

**NEW ENGLAND CHILDREN'S BOOKSELLING ADVISORY COUNCIL  
FALL REVIEWS, 2007**

This list is our annual attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous new July-December middle-grade and young-adult fiction books. NECBA booksellers read ARCs from as many publishers as possible, and review and rate as many of as we can. From these titles, a Top Ten list has been selected as a service to our general bookstore colleagues who are less familiar with the genre. The full text will be available on the NEIBA website, [www.newenglandbooks.org](http://www.newenglandbooks.org). 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 might have missed.

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**REVIEWERS**

Gretchen Baker-Smith, Baker Books (N. Dartmouth, MA)  
Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove (Hanover, MA)  
Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove (Hanover, MA)  
Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore (Shelburne, VT)  
Kenny Brechner, Devaney, Doak & Garrett (DDG) Booksellers (Farmington, ME)  
Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers, Ltd. (Kinderhook, NY)  
Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford, NH)  
Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins (Falmouth, MA) and BookStream (Poughkeepsie, NY)  
Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer – Bookazine (Bayonne, NJ)  
Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop (Northampton, MA)  
Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft (Great Barrington, MA)  
Lori Kauffman, Brookline Booksmith (Brookline, MA)  
Josie Leavitt, The Flying Pig Bookstore (Shelburne, VT)  
Kathleen McGonagle, Buttonwood Books and Toys (Cohasset, MA)  
Joyce Miller, Baker Books (N. Dartmouth, MA)  
Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith (Wellesley, MA)  
Mimi Powell, Baker Books (North Dartmouth, MA)  
Karlene Rearick, The Alphabet Garden (Cheshire, CT)  
Beth Reynolds, Norwich Bookstore (Norwich, VT)  
Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar (Waterville, ME)  
Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith (Wellesley, MA)  
Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books (Cambridge, MA)  
Valerie Tate, Village Book Store (Littleton, NH)  
Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library (Bridgeport, CT)

**2007 FALL REVIEW PROJECT  
TOP TEN TITLES (plus one)**

**Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**, by Sherman Alexie (Little, Brown / 978-0316013680 / \$16.99) Budding cartoonist Junior leaves his troubled school on the Spokane Indian Reservation to attend an all-white farm town school where the only other Indian is the school mascot. (Ages 14+)

**The Arrival**, by Shaun Tan (Scholastic / 978-0439895293 / \$19.99) In this wordless graphic novel, a man leaves his homeland and sets off for a new country, where he must build a new life for himself and his family. (Ages 10-adult)

**The Aurora County All-Stars**, by Deborah Wiles (Harcourt / 978-0152060688 / \$16.00) For most boys in a small Mississippi town, the biggest concern one hot summer is whether their annual July 4th baseball game will be cancelled due to their county's anniversary pageant, but after the death of the old man to whom twelve-year-old star pitcher House Jackson has been secretly reading for a year, House uncovers secrets about the man and the history of baseball in Aurora County that could fix everything. (Ages 9-12)

**A Crooked Kind of Perfect**, by Linda Urban (Harcourt / 978-0152060077 / \$16.00) Ten-year-old Zoe Elias, who longs to play the piano but must resign herself to learning the organ, instead, finds that her musicianship has a positive impact on her workaholic mother, her jittery father, and her school social life. (Ages 8-12)

**Elijah of Buxton**, by Christopher Paul Curtis (Scholastic / 978-0439023443 / \$16.99) In 1859, eleven-year-old Elijah Freeman, the first free-born child in Buxton, Canada, which is a haven for slaves fleeing the American south, uses his wits and skills to try to bring to justice the lying preacher who has stolen money that was to be used to buy a family's freedom. (Ages 9-13)

**The Pig Who Saved the World**, by Paul Shipton (Candlewick Press / 978-0763634469 / \$15.99) Continues the epic tale of Gyllus, a talking pig, as he and his friends, ex-priestess Sibyl and poet Homer, set off on the high seas in search of Circe, who can return Gryllus to his human state, but first they must free some captive gods and, perhaps, save the world again. (Ages 9-12)

**Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow**, by James Sturm; illustrated by Rich Tommaso (Jump at the Sun / Hyperion / 978-0786839001 / \$16.99) Told from the point of view of a sharecropper, the graphic novel narrative follows Baseball Hall-of-Famer Leroy "Satchel" Paige (1905?-1982) from game to game as he travels throughout the segregated South. (Ages 10+)

**Thirteen Reasons Why**, by Jay Asher (Razorbill / Penguin / 978-1595141712 / \$16.99) When high-school student Clay Jenkins receives a box in the mail containing thirteen cassette tapes recorded by his classmate Hannah, who committed suicide, he spends a bewildering and heartbreaking night crisscrossing their town, listening to Hannah's voice recounting the events leading up to her death. (Ages 14+)

**Time to Smell the Roses**, by Michael Hoeye (Penguin / Putnam / 978-0399244902 / \$15.99) While immersed in wedding plans, Hermux is hired to find the son of the patriarch of the DeRosenquill rose dynasty. In the process, he discovers a homeless teen, fields of dying flowers, and killer bees. (Ages 9+)

**When I Crossed No-Bob**, by Margaret McMullan (Houghton Mifflin / 978-0618717156 / \$16) Ten years after the Civil War's end, twelve-year-old Addy, abandoned by her parents, is taken from the horrid town of No-Bob by schoolteacher Frank Russell and his bride, but when her father returns to claim her she must find another way to leave her O'Donnell past behind. (Ages 10-14)

**2007 FALL REVIEW PROJECT — TOP TEN TITLES, continued**

And one more; as always, in a category by itself:

**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows**, by J.K. Rowling (Scholastic / 978-0545010221 / \$34.99)  
Burdened with the dark, dangerous, and seemingly impossible task of locating and destroying Voldemort's remaining Horcruxes, Harry, feeling alone and uncertain about his future, struggles to find the inner strength he needs to follow the path set out before him. (Ages 10-adult, though many younger readers also loved it)

**COMPLETE LIST OF FALL 2007 TITLES REVIEWED**

*68 Knots*, by Michael Robert Evans  
*Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie  
*Ana's Story*, by Jenna Bush  
*The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan  
*The Aurora County All-Stars*, by Deborah Wiles  
*Benjamin Dove*, by Fridrick Erlings  
*The Black Book of Secrets*, by F. E. Higgins  
*Book of a Thousand Days*, by Shannon Hale  
*Boy Toy*, by Barry Lyga  
*Bullyville*, by Francine Prose  
*Camel Rider*, by Prue Mason  
*Candyfloss*, by Jacqueline Wilson  
*Carpe Diem*, by Autumn Cornwell  
*The Chaos Code*, by Justin Richards  
*The Charioteer of Delphi*, by Caroline Lawrence  
*Chasing Tail Lights*, by Patrick Jones  
*The Chicken Dance*, by Jacques Couvillon  
*Clarice Bean, Don't Look Now*, by Lauren Child  
*Click: One Novel, Ten Authors*, by various  
*A Crooked Kind of Perfect*, by Linda Urban  
*Deadline*, by Chris Crutcher  
*The Declaration*, by Gemma Malley  
*Diamonds in the Shadow*, by Caroline Cooney  
*Disguised: A Wartime Memoir*, by Rita la Fontaine de Clercq Zubli  
*Dragonhaven*, by Robin McKinley  
*Dussie*, by Nancy Springer  
*Eclipse*, by Stephenie Meyer  
*Edward's Eyes*, by Patricia MacLachlan  
*Elijah of Buxton*, by Christopher Paul Curtis  
*Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*, by Lynne Jonell  
*The Faceless Fiend: Being the....*, by Howard Whitehouse  
*Faeries of Dreamdark: Blackbringer*, by Laini Taylor  
*Freak*, by Marcella Pixley  
*The Garden of Eve*, by K L Going  
*Guyaholic*, by Carolyn Mackler  
*Gym Candy*, by Carl Deuker  
*Home of the Brave*, by Katherine Applegate  
*How the Hangman Lost His Heart*, by K.M. Grant

**COMPLETE LIST OF FALL 2007 TITLES REVIEWED, continued**

*If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period*, by Gennifer Choldenko  
*The Jaguar Stones: Book One, Middleworld*, by J & P Voelkel  
*Lenny's Space*, by Kate Banks  
*Lily Dale 01: Awakening*, by Wendi Corsi Staub  
*Little Klein*, by Anne Ylvisaker  
*Lobsterland*, by Susan Carlton  
*Love, Meg*, by C. Leigh Purtill  
*Love, Stargirl*, by Jerry Spinelli  
*The Man with the Red Bag*, by Eve Bunting  
*Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac*, by Gabrielle Zevin  
*Middle School is Worse Than Meatloaf*, by Jennifer Holm  
*the mysterious edge of the heroic world*, by e.l. konigsburg  
*The Name of This Book is Secret*, by Pseudonymous Bosch  
*Naomi and Ely's No-Kiss List*, by R. Cohn & D. Levithan  
*Paint the Wind*, by Pam Munoz Ryan  
*Parrotfish*, by Ellen Wittlinger  
*The Perfect Hamburger and Other Delicious Stories*, by Alexander McCall Smith  
*The Pig Who Saved the World...*, by Paul Shipton  
*Revolution is Not a Dinner Party*, by Ying Chang Compestine  
*Robot Dreams*, by Sara Varon  
*Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow*, by James Sturm  
*Schooled*, by Gordon Korman  
*The Seems: A Glitch in Sleep*, by John Hulme  
*Slam*, by Nick Hornby  
*Still Just Grace*, by Charise Mericle Harper  
*The Swan Maiden*, by Heather Tomlinson  
*Taken*, by Edward Bloor  
*Thirteen Reasons Why*, by Jay Asher  
*Time to Smell the Roses*, by Michael Hoeye  
*Underground*, by Jean Ferris  
*The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous*, by Suzanne Crowley  
*What-the-Dickens: The Story of a Rogue Tooth Fairy*, by Gregory Maguire  
*When I Crossed No-Bob*, by Margaret McMullan  
*Zen and the Art of Faking It*, by Jordan Sonnenblick

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**The Chittenden Rating Scale**

- 10 — A desert island book for all time: *Charlotte's Web*, *Frederick*, *Bridge to Terabithia*.  
 9 — One of the best of the season, probably saleable in hardcover, can recommend with honest enthusiasm to customers, will have legs in paperback.  
 8 — Solid Newbery or Printz honor contender, whether I like it or not.  
 7 — I will handsell it well in hardcover, but others might or might not.  
 6 — Mixed bag, but with some fine points. Probably can recommend in paperback if not hardcover; OR kids will go wild for it but the enduring literary quality is mixed.  
 5 — Suitable for some school library situations, but unlikely to sell in hardcover as a child's choice or as a gift.  
 4 — An honest but unsuccessful effort, probably an editor's hope that better things will follow.  
 3 — Not a book I would want on my store's shelves if I could help it.  
 2 — A book I'd have a hard time embracing even if a friend's child wrote it.  
 1 — Waste of a good tree.

## NECBA FALL 2007 REVIEWS

**68 Knots**, by Michael Robert Evans  
978-1933718149 / \$15.95  
Tanglewood  
October 2007

Core audience: Will appeal to older teen boys and girls; definitely for 14+.  
Notable aspects: the issues it raises about the true nature of leadership and morality

Eight young first-time teen sailors on a leadership skills cruise get more than they signed up (and paid for) when their captain commits suicide and the experienced teen counselors jump ship. Their idyllic summer of cruising Maine's waters becomes a learning experience, all right! Pirate raids (theirs!), parties, and power plays make for some interesting consequences for teens aboard "The Dread-nought." Lots of suspense, and maybe some characters they "know" will keep teens hooked. The problems they face and the options they see for solving them are great discussion points. Despite implausibilities, the book has potential for more than a summer read.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

*Additional rating of 68 Knots:*

Books about sailing and the sea always pull me in! This one was no exception.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 7.5

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**The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**, by Sherman Alexie  
978-0316013680 / \$16.99  
Little, Brown  
September 2007

Core audience: Older teen boys and girls

The power of expectations! Born with water on the brain, suffering disfigurement, Arnold Spirit wants more from life than the reservation can offer. He travels miles to go to an all-white high school and wows the students there with his athletic prowess, while never forgetting his heritage. This is a humorous and moving tale of friendship lost and found, triumph over poverty, talent and determination. You'll love this guy! Ellen Forney's drawings add more humor and heart. I give it an 8 and would love to see it a movie!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

*Additional review of The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian:*

Core audience: 14 and up

Notable aspects: Native American reservation, poverty, The Depression, alcoholism, acceptance, peer pressure, humor, cartoons, conviction

(Review of **The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**, continued)

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is fresh, funny, seemingly authentic, and 100% winning. It effectively captures the harsh realities of life for an impoverished Native American teenager in a way that's neither depressing nor disturbing. It's honest. And funny. And wonderfully memorable. Much as Jack Gantos did with his autobiographical *A Hole in My Life*, Alexie tells Arnold's (and parts of his own) story with enough humility and humor to save it from the weight of its own themes and make of it something meaningful, sincere, and greatly entertaining. This is one of those memorable, hopeful books that I wish I could put in the hands of every high school student.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith Rating: 9.5

*Additional ratings for **The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**:*

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine — Just as fabulous as his adult titles. Rating: 9

Rondi Brower, Brouwer & Blackwood, Ltd. Rating: 7

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 9

I would venture to give maybe my first 10 to the Sherman Alexie.  
Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating: 10

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**Ana's Story**, by Jenna Bush  
978-0061379086 / \$18.99  
HarperCollins  
October 2007

Core audience: Age 15 & up  
Notable aspects: easy to read, short 1-2 page chapters

Ana's story is that of a seventeen-year-old girl who was infected with HIV at birth and does not consider herself someone who is dying from HIV but rather a survivor who is living with it. This is a work of nonfiction, set in Latin America. Ana's parents both died of AIDS when she was very young. As orphans, she and her sister lived with other poor relatives. Abused, treated as a burden, taught to keep her infection a secret, she has a tough childhood. When she confides in a teacher about the abuse she suffers, she winds up in a detention center. She eventually is moved to a home for people with HIV where she falls in love with a boy her age who has a similar story. She gets pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl. She is determined to raise her daughter in a setting free of abuse, full of love and hope. The story is important for spreading the word that HIV/AIDS is not something that should be discriminated against.

