfman, by Meg Wolitzer
The Flint Heart, by Katherine and John Paterson
The Future of Us, Jay Asher & Carolyn Mackler
Glow (*Sky Chasers* Book 1), by Amy Kathleen Ryan
Gooney Bird on the Map, by Lois Lowry, illus Middy Thomas
Hound Dog True, by Linda Urban
Icefall, by Matthew J Kirby
In The Forests of the Night, Kersten Hamilton
Island's End, by Padma Venkatraman
Legend, by Marie Liu
Liesl and Po, by Lauren Oliver
Life: An Exploded Diagram, by Mal Peet
Mangaman. by Barry Lyga, illus. by Colleen Doran
The Magician King, by Lev Grossman
The Medusa Plot (Vespers vs. Cahills), by Gordon Korman
A Monster Calls, by Patrick Ness
Mystery of the Missing Everything, by Ben H. Winters
Name of the Star (*Shades of London Book 1*), by Maureen Johnson, Penguin
The Night Circus, by Erin Morgenstern
Notes from an Accidental Band Geek, by Erin Dionne
Now Is The Time For Running, by Michael Williams
Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists! xx
The Ogre of Oglefort by Eva Ibbotson
The Other Felix by Keir Graff
Pearl Versus the World, by Sally Murphy
Pie, by Sarah Weeks
A Plague Year by Edward Bloor
The Predicteds, by Christine Seifert, Sourcebooks
The Princess Curse, by Merrie Haskell
Ready Player One, by Ernest Cline
Rebel Fire (Sherlock Holmes: The Legend Begins Book 2), by Andrew Lane
Rip Tide, by Kat Falls

The Scorpio Races, Maggie Stiefvater
Secrets at Sea, by Richard Peck
Shelter, by Harlan Coben
Stan and the Toilet Monster, by Steve Shreve
Steampunk!, edited by Kelly Link and Gavin Grant
The Summer I Learned To Fly, by Dana Reinhardt
Tuesdays at the Castle by Jessica Day George
Variant, by Robison Wells
Vietnam #1: I Pledge Allegiance, by Chris Lynch
Waiting for the Magic, Patricia MacLachlan
Why We Broke Up, by Daniel Handler and Maira Kalman
Wildwood, by Colin Meloy
Wonderstruck, by Brian Selznick
A Year Without Autumn, by Liz Kessler
You Against Me, by Jenny Downham

TOP TIER TITLES

Ashes, by Ilsa J. Bick
9781606841754, \$17.99
Egmont/Random House, September 2011
Core Audience: Teens, 14+

Dead End in Norvelt, by Jack Gantos
9780374379933, \$15.99 (Hardcover)
9781427213563, \$29.99 (audio)
FSG/MacMillan Audio/MPS, September 2011
Core Audience: Ages: 10-14, especially boys

The Flint Heart, by Katherine and John Paterson
("freely abridged" from Eden Philpott's original tale); illus. by John Rocco
9780763647124, \$19.99
Candlewick, September 2011
Core Audience: Ages: 8-10 for self-reading; younger for read-aloud

A Monster Calls, by Patrick Ness
9780763655594, \$16.99
Candlewick, September 2011
Core Audience: 12 and up, especially boys

The Night Circus, by Erin Morgenstern
9780385534635, \$26.95
Random House, September 2011
Core audience: Ages 15+

Pie, by Sarah Weeks
9780545270113, \$16.99
Scholastic, October 2011
Core audience: Ages 9-12, especially girls

Ready Player One, by Ernest Cline
9780307887436, \$26.95
Crown/Random House, 8/2011
Core Audience: Young adult gamers and 80's nostalgia buffs

Secrets at Sea, by Richard Peck
9780803734555, \$16.99
Dial Books/Penguin, October 2011
Core audience: boys and girls 8-12

Steampunk!, edited by Kelly Link and Gavin Grant
9780763648435, \$22.99
Candlewick, October 2011
Core audience: Ages 14+, both boys and girls

The Summer I Learned To Fly, by Dana Reinhardt
9780385739542, \$15.99
Wendy Lamb/Random House, July 2011
Core audience: 12 – 16, especially girls

Wildwood, by Colin Meloy, illus. Carson Ellis
9780062024688, \$16.99
Balzer & Bray/HarperCollins, August, 2011
Core audience: Ages 9-13, both girls and boys who love fantasy

Wonderstruck, by Brian Selznick
9780545027892, \$29.99
Scholastic Press, September 2011
Core audience: older elementary and middle school

THE COMPLETE REVIEWS

12 Things to do Before You Crash & Burn, by James Proimos
9781596435957, \$14.95

Roaring Brook, November, 2011

Core audience: 14 & up, lots of profanity. This would be especially good for reluctant readers since it appears slight.

Notable: This book could be used as an object lesson in packing a lot of story into a small space.

Review: Hercules' dad has died. His mom, a wreck, sends him to stay with his Uncle Anthony for the summer. Anthony doesn't seem to have it all together either, but he gives Hercules a list of things that he must accomplish over the summer. Day One: Choose a mission. Day Two: Find the best pizza joint in town. Day three: Clean out the garage, etc. At first Hercules wants nothing to do with the list but eventually he gives it a try. It turns out that Uncle Anthony was on to something. This is a bit like 13 Little Blue Envelopes for boys but with more profanity. Well done.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

After Obsession, by Carrie Jones & Steven E Wedel

9781599906812, \$17.99

Bloomsbury/MPS, September 2011

Teen girls, 14+

Notable for having a mysterious, exotic, major hunk hero. Lots of suspense. Ghosts, possession, evil Indian spirits. Parents, though somewhat two dimensional, are presented as positive, loving, involved. Review: Alan and his mother have moved from Oklahoma to Maine to live with her recently widowed sister and niece, Courtney. Alan, though he never knew his Native American father, is proud of his Navajo heritage and has been delving into its spirituality. He is not thrilled to be in Maine. Courtney's best friend, Aimee, and Alan sense an immediate connection beyond both being close to Courtney, who is clinging to the irrational belief that her father (lost at sea) isn't really dead and will return to his family. Aimee lives with her younger brother, father and grandfather since her mother drowned in the nearby river. Like her mother, Aimee has visions and has healing powers that her father refuses to acknowledge. Both Aimee and Alan sense something wrong, something evil, in their small community and come to realize that Courtney is being possessed. They learn that for centuries strange deaths have occurred in town; Alan concludes the river harbors an ancient, malevolent spirit that is consuming Courtney. He and Aimee alone can save Courtney and the town. A thrilling, climactic battle with the demon caps a story that offers shivers throughout. Fun and exciting.

Here's hoping a host of cringe-worthy grammatical mistakes are edited out in the final edition.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7

Amplified, by Tara Kelly

9780805092967, \$16.99

Henry Holt/MPS, October 2011

Core audience: Ages 13 & up

Notable: Authentic portrayal of a beginning musician

Review: Jasmine does not want to go to Stanford, at least not right away. She plans to defer her acceptance for a year while she explores the possibilities her musical talent may have. Her father is not happy about her decision and refuses to help her financially through the next year. Jasmine leaves home with her favorite guitar and a vintage amp but without a plan of where she will live or how she will earn money. After a few days of homelessness she lands a place in a local band that includes a place to live. Everything is going well until the first gig with the new band. What her band mates do not know is that it is her first gig ever and she has paralyzing stage fright.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 7.5

Around the World, by Matt Phelan

9780763636197, \$24.99

Candlewick, October, 2011

Core Audience: 4th grade plus. Teachers, children interested in history or graphic novels.

Notable: Beautiful, color interior illustrations. Suggested further reading materials in the back. The book is based on historical fact, but is fictionalized, providing a springboard from graphic novels to history. I'd also let some adults know that this is a full color book at the same price as a regular adult hardcover.

Review: Many local teachers have been using graphic novelizations of classic stories in their classrooms. Phelan's *Around the World*, though fiction, is grounded in historical fact and quotes from primary sources, proving an exciting base for history lessons or a path to the exploration of non-fiction. Phelan's book presents three famous individuals who each circumnavigated the world in his or her own way: Thomas Steves by bicycle, Nellie Bly by ship and rail, and Joshua Slocum by sail boat. The pacing and speed of each journey are captured by the graphic novel layout, which serves to combine

writing, image, maps, and other materials, each adding a layer to the reader's understanding of the journey. Sprightly line drawings and colorful washes capture the emotion and drive of each character, bringing a rush of thrilling speed to each adventure.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 8

Ashes, by Ilsa J. Bick

9781606841754, \$17.99

Egmont/Random House, September 2011

Core Audience: Teens, 14+

Notable: An interesting and, theoretically, possible dystopian scenario; well developed characters, flawed and human; great grisly details that zombie fans will “eat up”

Review: A strange electromagnetic pulse sweeps across the sky over the Waucamaw Wilderness. Alex, a young woman with a terminal brain tumor, survives the blast, which has a devastating effect on many other people, animals, and anything electronic. Banding together, Alex, Ellie (a young girl whose grandfather dies in the catastrophe), and Tom (a young soldier) make their way to a ranger station/watchtower hoping to find other survivors there. Using an antiquated radio at the abandoned station, they are able to catch snippets of news from around the country and realize that the mysterious blast’s effects were widespread, perhaps world-wide, but that there are other survivors. They strike out from the station, hoping to find a safe haven. As they travel, they encounter zombie-like human survivors (The Changed), wild animals, and desperate (Unchanged) survivors who are almost more vicious than the Changed. Ellie is taken by one group of thieves who leave Alex and Tom with no provisions. Tom is injured in the fight and, fearing he may die, Alex leaves him to try to find help. She finds the survivor village Rule and is taken in. By the time she can get back to him, Tom has disappeared. In the village, Alex feels uneasy, almost like a captive. One of the robbers who kidnapped Ellie is brought to the village; his crimes revealed, he is banished, but not before he tells Alex that he deserted Ellie in the woods. Desperate to escape and to take her chances on her own, Alex finds herself a pawn in a power struggle in the village. She is helped to escape by one faction. As the book ends, Alex is alone, on foot, in the wilderness, facing a group of Changed children who are eying her as their next meal. The cliff hanger in *Ashes* is definitely a corker. I’ll admit, I’ll read the next book as soon as I can get my hands on it. Will Alex survive? Tom and Ellie can’t really be dead, can they?

Ellen Richmond, The Book Cellar

Rating: 8

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9.5

The Beginning of After, Jennifer Castle

9780061985799, \$17.99

Harper, September 2011

Core Audience: 12+, fans of Sarah Dessen, Gayle Forman

Notable: death of parents, Jewish characters & traditions

Review: In Jennifer Castle's debut novel, *The Beginning of After*, high schooler Laurel's parents and brother die in a car accident. Laurel should have been in the car with them, but chose to stay home and do homework instead of going out to get ice cream. Her grandmother comes to live with her and she eventually returns to school. She also begins to befriend the son of the man who was responsible for the accident. This is a strong story of emotional conflict and friendship. It's perfect for fans of Dessen & Forman, and a strong debut from Castle.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 7.5

Bluefish, by Pat Schmatz

9780763653347, \$15.99

Candlewick Press, September, 2011

Core audience: boys and girls age 12+

Notable for issues of bullying, teen illiteracy, parental alcoholism

Review: Eighth grader Travis and his grandpa have moved from the beloved country place into town and to a new school. His dog is dead, he skips school, and he can't do his homework. It takes a savvy teacher to discover that Travis can't read and he cleverly convinces him to come before school for extra help. Grandpa obviously cares for the boy and tries to help but Travis is hurting too much to communicate without hostility. Alternate chapters are told from point of view of classmate Velveeta, with home problems of her own. She befriends Travis and uses cleverness with words and humor to make him respond. Readers will enjoy her clever banter and feel empathy for these kids, whose problems are more common than we wish to know. I liked that Velveeta has read *The Book Thief* and talks about it a lot. She learns that grief is a rough ride but the "only way through it is through it." The "bluefish" (of Dr. Seuss and Travis' third grade reading group) finds he can get ahead and make his own path. This is a good read aloud for middle school. There is a lot to discuss.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 7.5

Enjoyable in parts, but so depressing I don't see the customer who will pay for it.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 7.0

Breadcrumbs, by Anne Ursu

9780062015051, \$16.99

HarperCollins, September 2011

Core Audience: Ages 9-13

Notable: weaves in the snow queen fairy tale as well as other fairy tale references; changing to a new school. Features adopted main character & divorced parents.