Karlene Rearick, The Alphabet Garden Rating: 7

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**The Arrival**, by Shaun Tan  
 978-0439895293 / \$19.99  
 Scholastic  
 October 2007

Core audience: upper elementary & middle school  
 Notable aspects: art, imagination, relevance

*The Arrival* is a wordless graphic novel about the immigrant experience. A man wraps up a picture of himself with his wife and child, packs it in his suitcase, says goodbye to them, and embarks on a journey to a new world. After a long sea voyage, he lands in a city and struggles to find his way in this strange place and to bring his family to him. Tan includes fantastical elements in his amazing, detailed and powerful art, which seems to capture the experience of the immigrant, to whom everything is strange and magical. The world he pictures is sometimes confusing and sometimes scary, as it must be for any stranger in a new place. He tells both a particular and a universal story and one that is especially relevant now that immigration is such a hot topic.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 9.5

*Additional review of **The Arrival**:*

Core audience: 10 and up  
 Notable aspects: graphic novel, wordless, immigration, hope  
 Clichéd though the expression, may be, this book is truly a visual tour-de-force.  
 Absolutely stunning.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 10

*Additional ratings of **The Arrival**:*

Breathtaking artwork that I could stare at for hours.  
 Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 9.5

Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 9

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**The Aurora County All-Stars**, by Deborah Wiles  
 978-0152060688 / \$16.00  
 Harcourt Children's Books  
 August 2007

Core audience: middle schoolers, boys and girls  
 Notable aspects: memorable characters, humor, significant underlying ideas, writing style

Walt Whitman's verse, baseball lore, the preparation of a town historical pageant that just might dash hopes for the annual baseball game, and the death of a mysterious resident fuel this non-stop humorous slice of small-town life. Kids with gumption, like sister Honey (who is a humdinger!) and bossy, overblown 14-year-old pageant director Frances, and a whole baseball team almost in revolt, pull together with creativity and hope to spur on this story that is enthralling from beginning to end! House learns that growing up comes from a dog to love, a little sister to protect, a loving father, and the pain of missing his

(Review of **The Aurora County All-Stars**, continued)

Mom, who has died. Partly because of his best friend's betrayal he also learns about the symphony words can create, "written or spoken or sung." Witty, wise, and wonderful, this story is a homerun and a "symphony true."

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 10

*Additional review of **The Aurora County All-Stars**:*

Core audience: 10 and up

Notable aspects: Baseball, poetry, Walt Whitman, death, ballet, small-towns, the American South

Like Wiles's previous books, this one flows like a symphony, sweet and true, with its heartwarming story of a small-town boy, a stranger who befriends him, and the legacy he leaves behind. This tale filled with wisdom, humor, grime, and grace should appeal equally to baseball fans, ballerinas, and the parents of both.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8.5

*Additional rating of **The Aurora County All-Stars**:*

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine — Fun southern fiction that will appeal to boys & girls.

Rating: 8

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**Benjamin Dove**, by Fridrick Erlings

978-0735821491 / \$7.95

North-South Books

September 2007

Core audience: 9 to 13

Notable aspects: Characterization, boy point of view, child-centered

This is a book about boy friendships and the good and bad power of camaraderie. Life-long friends Benjamin (age 12), Jeff (age 12), and Manny (age 9), and Roland, the new kid in the neighborhood whom they befriend, are feeling helpless after an encounter with a bully and the revenge that follows. They decide to stand together as friends and become Knights in the Order of the Red Dragon with the slogan "I fight for justice, against injustice." Unfortunately, the goals of the four boys are not the same: Jeff wants to fight and win rather than to do good deeds so he splits from the group and helps form the Order of the Black Feather. This fast-paced book explores both the good and bad avenues used to obtain justice. Some events are predictable, some just too good to be true, and some evil actions have disturbingly devastating consequences. *Benjamin Dove* is a good, quality book to keep boys interested and aid them in exploring friendship issues.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 8

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**The Black Book of Secrets**, by F. E. Higgins

978-0312368449 / \$14.95

Feiwel / Holtzbrinck

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 8-12; more appealing to boys; some girls would like it as well

Notable aspects: suspenseful, satisfying ending, interesting twists

In the City, which is dirty and dangerous, young Ludlow Fitch survives by picking pockets and petty thievery. His parents are drunkards and villains who care little for Ludlow beyond the income he brings them. When he realizes that his parents are delivering him to a local “dentist” to whom they’ve sold Ludlow’s teeth (They will have to be wrenched from his jaw first, of course!), Ludlow fights and flees. He clings to the back of a carriage leaving the city and escapes, undiscovered by the coach’s passenger. Hours later, when the coach finally stops, Ludlow finds himself in Pagus Parvus, a poor, tiny, remote village perched on a steep mountainside. Jeremiah Ratchet, on whose coach Ludlow has ridden, is the richest man in the village. He protects his wealth jealously and keeps the village under his thumb.

Another newcomer to the village that night is the mysterious Joe Zabbidou. He finds an empty shop at the edge of the village near the top of the hill, and begins to settle in. He unpacks many interesting objects from his traveling bag. Into a glass tank, the man places a beautifully colored frog that had been traveling in a small drawstring bag. Caught spying by the strange man, Ludlow is invited in and treated kindly. Unlike most urchins from the city, Ludlow can read and write. (His one friend in the City, a pawnbroker named Lembart Jellico, had taught him.) Zabbidou, too, is a pawnbroker... a secret pawnbroker, though Ludlow doesn’t yet understand what that means. When Joe offers him a job, Ludlow accepts. In the morning, curious villagers gather round the pawnshop. Asked if the frog is for sale, Joe says “No.” Saluki is his companion.

Down the hill, Jeremiah Ratchet wakes in a foul mood. Of course, he is always in a foul mood. The hubbub up the hill only adds to Ratchet’s distemper. As he makes his way up the hill, the villagers shrink away from him. Face to face with Joe, Ratchet informs him that the pawnshop is not welcome or needed in Pagus Parvus. “You’ll get no business here. You’re not needed. These people own nothing of worth... I should know; most of them owe me back rent.” But Joe is not your typical pawnbroker. In addition to the regular goods of a pawnbroker, he buys people’s secrets. Ludlow’s job is to record their stories in “Joe’s Black Book of Secrets.” In the dark of night, one by one, the villagers come to Joe’s shop and exchange their guiltiest secrets for purses full of coins. More money than they have ever seen, enough money for them to pay their debts to Jeremiah Ratchet and be free of his control. Jeremiah Ratchet has some hold over each of them and they each fantasize to Joe about exacting a glorious revenge. Joe assures each of them that Ratchet will get his just reward if they simply wait. Ratchet, of course, guesses where the townspeople are getting the money. He’s furious that he’s losing income. He is furious that he is losing control of his village.

Then comes the day the villagers begin to question Joe and his motives. He knows the worst about them; what might he do with that knowledge? Blackmail them like Ratchet does? To their minds, he has not delivered on his “promises” to make Jeremiah Ratchet pay for his greed and meanness. Of course, he has made no such promise to any of them; he has simply advised them to wait. “*Vincit qui patitur*. ... Who waits, wins.” Ludlow is afraid but Joe simply waits. Finally, Jeremiah Ratchet arrives at Joe’s door late one night asking to unburden his soul. Ever the villain though, Ratchet intends to steal the “Black Book of Secrets.” He lunges at Ludlow and then struggles with Joe for possession of the book. When he can’t wrest the book from Joe, Ratchet grabs the frog, Saluki, and threatens her life. Joe surrenders the book to Ratchet. Safely home before his fire, Ratchet pores over the book, gloating. “My fortune is made.... There’s secrets in this book I couldn’t even have guessed.” But Ratchet is not feeling well. His palms are

(Review of **The Black Book of Secrets**, continued)

burning from where he held the frog, Saluki. His breathing is becoming labored. His limbs are going numb. By the time Ludlow emerges from the shadows to take back the book, which has fallen to the floor, Ratchet cannot stop him. He can barely croak an answer to the question, “Who has done this to you?” Ratchet’s answer upsets the boy.

Back at the pawnshop, Ludlow realizes that Joe is leaving and is suddenly hesitant to accompany him. He’d believed in Joe and his new belief that Joe is a murderer has shaken him. A last confession from a Pagus Parvusian finally convinces Ludlow of Joe’s innocence and so they leave the village. Joe Zabbidou takes Ludlow into the mountains into a cave that tunnels deep into the mountain. This is Joe’s true home, he says. There everything is finally explained to Ludlow. He sees the three sisters who are the Fates. He sees the thousands of books stored in the underground tunnels. He is reunited with his friend Lembart Jellico. And he receives his own “Black Book of Secrets.” For the time being, Ludlow will continue to work with Joe, The Secret Pawnbroker, as his apprentice. Eventually, Ludlow will take the job himself.

Ellen Richmond, Children’s Book Cellar

Rating: 6

*Additional rating of **The Black Book of Secrets**:*

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7

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**The Book of a Thousand Days**, by Shannon Hale

978-1599900513 / \$17.95

Bloomsbury

October 2007

Core audience: Girls, 11+

Notable aspects: Settings, characters, historical value

Seven years is a very long time, especially in a young life, to commit to loyally following your mistress into a dark tower for seven years. But, Dashti, maid to Lady Saren, is a larger-than-life kind of girl. Life in a bricked-up tower is surprisingly busy for Dashti, what with killing rats, cooking, keeping a journal, and communicating with her lady's suitors through a brick wall (her lady refuses to communicate with them herself). It eventually becomes clear to Dashti that they will die if they don't escape, and she manages this as well. They then begin an odyssey that eventually determines each of their fates. I thought this book was a wonderful blend of fairy tale, historical fiction, and magical realism. The historical background is well researched, and the characters are interesting and lively.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **The Book of a Thousand Days**:*

This is the diary of Dashti, a lady’s maid who has promised to accompany her mistress becoming locked in a tower for seven years for refusing to marry her father’s choice. Dashti has a gift, the ability to heal pain through song, but will that be enough to help her and her mistress survive? Dashti is an enormous heroine full of courage though not without the ability to express her fears. The world she inhabits, The Eight Realms, is a mythical imagining of medieval Mongolia; a full and lush setting that wonderfully combines fantasies of once-upon-a-time with characters you feel you could meet today. The quality of Shannon Hale’s writing continues to amaze me. —Lori Kauffman, Brookline Booksmith Rating: 9

*Additional rating of **The Book of a Thousand Days:***

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 8

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**Boy Toy**, by Barry Lyga

978-0618723935 / \$16.95

Houghton Mifflin

September 2007

Core audience: teens, 14-15 and up

It is very possible that had I stuck with it, this book would prove to be very good, even useful. But after 1/3 of it, I quit. It seemed too slow moving, with too many illusions to 'what happened' and too much beating around the bush. I think it is an important and obviously real subject, and I wish I had wanted to read the whole book.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books

no rating

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**Bullyville**, by Francine Prose

978-0060574970 / \$16.99

HarperCollins / Harperteen

September 2007

Core audience: 12+ years, especially boys

Notable aspects: realistic character development -- especially between main and his mom, readability, current issues of bullying and 9/11 aftermath

This is the story of a seventh-grader named Bart, whose father died in the Twin Towers on 9/11 and whose mother 'should have died' as well, except that she was home from work because Bart was sick in bed. The media loves this and he becomes known far and wide as the 'miracle boy.' What no one else knows is that Bart's dad had actually moved out six months earlier to shack up with a young, beautiful co-worker. (The author makes some attempts to explore the messiness of grieving, but I was disappointed with the mostly missed opportunity here.) Bart is offered a full scholarship to a very prestigious local private school with a reputation for producing bullies, and he reluctantly agrees to go in order to make his mom happy. The majority of the story is about his experiences being bullied—and his struggles to come to terms with his own loss and grief.

I liked the relationship between Bart and his mom, and thought it was very accurate. And I think Bart's solitary struggles with his dad's death and with being bullied were not overplayed. However, way too much of the book is spent foreshadowing how awful his year at "Bullyville" ends up being, rather than on the actual plot. The best part of this book is the subplot in which he befriends a young girl in a local hospital, but it's honestly not enough to carry the book.

Gretchen Baker-Smith, Baker Books

Rating: 6

*Additional rating of **Bullyville:***

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine — Though I only got half-way through this one before my attention was drawn elsewhere, I enjoyed what I did read. Intense emotional rollercoaster.

Rating: 8

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**Camel Rider**, by Prue Mason  
 978-1580893145 / \$15.95  
 Charlesbridge  
 July 2007

Core audience: boys 9-13  
 Notable aspects: Cross-cultural communication, characters, action

Though a little slow to start, once this story hits the road, the action is non-stop. The plot: Adam, an eleven-year-old Australian boy, manages to cut himself loose from family travel plans in the ex-patriot compound of a fictional Arabian oil sheikhdom. At the same time, a Bangladeshi boy, Walid, sold into slavery as a camel jockey, offends his master. The master binds Walid hand and foot and leaves him to die in a mountainside cave. That's when the war begins. The two boys meet and their great escape (and recapture and escape and recapture and escape) proceeds. The brilliant thing about the book is that Adam knows no Bengali and only a handful of Arabic words. Walid knows no English and only a bit of Arabic. Both boys are filled with prejudice against each other's ethnic groups. Yet they manage to work through one misunderstood action after another, survive in extreme conditions, and high five one another with big grins when they reach safety and security at last.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins & BookStream

Rating: 8.5

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**Candyfloss**, by Jacqueline Wilson  
 978-1596432413 / \$14.95  
 Roaring Brook  
 September 2007

Core audience: preteen girls  
 Notable aspects: character, humor, relationship issues dealt with sensitively  
 (Review of **Candyfloss**, continued)

When her stepfather is transferred from England to Australia for six months, Floss decides to stay with her down-on-his-luck father instead of going to her mom's glitzy new home. Dad has a heart of gold and some quirky friends but little else. At the core of the story is Floss' switch from her catty, privileged friends to being best friends with a creative classmate the others make fun of, thereby becoming the object of their nastiness herself. There are lots of wonderful heart-warming moments and, at the end, a somewhat hopeful outlook for Dad's future. Written in a "breezy" style, with lots of humor, the story moves right along. Preteens will see themselves in this book and learn a few things about what is really important in life.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

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**Carpe Diem**, by Autumn Cornwell  
 978-0312367923 / \$16.95  
 Feiwel & Friends / Holtzbrinck  
 August 2007

(Review of **Carpe Diem**, continued)

Core audience: Ages 14 & up

Notable aspects: memorable characters, unique setting, intergenerational relationships, other-country authenticity, teen appeal, significant underlying ideas, friendship

Refreshingly told; I couldn't get enough of Vassar Spore's story. What starts out as an over-achiever's tale soon finds our Advanced Placement heroine leaving behind her Honor's Latin friends and visiting a new country to accompany her grandma, of all people. And what a hoot this old lady turns out to be. I enjoyed their intergenerational banter, as well as the not-so-typical boy-next-door romance. As they move from country to country, Cornwell manages to sneak in a plethora of travel tips. You can tell she's "Been There, Done That and Has the T-shirt to Prove It." Clearly, this book is a way to use her past experiences in a way that will entertain others. It's especially noteworthy for those of us not lucky enough to do so much traveling.

I would highly recommend this to a teen looking for something a little different than her usual reading. If it makes teens think for even a millisecond that the world is bigger than they first imagined, and that a stellar GPA is not the only thing worth striving for, then I say that's all the proof you need that the written word is powerful indeed.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**The Chaos Code**, by Justin Richards

978-1599901244 / \$16.95

Bloomsbury

October 2007

Core audience: 10 and up, both guys and girls

Notable aspects: Fast-paced adventure with a science/archaeology hook. Interesting combination of archaeology, legend, computer technology.....Atlantis, golems, computers, knights of the Crusades, and lost cities in the Amazon. Well-plotted, with twists and turns to keep the reader intrigued.