Review: Sometimes, you need a nice, satisfying stand alone novel. *Breadcrumbs* is just that. The first half of the book is the story of new schools, old friends, and changes. Hazel's best friend Jack has been growing distant from her, trying to balance his time between her and his male friends from school. Hazel is trying to fit in a new school where everything is different. She's frustrated, confused, and wants things to be the way they were. Ursu is kind to all her characters, as there is a reason for everyone's choices, feelings, and desires. Her handling of the subject matter is reminiscent of Stead's *When You Reach Me*, and Ursu is deserving of the comparison. When Jack stops speaking to Hazel altogether and then disappears, Hazel is the only one who realizes that something is truly wrong. Hazel heads off to the snowy woods after Jack, seeking the snow queen and her best friend in a fantastical adventure inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's "The Snow Queen."

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

Charlie Joe Jackson's Guide to NOT Reading, by Tommy Greenwald

9781596436916, \$14.99

Roaring Brook Press/MPS, July 2011

Core Audience: Wimpy Kid Diary fans, boys ages 9-12

Notable: Books and reading, friendship, teachers, humor, middle school

Review: Tommy Greenwald's new book *Charlie Joe Jackson's Guide to NOT Reading* is a perfect book for the non-reader or reluctant reader in your life. Charlie Joe has made it all the way to Middle School without ever, EVER, reading a book cover to cover. It hasn't been easy, but he came up with an arrangement that has carried him this far successfully: his friend Timmy reads the books and tells Charlie what they're about in exchange for snacks from the school cafeteria. But now, his teachers have discovered what he's been up to. Will Charlie Joe be able to keep up his no-reading track record?

With his final assignment looming and his English grade for the entire year on the line, Charlie Joe has to think quickly. He decides to write his Position Paper on school cliques and to do what he calls a

“social experiment:” he sets up Hannah and Jake, a girl and a boy from different circles. Hannah agrees to go along with the plan since she thinks it’s a pretty cool experiment, and Jake is overjoyed at the idea of going out with possibly the most popular girl at school. And conveniently, since Jake now owes Charlie Joe a favor for putting him in a new social orbit, Jake agrees to be Charlie Joe’s new book reader. Nothing could possibly go wrong!

In this hilarious book, Charlie Joe speaks directly to you, the reader, and as he relates his own story, he shares tips and tactics to help you avoid reading at all costs. Middle School boys (and girls!) will appreciate the references to modern tween pop-culture, such as facebook, texting, and X-Box, among others. “Exclusive Non-Reading Tips” are sprinkled throughout, offering advice like “IF YOU HAVE TO READ A BOOK, MAKE SURE IT HAS SHORT CHAPTERS” and “NOT ALL BOOKS ARE BAD (exceptions: comic books, yearbooks, checkbooks, Facebook).” Along with these interspersed lists of tips, short chapters and simple illustrations help keep the book moving at a quick pace. The surprise ending brings the story full circle, and readers who picked up what they thought would be a guide to NOT reading will discover that they have, in fact, just finished (and enjoyed!) an entire book. Laugh-out-loud funny, clever, and relevant, I believe Tommy Greenwald has written a book that will appeal to kids of all reading tastes. After all, I love books more than anything, and even I appreciated the fun and humor of Charlie Joe’s tale!

Kaley DeGoursey, RJ Julia

Rating: 6

Circus Galacticus, by Deva Fagan

9780547581361, \$16.99

Harcourt/HMH, November 2011

Core Audience: 9 to 13, primarily girls

Notable: A fun science fiction/fantasy full of adventure, mystery, suspense. Trix, the main character, is engaging and courageous.

Review: Trix is a misfit in the snobby boarding school where she was enrolled after her parents’ deaths. She is bullied and unhappy. Her only legacy from her parents is a fascination with the stars and a strange space rock, which, (her father told her) she must keep safe. A strange man, Nyl, who breaks into her room, wants the stone, and his cryptic comments during their encounter confuse and upset her; but she saves the stone. When she looks in the mirror the next morning her hair is, inexplicably and permanently, bubblegum pink. Trix’s life is about to change and her hair is just the first indication of how strange it will be. During a school trip to the Circus Galacticus, Trix, trying to evade Nyl again, finds herself backstage at the Circus. Invited to join Circus Galacticus, Trix ships out for adventure. The denizens of the circus are an odd assortment of people from around the galaxies. Among them Trix finds her first real friends. The handsome, young ringmaster is an intriguing and enigmatic character. The planets where the Circus visits are strange and colorful. When one of her circus friends is captured by Nyl and his cohorts, Trix plots and executes an exciting rescue which almost causes the demise of the Circus Galacticus. Trix, however, has the Tinker’s Treasure (the stone) and the courage to save her new home.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7.5

Cleopatra's Moon, by Vicky Alvear Shecter

9780545221306, \$18.99

Arthur A. Levine/ Scholastic, August 2011

Core audience: teen girls

Notable for historical fact, issues of fate and free will

Review: Cleopatra Selene's parents have both committed suicide as the honorable way to accept defeat when the Roman ruler, Octavianus conquers Alexandria. Young Cleopatra Selene holds on to the hope of someday regaining the throne of her beloved land, even when she is taken to Rome. When her

brothers are murdered she is more determined than ever. As she makes a new life for herself, always staying one step away from Octavianus' plans for her, she eventually confronts the idea that maybe she does not want to be like her mother and maybe she does not have to accept what fate brings to her. Lots of historical research has been done here. At the end there is a list of Facts Within the Fiction and an extensive list of characters at the start. Readers will want to know more about the glorious city of Alexandria and appreciate the Hebrew concepts of free will in opposition to worship of various Roman gods who decide everything for us. Written from Cleopatra Selene's own point of view, covering a period of several years, the story has more than a touch of romance, and the ending is sure to please even as it seems a bit sudden. Teen girls will enjoy this well-written historical fiction as much as I did.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

Dead End in Norvelt by Jack Gantos

9780374379933, \$15.99

9781427213563, \$29.99 (audio)

Farrar Straus Giroux./MPS, September 2011

Core audience: Ages 10-14

Notable: Humor, authentic voice

Review: It is so easy to imagine this as biography. The fact that the young boy in the story is named Jack Gantos probably adds to that feeling. Jack is growing up in a small town during the post-war era of bomb shelters and close neighborhood ties. There was a lot to like about this book. There was a quirky neighbor lady with arthritic hands who ropes Jack into typing out the obituaries she writes for the town paper. There was a mystery to solve. There were many instances of Jack trying to stay out of trouble. The one thing I did not like was the (possibly also autobiographical?) continual and graphic description of Jack's bloody nose episodes. Maybe kids will not be so squeamish.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 7

Core audience: Ages: 10-14

Notable: History, humor, quirky characters

Review: When Jack is grounded for the entire summer, it seems as though life is entirely ruined. His mother will only let him out of the house to help old Miss Volker, who writes the obituaries of original Norveltians and the "This Day in History" column for the local paper. This means no baseball, no rides in the plane his dad is fixing up, and no drive-in movies. But something fishy is going on in Norvelt; there's a surprising number of deaths (even for old ladies), someone is moving the houses to another town, and the Hells Angels have been spotted. History and mystery combine in this funny, sharp, narrative. Jack Gantos himself reads the audio and his Pennsylvania accent transports the listener directly to Norvelt. With its historical content and perfect wit, *Dead End in Norvelt* would be a wonderful choice for classrooms and bookclubs, or a surprising and enjoyable read.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

Please add my score of 8 to the review already done of *Dead End in Norvelt* by Gantos. Funny is good.

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

Staff is divided, but great love trumps mild antipathy. One of our Picks of the Year!

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8.5

Death Cure, by James Dashner

9780385738774, \$17.99

Random House, October 2011

Core Audience: People who have read the first two *Maze Runner* books

Notable: Suspense, Denver is laid waste rather than Chicago.

Review: The third book in James Dashner's *Maze Runner* Trilogy offers almost perpetual cliffhangers and suspense, some good twists and turns, excellent government evil, and a satisfyingly macabre ending. The suspense comes across as a bit too much a narrative end in itself at points, and the dialect of the characters seems to slip in and out distractingly, but there is no question that *Death Cure* is "not a bunch of klunk."

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 8.5

The Eleventh Plague, by Jeff Hirsch

9780545290142, \$17.99

Scholastic Press, September 2011

Core Audience: children aged 12 and up who like dystopian novels, with realistic teen characters

Notable: characters and plot development

Review: In this future picture of the United States, the country has been ravaged by a plague. Stephen, his folks and his grandfather, a military man, have been scavengers, traveling around the country and relying only on themselves for survival. The story starts with only Stephen and his father trying to survive together. When his father is injured by "slavers" and near death, Stephen is forced to join people in a settlement and begin to trust them – actions which are totally opposite to everything his grandfather had taught him. The settlement he joins is not perfect and there is ongoing turmoil and conflict with another group which he unwittingly escalates. While this is a story of rebuilding of society in the future, it is more about human nature and how adversity brings out the good in some people and the bad in others.

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7

Every You Every Me, by David Levithan, photographs by Jonathan Farmer

9780375860980, \$16.99

Random House, September 2011

Core audience: Ages 14+

Notable aspects: friendship, high school, teen mental illness, photography

Review: Evan is haunted by his best friend Ariel. Ariel is gone. Her boyfriend has moved on, but Evan cannot -- especially when someone begins planting photos of her. But who could have taken these photos? Is Ariel haunting Evan? Evan knew she was sick. He knew, that day in the clearing, that getting help was the right thing to do, yet he can't forgive himself for not stopping her. And he will not move on, especially when there's someone who knows things about Ariel that he doesn't.

Farmer's photos are included in the book, the reader coming across them as Evan does. They're arresting images that pull the characters into the real world, giving them more emotional power and heightening the mystery. Yet again, Levithan has created flawed yet beautiful characters who reach out from the pages and pull you in.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 7

The disjointed way that this book was constructed is evident on every page. The story arc is convoluted, repetitive and, in some places, just plain boring.

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes

Rating: 6.5

The Fingertips of Duncan Dorfman, by Meg Wolitzer

9780525423041 \$16.99

Dutton/Penguin, September 2011

Core audience: Ages 8-12

Notable: Scrabble lore, girls and boys as friends.

Review: For some reason that we are never told, Duncan Dorfman can read through his fingertips.

While this is, in general, not one of the more useful or spectacular superpowers, in the game of Scrabble it is of great use. Duncan usually spends his lunch exiled from the cool crowd but in peace.

When the school Scrabble champ discovers Duncan's power he tries to use it to win the YST, the national Youth Scrabble Tournament. Duncan goes along with the plan, just happy to be accepted, but finds that he doesn't need the power to win at Scrabble, he is getting pretty good at the game without it. I love Scrabble and Wolitzer must too since she got all the facts right.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Notable for humor, smart juvenile characters, relationship issues

Will appeal to Middle School boys and girls

April wants to be a Scrabble champ to prove to her jock family that Scrabble is a sport and they should be proud of her skill. Maxie ended up at the Championships because she was asked to be a partner for her analytical math skills. Duncan came to the finals with Carl, who thinks he needs Duncan's uncanny special skill of being able to read overturned letters through his left hand. That's right. Carl has been a bully and now he needs Duncan in order to win the Championship. Three sets of partners from all over the US meet at the National Youth Scrabble Championships in Florida and hit it off. Throw in Nate, who hates Scrabble, and his relentlessly pushy Dad, who wants his son to win the prize Dad lost many years ago, and you have the recipe for a fascinating tale about Scrabble, friendships, the meaning of honesty, and the chances we take in life. I liked the kids and found the Scrabble facts interesting.

Wolitzer knows her stuff and non-Scrabble-playing readers will enjoy the book and maybe get interested in the game. Hooray for a book that gives smart kids a place to shine and shows readers that we all have "...something that made them different, quietly powerful, even if no one else knew it."

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 7

The Flint Heart, by Katherine and John Paterson ("freely abridged" from Eden Philpott's original tale) illustrated by John Rocco

9780763647124, \$19.99

Candlewick, September 2011

Ages: Probably 8-10 for reading, but really great read-aloud material for younger children

Notable for: Old-fashioned storytelling style, humor, fairyland setting, consequences of abusing power

Review: The Flint Heart is an ancient bit of magical stone that overcame the good nature of one Stone Age cave dweller named Phut, turning him into a power-hungry murderous leader before he died and the heart was lost for thousands of years. Having been discovered by the beloved Billy Jago, its vile effects are making themselves felt upon his family and neighbors. It is up to Charles, the oldest of the Jago children, to find out how to turn their father back into the happy, loving man he used to be, and Charles knows that the one place an answer can be found is from the fairies. With help from his adoring little sister, Unity; their faithful dog, Ship; the amusingly pompous fairy poet De Quincy; the befuddled but likable King of the Fairies; and the great and wise Zagabog, Charles eventually finds a way to dispose of the Flint Heart (though not before it works its unfortunate mischief on the creatures of the forest.) This book begs to be read aloud, and though the ARC I read has only black and white illustrations, the final full-color book should be a treat for the eyes. John Rocco's whimsical artwork is a perfect complement to the Paterson's (and Mr. Philpot's) delightful story.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating : 8.5

I just finished *The Flint Heart* and totally agree with Sandy that it is a fabulous family read-aloud! The detailed descriptions of the fairy banquets are delightful! I also can't wait to see the color illustrations.

Sarah Nixon, Westwinds Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

Please add my score of 8.5 to the review already written of *The Flint Heart* by Katherine Paterson.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8.5

Despite the charming bits, the allegory is so strained and the narrator's cheer is so forced that I could never let myself sit back and enjoy the book. Other reviewers are correct that it would work well as a family read-aloud, provided there were no skeptics aboard.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 7.0

The Future of Us, Jay Asher & Carolyn Mackler

9781595144911, \$18.99

Razorbill/Penguin, November 2011

Core audience: 12+, boys & girls

Notable: alternating boy & girl first-person narration

Review: First of all, this is not another *Thirteen Reasons Why*, nor should it be. It's a much lighter, sillier novel (much more Mackler-y than Asher-y), and I enjoyed it more than I expected. The premise sounds a bit hokey: in 1996, Emma puts an America Online CD into her computer for the first time. She boots it up and the first webpage it opens to is Facebook (in 2011). She sees herself 15 years in the future and decides to go about trying to change her path in life so she doesn't end up unhappily married. Josh is the next-door neighbor she shares this secret with. It's a fun story and I read it straight through.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 7.5

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7

Glow (*Sky Chasers* Book 1), by Amy Kathleen Ryan

9780312590567, \$17.99

St. Martin's Griffin/MPS, September 2011

Core audience: Ages: 14+

Notable: Issues of ethics and religious fervor; life on a spaceship; told from both male and female points of view (lots of great strong females here, though); beginning of a new trilogy

Review: Though the cover and title (and, Oh, God, not another dystopian YA...) initially dissuaded me from picking up this ARC, I took a colleague's recommendation to give it a chance, and I got hooked. If I were to make comparisons, I'd liken *Glow* to *Across the Universe* (star-crossed lovers living in the claustrophobic world of a space ship) meets the *Chaos Walking* trilogy (the uses and abuses of power, resorting to extreme measures in the name of a cause, consequences of terrorism and war). Waverly and Kieran are the oldest of their generation on board the Empyrean, one of two starships on a mission to colonize New Earth, leading the way for future refugees from our planet. The two teens seem destined to marry and become leaders, as Kieran is being groomed for the role by Captain Jones. The peaceful and certain world of the Empyrean is rocked when their sister ship, the New Horizon makes an unprovoked attack, taking away every young girl on board and leaving the ship crippled. The girls discover that they were chosen as egg donors for the barren women of New Horizon. Meanwhile, Kieran's leadership is undermined by a rival whose methods tend toward brutal. Waverly and Kieran, each facing their own desperate situation with no way of knowing where the other is or if any of their loved ones remain alive, must make choices that will affect not only themselves but the entire mission and everyone involved. This is a gripping novel that kept me reading in spite of myself and doesn't always go in the direction you might expect. I look forward to the next two installments.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop, Hardwick, Vermont

Rating: 8

Glow, by Amy Kathleen Ryan

9780312590567, \$17.99

MPS, September 2011

Core Audience: YA Dystopia readers

Notable Aspects: Fertility space drama

Review: An entrant in the Dystopia Games, *Glow* involves two twin space ships sent to preserve the human race on a multi-generational voyage. In order to reach their goal the colonists will need to successfully breed in space. You may have thought captive pandas have fertility trouble, but it turns out that space is a real fertility downer. One ship, composed of secular crew members succeeds, while the ship with religious crew members fails. The religious ship boards the secular ship and takes all the young girls to breed, leaving everyone else to die. While you may worry that this sounds like an awful concept for young readers, the lack of character development and the flat tone of the book mutes the impact so much that there is no problem with the content.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 6

Gooney Bird on the Map, by Lois Lowry, illus Middy Thomas

9780547556222, \$15.99

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, November 2011

Core audience: Boys and girls ages 7-9

Notable: Characters, problem solving within narrative arc, good-natured turnabout for the underdogs

Review: Though the *Gooney Bird Greene* series is well established and hardly needs recommending, I can never help myself from reading the latest one, to see what problem Lowry poses, and how she resolves it. In this case it's a combination of geography and snobby attitudes about vacation destinations. Just to keep the bar well above the common level, the setting is a second grade classroom in the dead of winter. As the class studies U.S. geography, Gooney Bird enlists the janitor to make a large outline map on the snowy playground. Some students are so eager to show where they plan to spend winter vacation that others feel left behind. By the time vacation eve rolls around, Gooney Bird has generated so much fun that the travelers wish they were staying home.

I always wish these books were set in a third or fourth grade classroom, because many readers who would enjoy them are cut out by the misguided notion that they're reading "below their level." Yet they gobble up the *Wimpy Kid*, which is far less challenging. Other than that, they're a delight to read and to hand sell.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 8.5

Hound Dog True, by Linda Urban

9780547558691, \$15.99

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, September 2011

Core audience: Girls ages 9-12

Notable: Characters, humor, contemporary sensibility, self-confidence

Review: Mattie is a very, very shy girl dreading entering fifth grade in a new school. Her ace in the hole is her mother's brother, Uncle Potluck, the school janitor and one of the funniest characters in the last ten years of children's literature. He is given to hyperbole, except when Principal Bonnet's presence seems to silence him. Mattie and her mama are living with Uncle Potluck. Out back in the tenant cottage live former prom queen Crystal Sweet, who flirts unsuccessfully with Uncle Potluck; and her daughter Quincy. Quincy is only a year older than Mattie, but in Mattie's eyes Quincy is an unattainably sophisticated teenager. Mattie struggles (and struggles and struggles) to understand her world, avoid teasing, and discover her own identity. Her progress is small but distinct, clear to an adult reader, but possibly missed by a child reader. However, the interactions among other characters are so charming, any reader will feel reading the book is time well spent.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins
Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove
Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 8
Rating: 7
Rating: 7.5

I found Mattie Mae Breen's voice to be unique and believable...I genuinely LIKED her!

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes

Rating: 8.5

Icefall, by Matthew J. Kirby

9780545274241, \$17.99

Scholastic, October 2011

Core audience: Girls and boys, 8 – 12

Notable: Creating a strong sense of place in an indefinite time (could be ancient Scandinavia, the Middle Ages, or just a few hundred years ago). Characters who are complex and convincing. A suspenseful story with mystery and adventure.

Review: An embattled king has sent his two daughters, their brother (the Crown Prince), and a retinue of faithful servants and soldiers to safety in a remote mountain fortress where they are to wait until he sends word that it is safe to return. Days stretch to weeks and their supplies are running low when more warriors arrive. Fortunately, the new troops bring additional supplies, as winter is settling in and the small band of refugees will be unable to leave for many months. Solveig, the younger daughter, has always felt like the ugly duckling at her father's court, but here, she comes into her own as a storyteller under the tutelage of her father's skald, Alric. Totally isolated, the group becomes restless and uneasy. Soon it becomes evident that there is a traitor among them. Small treacheries keep everyone off balance. No one is above suspicion and tempers fray. When a mysterious illness strikes the company and several die, it seems as if everyone is going to perish before the king summons them. Finally, in early spring, messengers arrive to summon the children home. As they are about to leave their sanctuary, the children and their protectors are attacked by the enemy and taken captive. Two of their company have gone missing, but the rest are locked up. Given an opportunity to escape, Solveig leads the others up, away from the fjord and toward the glacier, which proves to be their salvation.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7

Core Audience: 10-14 (note difference with entry above)

Notable: Very authentic saga like quality

Review: A number of YA fantasies have been set in a Norse, or Norse like backdrop, but none have come closer to capturing the ethos, depth, and personal drama of the Sagas than this quietly excellent book. *Icefall* is set in an unnamed Viking Age country, judging from the landscape either Sweden or Norway, circa 900 or so. A king has gone off the war and safeguarded his son and two daughters in a hidden stronghold. The lead character is the younger of the two daughters, Solveig, who experiences both personal betrayals and the awakening of her own artistic strength as a skald. The small scale of the book strongly develops its themes of personal identity and accountability. Understated and imbued with Norse stoicism, *Icefall* is a gem of a book that shouldn't be overlooked.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 9

In The Forests of the Night, by Kersten Hamilton

9780547435602, \$17.99

Houghton, November, 2011

Core Audience: People who have read *Tyger Tyger*

Notable: Character development, Celtic lore.

Review: The follow up to the excellent *Tyger Tyger* is very much a bridge book. Hamilton focuses almost exclusively on character development, which, though not making for a balanced narrative, is

still well done and engaging. The pace picks up at the end when an evil, contaminated lick on the face, propels the narrative into a race against time, setting the stage for what will be a very intriguing book three.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 8.5

Island's End, by Padma Venkatraman

9780399250996, \$16.99

Putnam/Penguin, August 2011

Core Audience: children aged 10 to 14 who like learning about different cultures

Notable: setting and characterization of a people

Review: Padma Venkatraman spent time on the Andaman Islands and was inspired to write this book after hearing how the natives had overcome a natural disaster and preserved their way of life.