Think Michael Crichton, Douglas Preston, Lincoln Child, or James Rollins for kids. *The Chaos Code* is a rollicking adventure that's hard to put down. Matt Stribling plans to spend his school holiday with his mother, but she's off on an important business trip and has arranged for him to stay with his eccentric archaeologist father instead. When Matt arrives at his father's cottage, he discovers the house ransacked and his father missing. A cryptic message from his father warns Matt "to worry if you don't hear from me" and tells him to go stay with his Aunt Jane. She is pleased to see Matt, but is busy as the personal assistant/estate manager for Julius Venture, a wealthy businessman and academic. So, while Aunt Jane works, Matt explores the museum-like mansion and meets Robin, Julius Venture's daughter. Again, Matt has an uneasy feeling; the elements seem to take on a threatening nature, almost as if they are alive.

Enter Atticus Harper, another eccentric millionaire, who hires Venture to help find the lost treasure of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem which is rumored to contain not only vast riches, but also the wisdom of the ancients. Harper reveals that Arnold Stribling, Matt's father, had been working for him and was getting close to finding the treasure before his disappearance. Julius, Matt, and Robin agree to help Harper, hoping to find Matt's father in the process. Deep in the jungle of the Amazon, in an ancient pyramid, Atticus Harper has built a high tech headquarters. Julius, Robin and Matt accompany him to his hidden stronghold from which they continue the search. Using the research left by Matt's father, they

(Review of **The Chaos Code**, continued)

recover the treasure, but discover that the treasure itself isn't the ultimate objective: Harper's goal is world domination. A relic from the treasure, a metal disc with strange symbolic writing, is one of two keys needed to unleash the power of another, more ancient site beneath the pyramid. With a powerful computer system and some mysticism from lost civilizations, Harper has already attained some power to manipulate earth, wind, water and fire. With the disks, he'll possess an ancient mechanism to control the elements and, therefore, the world. In a rousing, fast paced conclusion, the teens (aided by Julius Venture and both Matt's father and mother) thwart Harper's plan and save the world.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: strong 7

*Additional rating for **The Chaos Code**:*

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

Rating: 8.5

\* \* \*

**The Charioteer of Delphi**, by Caroline Lawrence

978-1596430853 / \$16.95

Roaring Brook / Holtzbrinck

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 10-13, both girls and boys (especially those with an interest in history/archaeology)  
Notable aspects: great history lesson in the guise of a mystery; strong, spunky girl, and boy, characters

This is the twelfth book in the Roman Mysteries series. I've read several of the early volumes and this is a nice continuation. In the series, a group of young friends keeps finding adventure, stumbling onto mysteries. Flavia is the daughter of a sea captain of some means. Jonathan is a secret Christian. Nubia is a former slave whom Flavia freed. Lupus, who is mute, was a beggar. In this story, Flavia and her friends are drawn into a mystery that involves stolen racehorses, rivalry, revenge, double crosses, and the excitement of the chariot races at Circus Maximus. A champion horse has disappeared. The children soon find it, but the mystery deepens. During races, "accidents" occur. Drivers are being hurt and killed in these accidents. Chariots have been sabotaged. There's danger and suspense and the kids find themselves right in the middle of it all. Like the other books in this series, *The Charioteer of Delphi* finishes with a glossary of Roman terms and a historical note. Educational and entertaining... a great mix.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7 (good book, but a tough sell in hardcover)

\* \* \*

**Chasing Tail Lights**, by Patrick Jones

978-0802796288 / \$16.95

Walker Books for Young Readers

August 2007

Core audience: Girls 14 and up

Notable aspects: Strong, believable voice for main character; gritty realism

*Chasing Tail Lights* is well written, powerful, edgy; it is not a fun read. Christy Mallory, a senior in high school, is just marking time until graduation so she can hit the road—away from Flint, away from her

(Review of **Chasing Tail Lights**, continued)

family. Her father is dead. She lives with her alcoholic mother, her (older) half-brother Ryan, her brother Mitchell, and her niece Bree. Another half-brother, Robert, is in prison for murder, which is why his daughter lives with Christy's family. Her best friend, Anne, is as privileged as Christy is not. Anne is going to go to college to become a doctor like her father; Christy simply hopes to get away. From a highway overpass, they watch cars zipping down the highway and fantasize where they might be going. Christy's father used to call this "chasing tail lights."

Christy has reason to want to escape. Despite the encouragement from one of her teachers at school, her schoolwork suffers because of her home life. She feels unattractive, so she gets into some awkward situations, both dangerous and embarrassing. She's being forced by her half-brother to carry drugs and cash for him. He is sexually abusing her, as well. One ray of hope is her job at the library and the boy she meets there. Another is her cousin Tommy, who helps convince her that she deserves better. Finally, Christy musters her strength and defies Ryan: she turns him in to the police and tells them about the drugs and how he has abused her. She doesn't tell the police that he has also molested his niece, Bree. She knows that he will be sentenced to the same prison that Robert is in. With a plea bargain, Ryan is sentenced to a year in prison. Anne is horrified and asks Christy, "Doesn't it bother you that he'll be out in a year?" Christy answers, "He won't." Finally, Christy envisions her letter to Robert making its way to him in prison. "I imagine this is the mail truck carrying the letter I wrote my convicted stone-cold killer brother Robert, describing what his future prison-mate Ryan did to his daughter. I'm not dreaming; I'm planning." Ouch...not something I'll stock here in central Maine.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 5

\* \* \*

**The Chicken Dance**, by Jacques Couvillon

978-159990438 / \$16.95

Bloomsbury

September 2007

Core audience: Ages 11-14, both boys and girls

Notable aspects: Child centered viewpoint, humor, strong ending

Don (or Stanley) is twelve years old and not too sharp – but he's trying hard. It was difficult to stick with him through thirty-three chapters of dogged existence in the face of a mean and unreasonable mother who's having a love affair, an inert father, a sleazy local merchant, a bully-turned-pal, an idealized dead sister, and a few personal quirks. Along about chapter fifteen I began to suspect that the sister wasn't dead, but it was a long wait until chapters thirty-four and thirty-five explained the family secret and why Don is really Stanley. The thing that rings so true in the book is Don's childish viewpoint of what's going on. He refuses to condemn his awful parents, believes their lame excuses, tries and succeeds at an impossible mission, nearly steals money but foils himself, saves the life of a diseased chicken, and forever hopes things will work out. They don't, and won't. That makes it a tough sell in a bookstore, but a book librarians can and should put into the hands of many, many kids whose families are lurching and coming apart.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 7

*Additional rating of **The Chicken Dance** from Sue Carita, Toadstool Bookshop* Rating: 6

\* \* \*

**Clarice Bean, Don't Look Now**, by Lauren Child

978-0763635367 / \$15.99

Candlewick Press

September 2007

Core audience: 8 and up

Notable aspects: friendship, moving, girl spies

Once again Clarice relies on the lessons she's learned from Ruby Redfort (her favorite fictional girl spy) to help her cope with life's worries. In this, her third adventure, her number-one worry is a big one: what to do when her best friend moves away. Quirky, funny, perfect for the third- and fourth-grade set.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 7

*Additional review of Clarice Bean, Don't Look Now:*

Core audience: 8-12

Notable aspects: memorable characters, third book in a popular series, humor, bit of a mystery, unique use of email communication and illustrations, dealing with moving and divorce

A new *Clarice Bean* is cause for celebration in our house. Whatever we're reading aloud at night is hurriedly set aside, bookmark firmly in place, so that we can catch up with our favorite girl "spy wannabe." Ahh, but we were a wee bit disappointed this time out. I should have known from the moment Clarice starts keeping a Worst Worry journal that this would be a bit more somber than the other two books in this series. We read it aloud each night from beginning to end, and were quite saddened when Betty Moody moved away, and worried with Clarice when she thought her parents might be divorcing. There are some funny bits sprinkled throughout. The idea of the hole in the bathroom floor that allowed you to see straight into the kitchen made us laugh each time that it was mentioned. And though the family members were just as quirky as always and their adventures just as chaotic, we missed all the silly illustrations that normally accompany Clarice. You should certainly let your *Clarice* fans know a new book has been published, but don't be surprised if they come back looking for another installment to cheer them up. Note to Lauren Child: Charlie and Lola might be adored, but it's Clarice Bean we truly clamor for.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, VT

Rating: 7

\* \* \*

**Click: One Novel, Ten Authors**, by David Almond, Eoin Colfer, Roddy Doyle, Deborah Ellis, Nick

Hornby, Margo Lanagan, Gregory Maguire, Ruth Ozeki, Linda Sue Park &amp; Tim Wynne-Jones

978-0439411387 / \$16.99

Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic

September 2007

Core audience: 12 and up

Notable aspects: unique story style, multiple writing styles

George Keane, known as "Gee" to his family and friends, was a photojournalist. After Gee's death, his granddaughter receives a box of shells with the message "Mags, throw them all back. Gee." By the

(Review of **Click**, continued)

alphabet code on the back of the shells she realizes she has to travel to the different oceans around the world to throw them back — her grandfather gave her a reason to explore the world. Jason, Maggie's brother, receives autographed celebrity photos that lead him to become a photographer. Each chapter of the book is written by a different author; some about Gee, some about Maggie, some about Jason and some connecting the shells to Gee's life story. All the chapters connect in that they are about the people Gee encountered and how they now affect his grandchildren.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**A Crooked Kind of Perfect**, by Linda Urban

978-0152060077 / \$16.00

Harcourt

September 2007

Core audience: Ages 8-12

Notable aspects: Kid connected, funny, characters with quirks

Imagine dreaming of one day playing a grand piano at Carnegie Hall, only to be sent to the local senior center, presented with a perforated piece of cardboard imprinted with a piano keyboard, and taught piano via the silent "More is Les" method! After six weeks of this, ten-year-old Zoe Elias is still dreaming of a concert career when her agoraphobic father buys her the Perfectone D-60, an electric organ which comes with six months of free lessons with Mabelline Persahhhhn. Still undaunted, she works with what she has and makes her way to perform at the Perfectone Perform-o-rama. A fun, fast-moving story that will resonate with anyone who has ever wished for the chance (or been forced) to take music lessons!

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **A Crooked Kind of Perfect**:*

Core audience: Ages 9-12, more girls than boys

Notable aspects:: Characters, plot, family dynamics, humor, language, sense of music, strong ending

Some books simply ring true, and this is one of those rare, precious finds — by a former bookseller, no less! Main character Zoe Eliot is an almost-eleven-year-old who thinks she might be a piano prodigy if she only had a piano. Instead, she has a cut-rate Perfectone organ, a father who's agoraphobic, and a mother whose professional demands allow little time and emotional contact. But imperfect as Zoe, her parents, and her classmate Wheeler happen to be, they're all trying hard to be better. Each tries to keep some perspective in a wacky world, and to help each other in such ways as they can. Urban is brilliant at gently parodying advertising language, contemporary suburbia, and unquenchable aspirations.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 9

*Additional review of A Crooked Kind of Perfect:*

Notable aspects: Humor, Music

This book features some of the funniest, freshest, snappiest writing I've ever read. Truly. I was charmed by every word of it and will continue to be so, as this book is one I can already tell I will be reading and re-reading, again and again. There are so many delightful surprises on these pages, so many unexpectedly moving moments, so many remarks that make me laugh out loud. I'm not sure how Linda Urban managed to pack so much charm into so few pages, but bless her for doing so, because this book has easily made it to my list of all-time favorites, and I intend to give copies to almost everyone I know!

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 10

*Additional rating for A Crooked Kind of Perfect:*

Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 9

\* \* \*

**Deadline**, by Chris Crutcher  
978-006085089 / \$16.99  
Greenwillow / HarperCollins  
September 2007

Core audience: Ages 14 & up

Notable aspects: Interesting premise well executed

In *Deadline*, eighteen year old Ben has just been told he has an incurable, terminal disease. As if that isn't YA cliché enough, his mother is insane, his girlfriend was raped by her uncle and bore the child at age thirteen and he makes the season defining catch on his small town football team even though he is less than five feet tall and weighs less than 130 pounds. This blithe summary makes the book sound ridiculous but in Crutcher's reliable hands it is anything but. No need to suspend disbelief, we are carried along on the tide of event and emotion toward what we fervently hope could be a happy ending.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8

*Additional review of Deadline:*

Core audience: Teenagers; would appeal equally to boys as well as girls.

Notable aspects: A very interesting plot device that holds the reader's attention throughout, without veering into the overly sentimental.

Ben discovers he has a terminal illness, and because he's eighteen, he chooses to tell no one and not get treatment. The reader never once shouts, "You idiot, get treatment." Instead, we're left thinking about the desire to be treated normally even in the face of death and we see that once the decision is made, there is a lot of freedom and courage to be found. Teen angst is brought to a different level. Ben is extremely funny and his doctor-mandated therapy sessions are often hilarious. A thoroughly enjoyable book that packs a very sad wallop at the end.

Josie Leavitt, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8.5

*Additional review of **Deadline**:*

Notable aspects: Smart writing about rich characters filled with humor, sports, eternal questions and quests.

Chris Crutcher's background as a writer, an athlete, and a social worker have never coalesced so well as in *Deadline*. When Ben Wolf learns he has a terminal illness, he decides to fight it in his own way...by doing nothing. In the process of keeping his own secret, he unwittingly enables others around him to reveal secrets of their own, some more publicly than others. Despite one chapter where I was lost in the analysis football plays, the sports part of the book was a powerful way of keeping Ben's determination going. I loved the interactions between Ben and his brother (and best friend) Cody and with his Coach. Also very moving were the relationships with the girl of his dreams and with the loner garage mechanic no one understands. Ben has the typical Crutcher character's attitude and smarts mixed with humor and empathy for others. When "the time" finally comes, we are moved to tears, but smile knowing that Ben did make a big difference in his little town (pop. 943).

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 8.5

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**The Declaration**, by Gemma Malley

978-1599901190 / \$16.95

Bloomsbury

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 10-14; fans of *Among the Hidden*, *Turnabout*, and other urban fantasies

Notable aspects: Interesting premise, well-drawn suspense

In the near future, scientists have developed a drug called Longevity that allows people to live forever. Of course, this messes up population patterns, and the only way to have a child legally is to sign papers opting out of Longevity--in essence, promising a life for a life. Illegal children are tracked down, captured, and brought up brainwashed in viciously repressive orphanages. Considered parasites (because they use up resources they aren't legally entitled to), these Surpluses' best hope is to become "Valuable Assets," i.e., servants to the legal population. Anna, a perfectly trained Surplus, has reached the coveted Pending status — the stage prior to leaving the orphanage for a permanent work assignment. And then a stranger comes to town: a defiant new Surplus teen named Peter who claims to know Anna's parents and says he wants to help her escape. This is the beginning of a dangerous journey for Anna, which gathers momentum and urgency over the course of the book. Confused, Anna's world begins to crumble around her as she re-evaluates everything she's been brought up to believe, discovering sinister secrets about the true fates of Surpluses, and developing a new sense of self.

We've seen aspects of this premise before (for instance, in Margaret Peterson Haddix's Shadow Children series), but *The Declaration* is still a suspenseful page-turner. There's just something about books featuring corrupt dystopian societies that resonates with today's readers. Note: some of the details of cruelty in the orphanage are vivid enough that I'd hesitate before handing this to a reader on the younger — or more sensitive — end of the recommended age spectrum.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 7

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**Diamonds in the Shadow**, by Caroline Cooney

978-0385732611 / \$15.00

Delacorte / Random House

September 2007

Core audience: Ages 12-14, both boys and girls

Notable aspects: Compelling plot, characters, refugee resettlement issue

Cooney has done an outstanding job bringing readers right into the Connecticut kitchen where African refugees meet a middle-class American family. It is the American boy, self-centered, selfish Jared, who first figures out that the African “family” is actually unrelated individuals, and that the boxed “ancestral ashes” have a special ingredient: raw blood diamonds. But Jared and his family don’t suspect what all four Africans know with deathly certainty: there is another refugee, an experienced, merciless killer who will stop at nothing to regain the diamonds they have been forced to carry. This makes for a thrilling plot that’s hard for anyone to put down, though the melodramatic ending is more suitable for a juvenile audience. The characters and their motives are each so distinctive that the story is easy to follow, and there’s just enough humor to maintain contrast with the menace that draws closer and closer.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins &amp; BookStream

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**Disguised: A Wartime Memoir**, by Rita la Fontaine de Clercq Zubli

978-0763633295 / \$17.99

Candlewick Press

September 2007

Core audience: 13 and up

Notable aspects: WWII Indonesia, Japanese POW camps, war, disguise

Rita’s story is a remarkable one. Not only did she pose as a boy during the three and a half years in which WWII overshadowed life in her native Indonesia, she did so while working right under the noses of the Japanese government, sometimes even advocating on behalf of the women and children in her POW camps. “Rick” was so resourceful, determined, hard-working and intelligent no one suspected that when the war began “he” had been a twelve-year-old girl wearing dresses.

What’s noteworthy about Rita’s memoir of these experiences is the clear, honest way she presents the sequence of events in her life, and her uncanny ability to recall the nuanced emotions of her adolescence. This is a remarkable, inspiring story that will lend itself especially well to middle-school- and high-school-aged book discussion groups.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **Disguised**:*

Core audience: Teen girls, teen boys into history

Notable aspects: strong female character, history told at a very personal, direct level

*Disguised* is the author’s memoir of how she survived WWII and the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. Twelve-year-old Rita la Fontaine lived on Sumatra with her family: her parents, an aunt, and two younger brothers. In 1942, the Japanese invaded Indonesia and, one by one, the individual islands were occupied.

(Additional review of *Disguised*, continued)

Because Rita's mother was sickly and very weak, the family stayed behind when most of their neighbors evacuated as the Japanese approached. When their capture seemed imminent, fearing that their daughter would be taken as a "comfort woman," Rita's parents transformed her into "Rick," their oldest son. As Rick, Rita survived three-and-a-half years as a prisoner of war. The adult men were held in one camp, while the women and children were imprisoned elsewhere. Briefly, the family was reunited and given a bit a freedom, a small house outside the confines of the camps. The Japanese expected Rick, nearly thirteen now, to work to help support the family. He was given an office job where he learned to speak fluent Japanese.

During this brief respite, Rick's mother died. Less than a week later, his father was taken away. Soon, Rick, his aunt, and his brothers were taken back into custody as well. Conditions in the camp were harsh. Because Rick was fluent in Japanese, he was given a job in the camp commandant's office and allowed some level of privilege. He and his aunt and brothers were moved several times to different camps as the Japanese occupation became less and less secure. Prisoners were packed into buses with covered windows and driven for days in intolerable heat, over muddy, rutted roads to more isolated locations. Food was scarce. Disease was rampant. Deaths occurred daily. Finally, in September, 1945, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been bombed and the war lost, the Japanese simply opened the camps. Rick became Rita again, to the amazement of her captors and many of her fellow prisoners. The family was reunited, but Rita's father was very ill and was taken to a rehabilitation center for treatment. Rita, her aunt, and her brothers were relocated to the city of Palembang where they were assigned a house and helped to get settled. As soon as he was well enough, her father joined them.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7

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**Dragonhaven**, by Robin McKinley

978-0399246753 / \$17.99

Putnam / Penguin

September 20, 2007

Core audience: Teens with fantasy or science leanings

Notable aspects: Political allegory, detailed descriptions of dragon intelligence

Robin McKinley, well-regarded reteller of Arthurian legends and other folklore, turns her attention to a different subject and a more modern setting in *Dragonhaven*. *Dragonhaven* is also known as The Smokehill National Park, in which The Makepeace Institute of Integrated Dragon Studies is housed. Dragons are essentially a highly regulated endangered species around which a political battle has been raging. Considered too dangerous and expensive to protect, or even to exist, by much of the public, but considered vitally worthy of study and protection by scientists and the liberal-minded, the scope for allegory here is as large as an adult dragon. *Dragonhaven* is in fact a rather self-conscious and allegorical fantasy. The story is narrated by Jake, a young man whose father is a scientist at the Makepeace Institute. Jake is politically and emotionally aligned with Makepeace's mission. One of the reasons for studying dragons is that no one knows whether or not Dragons are intelligent.

No reader expecting Jake to "mindmerge" with a baby dragon, discover that they are highly intelligent, learn their language, and swing the political pendulum back towards center with his discovery, will be disappointed. McKinley seeks to overcome the predictability and familiarity of the plot by exploring dragon-human communication at great length. Yet for all its tried-and-true ingredients, mindmerged

(Review of **Dragonhaven**, continued)

friendships with dragons, saving the day by discovering dragon intelligence, and convincing the world that there are Whos down in Whoville, a group of kids who break ground that their highly educated adult counterparts have failed to break, a love story forged amidst adventure, a new batch of dragon babies, and the realization that "us humans have sure messed up a lot of stuff but we haven't quite finished the job so maybe we can unmess a little. Maybe with some help from dragons," *Dragonhaven* never quite catches fire. Jake feels a bit too consciously constructed as a narrator, and the story lacks the conviction and wonder which would have transcended its predictability. It will do fairly well, just on the strength of its dragonness and McKinley's established name, but I don't think kids will fall in love with it.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 7

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**Dussie**, by Nancy Springer

978-0802796493 / \$16.95

Walker & Co.

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 10+

Originally published as part of the short-story collection "Half-Human," Nancy Springer brings to life the niece of a well-known character from Greek myth. Puberty brings changes that are hard on anyone, but when your hair turns into a nest of living snakes, it gives new meaning to the phrase "bad hair day." Dussie discovers the truth about her birth, the human father she never knew, and the family secret that threatens to destroy her chance at a normal life.

Being a big fan of both Greek Mythology and the "twisted classic" genre, I liked this story when it was part of the collection. Now that it is flushed out into a full-length book of its own, I love it even more. For fans of this book, look for a new novel in January from Scholastic called *Medusa Jones*.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 7.5

\* \* \*

**Eclipse**, by Stephenie Meyer

978-0316160209 / \$18.99

Little, Brown Young Readers

August 2007

Core audience: Ages 13+

Notable aspects: ambiance, memorable characters, sets the standard for teen yearning and lovesickness; particularly notable for evoking romance and sex without actually portraying sex (i.e., the opposite of series like *Gossip Girls*)

*Eclipse* is the third book in Stephenie Meyers' juggernaut of a teen series featuring vampires and werewolves, sacrifice and revenge, possible damnation, endless romance and eternal love. Bella is a Washington state teenager who falls in love with a gorgeous, kind, patient, protective (and controlling) Edward — a vampire who has repudiated drinking human blood, and instead survives on animals. Throughout the books, Edward struggles with his intense reaction to Bella; her blood "sings" to him, and

(Review of **Eclipse**, continued)

he is in danger of losing control around her. When their romance blossoms, his self-control is severely tested. Bella's friend, Jacob, on the other hand, is a sunny boy gives her a sense of solidity and warmth. His crush on her takes a difficult turn when he turns into a werewolf, part of a generations-old legend of his Native American tribe that pits wolves against vampires in deadly enmity. The love triangle heats up in *Eclipse* when Jacob makes his feelings known and he and Edward vie for Bella's heart. But they must set aside their conflict in order to stop a rampaging set of newbie vampires intent slaughtering people in Seattle and destroying Bella. Jacob, Bella, and Edward take turns making sacrifices for one another, and there is a lot of jawline kissing and being-pulled-toward-chests on all sides. The three teens make deals and break their hearts like crazy. The end of *Eclipse* leads readers eagerly toward the next book.

Are there some passages that induce eye-rolling in this 43-year-old reader?\* Perhaps. But Meyer does a beautiful job capturing the intensity and longing of young love, the heady romance and dance around sex that pretty much obsesses most teens, and she is clever enough to pay homage openly to her predecessors (Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, for one). *Eclipse* also addresses some critics' most major complaints: for instance, I would argue that both Bella's passivity and Edward's paternal controlling behavior shift subtly but surely over the course of *Eclipse*.

\* My pet peeves: the frequent scenes of Bella fervently and repeatedly asserting her wish to sacrifice herself, even to die in order to save this or that character from pain or harm. Also, the scenes where Jacob and Edward want nothing besides Bella's happiness -- and I mean, nothing; it's all they think about, constantly, the sum total of what they want, even if her happiness precludes their own, even if it means that they will suffer for eternity. But this is fantasy; why not let the girl revel in it? Meyer is good enough that I can let my skepticism go and enjoy the story almost as readily as a fifteen-year-old girl.

Elizabeth Bluemle, Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8.5  
(likely a solid 9.5 to its fan base)

\* \* \*

**Edward's Eyes**, by Patricia MacLachlan  
978-1416927433 / \$15.99  
Simon & Schuster / Atheneum  
September 2007

Core audience: Ages 8+

Newbery-award-winner Patricia MacLachlan returns with a touching portrait of a unique young boy through the eyes of his older brother. Jake knew something was special about Edward from the first time he saw him. A precocious child who reads French & can play baseball better than kids twice his age, Edward manages to light up the room with his mere presence. During the course of one fateful summer though, Jake learns that you can't always save the ones you love.

Sad to say, I didn't love this one. I found the relationship between Edward & Jake (really the whole family) not believable. Perhaps if the book had been set in the 1960's, I would understand the awe Jake had for his younger brother but I just don't know that many kids who are that obsessed with their younger siblings. This is one I'd love to hear other opinions on.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer Bookazine

Rating: 6.5

*Additional review of **Edward's Eyes**:*

Core audience: New Yorker readers

Notable aspects:: Brevity

The emperor is very scantily attired. The plot: little brother Edward, who had lovely blue eyes and adored his baby sister, died when his bike hit a tree. It takes 116 pages, some blank and others widely spaced, to put this across. There are a bewildering number of characters, barely distinguished from one another, buzzing around like midges, but going nowhere. Everyone enjoys baseball. And that's about it.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 4

\* \* \*

**Elijah of Buxton**, by Christopher Paul Curtis

978-0439023443 / \$16.99

Scholastic

October, 2007

Core audience: older elementary and middle school, good for boys as well as girls, especially those who like historical fiction

Notable aspects: history & setting, humor, characters

Christopher Paul Curtis has given us a glimpse into a history that many of us know little about. Buxton is a Canadian community of ex-slaves who have managed to escape and cross the border. They live in relative safety, although there is still danger from hostile whites and slavers. Elijah is the first child born in the free community and has distinguished himself as an infant by throwing up on Frederick Douglass when the famous abolitionist visited Buxton. He is now 11 and is trying to distinguish himself in other ways and fighting his mother's view of him as "fragile." The reader gets a real sense of life in this community, including the very moving experience of welcoming new runaways who have made it to Buxton. When Preacher steals the money that one of the community members had been saving to buy his family, Elijah embarks on a dangerous journey into the US to find him and in the process finds his own courage and compassion. The story is told with humor, but there are some very difficult scenes, which make it unsuitable for younger readers.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 8.5

*Additional review of **Elijah of Buxton**:*

Core audience: Ages 9-13, both boys and girls, any race

Notable aspects:: Characters, plot, language, setting, humor, underlying messages, strong ending, slavery topic, child-awareness

One of the best of the decade. Others have described the setting and thrilling plot. They are understating the case, and that's important for a book whose cover and topic communicate "for minority readers." So not true! This is a book for everyone who likes an active eleven-year-old boy, charming language, lots of action, and a righteous cause to root for. As an adult I also love it for presenting neglected history, for making the case against slavery in a particularly compelling way, for the human strengths and frailties of the characters, for some realistic ambiguities, for Elijah's childish certainty that his own words and actions are a central concern to everyone around him, and for (did I already say it?) the language. It will make a great read-aloud, though weak readers may struggle a bit with the dialect (e.g. "gunn" for "going

(Additional review of *Elijah of Buxton*, continued)

to"). One of Curtis's many triumphs is managing, almost without a blink, to keep the river of period speech rolling along, and the chapter where Elijah's friend Cooter misinterprets the sign "Familiarity breeds contempt" as "Family breeding contest" will have you laughing out loud. Usually I'm seized with regret when a terrific book becomes a movie. In this case, I can hardly wait.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 9.5

*Additional rating for Elijah of Buxton:*

I'll go to 8 on *Elijah of Buxton*, but I REALLY don't like the cover.

Rondi Brower, Brouwer & Blackwood Lrd.

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat**, by Lynne Jonell

978-0805081503 / \$17.95

Henry Holt & Company

August 2007

Core audience: 8-12

Notable aspects: memorable characters, kid appeal, unique use of flip book illustrations, interesting setting

This interesting book hearkens back to the Roald Dahl days of yore. As our story begins, poor Emmy has to deal with Mrs. Barmy, an evil witch of a lady who is trying to keep Emmy separated from her parents. But who will help Emmy? She doesn't have any friends, thanks to dear ol' Mrs. Barmy.... Then something magical happens: the class rat starts to talk to Emmy and she actually understands him. And then it's "Strap yourselves in, ladies and gentlemen, you're in for a wild ride." Prepare yourself for a twisted, silly, quirky story about a young girl who must figure out just what exactly is going on with Mrs. Barmy, why her parents are acting so strangely, and what does happen if the rat bites you a second time.

There are surprises around every corner, and I was ever-so-pleased to be spending time with a book that didn't involve dead parents, alcoholic friends, or abusive family members. I think it's had to find a "light" well-written book for kids who don't want to read fantasy (as in *Harry Potter*). This reminded me of books from my youth, a pleasant diversion from my life at hand. And if ever I had a moment, I found myself flipping the pages of the book to see that rat fall and end up in Emmy's outstretched hands over and over again. You can be sure this book has a happy ending, and kids will thank you for recommending it to them.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 7.5

\* \* \*

**The Faceless Fiend: Being the Tale of a Criminal Mastermind, His Masked Minions and a Princess with a Butter Knife, Involving Explosives and a Certain Amount of Pushing and Shoving**, by

Howard Whitehouse, illus by Bill Slavin

978-1554531301 / \$16.95 hc

978-1554531806 / \$7.95 pb

Kids Can

September 2007

(Review of **The Faceless Fiend**, continued)\

Core audience: 10-13

Notable aspects: Characters, tongue-in-cheek humor, action

This is actually a sequel to *The Strictest School in the World*, which I flat-out missed last fall – so for my purposes this is brand new material. The setting is the 1896 England of Sherlock Holmes, and Holmes makes a cameo appearance in the second half of the book. In *Strictest School*, Princess Purnah of Chiligrity barely escaped St. Grimelda's awful Headmistress Scantcommon and Matron Wackett, and went to live at Aunt Lucy's with her brilliant classmate, Emmaline. In *Faceless Fiend*, I think we can simply describe the plot as "madcap adventures." The cast of characters will tell enough of the tale in itself: For unknown political reasons, the Faceless Fiend and his Masked Minions are pursuing the feisty Princess Purnah. Princess Purnah possesses sparse English, punctuated with Chiligrity exclamations such as "Tantarantoo tooty!" "Zapka Powee!" and "Tok tok!"