Vido, a young woman, has been chosen to be the next spiritual leader of her tribe. They are guided by nature and the spirits. There is some friction between her and her brother, especially when some strangers come to the island bearing gifts. Her island has retained what we would call "primitive ways" while the mainland has become more civilized. When her young brother is badly hurt, she must go to the mainland. She returns to her island after helping to "heal" her brother. Upon arriving back to her people she must find a way to preserve their culture. She becomes their leader, reads the signs of nature and rescues them from a tsunami. This story helps to relay the message that we must take care of the earth and not get totally caught up in technology and fast-paced society.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 8

Legend, by Marie Liu

9780399256752, \$17.99

Putnam/Penguin, November 2011

Core Audience: YA Dystopia readers

Notable: Narrative balance and strong character development

Review: An entrant in the Dystopia Games, is quite entertaining on the strength of its two engaging first person narrators, June and Day. Set in a North America that is divided into warring territories, and in which the historical existence of the United States is considered a myth, Legend offers a not terribly original but enjoyable trilogy start, replete with government induced plagues, brainwashing, and a shadowy rebel group. All in all Legend is fun, emotionally engaging, and age appropriate. A bonus for Dues ex Machina fans is that key information is passed on from June's dead brother through the preposterous mechanism of a puzzle left in his diary that leads her to a secret website Matias has left behind for her.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating 8

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7.5

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7.5

Liesl and Po, by Lauren Oliver

9780062014511, \$16.99

Harper, October 2011

Core Audience: Hmmm

Notable: Traditional orphan narrative suffused with heavier issues.

(Elegant Screech Warning)

Review: Liesl and Po is a parable of escaping emotional confinement by working through grief and trauma to re-engage with the world. The elements of the story provide physical metaphors for this process. Liesl is a girl whose kind-hearted father was slowly poisoned to death by Liesl's evil stepmother, who subsequently imprisoned her in the attic of the family mansion. Po is a ghost who is

confined to the "Other Side" a standard issue purgatory for deceased spirits who have unfinished business which keeps them from moving to the 'Beyond.' They run the risk of losing their way and their shape, and staying in limbo indefinitely.

The Other Side is, of course, a metaphor for Liesl's state. A third child protagonist is Will, an orphan whose caregiver, a master Alchemist, is abusive. The storyline involves the physical escape of these three confined children, the comeuppance of Liesl's and Will's abusive caregivers, and the restoration of their emotional equilibrium. The restoration hinges on bringing peace to Liesl's father, who is stuck on the Other Side lamenting having been an unwittingly bad caregiver. As with other parables which use children as proxies, such as *The Magician's Elephant*, the attempt to restore things to their place is aided by a singular act of magic, in this case the magic turns out to be the real life magic of the cycles of life and death, returning to the soil, new life springing up and so forth.

Children subject to a failure to protect by one caregiver and abuse by another often feel imprisoned emotionally as a result unless they are able to work through the trauma later in life. The disconnect here is the issue of audience. Working through grief and trauma and childhood helplessness by magically attaining adult perspective is not a good subject for a children's book. The adult characters in this book are either completely evil, dimwitted and childlike with gigantic hearts, or dead. Adult readers engaging with their childhood selves and their unresolved childhood issues, which involve bad care taking by adults, may find *Liesl and Po* a satisfying parable. Children, however, in the main, want the magic of a simple escape into a good fantasy with some cool adults in it, and will find Liesl and Po a gloomy and emotionally confusing place to be confined in.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 6

Core Audience: 8-14

Notable Aspects:friendship. Releasing the dead and allowing them to move on.

Review: I was immediately captivated by the cover of Liesl and Po. This was a magical book, a new fairy tale, a story with both great darkness and wondrous possibility. And then I started reading...and Oliver's text was exactly what the cover promised.

The story begins in a world without sunshine. Liesl is locked in the attic by her stepmother and her father is recently deceased. Po and Bundle are dark ghosts who are attracted to Liesl's drawings and Will is an orphaned alchemist's apprentice who is attracted to her face at the attic window. When Will accidentally loses the alchemist's most powerful potion, accidentally switching it with the ashes of Liesl's deceased father, he is forced to run away. Soon after, Liesl sets out with Po and Bundle to bury the box she believes holds her father's ashes. While escaping a host of strange adults -- characters who might have escaped from a Roald Dahl novel -- Liesl and Will meet one another, their story threads weaving together effortlessly. But what will become of the most powerful magic in the world? And how can Liesl and Will ever escape the powerful and murderous adults following them?

Oliver takes the classic fairy tale ghosts, orphans, and evil stepmothers, and crafts a heart wrenching yet humorous tale that is completely original. Kei Acedera's drawings supplement the gorgeous text of this stunning stand-alone novel.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9

Life: An Exploded Diagram, by Mal Peet

9780763652272, \$17.99

Candlewick, October 2011

Core Audience: 14 +

Notable:

Review: An astonishingly engaging, wonderful, un-put-downable book. By following the life of

Clem, which begins in World War II England and leaves him in 2001 New York, Mal Peet tells the story of family, duty, and the concept of home while elucidating important historical events. His gorgeous writing makes one reread sentences over and over again for the pure joy of experiencing the language. *Life: An Exploded Diagram* begs to be read again and again.

Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 9

Mangaman. by Barry Lyga, illus. by Colleen Doran

9780547423159, \$18.99

Houghton Mifflin, November 2011

Core audience: Ages: 14+

Notable: graphic novel format, send-up of the devices used in manga, combination of manga and Western comic formats, humor, some sexual content. Would recommend to: comics & manga readers, budding comic book artists, possibly supernatural romance readers who are willing to try something a little different

Review: Ryoko has been violently transported from his manga universe into the “real” world, where he now has to navigate the tricky waters of American high school as a complete outsider (he’s a two-dimensional line drawing who continues to adhere to the laws of manga, which includes embarrassing reactions to pretty girls and superhuman strength in a fist fight). While Ryoko is busy falling in love with Marissa--a popular girl who understands the strange visitor’s loneliness--army scientist Major Capeletti is trying to fix the rift that brought the boy to our world before some much more frightening creatures find their way through. The story is light and fast-paced and hits all of the typical notes of a teen romance (alienation, high school pecking order, a romantic rivalry...) but in a different format with some fun twists to keep it lively and entertaining. I haven’t read manga, and so I probably missed plenty of allusions to comic/manga devices and stereotypes, but I really enjoyed this humorous take on the comic world. I especially enjoyed Ryoko’s manga reactions, which have funny real world consequences, such as when his “speed lines” litter up the school hallways and the word “Brake!” appears at his feet when he is caught off-guard and stops short.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

The Medusa Plot (Vespers vs. Cahills), by Gordon Korman

9780545298391, \$12.99

Scholastic Inc., August 2011

Core Audience: Ages 10 to 12 and those who have read the 39 Clues

Notable: mystery and combination of historical facts and people with fictional characters and events

Review: Fiske Cahill, Reagan Holt, Natalie Kabra, Nellie Gomez, Alistair Oh, Ted Starling and Phoenix Wizard are all kidnapped by the Vespers, a group of evil people who have been secretly following the Cahills through the years. Amy and Dan are given an assignment, to steal the Medusa painting by Cara Vaggio at the Uffizi Museum in Florence, Italy. With the help of Jonah Wizard, Ian Kabra, Hamilton Holt, Siobhan Starling and Mr. McIntyre they undertake this task. Vesper One means business. After they steal the painting, which ended up being a forgery, Nellie gets shot. Eventually Amy and Dan are once again successful in retrieving the real painting, but the Vespers will not give up the hostages until they accomplish more tasks – hence more books in the series. I enjoyed learning about historical people and places in the original *39 Clues* series and expect to continue to do so throughout this series.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7

A Monster Calls, by Patrick Ness

9780763655594, \$16.99

Candlewick, September 2011

Core Audience: 12 and up

Notable for: The first successful literary baton pass since Lotte in Weimar. Magnificent illustrations by Jim Kay.

Review: *A Monster Calls*, the story of a 13 year old boy, Conor, who lives alone with a mother dying of cancer, began life as the last story idea of acclaimed author Siobhan Dowd, who died of cancer in 2007. Patrick Ness was approached with Dowd's sketch of a tale in the hopes that he might work with it. Reasoning that to "write a story mimicking her voice...would have been a disservice to her, to the reader, and most importantly to the story.", he instead set himself the task of writing a story Dowd would have liked.

The book explores the power which the need to be invisible gives to false monsters, be they nightmares or school bullies. Conor's struggles to grapple with his life, saddled with a need and a burden he is unable to confront, calls an ancient, a true, and many named monster of the world. The Green Man, Cernunnos, and Herne are some of its names. It makes Conor an offer. It will tell him three tales and then Conor will tell him a fourth, the truth. To lay his nightmare to rest, to set down his tormenters at school, and to re-engage with a friend, Conor must speak the words he fears above all others.

There are many young adults who lie in their beds awake at midnight and could well stand a visit from the Green Man. Failing that, a copy of *A Monster Calls* will be just the thing for them. This is a marvelous book which strongly conveys that the power of being seen, and of the spoken truth, is magic enough.

Kenny Brechner: DDG Booksellers

Rating: 9

Core Audience: Ages 12 plus

Notable: incredible illustrations, award-winning author, dealing with the death of one's parent

Review: Jim Kay's dark, deep, and haunting cover immediately captivated my attention and promised a dark tale. The darkness of the tale comes from Conor's current regards for the worlds. His mother has cancer and the treatments don't seem to be working, his former best friend told everyone that his mother is sick, and his grandmother seems intent on coming round to help his mum. But the worst are the nightmares. Then, at 12:07 one night, a monster shows up. This monster is not the one from his dream, rather an ancient storyteller who wants the terrifying truth from Conor. Jim Kay's illustrations of the monster capture the dark shadows of just after midnight and the sketchy smears of a not dreaming, not waking experience. His textures, splatters, and lines make visible the emotional turmoil Conor experiences, splashing it onto the page. Though I sobbed through the hour and a half it took me to finish this novel, I persisted in reading through my tears, desperately needing to know what would unfold, and wanting to submerge myself in Patrick Ness' glorious prose.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9

I loved your review of *A Monster Calls*! I also LOVED it and couldn't put it down. Read the last chapter in the parking lot outside of a Marshalls sobbing the whole time! Fabulous book.

Sarah Nixon, Westwinds Bookshop

Just finished *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness and inspired by Siobhan Dowd and had to add to the reviews by Kenny and Marika. (Marika, I read through tears, too.) This is an incredibly powerful, well written, insightful and sad. But it is also affirming and, at times, it is even funny. It is about speaking the truth and knowing that as impossibly hard as it can be in times of tragedy, speaking a terrible truth is the way to begin the process of healing. It is a brilliant way to talk about difficult times and the monsters that live inside us as we do our imperfect best to cope - often striking out in anger, thinking horrible thoughts, making terrible mistakes, feeling utterly alone.

"You do not write your life with words, the monster said. You write it with actions. What you think is

not important. It is only important what you do." There was a long silence as Conor re-caught his breath.

"So what do I do?" he finally asked.

"You do what you did just now," the monster said. "You speak the truth."

"That's it?"

"You think it is easy?" The monster raised two enormous eyebrows. "You were willing to die rather than speak it."

Conor looked down at his hands, finally unclenching them. "because what I thought was so wrong."

"It was not wrong", the monster said, "It was only a thought, one of a million. It was not an action."...

... "If you speak the truth", the monster whispered in his ear, "you will be able to face whatever comes."

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Bookshop

Rating: 9.75

I agree with all of the reviews of *A Monster Calls*. I found myself putting the book down because I was afraid of what would happen next and then a few minutes later back to read on. The combination of Ness's prose and the illustrations by Jim Kay equal a masterful storytelling team.

Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys

Rating 9.5

Also, I'd like to add my rating of 9 for *A Monster Calls*.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Rating : 9

Simply brilliant. Another Pick of the Year. Long staff discussion about appropriate age, finally decided on 13-14-15.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 9.0

Mystery of the Missing Everything, by Ben H. Winters

978-0061965449, \$16.99

Harper, September 2011

Core Audience: Ages 8 - 12. Main character is a girl, so probably more girls will read it, but supporting cast has lots of interesting guys. I think it would be fun as a third or fourth grade read-aloud.

Notable: middle-grade mystery that is fun, fun, fun

Review: Publisher description: When a treasured trophy disappears from the display case at Mary Todd Lincoln Middle School and the principal cancels the eagerly anticipated eighth-grade class trip, Bethesda Fielding has no choice but to solve the mystery.