Emmaline's chief interest is flying, but her research is constantly sidetracked by the chase and by the idiotic tutor, Professor Bellbuckle. Aunt Lucy Butterworth is quite a swashbuckler in her own right, wielding a revolting tea tray (slugs, anyone?) and a mean umbrella when required. Her household's little errand boy, Robert Burns, is nicknamed "Rubberbones" because he never seems injured by falls or collisions. He loves his dogs, especially Stanley. Aunt Lucy also retains an amazing butler, Lal Singh, who anticipates every need and manages escapes with sandwiches to go. Those are the main characters, abetted by London urchin Peachey, Mr. Pettipas the balloonist, Monsieur DeGroof, Mr. Drone-Tiffin, and more. The occasional line drawings are the very epitome of "madcap." A weak reader would consider the length (272 p.) daunting, but a strong reader will revel in every charming paragraph and find it entirely too short.

Carol B. Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Rating: 8.5

\* \* \*

**Faeries of Dreamdark: Blackbringer**, by Laini Taylor

978-0399246302 / \$17.99

Putnam / Penguin

August 2007

Core audience: 12 & up

Notable aspects: memorable characters, unique setting, illustrations, humor, unputdownable-ness

I read a review on Elizabeth Bird's blog that said if you read one fantasy novel this year, let this be the one. She wasn't kidding. Laini Taylor's novel grew from her interest in faeries and art. Lucky for us that she could channel all of her creative energy into such a fabulous first novel.

To sum up: Young Magpie Windwitch travels with a band of crows trying to put an end to the "snags" (devils) that inherit the world. Now she must try to put a stop to the greatest enemy her folk have ever known. Reading this aloud, my son was quick to point out that Greatest Enemy Ever Known means No More Sequels. This realization made us very sad. Once you enter a world as fully imagined as Taylor's you don't ever want to leave. The best thing about fantasy novels is the creativity the author puts into them. The names, the setting, the rules the world is governed by—all of it takes an amazing amount of imagination. My son and I decided that if we were lucky there could be a sequel, maybe involving a faerie trying to stop a plague or illness, or following another character on a different type of quest. We're keeping our fingers crossed.

(Review of **Fairies of Dreamdark**, continued)

Because, quite honestly, there should be more books like this. There need to be more well-written stories aimed at this age group that are complex enough, but balanced by light humor. (Who wouldn't be amused by a furry imp who sucks on his own tail to console himself, and is obsessed with a pair of silver bat wings?) Otherwise, teens just quickly jump to the adult section of the store. Not that they shouldn't be challenged, but Taylor's work just seems so much better suited to a teen who wants a book with a bit more bite to it. (In the interest of full disclosure, I have to say we aren't quite finished reading this aloud. I'm not allowed to read silently ahead for any reason—even for something as important as The Fall Review Project. We're about halfway through and it's been utterly fabulous up to this point! I wanted to make sure I got something written in support of this great book.)

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 8.5

\* \* \*

**Freak**, by Marcella Pixley

978-0374324537 / \$16.00

Melanie Kroupa Books / Farrar Straus Giroux

September 2007

Core audience: 14 and up

Notable aspects: bullying, romance, non-conformity

Pixley does painful painfully well. I ached for Miriam, the main character of *Freak*, in her most awkward and brutal moments – being teased mercilessly by a pack of cruel girls, trying unsuccessfully to divert the attentions of her self-obsessed mother, and falling hopelessly and obliviously in love with a boy who so clearly wants to undress her sister. The world's cruelty, though, is not enough to harden the heart of Miriam. When the world seems to have finally beaten her, she finds a shockingly brave way to beat back.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**The Garden of Eve**, by K L Going

978-0152059866 / \$17.00

Harcourt

October 2007

Core audience: 8-12, probably girls

Notable aspects: original story, unpredictable

When Evie's mom dies, she and her dad move to an eerie town in upstate New York, to a house with an apple orchard that appears to be dead. Indeed the whole town seems to be in mourning. Evie just wants to be back home where all is familiar. Her fate, however, is tied up in this strange town and Evie has to follow her heart in order to unlock the life of the community that has been hidden for many years. The characters are unique and the story hangs together beautifully with its theme of spiritual and physical rebirth.

Carol J. Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 8

*Additional rating of **The Garden of Eve**:*

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine — Haunting cover art, but I didn't feel the story held up.

Rating: 6.5

\* \* \*

**Guyaholic**, by Carolyn Mackler  
978-0763625375 / \$16.99  
Candlewick Press  
September 2007

Intended audience: 15-year-old girls who loved the previous two Mackler books.  
Notable features: self-discovery, road trip, romance,

In this companion book to *Vegan Virgin Valentine*, Mackler follows V, the niece-from-hell who made teenage Mara's life miserable in the earlier book. V is now a senior in high school, living with her grandparents, working at a Pizza Hut, and longing for her long absent mother's attention. When she is hit by a hockey puck and literally falls into the lap of a handsome guy named Sam, could he be "the one"? V fears that she is just like her promiscuous mother, yet she refuses to let Sam call her his girlfriend or talk about their future together. Fast-forward a few months to the last days before graduation when these fears seem to be coming true and V seems to be sabotaging her own happiness at a rapid clip. When in doubt, road-trip to see Mom! What is charming about this particular road trip is that much of it is well planned-out—maps and atlases, hotels to go to, friends and family to stay with (including Mara). Yet wrong turns of all sorts and wrong choices still find their way onto V's itinerary. The story has its predictable moments with the "train wreck waiting to happen" theme, but, as one of the characters says about her, we care about V because of her flaws and so we are willing to go with her on this journey. This book is a quick read not meant for younger readers since there is plenty of sex and drugs and rock & roll.

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **Guyaholic**:*

Core audience: Ages 13+ due to language/sexual situations

The follow-up to *Vegan Virgin Valentine* follows the boy-laced adventures of Vivienne, known to her friends as V. Little has changed in V's life since last we saw her. Still too many boy-toys to count, and, a year older, she is spending her senior year at her grandparents' home in Florida when an embarrassing accident with a hockey puck introduces her to Sam. Could this be the guy to finally make V settle down or will her fear of turning out like her mother cause her to lose the perfect guy?

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 7

*Additional ratings of **Guyaholic**:*

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

Rating: 6

I like her previous books, but was a bit disappointed with this one.  
Lori Kauffman, Brookline Booksmith

Rating: 6

\* \* \*

**Gym Candy**, by Carl Deuker  
 978-0618777136 / \$16.00  
 Houghton Mifflin  
 September 03/07

Core audience: 12-16 year old boys

Notable aspects: Reality, sports, steroid and addiction themes, authentic characters, especially the main character and his father

Mick Johnson is a strong, hard-driving high school football player with an equally driven dad pushing him to be the successful pro athlete he came close to but never actually became. Although most people think Mick has all he needs to accomplish his goals, Mick (and his dad) never think he's quite there yet. His dad hooks him up with an individual trainer at a local gym who gets him on a personal training schedule — but also starts him on steroids. Deuker not only does a good job chronicling the progression of steroids (pill to needle) but he also paints a realistic portrait of the escalation of deception required, and the changes in mood and body that often accompany usage. The plot is fairly predictable, though we are left 'hanging' at the end -- not knowing for sure if Mick is going to successfully go 'clean' when he leaves the rehab or succumb to the temptation to use every means available to be all he can be. I think this is an important book for booksellers to be aware of, especially for early teen boys whom I feel like are always looking for authentic, contemporary fiction.

Gretchen Baker-Smith, Baker Books

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows**, by J.K. Rowling  
 978-0545010221 / \$34.99  
 Scholastic / Arthur A. Levine Books  
 July 2007

Authors of epic narratives usually find themselves sharing the burdens which encumber their central characters: The arduousness of quests, the difficulty of fulfilling prophecies, the many perils and pitfalls which await anyone attempting to finish a laborious and exhausting task resonate on the page because their authors are themselves attempting the completion of a draining and perilous exercise.

Over thirteen million people have already read the concluding book in the Harry Potter cycle, and I'm not aware of a single one who has expressed any kind of substantive, deep-rooted disappointment in what was the most highly anticipated literary conclusion ever written. Many substantive minor concerns, and minor disappointments, have been voiced; however, considering the scale, and the pressure, under which Rowling was working, one can only start by saying to the author... well done.

The central task faced by J.K. Rowling was the need to make Harry Potter, still a teenager after all, develop sufficiently to fulfill his destiny of defeating Lord Volemort in a convincing manner. The possibility of the final resolution being unconvincing, of depending on cheap magical and melodramatic devices, was very great. One expected that the story would fall short of having Ludo Bagman coming out of retirement to lead a Hogwarts Quidditch team in a match against the Death Eaters with the fate of the world at stake; however, one could fall short of that potentiality and still come up well short of a convincing narrative.

(Review of **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows**, continued)

Rowling worked towards this goal steadily throughout the series. The books grew in terms of depth and sophistication, matching the development of the characters who aged a year with each book. Equally important, the central plot structure of the books had been outlined from the beginning, and Rowling was able to lay the groundwork for the ultimate culmination of her story with a steady and convincing pace and thoroughness.

In the final scenes we clearly feel that Harry has grown into his role, and that Voldemort has shrunk. When Harry tells Voldemort "I know things you don't know, Tom Riddle. I know lots of important things that you don't," he speaks with both substance and conviction. Voldemort continually reminds Harry of his age, calling him "childish" and "little boy," yet it is Harry who controls the exposition and the dialogue. Harry has stepped beyond his fears; Voldemort is controlled by his.

The final line of book seven (before the epilogue) is Harry's. "I've had enough trouble for a lifetime." Yet we feel that it is as much Rowling speaking here as Harry. She too has carried a great burden of carrying a task through to completion amidst tremendous scrutiny and pressure. And if we find Harry, in the epilogue, enjoying a relatively obscure adult existence, centered around a happy family life, it is no surprise that Rowling would feel that such a life is just the thing for Harry after his protracted ordeal. Harry's story is done, and Rowling has made it very clear that she is done telling it.

In terms of minor disappointments expressed regarding *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, we'll touch on three. Many have expressed dissatisfaction with Harry's retirement from the world stage, and have trouble picturing him going off to work at the ministry every day as an Auror. It is felt that Hogwarts is his true home, and that the true completion of his destiny lies in being Headmaster there. It's a funny thing about Hogwarts, though: None of the faculty are married; indeed, they are all strictly unattached and not looking (Hagrid's wooing of Madame Maxime being the only exception). The Ministry, on the other hand, is filled with married individuals. I can't say why, but in Rowling's world, Harry's marriage to Ginny, and Ron's to Hermione, seem to dictate that their days at Hogwarts are over.

The two other common complaints registered concerning *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is that Rowling, so diligent in sticking to her outline generally, couldn't bring herself to kill off Ron, as originally planned, and ended up fudging things by killing Fred instead. This is pure speculation, but I certainly think it's true. Dobby's death has great pathos; it resonates. Fred's does not; it feels like a jarring afterthought.

Finally, it has been widely remarked that the battle of Hogwarts reads a bit more like a comic-book battle rather than a masterly conflict such as Tolkien's Battle of the Pelennor. There is certainly some truth here. But Rowling seems to reach for some of Tolkien's dramatic depth at the end. Harry's role after the battle — his people "wanted him there with them, their leader and symbol, ... he had not slept ... he must speak to the bereaved, clasp their hands" — is very reminiscent of Aragorn's after the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. Dumbledore's remark to Harry — that "those who are best suited to power are those who never sought it. Those who, like you, have leadership thrust upon them, and take up the mantle because they must, and find to their own surprise that they wear it well" — resonates strongly with Sam Gamgee's reflection that "...that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have just been landed in them, usually - their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect that they had lots of chances, like us, to turn back, only they didn't."

Indeed, the epic story of Harry Potter is a story that matters, a story that stays in the mind. Rowling reaches the depth achieved by great epic fiction, not in battle scenes, true, but in character development. What story has had characters to whom more people have been deeply attached? And there are so many

(Review of **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows**, continued)

successes in that regard: Dumbledore's past, Snape's true nature, and Ron and Hermione's relationship, to name a few. In the end, so many important story elements are dealt with so satisfactorily, that everyone who made the journey through these books can feel that highest of praise toward them, that the reader has taken from the Harry Potter epic as much as she has put in.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rating: 10

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**Home of the Brave**, by Katherine Applegate

978-0312367657 / \$16.95

Holtzbrinck Publishers / Feiwel and Friends

September 2007

Core audience: 10-15 year olds (boys and girls)

Notable aspects: prose, language, sensitivity, timeliness, characters

Katherine Applegate co-wrote the *Animorphs* series, and I confess I never took her writing ability seriously until reading this novel, her first stand-alone one, yesterday. All in all, this is an exquisitely written story in free verse about a young Sudanese refugee's arrival in Minnesota.

Kek, the main character, is a ten-year-old boy who has seen and known too much pain and horror for someone his age. Nonetheless, there is a part of him that remains tenderhearted and hope-filled, even as he is surrounded by the grief, anger, and weariness of other surviving family members. He believes his mother is still alive in Africa and will be found and brought to live with him and his extended family in the U.S, despite everyone else's warnings that he not be "too hopeful." In the meantime, he befriends and enlightens a cow and its owner, ESL classmates, and his angry older cousin through a series of sometimes quirky, sometimes poignant events and exchanges. Each word, line and piece is beautiful, and many could stand alone out of context of the novel as a whole. In the forward, Applegate explains that the more she worked on this story, the more it became clear that she had to tell it in poetry because it was the most authentic way for Kek's struggles with language to be felt and heard. The spaces and silences in between are very powerful.

I loved this book, up until the ending -- and then I was terribly disappointed by its abruptness and unlikelihood. It felt like Applegate just ran out of time or pages or something. Nonetheless, this book still has much merit and beauty. Being poetry, it would be a wonderful book to share out loud.

Gretchen Baker-Smith, Baker Books

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **Home of the Brave**:*

I can understand where Gretchen was coming from in her critique of the ending, but OMG did this book captivate me. It had me crying and then smiling through the tears at the same time, and I just love that. And I'm not usually a fan of free verse, but this was done so well, so beautiful, just right. I highly, highly recommend it.

Lori Kauffman, Brookline Booksmith

Rating: 9

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**How the Hangman Lost His Heart**, by K. M. Grant

978-0802796721 / \$16.95

Walker

October 2007

Core audience: Girls 12+

Notable aspects: humor, a strong heroine

*How the Hangman Lost His Heart* is a silly bit of offbeat humor, amusing but unsubstantial. Based on a true episode in the author's family history, it sheds light on the history which is its backdrop. Its unusual premise is quirky and entertaining and will appeal to girls with a wry sense of humor. The story gallops right along to its happy ending.