I really enjoyed Winters' first mystery set in Mary Todd Lincoln Middle School (*The Secret Life of Ms. Finkleman*) and this is a worthy successor. Bethesda and her friends are now eighth graders. As a group they are diverse and mostly likable. The most over-the-top characters are the principal and Bethesda's father. The mystery is cleverly plotted and the ending is not obvious. There is plenty of humor. It's not as deep as some of the Andrew Clements school stories, but it's good fun.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 7

Name of the Star (Shades of London Book 1), by Maureen Johnson

9780399256608, \$16.99

Putnam/Penguin, September 2011

Core audience: Teen girls, 13+

Notable for some genuinely spooky moments, interesting concept

Review: Aurora (Rory) Deveaux, a teen from Louisiana, is attending boarding school in London while her parents take a sabbatical position in England for the year. When she arrives, the school, Wexford, is buzzing with the news that "someone has done a Ripper" near Whitechapel. The copycat murders continue, causing great concern and curiosity at the school. Though the school has forbidden forays outside after dark, Rory and her roommate, Jazza, go out one night. Sneaking back into their

residence hall, they encounter a strange man; Rory sees him, but Jazza does not. Suddenly, Rory is in the middle of something that she has a hard time comprehending. An elite group of “ghost police” is watching over her. She, like them, can see ghosts now (because of her near death experience death in the Wexford dining hall). The duty of the ghost police is to keep this world safe from the ghosts who are stranded, still tied somehow to the mortal world. The man, the murderer, she saw was a ghost and has chosen her as his next victim; the ghost police are trying to protect her and to stop the murderer. Of course, Rory does not die, the ghost murderer is dispatched to another realm, and the “ghost police” seem to have a new recruit. *Name of the Star* is “a candy bar book”. The book reads well, is exciting and suspenseful, but (like a candy bar) it isn’t particularly filling or sustaining.

Ellen Richmond, Children’s Book Cellar

Rating: 6

The Night Circus, by Erin Morgenstern

9780385534635, \$26.95

Random House, September 2011

Core audience: Ages 15+

Notable: magic, illusion, tests, love story, incredible visual imagery

Review: The Night Circus arrives and departs suddenly, its white and black tents springing up at random. And it is only open at night. Inside each tent is a marvelous wonder in black and white- fortune tellers, acrobats, illusionists, gardens of ice, and rooms of cloud. The only splashes of color are those who attend the circus, for one night reveling in its miraculous illusions. But there is more to the circus than one might think. The circus is a challenger's ring, the place where two students must magically battle, each trying to outdo the other, each forced to prove that their teacher is the more powerful magician. Morgenstern's beautiful descriptions will leave you feeling as if you've walked through a fantastic dreamworld in this original fantasy. Also a great Teen crossover.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9

I support Marika's rating of 9 for this sumptuous book.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Books

Rating: 9

A crossover book if ever there was one. Will be read and savored far into the future.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Rating: 9

Notes from an Accidental Band Geek, by Erin Dionne

9780803735644 \$16.99

Dial/Penguin, September 2011

Core Audience: girls 11-15

Notable: realistic fiction, friendship, funny and flawed main character

Review: Elsie Wyatt is a 13 year old only child who is focused on mastering the French horn. In order to get into a prestigious summer music camp which was attended by both her Dad and Grandfather, she joins the marching band to expand her resume. She soon realizes that marching band is not going to be as easy as she thought it was to master. It is both mentally and physically challenging. Plus, there is an entire teamwork component that is new to her. Along the way she is even starting to make some friends, that is when she is not unintentionally hurting their feelings by making “too blunt” comments or not spending time with them due to her practice schedule. Elsie ultimately learns that she can still make time for friends as she works to achieve her goals. Dionne creates a sweet story full of humor with a “real” girl main character. Will probably sell best as a paperback but a great lighter fun read.

Lisa Fabiano, Wellesley Books

Rating: 7

Core Audience: young adults 12 & older who enjoy music

Notable: character development

Review: Elise Wyatt is a 13 year old extremely gifted french horn musician. She wants to be the youngest person to be accepted at the Shining Birches, a prestigious summer music camp. Music will be her life as it was for her father and grandfather before her. One of the requirements of the camp is that she be in a structured group in the preceding school year, thus she must join the marching band. She is a determined and highly opinionated girl. She even alienates kids who want to be her friends. At first she hates the "trumpet" she must play, but eventually she learns to be a team player, a friend, and to still hold fast to her dream.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 8

Now Is The Time For Running, by Michael Williams

9780316077903, \$17.99

Little Brown, July 2011

Core Audience: ages 13 and up

Notable: Africa, South Africa, xenophobic attacks of May 2008, Soccer Homeless World Cup

Review: As the soldiers destroy the Zimbabwe village where Deo lives, he must protect his mentally handicapped brother and get him to safety. They walk to another village and seek the help of their Grandfather's and mother's friend who gets them a lift to South Africa. The truck drops them off at a border town and they must barter the shoes off their feet to get help being shepherded into South Africa without paperwork. Once in South Africa they take work on a tomato farm. Deo soon realizes they are being taken advantage of and puts trust in an unworthy character, who promises them a new place to live, but only uses their money to get them to the Alexander township, Johannesburg. After a short time, they meet a group of refugees who are living in a bridge and join them. Then, tragedy happens during the xenophobic attacks and Deo goes into a downward spiral into drug abuse. As he is about to hit rock bottom, he gets the opportunity to try out and compete in the Homeless World Cup. Will he be able to put the past behind him and move on? An interesting read that introduces a different look at the situation in Africa.

Lisa Fabiano, Wellesley Books

Rating: 7

Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists!

9781596436008, \$18.99

First Second/MPS, October 2011

Core audience: ages: 5 through adult

Notable Aspects: Well known cartoonists and picturebook illustrators, classic rhymes, fresh takes on some classics

Review: Take fifty of incredible artists, give them a classic nursery rhyme, and let them run! Lucy Knisley turns the "Old Lady Who Lived in a Shoe" into a Rock & Roll baby sitter whose charges form the band "The Whips." Raina Telgemeier sets "Georgie Porgie" at a birthday party- one that ends with a cupcake fight. Dave Roman depicts a surreal, sci-fi "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe" that is completely different from Patrick McDonnell's sweet "Donkey." Readers will find more than a few comics to adore in this compilation and maybe even discover a new graphic artist to love.

A fabulous introduction to comics format for the young and old alike. I can't wait to see a seven year-old share this with his grandparents.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9.5

Core Audience: Families, graphic novel fans, nursery rhyme fans, hipster parents.

Notable: A joyously wide variety of styles and interpretations of nursery rhymes, some of which are familiar, some not.

Review: First Second has assembled a delightful book of nursery rhymes, each illustrated by a cartoonist/graphic novel artist. The styles vary, as do the rhymes themselves. Familiar rhymes get a new interpretation as in Pat-a-Cake by Gene Luen Yang, which takes place on a space ship. In Tao Nyeu's Rock-A-Bye-Baby, the illustrations tell another story of a gentle lamb being threatened by a wolf until she grabs the wolf's chain saw to scare him away. While this collection includes known graphic artists such as Sara Varon and Mark Siegal, it also introduces newer talents and a few unexpected participants such as David Macaulay. Anyone who loves nursery rhymes and/or comics will savor this feast for the eyes.

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 9.5

The Ogre of Oglefort by Eva Ibbotson

9780525423829, \$16.99

Dutton/Penguin, August 2011

Core Audience: Fantasy lovers age 8 & up

Notable: great characters, thick plot, issues of identity

Review: This book starts with one of the best first lines I've read in a long time, "Most people are happier when their feet are dry." Hag of the Dribble is an exception. The Hag, along with a troll named Ulf and an orphan named Ivo undertake the task of rescuing the princess Mirella from the flesh-eating Ogre of Oglefort. As usual, Ibbotson has created a fantasy world populated by wonderful characters and has placed them in a suitably complicated plot. A clever, humorous & thoughtful adventure.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

The Other Felix by Keir Graff

9781596436558 \$15.99

Roaring Brook/MPS October, 2011

Core audience: ages 8-12

Notable: nice handling of the transition between dreams & wakefulness; truth & imagination

Review: Felix is transported in sleep to a land inhabited by huge monsters and a lone human-- another fourth grade age boy. At first Felix does not like these nightly travels but as he gets to know The Other Felix (so called because he looks like Felix) and as his waking life becomes more difficult (a father with job uncertainties & bullies) he comes to appreciate the strange experience. The control he masters in his night life also finds its way into his awake world. As the book ends we never get to know what happens to The Other Felix but we are sure that Felix will be just fine. I hope that children will want to read this story. It would be a great family read aloud since children of a wide range of ages will find it thought-provoking.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Pearl Versus the World, by Sally Murphy, illustrated by Heather Potter

9780763648213, \$14.99

Candlewick, August 2011

Core Audience: ages 7-10

Notable Aspects: written in unrhymed verse, deals with the death of a grandparent, friendship becomes important.

Review: This is what you give the child who is too old for the explanatory picture books on death or would like some beautiful poetry. Told in unrhymed verse, *Pearl Verses the World* is the story of a young girl who is watching her grandmother slowly die. Living with her mother and her grandmother for her entire life, Pearl's household is three people, and two people will not be the same. Pearl writes because "A poem comes //when it is needed// and writes itself// in the way it needs//to get its point across." Through her writing, Pearl learns that two will be okay, and that the world is not against her.

Poems, Pearl learns, are a way to process, and they sometimes bring the sweet surprise of friends. Sally Murphy strikes that perfect balance between what to say and what to suggest. Her expert handling of the text and Pearl's emotions is reminiscent of Patricia MacLachlan's stunning work. *Pearl Verses the World* is a little gem that should be waiting on bookshelves for that someone who needs it.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 7

Core Audience: Girls 7-10

Review: Pearl lives with her mom and Granny. They have always been a family of three, but now Granny is very ill and Pearl knows life is changing. And she doesn't like it..not one bit. Pearl also likes to write poems, but her poems don't rhyme and her teacher, Ms. Bruff, seems to insist that they should. Pearl is feeling all alone and confused during this difficult time, both at home and in the classroom. Eventually she finds a way to deal with her grief in her own unique style and discovers that she's not a "group of one" after all. I loved this short, poignant, lyrical novel. The illustrations are charming. And despite the very sad topic there is also a good deal of humor. Pearl is a great little girl and I intend to recommend this for mother/daughter book clubs as there is much to discuss. I also gave it to a 7 year-old neighbor and she loved it.

Sarah Nixon, Westwinds Bookshop

Rating: 9

Pie, by Sarah Weeks

9780545270113, \$16.99

Scholastic, October 2011

Core audience: Publisher marketing suggests ages 9-12 but strong younger readers will enjoy it too.

Notable aspects: Humor & pie recipes!

Review: Scholastic rep Nikki was right when she said that reading this book will cause a immediate desire to make and/or eat a wide variety of homemade pies! The story starts at Aunt Polly's funeral. Alice was Aunt Polly's favorite niece. Everyone expected Polly to leave Alice her secret, award-winning apple pie recipe. Instead, Alice inherits Lardo, Polly's cat. The recipe, states the will, has been left to Lardo. Consternation, confusion & a flurry of competition ensues. This is a wonderful, completely wholesome, book that will appeal to a wide range of ages & tastes.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 9.5

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Rating: 9

It was pie craziness at its best. Another young female smarter and nicer than her Mother! Good recipes, humor.

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 7.5

I will put an 8 on my ratings. Delicious tale of a girl trying to find herself amidst the crusts and crumbs of her wacky family!

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 8.0

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 8

A Plague Year, by Edward Bloor

9780375856815, \$15.99

Knopf/Random House, September 2011

Core audience: Ages 12 & up

Review: The methamphetamine trade has somehow avoided (Is that really possible?) the small Pennsylvania coal town where Tom lives with his family. It is 2001 and the 9/11 bombing has just happened. Tom visits the site of the plane crash in Pennsylvania. As the story progresses, Bloor relates the infiltration of meth and 9/11. The end result is a town of zombies. Tom and his small cadre of drug

therapy group friends use the heroism of the 9/11 plane passengers to fuel their fight against the zombies. I did not appreciate the juxtaposition of meth addiction and 9/11. I get what Bloor was trying to do here but I just didn't like it. There are better zombie books, better meth books and better 9/11 books for teens.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating 6

The Predicteds, by Christine Seifert

9781402260490, \$9.99

Sourcebooks, September 2011

Teens, 13+ (primarily girls)

Notable: Thought provoking "nature vs. nurture" theme in a familiar, contemporary setting

Review: Daphne and her scientist mother, Melissa, have recently relocated from St. Paul. Daphne's adjustment to her new school is only slightly less traumatic than her first day, on which the school was terrorized by a student with a gun. Like any high school, Quiet High is a maelstrom of teenage angst. Daphne has a hard time finding her niche; there are hot boys, jealous girls, bullies, outcasts, partiers, jocks, rich kids, poor kids, good students, and dummies. Before Daphne's arrival all the students at Quiet High were tested by a computer program called PROFILE, the results kept confidential; the students will be tracked to test the accuracy of PROFILE's findings. PROFILE purports to indicate a person's future behavior: good, bad, successful, criminal, violent. A second act of violence, a brutal attack on a teen girl, shocks the town, but the community believes there is a solution. The parents now demand that PROFILE results be revealed so that "predicted" students can be segregated from the rest of the student body. Daphne realizes that her mother knows more about PROFILE than she has ever indicated; Melissa helped develop the program and left her previous job because she disagreed with the company about the use of the PROFILE results. Melissa feels strongly that the results only show a predisposition; she argues that PROFILE can't predict specifics and should not be used to label or segregate students. Mob rule, of course, wins and the predicted are sent to a separate school, where they can't hurt anyone. Jesse, the boy to whom Daphne is attracted, is a predicted. Her heart tells her that he would never hurt her, but the test has marked him as dangerous. Predictably the plot isn't as straightforward as it might seem. When Daphne is attacked and nearly killed, the integrity of the PROFILE study is questioned. Ultimately, the town of Quiet finds itself split into factions and the validity of PROFILE yet to be determined. Interesting concept, blandly executed.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 5

The Princess Curse, by Merrie Haskell

9780062008138, \$16.99

HarperCollins, September 2011

Core audience: Middle grade girls

Notable: romance, comedy, sharp-witted female

Review: Reveka is an apprentice herbalist in the castle of the twelve dancing princesses. She wants to be the one who can bring all the unfortunate-cursed sleeping ones back to life and win the prize to further her herbalist future. Her sharp wits and straight sights help her not only meet that goal, but figure out the Beauty/Beast (you know THAT story too!) aspect and win the handsome guy! She even gets to heal the dying land! The story is fun with plenty of action and twists, and Reveka is a gutsy young lady who is willing to sacrifice to save her loved ones. This will be a good holiday gift choice.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop

Rating: 7.5

Ready Player One, by Ernest Cline

9780307887436, \$26.95

Crown/Random House, August 2011

Core Audience: Young adult gamers and 80's nostalgia buffs

Notable: Very believable presentation of an all encompassing role for RPG in the future.

(Though published for adults, this book works entirely as YA)

Review: Cindy Lauper argued that "girls just want to have fun," and Ernest Cline's new book, *Ready Player One*, makes that same case for gamers. In the year 2044, that includes just about everyone. The division between haves and have-nots has widened to the point that living conditions for the great mass of humanity are so poor that life within a comprehensive global online Role Playing Game (RPG) called OASIS is vastly superior to life outside it. Most people's lives have devolved into eating, sleeping, the occasional physical release, and logging into OASIS until a pause for any of the aforementioned activities is required. Children attend school on an education planet within OASIS. Parents take pre-k children to zoos, and on storybook adventures within OASIS, logged into haptic consoles while their physical bodies sit on mouldering sofas in dingy stacked mobile homes. Most of their good memories and experiences occur within OASIS. Here's the thing - OASIS was created and controlled by a pretty good guy, James Halliday, who was opposed to the exploitation of OASIS by nefarious Corporate types. He insisted that access to OASIS remain free, that its development be essentially open source, and that its inner architecture be a haven for Gamers and the underclass. Halliday died without heirs and has left behind a game whose winner will become his heir. Being a Halliday scholar, essentially reliving his life and sharing in his obsession with 1980's culture in general and 80's gaming technology, loving the films he loved, is essential to having any shot at all at the quest to find the three hidden keys and the golden egg.

The book's narrator is a dirt-poor but very skilled gamer. An added plot element is that the patently evil online service provider Innovative Online Industries, which is the rival to Halliday's company, Gregarious Games, is using all its vast resources to hire co-opted gamers to win the game using underhanded means, which would pervert Halliday's purpose of finding an heir who shares his dreams and values. Is this a remake of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory? Sure, and Cline gives that a big nod. In fact, Cline gives all his many influences cameos in the book. *Ready Player One*, like a good video game, is an odd mix of good concepts, underdeveloped characters, formulaic plots and embedded cultural references. The boy from the wrong side of the tracks goes on a quest, makes good, wins the game and the girl. The underlying plot structure is entirely formulaic, but the book is chock full of innovative concepts, fun 80s trivia and references, and lots of vicarious puzzle solving. We come to like our narrator Wade and his avatar Parzifal. Reading *Ready Player One* is a lot like watching over your son or daughter's shoulder while they are engaged in an interactive game, sharing some time with them while they are off in an online world. Cline's novel is all about good times online, and apart from a cameo by Cory Doctorow, lacks any real depth or social commentary. The conclusion that when you kiss an avatar you can't really feel it so real kissing is plus one is not exactly deep but hey, how much can you develop other aspects of your personality when you need to master obscure 80s Atari games and memorize War Games? Cline has offered his readers some great mind candy here, which is a lot better than a lot of stuff in the real world.

Kenny Brechner DDG Booksellers,

Rating 8.25

Review: It's the year 2044 and the real world is such a mess that people prefer to live in the OASIS, a virtual universe where almost anything is possible. Created by Halliday, the most brilliant game designer and 80s enthusiast, OASIS is the ultimate virtual existence where people exist as avatars and any science-fiction or fantasy based concept is possible. When Halliday died, he left the ultimate Easter egg in OASIS: his entire fortune and the rights to OASIS. Wade, like millions of others around the world, has spent the past five years searching for the Easter egg, as has the IOI, a corrupt company intent on finding the egg for itself. Halliday was a man obsessed, and only one of a like mind will be able to unlock his secrets. Luckily, Wade has spent his life studying all things Halliday, and might just have a breath of a chance.

This fast-paced novel is a fun read and impossible to put down. Just as the line between real and virtual is blurred for Wade, readers will forget what is real and what constructed, falling completely into Wade's experience. *Ready Player One* is the complete book experience with thoughtful questions, epic battles, powerful enemies, personal journeys, and maybe even true love. Part of a complete breakfast, it's also chock-full of 80s references and trivia, sci-fi, fantasy, and video-game geekery. So grab a bag of corn chips, put on your favorite 8-track, and prepare yourself for an epic experience.

Though an adult book, I think it would be appropriate for teens ages 16 and up.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9

Rebel Fire (Sherlock Holmes: The Legend Begins Book 2), by Andrew Lane

9780374387686, \$16.99

Farrar Straus Giroux/MPS, November 2011

Core audience: Teens, 12+

Notable for being true to the spirit of Doyle's originals, this mystery requires logic, observation, deductive reasoning. A smart, plucky girl character. Friendship and loyalty. An adventurous, though far-fetched plot, a touch of American history.

Review: Young Sherlock meddles when he overhears his brother Mycroft and his tutor Amyus Crowe discussing the possibility that Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth is alive in England. Sherlock's clumsy attempt to confirm Booth's presence alerts the crooks who flee with Sherlock's friend, Matty, whom they capture as they run. Presuming that Booth is being taken back to the United States, Crowe sets sail for America with his daughter, Virginia, and Sherlock. In New York, Sherlock is spotted by one of the crooks, but turns the tables and follows the man back to a boarding house where the villains are holed up. Matty sees Sherlock and manages, with gestures, to tell him that the crooks are heading to Virginia. Not waiting for Crowe to return from consulting with the Pinkertons, Sherlock and Virginia race off to rescue Matty and are themselves captured. Finally, though, the full plot is revealed. The gang has been working for a cruel madman whose intent is to invade Canada and establish a free Government in Exile of the Confederacy. John Wilkes Booth, scarred by fire and insane, will serve to rally the troops. Narrowly avoiding death, the kids escape to warn Crowe and the Pinkertons, who have already deduced the plot and are prepared to stop it by using balloons to drop explosives on the Confederate Army. Horrified at the thought of such slaughter, Sherlock prevents the planned massacre and the battle is avoided. Duke Baltassar (the madman) dies, and with him the madness. Booth will live out his life as an anonymous patient in an asylum. The Union is safe.

Like the first book in this series, the mystery here is far-fetched. The telling of the tale, though, is exciting and in keeping with the original Holmes stories.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7

Rip Tide, by Kat Falls

9780545178433, \$16.99

Scholastic Press, August, 2011

Core Audience: Ages 10 to 12 science fiction readers

Notable: unique setting

Review: *Rip Tide* is the sequel to *Dark Life* and continues the adventures of Ty, the first person to be born in the underwater settlement. When a trading opportunity goes bad, his parents get kidnapped. He must use all of his skills and his echo-location/sonar gift to survive many close-death encounters with creatures and people. This is an action filled book which will keep reluctant readers reading to find out the next obstacle and how he will survive.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 6.5

The Scorpio Races, Maggie Stiefvater

9780545224901, \$17.99

Scholastic, October 2011

Core Audience: 13+, especially readers who enjoyed Stiefvater's Shiver series.

Notable Aspects: Strong male and female characters. Lyrical writing. Stand-alone novel. Just a smidgen of fantasy.

Review: Maggie Stiefvater's newest young adult novel, *The Scorpio Races*, is lyrically written and features just a hint of fantasy. Stiefvater's heroine, Puck Connolly, lives on an island where the sea is very much alive, a place where the capaill uisce, or horses of the sea, walk on land. These horses, though bloodthirsty and fey, are faster than any normal horse. Each year at the Scorpio Races men ride the capaill uisce at the edge of the ocean in a reckless and bloody race. Sean, the best rider with the fastest capaill uisce, has won the race for the past handful of years, but has his own reasons for entering this year. Puck, in an attempt to keep her brother on the island and her family in their house, enters, though she has only a pony to ride. Though the two know little of one another, both are children of the island, who love the sea, the land, and the horses. Sean and Puck each hope to win more than money in the races, but while many die in the Scorpio races, there can only be one winner. Light fantasy and romance combine in this strong coming of age novel, slightly reminiscent of Robin McKinley's *Blue Sword*.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 7

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7.5

Secrets at Sea, by Richard Peck

#9780803734555 \$16.99

Dial Books/Penguin, October 2011

Core audience: boys and girls 8-12

Notable for fantasy adventure, humor, charm

Review: Richard Peck's versatility in writing is a constant delight. This is the first light-hearted fantasy authored by him that I have read. Add this to your ever-growing collection of mouse books! The mouse family lives in the Cranston household, where the humans are planning a sea voyage abroad in order to find a husband for the eldest daughter, Olive. The whole mouse family decides to stowaway in order to keep an eye on them, the humans not being all that bright. They aren't the only mice there. The ship has its own mouse society, both travellers and employees! Both humans and mice can be seen as a microcosm of various human characteristics. I enjoyed the humorous adventures of both people and mice as they voyaged on the luxurious crossing. Secrets are revealed, self-confidence is gained, romances are enjoyed and weddings ensue. This is a fun read, partly due to Peck's use of language and amusing names (Duchess of Cheddar Gorge, for example). Good title to handsell for holiday gifting!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

I was just about to review this book. Sue's review is wonderful and I also agree that this is a great holiday recommendation. However, I see it as more appealing to girls than boys. Kelly Murphy's illustrations are delightful!