Alice's Uncle Frank has been hanged, drawn and quartered for supporting Bonnie Prince Charlie's claim to the throne. His head is put on display to warn other would-be conspirators against the king. Claiming the body for burial, Alice vows to reunite her uncle's head and body. She manages to retrieve the head from a pike above Temple Bar, but a madcap chase ensues. The kindly executioner, Dan Skinslicer, smitten with Alice (though a married man), helps her escape with the head. The King's Guard wants to put it back on display. On the run time and again, Alice and Dan Skinslicer barely escape. Major Slaverling is obsessed with capturing Alice and getting the head. His captain, Captain Ffrench, however, becomes more and more sympathetic. Eventually, he, too, becomes an ally. Alice, Dan, and Captain Ffrench eventually perform a complicated deception that allows them all to escape to Alice's family home in the country where Uncle Frank and his head are buried.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 6

\* \* \*

**I Am Not Joey Pigza**, by Jack Gantos

978-0374399412 / \$16

Farrar Straus Giroux

July 2007

Core audience - readers of previous Joey Pigza titles, 10 and up.

Notable aspects - good look at a dysfunctional family and the effects of alcoholism

Ingram annotation on plot: "In this rocket-paced new chapter in Joey Pigza's life, a favorite hero discovers what identity and forgiveness really mean, and how to cook a delicious turkey burger."

This is definitely NOT a stand-alone. The Pigza family, now with all new names—Joey's Dad has won some money in a lottery and is busily reinventing all of them—is really going off the rails. I think the earlier books are required. It's important to have information on Joey's ADD, which is referred to but not discussed in this book, and also to know how Joey's alcoholic Dad has disrupted the family in the past. Also, no one is behaving very well for much of the story (which is often funny but not endearing), so you're not going to like these characters if this book is all you know about them. It's sad to see Joey have to struggle so hard. I thought there was less hope in this book than previous ones, so I want this not to be the end of Joey's story. The reality is that many of the Joeyes of the world don't make it, but I'm definitely rooting for him. I think he is one of the more memorable and important characters in recent fiction.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood &amp; Brouwer Booksellers, Ltd.

Rating: 7.5 - 8

\* \* \*

**If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period**, by Gennifer Choldenko

978-0152057534 / \$17

Harcourt

September 2007

Core audience - Ages 9-12

Notable aspects - alternating narrators, one girl, one boy, one white, one black; a private school story that's not all about fashion.

The premise is interesting. It combines two standard story lines. Kirsten, a white girl in a well-off family, has gained thirty pounds recently. Her parents aren't really speaking to each other, and her former best friend is hanging out with the cruel, popular girls. Walker, a black teen, is starting at a nearly all-white private school because his single mother doesn't want him to go "bad" like his cousin Jamal. The two meet on the first day of school when they are both late to class. They narrate alternate chapters and their lives intersect more and more. They wind up at the same lunch table. They do an extra-credit project together. They work to try to help a friend, Matteo, a Hispanic boy who will do anything Brianna, the blonde school queen-bee, asks him

I really liked the first half of the book. It reads easily, and there is plenty going on. Kirsten has a good relationship with her younger sister Kippy; Walker has a good relationship with his cousin. In one humorous section, Jamal wants Walker to go in with him on a "deal." Walker fears drugs, but it turns out to be Amway! I'm not sure how many kids will get that, but it was funny. Unfortunately, the conflicts and their resolutions turn soap-opera-y. I won't give away the connections between Walker and Kirsten, but Matteo turns out to be the son of Brianna's family's cleaning woman and he's worried Brianna will get his Mom fired. Some interesting questions about race relations are raised, but it's a little heavy-handed. Really stunning cover and a great title, but a disappointment after *Al Capone*.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood &amp; Brouwer Booksellers, Ltd.

Rating: 5.5

*Additional rating of If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period:*

One of my favorites for middle grade; diverse characters.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**The Jaguar Stones: Book One, Middleworld**, by J&P Voelkel

978-1575255613 / \$17.95

Smith &amp; Sons / Imprint of Smith and Kraus Pub. Inc.

September 2007

Core audience: 10 &amp; up

Notable aspects: memorable characters, unique setting, illustrations, fast paced, suspenseful, kid friendly, Maya words (and pronunciations) incorporated throughout, small publishing house

I wanted to be sure to review this book written by a husband and wife team living here in Norwich. Not knowing quite what to expect from this fantasy novel set in Central America, I tossed it to my ten-year-old. He ended up reading it twice—once for fun and a second time for the sheer pleasure of it—so I figured it was worth a shot.

(Review of **The Jaguar Stones: Book One, Middleworld**, continued)

What I found was a book that was funny, fast-paced and entirely original. Though there are some elements of *The Lightning Thief* and *Lionboy* mixed in with a bit of Indiana Jones, this is a case where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I certainly don't want to dismiss this as a knock-off in any way. Jon Voelkel grew up in Central America, and the bits of Maya culture that he weaves are interesting and humorous. Pamela, his wife, handles the dialogue, which is spot-on for a lazy, game-lovin' teen.

And then there is Lord Six Rabbit, his evil brother Tzelek, and the disappearance of Max's parents into the Underworld. Will a kid who's only ever seen the jungle in a video game be able to defeat evil and save his parents? When Max meets up with Lola and her monkeys at the beginning of his quest, I found myself wishing for my own primate pet. The setting is like none I've ever encountered, and along with Max, I viewed it as new territory to explore.

This is the first of a trilogy, and if the readers here are any judge, there will soon be kids all over awaiting the sequel. A great book for anyone wanting a new fantasy book, and perfect for a birthday present, as the recipient is not likely to have a copy already. Why not pick up a copy for yourself and see?

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, VT

Rating: 8

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**Lenny's Space**, by Kate Banks

978-0374345754 / \$16.00

Frances Foster Books / FSG

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 8-12

Notable aspects: Single-parent family, strong emotional content, discussions about fears and diseases, friend with leukemia

Ultimately moving and worthwhile story of one boy's struggle with his feelings. His single mom and teachers can't seem to handle his outbursts and misbehavior. With the help of a kind school therapist and the discovery of a new friend, Lenny takes some big steps toward growing up.

Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

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**Lily Dale 01: Awakening**, by Wendi Corsi Staub

978-0802796547 / \$15.95

Walker & Co.

August 2007

Core audience: Ages 13+

After a freak accident kills her mother, Calla decides to spend the summer attempting to discover the secrets of her mother's past in the home she grew up in. But this isn't your ordinary small town. Lily Dale is populated by psychics who regularly give readings to paying strangers & the "gift" tends to run in families. When she begins receiving messages that hit eerily close to home, Calla begins to question whether her mother is trying to tell her something from the beyond. Bestselling adult mystery author

(Review of **Lily Dale 01: Awakening**, continued)

Staub tries her hand at the YA crowd in what is the start of a paranormal series sure to be a hit with fans of Meg Cabot's *Mediator* series.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 7.5

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**Little Klein**, by Anne Ylvisaker  
978-0763633592 / \$15.99  
Candlewick Press  
October 2007

Core audience: Middle grade boys and girls

Notable aspects: characters, language, significant underlying ideas

Little Klein is a gem! He is the youngest of several big, strapping, problematic Klein boys, whose salesman father is usually absent for weeks at a time. Mother is a sometimes wise and gutsy woman but she has babied little Harold because of his size. She says he is "delicate." With the help of an adopted stray dog they name LeRoy, Little Klein has a chance to become stronger in body and mind. His nightmares disappear when the dog finally comes to share his bedroom. LeRoy's point of view is often expressed and he is as quirky and lovable as the other small-town characters. It is 1949 and life was simpler then in this rural small town. Building a doghouse, a garden, then a raft, occupy days not spent fishing. Little Klein has his chance to prove himself when a tornado hits town and his brothers are hurt in a rafting accident. Readers will cheer with him when his mother says he was the "biggest" of the Kleins that day for his bravery. Readers already knew he was huge of heart.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

*Additional rating of **Little Klein**:*

Short Review: The premise of this book intrigued me, and Little Klein is an engaging character. The slang and time frame seem to have limited appeal to the book's target age group. The first 50 pages were repetitious, and I gave up on the book.

Joyce Miller, Baker Books

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**Lobsterland**, by Susan Carlton  
978-0805080964 / \$16.95  
Henry Holt  
September

Core audience: older teen girls

Notable aspects: relationship issues

This was a fun July read. I wonder at the September pub date.

Charlotte is sixteen and lives on an island off Portland that she nicknames Bleak (Could it be Peaks Island?); that about sums up her view of island life. She longs to be accepted at a mainland private

(Review of **Lobsterland**, continued)

boarding school, but there is the question of her lifelong best friend/boyfriend, Noah. There is also a best girlfriend who seems just now to be more interested in (gasp! surprise!) Noah. There is the issue of busy parents who do not seem to live together as much as coexist without meaningful communication. Her younger siblings depend on her for much of their nurturing (and delivery to and from mainland childcare). More than likeable, Charlotte spends a lot of time running in heels to and from the ferry to Portland. The breezy style and familiar teen problems and feelings will make this a very appealing teen read, especially for a future summer paperback!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 7

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**Love, Meg**, by C. Leigh Purtill

978-1595141163 / \$16.99

Penguin

July 2007

Core audience: Girls age 12 and up

Notable aspects: Believable characters that stay true to their personalities, good discussion book for moms and daughters

Meg Shanley is fifteen years old and her life is not exactly stable. She lives with her thirty-year-old sister, Lucy. They move around a lot, but Lucy is the only family Meg has, so while she craves a "normal" life, she just adapts to each new school, neighborhood, etc. One way she copes is by writing letters to her favorite celebrity, who writes back with thoughtful heartwarming advice. Then one day a man shows up who claims to be Lucy's twin brother, Meg's uncle. Lucy wants nothing to do with him, but Meg is ready to travel across country with him, to meet her grandmother, and find out more about this mysterious family she knows nothing about. By the end of the story, after learning much about Lucy's childhood and high-school relationships, Meg comes to understand Lucy and her actions. As a reader, I loved the explanation that Lucy gives for her deception.

Karlene Rearick, The Alphabet Garden

Rating: 8

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**Love, Stargirl**, by Jerry Spinelli

978-0375813757 / \$16.99

Knopf / RH

August 2007

Core audience: Middle-school girls, Ages 11-14

Notable aspects: strong female character, humor, sensitivity to teen feelings

Sequels often do not offer anything new, but this one does. Stargirl has moved to Pennsylvania and is still being homeschooled. She cannot get Leo, the chum from Arizona who dumped her, out of her mind, so she writes him a long letter. Actually many letters. In fact this whole book! From January to December she recounts all the endearing and charming people she meets and the wonderful things she does to prepare to celebrate the upcoming Winter Solstice.

(Review of **Love, Stargirl**, continued)

She plans a community celebration on a nearby hill complete with big tent for shelter and background for that first precious sliver of sunrise that would evolve from a pinhole dot on black fabric to a gorgeous circle of light. It works beautifully and the moment fills all the onlookers with awe and joy. In the end, Stargirl decides Leo is part of her past and she can go forward to an uncertain but welcome future. Her "happy wagon" of declining numbers of pebbles becomes full again. It is a satisfying conclusion for Stargirl's year and for the reader as well.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 8

*Additional ratings of **Love, Stargirl**:*

A worthy sequel that teens will devour.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 8.5

Carol Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 8.5

\* \* \*

**The Man with the Red Bag**, by Eve Bunting

978-0060818289 / \$15.99

Joanna Cotler Books / HarperCollins

September 2007

Core audience: 9-12 mystery readers

Notable aspects: Characterization, child-connected

This story takes place shortly after 9/11. Kevin, a twelve-year-old mystery writer / detective want-to-be, is on a bus tour with his grandmother when a man who appears to be of Middle Eastern descent (he is actually Charles Stavros, a Greek) joins the tour. Stavros arouses suspicion by refusing to let go of his red tour bag. He even takes it on a raft! Kevin feels for sure that Charles must be a terrorist, so he and his fellow traveler Geneva try to find out if their suspicions are true. It's a nice little mystery. My one major complaint is why wouldn't Mr. Stavros tell people what was in his bag rather than just saying it was "personal and precious" when asked. I didn't find his reason plausible enough, but the story did keep me wondering what exactly was in that bag.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 6

\* \* \*

**Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac**, by Gabrielle Zevin

978-0374349462 / \$17.00

Farrar Straus Giroux

September 2007

Core audience: 14 and up

Notable aspects: memory, popularity, friendship

While there are a few predictable twists in the plot of this book, I thought *Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac* was a thoroughly enjoyable and thought-provoking read—one that's certain to resonate with

(Review of **Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac**, continued)

teenage girls especially. I enjoyed the complicated sets of emotions Zevin dealt to her characters here, and the fact that she often unraveled them in rather surprising ways. As was true of her first novel, *Elsewhere*, the central message of this book is one of embracing the present and being honest with yourself. Stop worrying about the past; start making your own life in the here and now. (And to think I never realized that amnesia could be such an asset!)

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac**:*

Core audience: 12 & up

Notable aspects: Memorable characters, humor, unique situations, friendship, romantic without being over-the-top, great use of typewriter key motif

After reading her adult novel “margarettown,” I thought I’d give this YA novel a try. I admit I picked it up because of the cover (I love typewriters) and I was intrigued to find out that the main character took photographs for the yearbook at her high school. And so I kept on reading. It’s not often you find a book for teens that involves the Yearbook Club. I think any mention of an extra-curricular club, not including sports, is to be applauded.

And amnesia, that’s certainly unique to teen lit. That’s what I enjoy about Zevin’s characters: they draw you in so that you feel like the novel is happening around you. As I read, I found myself talking to Naomi, coaching her along as she steps outside her normal life to examine it from all sides (one of the benefits to not remembering your past life). It wasn’t quite clear to me who she was going to end up with, and this is just one of the reasons that teens will want to keep reading until the very end. I found it thought provoking and enjoyable, and would certainly recommend to anyone looking for more from their characters than cardboard cutouts. Zevin’s teens are the real deal.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore, VT

Rating: 7.5

*Additional rating of **Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac**:*

Heather Doss, Children’s Book Buyer, Bookazine — another one of my favorites; slightly older than her previous teen novel.

Rating: 8.5

\* \* \*

**Middle School is Worse Than Meatloaf**, by Jennifer Holm

978-0689852817 / \$12.99

Ginee Seo Books / Simon & Schuster

July 2007

Core audience: Ages 10+

The hilarious and touching look at a year in the life of a seventh-grade girl told entirely in pictures. Ginny has decided to make this year *the* year: she will become popular, begin to date, and discover her inner beauty queen. Unfortunately, fate doesn’t always agree with your plans. Using everything from magazine clippings, drugstore receipts, and doctors’ notes, the reader learns about Ginny’s attempt at a natural fruit facial....and her apparent allergic reaction to strawberries!