Sarah Nixon, West Winds Books, Duxbury, MA

Rating: 8.5

Shelter, by Harlan Coben

9780399256509, \$18.99

Putnam, September 2011

Core Audience: Ages 12 and up.

Notable Aspects: First in a projected series, main character Mickey Bolitar is the nephew of author's

popular adult series character.

Review: Publisher description. "Mickey Bolitar's year can't get much worse. After witnessing his father's death and sending his mom to rehab, he's forced to live with his estranged uncle Myron and switch high schools. A new school comes with new friends and new enemies, and lucky for Mickey, it also comes with a great new girlfriend, Ashley. For a while, it seems like Mickey's train-wreck of a life is finally improving - until Ashley vanishes without a trace. Unwilling to let another person walk out of his life, Mickey follows Ashley's trail into a seedy underworld that reveals that this seemingly sweet, shy girl isn't who she claimed to be. And neither was Mickey's father. Soon, Mickey learns about a conspiracy so shocking that it makes high school drama seem like a luxury - and leaves him questioning everything about the life he thought he knew.

First introduced to readers in Harlan Coben's latest adult novel, *Live Wire*, Mickey Bolitar is as quick-witted and clever as his uncle Myron, and eager to go to any length to save the people he cares about. With this new series, Coben introduces an entirely new generation of fans to the masterful plotting and wry humor that have made him an award-winning, internationally bestselling, and beloved author."

Spoiler alert!

My first thoughts are about the book on its own. Until the end, Coben did a great job. Like his best adult thrillers, there were likable characters, snappy dialogue, detestable villains and plenty of action, mystery and suspense. Unlike many writers of adult books, he did a more than credible job of writing teenagers for teens. Even the denouement, while far-fetched, was OK. A Holocaust survivor runs a secret organization dedicated to rescuing children and Mickey's father worked for them. The difficulty comes, for me, at the very end. Although there are certainly enough young people around the globe who need help to make for a long and successful series, it was decided that there needed to be an opposing group. This is standard fare, there's no spy thriller genre without Nazis or Russians or secret terrorist organizations. Unfortunately, the person they chose was the (fictional) Butcher of Lodz. He's certainly a monster anyone could fight against, but he's just not credible as the murderer of Mickey's father, if only because he'd have to be at least 90 years old.

Second thoughts - book as part of Coben's work. I have no idea how that's supposed to work. Mickey was introduced in Coben's recent adult book, *Live Wire*, in which the adult characters, including Mickey's Mom, Dad and Uncle Myron, behave badly, or stupidly, or both. Indeed, the sophomoric dialogue worked much better when the characters were actual sophomores! The drug addiction of Mickey's mother is a painful, and critical plot element of both books. Coben's success in making *Shelter* a real YA title means there isn't any logical connection between the two. For young people who don't know about his other work, this is a perfectly good stand-alone thriller - until the last 5 pages.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 6.5 - 7

Core audience: teen mystery readers; young if can deal with violence in a "dance club."

Notable: good teen characterization with a twisting plot

Review: Mickey Bolitar, nephew of Myron Bolitar (character known to readers of Coben's "grown-up" novels), is finally able to settle down in one place because his parents promised to stop traveling around the world for work once he reached high school. Before they can settle in, his father dies in a horrible car accident and his inconsolable mother ends up in rehab following her use of drugs to dull her grief. While Mickey goes to live with his estranged Uncle Myron, he doesn't really get to know him or rely on him for help. The story is told from Mickey's point of view. He has grown up without prejudices and is truly a "nice kid." He becomes friends with a unique mix of students: a new girl, Ashley, who disappears; an ostracized fat "goth-clothed" girl, Ema; a boy who wants to be Robin to his Batman who Mickey calls Spoon; and a beautiful girl, Rachel, who isn't just beautiful on the outside. The story takes many twist and turns. The good guys and bad guys keep changing. There are some very seedy and violent situations including many near death events (hence the older rating) that keep

the story tense. Mickey finds out some family secrets in the end but you know there are more to be discovered. A tense, action-packed mystery that will be loved by Harlan Coben fans. Will sell in hardcover to children of Harlan Coben's fans, but easier to sell in paper to new readers.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7

Stan and the Toilet Monster, by Steve Shreve

978-0761459774, \$12.99

Marshall Cavendish, October 2011

Core Audience: Boys ages 8 - 11, especially the Captain Underpants crowd.

Notable Aspects: Good writing put this a cut above the usual toilet-humor focused chapter book.

Review: Publisher description: It's just another day on Calamity Avenue. Stan Hankie and his friends are playing baseball, when the ball --- their last one --- falls into the sewer drain. Everyone knows that there's a monster in the sewers. Stan and his best friend, Larry, go down in search of the ball anyway. But instead of a baseball, they find something else. Then strange things start happening around town. Is a creature from the sewers coming after them? Can Stan and Larry figure out what's going on before the whole town is destroyed?

It's a little thing, but here's my favorite part of the book. Stan and Larry, our protagonists, are taking their discovery (a foul-smelling rock) to the local mad scientist to see if he can figure out what it is.

"Are you sure this is the place?" asked Larry. "It doesn't really look like the kind of place a mad scientist would live." It was true - the house was a cottage with white shutters and window boxes full of gerbera daisies."

Yes, that's what I'm so excited about, the use of the word "gerbera" in a book for young boys. Little out of the ordinary touches made this book fun even for me, probably the antithesis of the anticipated reader. There are other wonderful things, too, including miffed poodles, the MacHaggis Kilt Emporium, a lime-green 1975 Chevy Vega and the notable absence of "me and" in the dialogue. There's plenty of the usual items for the target audience - fart jokes, twelve-day underwear, world's biggest wedgie, dumpster diving, and a giant chameleon. Some of the humor is more sly than slapstick. The illustrations are serviceable, a la Kinney and Pilkey. Book construction and pricing also a plus. \$12.99 seems the current acceptable price for a non-jacketed hardcover, but this book is a little taller and deeper (wider?) with nice heavy paper. All in all, nicely done.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers

Rating: 7

Steampunk! An Anthology of Fantastically Rich and Strange Stories, ed. by Kelly Link & Gavin Grant

9780763648435, \$22.99

Candlewick, October 2011

Core audience: high school students, boys and girls, who like fantasy and science fiction (with crossover appeal)

Notable aspects: variety of authors and stories, fantastical and imaginative

Review: This wonderful story collection explores and expands the meaning of steampunk, but it is totally enjoyable for those of us who don't really know what steampunk is. The editors have gathered a notable group of young adult authors, including Cassandra Clare, Libba Bray, Cory Doctorow, Garth Nix, Holly Black and M.T Anderson. The stories they have contributed vary in style (including two graphic stories) and the settings range from ancient Rome to the American wild west to a Dickensian orphanage. What they have in common, and what defines the genre, I gather, is the role that machines, clockwork automatons, etc., have in the stories. It is a beautifully produced book and I really enjoyed the stories.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 9

A rich smorgasbord of almost-believable inventions, prepared and served by fourteen leading writers.
Carol Chittenden, *Eight Cousins* Rating: 8.5

The Summer I Learned To Fly, by Dana Reinhardt

9780385739542, \$15.99

Wendy Lamb/Random House, July 2011

Core audience: 12 – 16, primarily girls

Notable: Realistic characterization of a girl dealing with some difficult issues in her life; solid friendships; coming of age story; not a cookie-cutter story or ending; well drawn characters; issues dealt with honestly; well written, effective, moving

Review: Drew and her mother are coping since her father's death. Her mother has invested all their assets into starting The Cheese Shop and is struggling to make it succeed. Drew, at 13, is dependable and responsible; she relates better to adults than to other kids. She has a major crush on Nick, a young surfer, who works for her mother (even though he has a girlfriend) and a pet rat named Hum which she carries everywhere. Their life is tough, but they are doing OK. However, when Drew suspects that her mother is secretly dating someone, she becomes angry and resentful; she fears "losing" her mother. She forges a sort of friendship with the boy she meets in the alley behind the store. Emmett is vague about his life, but Drew likes him and trusts him. Then a series of events rocks Drew's world: Emmett finally tells Drew his story, Nick is badly injured in a motorcycle accident, she and her mother hit a really rocky patch in their relationship. Ultimately, Drew accompanies Emmett on a crazy bus trip in pursuit of a dream. In the epilogue, things are sewn up, but not necessarily happily or neatly. Kinda like real life.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 8.5

Carol Chittenden, *Eight Cousins*

Rating: 8.5

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 8.5

Sue Carita, Toadstool Books

Rating: 8

Isabel Berg, BookEnds

Rating: 8.5

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes

Rating: 8

Tuesdays at the Castle by Jessica Day George

9781599906447, \$16.99

Bloomsbury/MPS, October, 2011

Core audience: Ages 8-12, especially younger children who don't like scary books

Notable aspects: Fantasy without much violence (violence lite?)

Review: Castle Glower takes care of the Kingdom of Sleyne. If the castle likes you, your bed chamber will be large and comfortable. If the castle doesn't like you, it may move the corridors around so much that you will never find the dining room. Princess Celie has taken it upon herself to create an atlas of the castle, a never-ending task since every Tuesday the castle makes changes. When the king and queen of Glower go missing the castle takes a very active role in selecting the next ruler of Sleyne and protecting the prince and princesses. The changing castle (it has been compared to the room of requirement in the Harry Potter books) makes an interesting setting for this otherwise not particularly inventive but well-told story.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 7.5

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 6.0

Variant, by Robison Wells

9780062026088 \$17.99

HarperCollins, October, 2011

Core audience: Ages 12 & up

Notable aspects: Page-turner with a twist at the end

Review: Benson Fisher thinks that he has finally found a way out of the cycle of foster homes he has been through since he was 5 years old. He applies for a scholarship targeted at foster kids that he hopes will gain him admittance to a private boarding school in New Mexico, far from Pennsylvania where he has always lived. He has high hopes that it will lead to a better education. What he finds when he is dropped off at Maxfield Academy is something else entirely. There are no teachers, no way to communicate with the outside world and no way to leave. The other students he finds at the school range from those who want to continue to try to escape to those who have accepted the situation and now attempt to run the school. There are only four rules: no sex, no trying to escape, no refusing punishment, and no violent fighting. Breaking one of these rules leads to detention from which no one has ever returned. It is an intriguing premise, not quite *Lord of the Flies* but with many of the same conflicts. All the characters are thinly drawn and some of the situations unlikely but most readers won't care as they are pulled along by the pace as it hurtles through twists toward the last page where we find out that this is just the first book in a series.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 7.5

Vietnam #1: I Pledge Allegiance, by Chris Lynch

9780545270298, \$16.99

Scholastic, November 2011

Core Audience: Boys ages 9 - 12.

Notable: Solid historical fiction, but also a beautiful book about friendship.

Review: Publisher description: Four best friends. Four ways to serve their country. Morris, Rudi, Ivan, and Beck are best friends for life. So when one of the teens is drafted into the Vietnam War, the others sign up, too. Although they each serve in a different branch, they are fighting the war together--and they pledge to do all they can to come home together. Haunted by dreams of violence and death, Morris makes it his personal mission to watch over his friends--and the best place to do that is in the US Navy. Stationed off the coast of Vietnam on the USS Boston, Morris and his fellow sailors provide crucial support to the troops on the ground. But the Boston itself isn't safe from attack. As Morris finds his courage and resolve tested like never before, he keeps coming back to a single thought. He made a pledge. He must keep them safe.