(Review of **Middle School is Worse Than Meatloaf**, continued)

I first thought this concept would be too simple; good for a lighthearted, fun story, but wouldn't be able to portray anything meaty. Much to my surprise, she does manage to cover some difficult family-life topics such as when her mom decides to get remarried. Great for reluctant readers & fans of Marissa Moss's *Amelia* books.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**the mysterious edge of the heroic world**, by e.l.konigsburg

978-1416949725 / \$16.99

Atheneum / Simon & Schuster

September 2007

Core audience: Ages 10-14

Notable aspects: Well-drawn characters, historical information

In *the mysterious edge . . .*, Amedeo Kaplan has just moved to a small town in Western Florida and begun the school year as an anonymous sixth grader. He meets "anything-but-anonymous" William Wilcox and they both go to work helping their elderly neighbor—an eccentric former minor opera singer—prepare to move into a retirement home. Amedeo has always yearned to 'discover' something that will distinguish him from other kids. Further on in the story, Nazis, stolen artwork, an absent father and a dear uncle complicate matters. A good story, well told, but I'm not sure that it will appeal to this age group in quite the way that Konigsburg's earlier books have.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8

*Additional review of the mysterious edge of the heroic world:*

Core audience: 10-14

Notable aspects: significant underlying ideas

As soon as I saw this galley I had to read it; it was E.L. Konigsburg, after all. And though I applaud any use of art appreciation woven into a fictional book for kids in this age group, it just didn't work for me. I didn't really like any of the characters, and it wasn't until we got to the backstory near the end of the book that I started to immerse myself fully in the world Konigsburg created. What made the reading so difficult were the few instances where one of the teens had a reaction to an adult and their response was so atypical for someone of that age. I found it quite jarring and couldn't relax back into the story.

Most importantly, there is the use of coincidence that Konigsburg relies so heavily upon. I just didn't buy it, and wasn't willing to suspend my disbelief quite that much. I did appreciate all the references to art, and if this book serves as a jumping-off point for more discussion in the classroom, or wherever, then more power to it.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 6

\* \* \*

**The Name of This Book is Secret**, by Pseudonymous Bosch

978-0316113663 / \$16.99

Little, Brown &amp; Co

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 8-12, and a good read-aloud choice for younger children

Notable aspects: Fun!

Books that pretend to be something they are not (e.g., a real teen's diary) have not usually been among my favorites, but this one sucked me right in! The author relates this story as if he were reporting on a highly dangerous (in the wrong hands) and inflammatory secret. Although we never get to know who P.B. really is and though there doesn't really seem to be an actual reason for keeping this all a secret, somehow we can overlook all that in the interest of seeming to participate in an adventure. The characters are creative and/or likable, allowing us to care about what happens to them. The premise and the (supposed) resolution (sequel?) of the secret is are interesting. In addition, there is a fun appendix with things like "Grampa Larry's Compass Recipe" and an explanation of keyword codes, as well as a circus glossary.

There is nothing of great import here, but you'll have fun finding that out. I enjoyed this book.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8.5

*Additional rating of **The Name of This Book is Secret**:*

I had a lot of fun reading this book, but it hasn't lingered in my consciousness the way the very best books do.

Lori Kauffman, Brookline Booksmith

Rating: 7

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**Naomi and Ely's No-Kiss List**, by Rachel Cohn & David Levithan

978-0375844409 / \$16.99

Knopf / RH

August 2007

Core audience: 14 &amp; up

Notable aspects: Sensitive treatment of teens questioning sexuality

Naomi and Ely have lived two floors apart in the same NYC co-op all their lives. Best friends, they always assumed they'd end up together as adults. That all changes when Ely announces he's gay. The No-Kiss List, a list of the guys that they both agree never to kiss, is their only partly tongue-in-cheek way of dealing with the awkwardness. It works surprisingly well until Ely kisses the one guy not on the list (but oh-so obviously off-limits)—Naomi's boyfriend, Bruce. Naomi is forced to confront the truth she has been repressing, that Ely will never love her the way she loves him. An unusual take on the subject but one sure to ring true for many teens. Cohn & Leviathan each infuse their unique voices in the characters of Naomi & Ely.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 7.5

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**Paint the Wind**, by Pam Munoz Ryan  
 978-0439873628 / \$16.99  
 Scholastic  
 September 2007

Core audience: 9-12

Notable aspects: Good adventure story, strong girl character

Orphaned Maya is thrust into a completely different life when her strict paternal grandmother dies and she goes to live with her mother's relatives in Wyoming horse country. She discovers her love of horses and her innate courage while connecting especially to Artemisia, a horse that her mom used to ride. This is a wonderful adventure story written in sophisticated language that girls especially will love. Fans of Pam Munoz Ryan will not be disappointed.

Carol J. Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 8

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**Parrotfish**, by Ellen Wittlinger  
 978-1416916222 / \$16.99  
 Simon & Schuster  
 July 2007

Core audience: high school students

Notable aspects: sensitivity, humor, characters, raising difficult issues

Angela has known for years that she is not comfortable being a girl and finally decides to be who s/he is. Angela changes his name to Grady, cuts his hair, and tells his family, his teachers, and his fellow students at Buxton Central High School that he is a boy. His decision is greeted with confusion, hostility, and denial and Grady has to deal with humiliating jokes and the loss of his best friend. He finds support in some unexpected places, which helps him find the strength to carry on. The story is told with empathy and humor, and we really see Grady struggling to figure out the whole gender thing: why do we have to be defined as boy or girl and why is that definition so central to who we are. We also see Grady going through the same struggles that all teens go through—dealing with friendships, teachers and parents who don't always understand. The people around Grady do come to understand, at least a bit, what he's going through, and he also comes to understand what his parents and friends are dealing with. This is a really important book for understanding transgendered teens as well as all teens.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop

Rating: 9

*Additional rating of **Parrotfish**:*

The issues and situations are all right on the mark.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8

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**The Perfect Hamburger and Other Delicious Stories**, by Alexander McCall Smith  
 Dual hc and pb: 978-1599901572 / \$7.95 pb; 978-1599901343 / 15.95 hc  
 Bloomsbury / VHPS  
 September 2007

(Review of **The Perfect Hamburger and Other Delicious Stories**, continued)

Core audience: Ages 7 to 9

Notable aspects: Three stand-alone short stories featuring kids and food; good for classroom use

I haven't read any of McCall Smith's kids' books before, although I am a huge fan of his adult stories. I was pleasantly entertained by these stories. The first one is about an old independent hamburger stand that goes against a new chain restaurant in town. It gets very exciting when the secret ingredient for the best tasting hamburger in the world goes missing. The spaghetti story was a little like Roald Dahl's chocolate factory. There's a contest and the winner gets a tour of a spaghetti factory. The owner of the factory is a big, odd but friendly guy, and the winners are a famished brother and sister who have only ever eaten their misguided aunt's sometimes raw and always healthy food. The last story is a modern twist on *Homer Price's* donut story: Some friends have a donut sale to raise money for a good cause. When they sell out of donuts too quickly, they send out a chain email request to supply more donuts.

Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 7.5

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**The Pig Who Saved the World (by Gryllus the Pig)**, by Paul Shipton

978-0763634469 / \$15.99

Candlewick Press

September 2007

Core audience: Ages 10-14, both boys and girls; fans of Gerald Morris, Lloyd Alexander, and Rick Riordan

Notable aspects: Interesting setting; great characters; liberally salted with clever references to Greek mythology, history, and philosophy (though accessible to kids with little background in Greek stories); and above all, humor and lots of heart.

What Gerald Morris has done for Arthurian legends, Paul Shipton is doing for Homeric Greece. Shipton's hilarious Gryllus the Pig novels (the cycle is called "The Grylliad") take episodes from well-known Greek tales and turn them on their ear, infusing them with droll charm and laugh-out-loud humor. The novels are narrated by a talking porker named Gryllus, one of Odysseus's crew who was transformed by the sorceress Circe; he enjoyed the carefree life of a swine so much that, when Circe dissolved her spell and turned the rest of the sounder back into men, he hid.

In the first novel, *The Pig Scrolls*, Gryllus was charged—against his self-preservationist self's better judgment—with finding a particular shepherd and bringing him to Apollo in order to save the world from total destruction. This he did, thanks more to a motley crew of competent friends than his own efforts. Now, resting on his laurels as "the pig who saved the world," Gryllus is disgruntled (*disgruntled*, har har) to discover that he's expected to save the Cosmos *yet again*. This time, he is supposed to free a prisoner from the Labyrinth at Knossos. The prisoner is none other than Thanatos, the embodiment of Death.

Privately, Gryllus admits that he would rather slip away and spend his days sipping cocktails on a beach than embark on this dangerous mission, but he is kept on the straight-and-narrow by his band of buddies. These are: the exasperated, brave, feisty young prophetess Sybil (former priestess of Delphi); Orpheus, who at this point is a gloomy disembodied talking head with a glorious singing voice; and Tithonus, a human, granted immortality, who forgot to wish for a youthful form and is now basically an ancient

(Review of **The Pig Who Saved the World**, continued)

grasshopper called Hoppy. Last is Gryllus's pal Homer, a pimply, unathletic teen with a penchant for poetry. Together, they all survive misadventure and mishap usually triggered by Gryllus himself, who, though he lives happily in a world of amusing self-aggrandizing and denial, manages, in spite of himself, to be pretty heroic when it counts. He comes out of it all having, yes, saved the world. With *The Pig Scrolls* now out in paperback, this series should begin to catch fire with Gerald Morris fans and other smart readers who like a lot of laughs.

Elizabeth Bluemle, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 9+

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**Revolution is Not a Dinner Party**, Ying Chang Compestine

978-0805082074 / \$16.95

Henry Holt

August 2007

Core audience: Girls 10 - 12

Notable aspects: Strong girl character; interesting historical fiction

In this semi-autobiographical novel, Ying Chang Compestine captures the flavor of the Cultural Revolution from the viewpoint of a privileged and feisty nine-year-old girl, Ling. Her father is a surgeon and her mother is a traditional doctor of Chinese medicine who has many rules for her spirited daughter. They live comfortably on the grounds of Hospital #4 in Wuhan. But everything changes dramatically in the summer of 1972 and the family must adapt in order to stay alive. There have been other books about this time in history written for young people, but few show the spirit of a young girl who follows the rules (familial and cultural) to a degree, but can't help reverting to her innate sense of right and wrong when she's pushed too far.

Carol J. Stoltz, Porter Square Books

Rating: 7.5

*Additional rating of **Revolution is Not a Dinner Party**:*

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine — interesting historical fiction on a time period not covered before (that I can recall).

Rating: 8.5

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**Robot Dreams**, by Sara Varon

978-1596431089 / \$16.95

First Second / Roaring Brook

August 2007

Core audience: 8 and up

Notable aspects: graphic novel, friendship, humor

Sara Varon's new *Robot Dreams* will charm the socks off readers aged 8 to 80 with its tale of two friends (a dog and a robot) who are separated when a terrible thing comes between them: rust. Wonderful details and quirky characters punctuate this quirky friendship story told almost entirely in pictures. A great new graphic novel.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

\* \* \*

**Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow**, by James Sturm; illustrated by Rich Tommaso

978-0786839001 / \$16.99

Jump at the Sun / Hyperion

December 2007

Core audience: 10 and up

Notable aspects: historical fiction graphic novel, US race relations, baseball (note the presence of one racial slur – yeah, that one)

Contrary to what its title might suggest, this graphic novel is not so much about Satchel Paige as it is about the miserably harsh conditions of life for blacks living under the divisive Jim Crow laws of the American South. Narrating the story is Emmet Wilson, a fictional Alabama sharecropper who once scored a run against the legendary pitcher of the Negro Leagues. Much of the plot hinges on the tension that builds along the racial divide in Emmet's town, but its black and white residents do share one thing in common: an awestruck regard for the pitching talents of Satchel Paige. It's his eventual appearance on their hometown field that brings this story to a heady climax and a powerful conclusion.

Sturm and Tommaso's collaboration offers a compelling narrative, a strong voice, solid illustrations, and the perfect pacing to move the story along but keep you, in places, on the edge of your seat. In the time it'll take you to complete it, you'll feel the range and strength of emotions it would take most prose writers twice as long to convey. I love this book. I love its deeply human message and I love the window on American history it so expertly opens. Through it we see just how much the sport of baseball and one of its stars meant to a generation of blacks who were barely allowed to play the game of life, let alone win at it.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 10

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**Schooled**, by Gordon Korman

978-0786856923 / \$15.99

Hyperion

September 2007

Core audience: 10 and up

Notable aspects: Characterization

Capricorn ("Cap") Anderson has lived his whole life in a community started in the 'Sixties. The community is down to two members, Cap and his grandmother, Rain, one of the founders of Garland Farm. When Rain breaks her hip, Cap is forced to go into foster care and to attend a public school for the first time. Little does he know that traditionally the most popular kid in the school manipulates the campaign to elect the most bullied kid in the school as student president. The most popular kid, Zach, sees Cap as the perfect candidate for the new school president.

Take a child of commune-living in the 'Sixties and put him in today's eighth grade and you can imagine what happens. Once elected, Cap in his naivete takes to heart Zach's comment that as president he should know everyone's name in the school. He doesn't realize that he is constantly being teased and tormented by an organized group of students. Amazingly, Gordon Korman believably keeps Cap "in character" the entire novel as the whole school comes to love this naive and patient person. A little unbelievable, but a

(Review of **Schooled**, continued)

really fun way to watch a bully see the unexpected and unintended result of his actions. An interesting twist is exploring first the relief and then the dismay felt by Cap's first friend, Hugh Winkleman, who would have been the "president" if Cap had not arrived.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7.5

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**The Seems: A Glitch in Sleep**, by John Hulme

978-1599901299 / \$16.95

Bloomsbury

September 2007

Core audience: Adventure-loving boys, with good girl appeal.

Notable aspects: Extremely creative and clever, and the protagonist's voice is clear and full of humor.

A combination science-fiction and middle-grade realistic fiction novel, *A Glitch in Sleep* will be a hit with Artemis Fowl and Alex Rider fans who are eager for new things to read. The Seems is an alternate reality (sort of a behind-the-scenes place), parallel to our world, that controls just about every aspect of our lives—from random events to weather and dreams. A glitch is something that happens to upset the delicate balance of our world; fixers are the ones to call when something goes wrong. The Seems is full of amazing gadgets and gizmos that Becker Drane, the youngest Fixer in the Seems, gets to use. On one level, this is a flat-out adventure; on another level, this book will make readers question everything in their lives: what is coincidence, and what might actually be part of a grander plan.

Josie Leavitt, The Flying Pig Bookstore

Rating: 8

*Additional review of **The Seems: The Glitch in Sleep**:*

Core audience: boys ages 9-12

Notable aspects: movie potential, alternate parallel worlds; word play on cliches

Reviewer's note: Reviewer has – after 6 weeks effort – read only 152 of 254 pages, and skimmed the rest. Although reading this as an adult was tiresome, I think it would have enormous appeal to little boys who a) want to see themselves as the guy who saves the day; and b) are able to assume that the world operates via a coherent, mechanistic Plan whose glitches can be repaired by the youngster with the Right Stuff. Events in The World (reality as we know it) are carefully set up from The Seems, an alternate existence dedicated to smooth operation of the Plan. The World experiences many difficulties, but when something goes wrong in The Seems, it's much more serious. Of course our hero, Becker Drane, is chosen to fix a big problem—worldwide insomnia—and of course he succeeds, with a little help from his earnest sidekick, Simly. Though there is a brief episode where an older friend, Thibadeau [sic] Freck, long presumed dead, appears and raises the question of whether there really is a Plan, and if so, why isn't it a better one, the book never engages with that issue. It does refer to Thibadeau as a future enemy, so presumably there will be one or more sequellae. Like Percy Jackson, Pendragon and a host of similar books on the market, *The Seems* is light entertainment good for reading practice.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Provisionally rated: 7

*Additional review of **The Seems**:*

Core audience: 10-13 boys (and girls)

Notable aspects: creative imaginative plot, fast-moving

Mix a fantasy story with interrelated, alternate worlds; a twelve-year-old boy (Drane Becker) recently elevated to Fixer (a MacGyver-type in the Seems), who is required to fix a "Glitch" in "Sleep;" with a large dose of wordplay and humor—and you have Hulme and Wexler's entertaining *The Seems: The Glitch in Sleep*. Readers will be cheering for Becker throughout this fast-paced story while worrying whether a twelve-year-old can fix something in the Seems world which has a direct impact on the existence of our world. The fantasy, the thought-provoking concept of the "Plan" and who controls it, the unique "science," and the pace should appeal to reluctant male readers as well as other boys and all girls. Three of our summer reviewers, Jessica (age 11), Michele (age 13) and Samantha (age 11) all thought this book was very good with an exciting plot and interesting characters.

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Rating: 7

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**Slam**, by Nick Hornby

978-0399250484 / \$19.99

Penguin

October 2007

Core audience: Teens

Notable aspects:: Sympathetic characters, humor, contemporary issues

Nineteen-year-old Sam Jones began his story back when he was fifteen and everything was "ticking along quite nicely." He was a carefree skateboarding fanatic who idolized Tony Hawke and was beginning to consider the possibility of college and a career in art. He had just met Alicia: they began dating and quickly lost their virginity. Just as he tired of Alicia and their shallow sex-based relationship, the bomb dropped and he learned she was pregnant. Sam's mother, who was a teenager when he was born, has never let him forget how his birth ruined her own chances for a college career (and, no doubt, a happy, successful life). Sam recounts the believable turmoil he experiences, from his initial desire to run away to his acceptance of responsibility. With warm humor and engaging characters, Nick Hornby has written a highly readable, honest portrayal of the unique difficulties of teen pregnancy.

Reviewer: Valerie Tate, Village Book Store

Rating: 7

*Additional review of **Slam**:*

Core audience: 14 & up

Notable aspects: significant underlying ideas, adult cross-over appeal

As someone who has read all of Nick Hornby's work, including his collection "Polysyllabic Spree," I couldn't wait to get my hands on this book. I thought of anyone, his work would certainly translate to the teen crowd. I expected it to be funny, even though it was dealing with a sensitive issue. And I thought maybe this would reach a different audience than, say, *The First Part Last* or any of the other "teen dad" books out there. I started reading and was pleased to find that Sam was a skater, certainly a unique pastime for a character, as far as my reading is concerned, and then I bought into the whole "Tony Hawk

(Additional review of *Slam*, continued)

Talks to Me From a Poster” idea. Okay, why not. But when Nick is launched into the future, more than once, and actually sees how things are going to turn out—down to the detail of his son’s name—well, I just didn’t buy it. It just seemed gimmicky and a total cop-out. If Hornby really believed in his character, then he would have had the guts to stand by him (and his talking poster), telling his story in a more straightforward manner.

I guess I wanted more from this book. Even early on, when Sam meets Alicia, and she seemed like a real witch, I kept going. I couldn’t see the attraction between these two, but my thinking was that I needed to be more open-minded and give everyone a chance. That said, I didn’t really like any of the characters, and by the end I just didn’t care what happened to anyone—even little Roof. I’d be curious to see what teens think, and of course which of his adult fans will want to read it just because Hornby wrote it. Don’t get me wrong; getting adults to broaden their reading is a GOOD thing, but I’ll be interested to see if he ever tries another teen book and what that one will be like.

Beth Reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore

Rating: 6

*Additional review of Slam:*

Core audience: 15+ year olds; especially, but not only, boys

Notable aspects: hip, present day, well-developed and likable characters

Sam, a skater (that's skateboarding, NOT ice skating), and his young mom (who had him at sixteen), share a flat in London. He's cruising along with college in mind when he meets Alicia: beautiful, posh, and seductive. When their short but very intense relationship is about to end, she stuns him by telling him that she is pregnant and keeping the baby. As he is the product of a similar situation, Sam decides to "do the right thing" and moves into Alicia's parents' house, where they share the duties of raising an infant. As they both mature, it becomes clear that they are not meant for each other, and they work at the details of a life apart while both still involved with "Roof." I think this book will really fly with teens, especially boys, as it is funny and yet serious, very clever (he uses Tony Hawk as a mentor -- they communicate via a poster!), and not very heavy. I liked it a lot.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books

Rating: 8

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**Still Just Grace**, by Charise Mericle Harper

978-061864632 / \$16.00

Houghton Mifflin

September 2007

Core audience: Girls ages 6 to 10

Notable aspects: Friendship story; school setting; diary-like with appealing illustrations; sub-plot includes Grandmother moving into elderly housing; a student teacher in the classroom. For fans of Mallory, Clarice Bean, Clementine or *Only Emma*. Sequel to *Just Grace*.

Grace is a very likeable girl with a few problems. First, her best friend may be hanging out too much with the new neighbor (a boy!) and second, there are three other girls named Grace in her classroom and she is stuck being called “just Grace.” In chatty, diary-like form, Grace describes her life and her problems, in school and at home. Her classroom has a student teacher whose “new ideas” keep getting shot down by

(Review of **Still Just Grace**, continued)

their teacher. After a visit to her Grandmother's takes her out of school, she is stuck working on a project with the other Graces, and together they help the student teacher and themselves. I think it's a great girl book with plenty of realistic situations about family, friends, and school that girls will enjoy.

Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 8

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**The Swan Maiden**, by Heather Tomlinson

978-0805032753 / \$16.95

Holt / Holtzbrinck

August 2007

Core audience: Girls, ages 12+

Notable aspects: engaging heroine; well plotted; a fairy tale in the classic tradition

In *The Swan Maiden*, Doucette is the youngest of three princesses. Her two older sisters are magical, but Doucette is earth-bound and non-magical, destined to be a perfect wife and chatelaine. After her sisters have ridden off to spend the summer learning magic from their aunt, Doucette discovers that she, too, is a swan maiden. Her parents have been hiding her swan skin. Once she discovers her true nature, she puts on her swan skin and flies to her aunt. After a summer of learning magic and practicing new skills, she returns home. Through trickery, Doucette's mother destroys her magic; through love Doucette regains it. The story has all the elements of the best French fairy tales: magic, deception, jealousy, sacrifice, redemption, and true love. Fortunately, too, *The Swan Maiden* takes some liberties with fairy tale conventions. Doucette is a more assertive heroine than most. Her "Prince Charming" is only a shepherd. But, like all fairy tales, it has a happy ending. And they all lived happily ever after.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Rating: 7

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**Taken**, Edward Bloor

978-0375836367 / \$16.99

Knopf / RH

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 12+

For wealthy children in the near future, being kidnapped has become commonplace; they are even trained in what procedures to follow to insure their safe return. Unfortunately for Charity, the real-life experience doesn't always go by the book. Her kidnapers aren't after money and the clock is ticking. Not one of my favorites by Bloor, as my attention wandered in the middle.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 6

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**Thirteen Reasons Why**, by Jay Asher  
 978-1595141712 / \$16.99  
 Razorbill / Penguin  
 October 2007

Core audience: Ages 14+

Clay arrives home to find a box of cassette tapes on his porch. Popping one in an old boom-box, he's stunned to hear the voice of Hannah, a crush who committed suicide weeks earlier. This is her account of why—and more importantly, who—gave her that final push to do the unthinkable. Anyone who receives the tapes falls into the story somehow; you just have to listen all the way through to find out how....

My personal favorite of all of the fall galleys so far, as nothing else has had such an impact. It is a brilliant debut that will leave readers feeling a sense of remorse for Hannah, guilt for Clay, and hope for the lasting lesson of the story. Put in the hands of every teenager, teacher, & school psychologist!

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 9.5

*Additional ratings for **Thirteen Reasons Why**:*

Incredible book, so powerful that I almost fear giving it to a teen to read without careful consideration. This is unusual for me. I never discourage kids from reading a book just because it might contain difficult situations. Somehow this felt different to me. Hmmm.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 9

The subject, teen suicide, carries with it a high standard for plausibility and narrative purpose, which I did not feel this book came close to reaching.

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

Rating: 4

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**Time to Smell the Roses**, by Michael Hoeye  
 978-0399244902 / \$15.99  
 Penguin / Putnam  
 October 2007

Core audience: Ages 10 and up

Notable aspects: a fun family read-aloud; adventure, mystery, humor, a creative world “peopled” with mice, squirrels and other creatures; this is the fourth in a series.

Michael Hoeye continues his clever, entertaining series about mouse detective/watchmaker Hermux Tantamoq. Hermux is planning his wedding to adventuress/aviatrix Linka Perflinger. He takes on a “missing squirrel” case in the resort town of Thorny End, well-known for its roses. The villainess/cosmetics tycoon, Tucka Mertslin, is there again to cause trouble; and Terfel, Hermux's devoted ladybug/assistant detective, is on the move again—this time in a Sport-A-Pet carrier so she doesn't miss any of the action. Add a new strain of giant bees and an insect taxidermist/coroner and you've got one terrific adventure. I enjoy entering Hermux Tantamoq's world.

Lorna Ruby, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 10

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**Underground**, by Jean Ferris  
 978-0374372439 / \$16.00  
 Farrar Straus Giroux  
 Nov. 2007

Core audience Ages 12+

Notable aspects: interesting setting; significant underlying ideas

Charlotte is a sixteen-year-old slave working in the Mammoth Cave Hotel in Kentucky. When she learns about the slaves who stop there on the Underground Railroad, she wonders if she, too, should escape to freedom. Her decision is complicated by her relationship with another slave, Stephen Bishop, who is a guide and a very respected explorer of the Caves. He finds his "freedom" underground and does not want to leave, although they both know their futures are not their own to plan if they stay. She decides to stay with him. An "Author's Note" tells us he gains his freedom many years later and then buys hers. The setting provides an interesting vehicle for a story about the kinds of freedom possible. Charlotte and Stephen are likeable characters who raise important questions about a person's worth.

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Rating: 7

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**The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous**, by Suzanne Crowley.  
 978-0061231971 / \$16.99  
 Greenwillow/Harper  
 September, 2007

Core audience: 10 and up

Notable aspects: Asperger's Syndrome, folksy southern setting, language

After 100+ pages I still wasn't captured, so this isn't a full evaluation. Having read *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, and knowing some people with Asperger's Syndrome, I found Merilee Marvelous more believable as an average quirky, grumpy child in an average quirky family (some of them grumps), than as an Asperger's bearer. However, the author apparently has a child with Asperger's, so maybe I'm all wrong. But I wasn't willing to tough it out to page 460. (The finished book runs 380.) Two things I liked very much: vernacular idioms, and the widely spaced, eye-friendly type layout, even in the finished version.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins and BookStream

Provisional rating: 7

*Additional rating of **The Very Ordered Existence of Merilee Marvelous**:*

My favorite of middle-grade new fall releases. Quirky characters including a boy with Down's syndrome and our main character with Asperger's; small southern town; hilarious and touching scenes that illustrate real life. A great debut!

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 9

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**What~the~Dickens: The Story of a Rogue Tooth Fairy**, by Gregory Maguire

978-076362961 / \$15.99

Candlewick Press

October 2007

Core audience: Ages 10-13

Notable aspects: Imagination and originality

Gregory Maguire's new book, *What~the~Dickens*, is a story within a story. The first story is about a monumental storm that has struck. Most of the people who live in the area have evacuated. For reasons not quite clear, three children, Dinah, Zeke and Rebecca Ruth, have been left behind under the care of their twenty-something, mandolin-playing cousin, Gage. Skeptical about Gage's abilities to shepherd them through this crisis, and in the absence of their parents, the children fall to bickering.

Gage realizes that with limited supplies and night approaching, he needs to redirect the childrens' minds. He gathers them together, and over the course of the night tells them about (the other story) the skibbereen, more commonly known as tooth fairies. Maguire weaves a fantastical story about the origin, evolution, and daily life in the tree hollow for each skibberree. I thought the story was creative but confusing. Tooth fairies are portrayed as warring tribes and they live in colonies that resemble communist villages. The cruel elite leaders and the controlled workers, who need to be led for the greater good, are the intended foils to the maverick "agent of change," Pepper, and our hero, the orphaned outsider, What~the~Dickens.

Kathleen McGonagle, Buttonwood Books &amp; Toys

Rating: 7

*Additional rating of What-the-Dickens:*

Twisted fantasy fairy tale with a title that draws you in; will appeal to his adult readers as well.

Heather Doss, Children's Book Buyer, Bookazine

Rating: 8

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**When I Crossed No-Bob**, by Margaret McMullan

978-0618717156 / \$16.00

Houghton Mifflin

November 2007

Core audience: 10 and up

Notable aspects: post-Civil War, poverty, race relations, Ku Klux Klan, hope

An authentic voice and thorough attention to detail make McMullan's second novel every bit as noteworthy as *How I Found the Strong*, her first. The war-ravaged, hope-depleted backdrop of the post-Civil War American South is the setting for this one. Its narrator is Addy O'Donnell, a young girl from a long line of poverty-stricken hoodlums, who fears it may be her fate to be every bit as heartless as her kin. Addy's inclination toward kindness, though, leads to her to befriend many of the people her relatives would cheat or spurn. The local population of free slaves is among these, as are the Choctaw Indians, and the generous neighbors who take in Addy when it seems her family has truly left her behind.

The writing in this book is wonderful—clean, perfect. McMullan deftly evokes the downtrodden emotions and depressive spirit of a South that's been physically trampled by war and the white Southerners who felt emotionally shuttered by what, to them, was a loss. Through it, though, she weaves

(Review of **When I Crossed No-Bob**, continued)

the hopeful stories of people savoring their first true taste of freedom. When she is finally able to throw off the shackles of family, Addy becomes one of them.

Alison Morris, Wellesley Booksmith

Rating: 9

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**Zen & The Art of Faking It**, by Jordan Sonnenblick

978-043983707 / \$16.99

Scholastic

October 2007

Core audience: Young teens

Notable aspects: Several issues treated well: changing schools issue; fitting in; ethnicity; multi-racial families, etc.

San Lee and his mother move to “Nowheresville,” PA, at the start of his eighth-grade year. Stan has moved before—many times—so he is something of an expert at fitting in wherever he finds himself. This move starts out to be no exception. San Lee, misidentified as Stanley, is Asian, something not familiar to the kids at Harrisonville Middle School. So when his social studies teacher begins a unit on Buddhism (something San had already studied at his last school), San becomes the self-appointed expert in the field. It all becomes too much when he starts being treated as a reincarnated mystic.

The book blurb says it best: “When things start to unravel, San needs to find some real wisdom in a hurry. Can he patch things up with his family, save himself from bodily harm, stop being an outcast, and maybe even get the girl?” Sonnenblick is fast becoming one of my favorite authors. His dialog is good, his sense of humor is great and he gets all of the issues.

Kathy Goddard, The BookLoft

Rating: 8.5

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