I can't do this book justice. Lynch has taken four fairly ordinary boys (actually, Rudi is mentally challenged), given them an extraordinary (but completely believable) friendship, and then put them in the Vietnam War. The writing is very powerful. There's enough fighting for the ra-ra guys. There are enough different thoughts expressed about the war to help today's young people understand how complicated it was. The scenes between Morris and his mother are heartbreaking and spot on. There is plenty of needed humor.

Nikki can confirm, but my guess is this will be a four-book series, with each book narrated by a different friend. Ivan's book (*Vietnam #2: Sharpshooter*) is due out in April 2012.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Ltd

Rating: 8.5

Waiting for the Magic, Patricia MacLachlan

9781442431638, \$15.99

Simon & Schuster, September 2011

Core Audience: Ages 7-10

Notable: Illustrated (with black and white illustrations). Award-winning New England author. Father leaves the family (briefly) and there's a new baby.

Review: Patricia MacLachlan uses each word carefully, never giving the reader more or less than they need, always keeping the delicate balance between what to state and what to suggest. In *Waiting for the Magic*, this precision allows the magic of MacLachlan's story to unfurl slowly and believably. When

William's father leaves, his mother, seeking to fill the hole, adopts four dogs and one cat. William's younger sister Elinor talks to the animals and they seem to understand one another as if by magic. But the only ones who know magic are "the young, the old, the brave, the honest, and the joyful." If William is brave enough to accept his new family, will he, too, experience the magic Elinor does? MacLachlan's heartwarming story combines a simple, realistic story with just a pinch of magic....and a pinch is all it needs.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 7

Why We Broke Up, by Daniel Handler and Maira Kalman

9780316127257, \$19.99

Little Brown/Hachette, 2011

Age range: 14-18 (note that there is consensual sex).

Notable: first relationships, high school, films, gorgeous illustrations

Review: Min has broken up with Ed Slaterton, and is writing him a letter chronicling their relationship and all the reasons she's breaking up with him. Min loves old films, her best friend, and coffee.

According to Ed, Min was "arty" and "different." But despite Ed's role as captain of the basketball team and his popularity, Min thought she loved him. That's over now and to prove it to herself and her friends she's put together all the items, tokens, and objects she accumulated during the brief relationship. The box, and the letter, are Min's goodbye present for Ed.

Each chapter begins with an illustration of an item in the box, followed by the chapter of the relationship associated with it. A concept that could just as easily have been executed by David Levithan, *Why We Broke Up* is a surprise from Handler. However, geeky film details and sincere teenage love- and ex-love- stories will find fans. What better way to get over your high school relationship than reading Min's story and adding your own?

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating 7

Wildwood, by Colin Meloy, illus. Carson Ellis

9780062024688, \$16.99

Balzer & Bray/HarperCollins, August 2011

Core audience: Ages 9-13, both girls and boys who love fantasy

Notable for fast moving fantasy plot, descriptive writing, characters kids will identify with

Review: When a murder of crows carry off 12-year-old Prue's baby brother to the Impassable Woods where humans practically never go, she sets out to get him back. Her friend Curtis tags along and they begin a fast-paced adventure involving coyote soldiers, bandits and their King Brendan, imprisonment in swinging cages deep underground, leagues of foxes, rabbits, bears, and owls who fight for their territory, and a frisky rat. All of them do all they can to help prevent the Governess Alexandra from commanding a heap of sleeping ivy to take over the land, choking the life from it. (It turns out that years back, a human couple promised Alexandra they'd give her their second-born child if she helped them produce a first-born babe. Does that sound familiar? Now it's pay-off time.) The baby's blood will be fed to the ivy to bring it back to life. Inhabitants of the Impassable Woods find they can fight evil if they forget their differences and band together. Respect for the environment is a theme throughout the book. Some readers will think of the *Narnia* and *Golden Compass* books as there are similarities. Kids will identify with Curtis and Prue and be involved with the wonderfully detailed descriptions of places and atmosphere. It is interesting that the illustrations are by Carson Ellis, who also illustrated *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, another favorite. This is Book 1 in a planned series (trilogy?) but ably stands alone. Great adventure!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

I second Sue's rating. I really enjoyed this one.

Marilyn Racette, Book Ends Rating: 8

Me too! I'll add a rating of 8 as well.
Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books Rating: 8

Surprises upon surprises. What a delight!
Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 8.5

Wonderstruck, by Brian Selznick
9780545027892, \$29.99
Scholastic Press, September 2011
Core audience: older elementary and middle school
Notable aspects: Art, weaving two stories together, deaf culture
Review: Brian Selznick has done it again. This is a rich and beautiful book about so many things: friendship and family, deaf culture, being different, museums, movies. As he does in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, Selznick uses art to tell parts of the story, but in *Wonderstruck* the art and the narrative tell different stories set in 1927 and 1977, respectively. Both involve children who are or become deaf and who spend time in the Museum of Natural History in New York. The narrative tells the story of Ben and begins shortly after his mother dies and he is living with relatives in Gunflint Lake, Minnesota. He decides to go to New York to search for the father he has never known. The art tells the story of a young deaf girl, the daughter of a silent film star, who is also searching for ways to change her life. Eventually, of course, the two stories connect in a moving way.
Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop Rating: 9.5

I was wonderstruck by this moving story---created in the same vein as *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, but not at all "self-derivative" on Brian Selznick's part. I love how Brian sensitively includes a person with hearing loss but without making the book an "issues" book.
My rating: 9.999999
Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library Rating: 9.9

I would like to add my rating for *Wonderstruck*: 9.9 Loved, loved, loved it.
Kaley S. DeGoursey, R. J. Julia Rating: 9.9

Oh, me too! I couldn't love it more. I'd like to offer a perfect 10!
Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes Rating: 10
Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9.5

I love the plausibility of it: no paranormal powers required!
Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 9.0
Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 9.5
Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 9
Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 9

A Year Without Autumn, by Liz Kessler
9780763655952, \$15.99
Candlewick, October, 2011
Core audience: Ages 9-12
Notable: Friendship, family dynamics, time travel, comas, death and dying, divorce,
Review: Sometimes I wish I could go back in time and hand books to my 9-year-old self. From the

first chapter of *A Year Without Autumn* I wished I could do this. It seems that there are relatively few books these days that start with loving, supportive families. Jenni's parents are in love and expecting their third child, and although her little brother can be annoying, Jenni loves him nevertheless. They are looking forward to being a family of five and enjoying their yearly one-week family vacation. Like every year, Jenni's best friend Autumn will be having vacation the same week, in the same time-share community as Jenni. As is often the case with best friends, Jenni and Autumn are very different. Autumn is outgoing, adventurous, and daring, the daughter of artists. Jenni is sensible, intelligent, and cautious...a trait few young protagonists are applauded for.

The first day of vacation, Jenni goes to meet Autumn, taking the old elevator up to her condo when the new one doesn't arrive. But Autumn isn't in her condo, someone else is. Autumn's parents' car is gone, and things look slightly different. When Jenni returns to her parents' condo, she's met with a messy living room, a baby sister, and an overly anxious mother. These are only the beginning of the changes, the biggest of which is that Autumn's little brother is in a coma, thrown from a horse one year ago. This pivotal event has completely altered both families, and wrecked Jenni and Autumn's relationship.

Liz Kessler carefully handles the issues faced by both Jenni and Autumn in their possible future. As Jenni doesn't get mentally older when she time travels, the snippets she sees, though difficult, are entirely age appropriate. In presenting only snippets of Autumn & Jenni's future, Kessler has allowed readers to view the situations through their personal experience, meaning the extent of difficulty will reflect what they are ready to handle.

Emotionally wrenching, slightly magical, and with a happy ending that fits perfectly, *A Year Without Autumn* is impossible to put down. If my 9-year-old self had been handed this, I would have hidden under the covers until I finished reading (despite school in the morning) and then immediately passed the book on to a friend.

A Year Without Autumn is a coming-of-age story that acknowledges the difficult realities and unexpected joys of growing up and assures readers that despite how things seem, they can always change.

Marika McCoola, Odyssey Bookshop

Rating: 9

You Against Me, by Jenny Downham

9780385751605 \$16.99

Random House, September 2011

Core Audience: 14 & up

Notable: issues of truth and loyalty explored in the context of family vs. the world

Review: Ellie Parker's 16-year-old brother Tom is accused of date rape in this story set in contemporary Great Britain. Mikey McKenzie's 15-year-old sister Karyn is the accuser. Mikey would do anything to help his sister and keep his family together. When he decides to crash Tom's 'making bail' party held at the Parker's estate he only intended to get revenge by physically attacking Tom. When he meets Ellie at the party everything changes. Ellie was in the house when the rape happened. Tom & Ellie begin a secret romance and Tom finds out that Ellie knows more about what happened that night than she has told the police. She knows she should speak up, but if she does her brother has a much greater chance of being convicted for his crime since the arguments are stuck in the he-said, she-said, limbo of many such date rape situations. When Mike and Ellie's romance comes to light, their families shun them and both struggle with issues of betrayal, loyalty and justice.

When I started this book I didn't expect it to be much of an addition to the significant titles already published on the subject of date rape and its aftermath, but the writing quality and the story itself drew me in. In the end this is really a story as much about loyalty and family as it is about date rape and that is what I found intriguing.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Rating: 8

Postscript:

The Magician King, by Lev Grossman

9780670022311, \$26.95

Viking/Penguin, August 2011

Core audience: adult, an occasional teen

Notable: Magic, atonement, mature content

Review: Atonement is an art of balance. In literature it is the closest thing we'll find to a magical object. It causes stories to cohere, and infuses them with drama and insight. Atonement is the lodestone of the Sagas, and the Greek Tragedies equally. *The Magician King*, which follows Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*, employs atonement in a fresh and prodigal manner. Expelled from its pages, it is soon spotted lurking again in the margins, and hidden in the folds of every curtain. For atonement requires rootedness and that is the very thing Quentin Coldwater, the central figure of Lev Grossman's *Magicians* book, is motivated to avoid. The same might be said of the other central figure of the book, Julia, a peripheral character in the first book, who has achieved power outside the normal avenues of a magical college education.

The narrative alternates between carrying forward from the end of *The Magicians*, and telling Julia's history retrospectively. The world of illicit magic, far from the safety and more conventional methodology of the magical college, Brakebills, opens up a group of compelling new characters, intimately involved in Julia's rise to power. Their heartbreaking combination of jaded worldliness, restive intellectual curiosity, and emotional naivete, is what makes these books such a delight! What a pleasure it is to find characters immersed in dangerous certainty, and to be filled with uncertainty and mistakenness as a reader. The magic of these books lies in their use of inversion, a fantasy that deconstructs itself yet becomes magical, characters who spurn meaning and end up immersed in it. One would have to search across many dimensions to find a book at once so philosophically challenging, emotionally astute, and flat out fun as the *Magician King*. There are many different ways to get from one point to another. Quentin's path is as intricate, and engaging as anything you'll read.

Rating: I made no attempt to review or rate the the book as YA because I don't think the book is appropriate for more than a handful of people under 18. It isn't just the incredible summoning scene which has a rape by a deity element, but rather that the whole sensibility of the book is adult, and makes no effort to be otherwise. It's wonderful book but it's not YA to me. How do others feel?

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Unrated

I loved both *The Magician King* AND your review! I would not have been able to put my thoughts down so eloquently, but I agree with your assessment of the quality of the novel and that it really isn't meant for YA crossover. I hope to meet him tomorrow night when he reads at The Brookline Booksmith. Speaking of adult novels with elements of magic or magical realism that are being marketed with YA crossover potential, did anyone read Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*? I really enjoyed that one as well but am ambivalent about the YA marketing... I'd love to know what others think.

Jill Crowley, The Concord Bookshop

Unrated