

NECBA REVIEW PROJECT -- SPRING, 2011

This list is our attempt to identify as many high-quality titles as possible from among the numerous releases of middle-grade and young-adult fiction between January and June of the year. (We do another round-up of July-December titles.) The list was produced by soliciting reading copies from as many publishers as possible, sharing the contributed books among NECBA members, reading and reviewing and rating as many as possible. From these titles a Top Ten list (actually thirteen in this case) has been selected as a service to our general bookstore colleagues who are less familiar with the genre. The full text will be available on the NECBA site, <http://www.necba.net/necbagalleyrev.html>

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

Reviewers

Mimi Powell, Baker Books

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brower Booksellers

Sue Carita, Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins

Kaley DeGoursey, R.J. Julia Booksellers

Margaux Depue, DDG Booksellers

Nancy Felton, Broadside Books

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music

Josie Leavitt, Flying Pig

Laura Lucy, White Birch Books

"Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys

Joyce Miller, Baker Books

Marilyn Racette, Bookends

beth reynolds, Norwith Bookstore

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library

TITLES REVIEWED, PUBLISHED JANUARY - JUNE 2011

Angelfire, by Courtney Allison Moulton

Beauty Queens, by Libba Bray xxxxx

Between Shades of Gray, by Ruta Sepetys xxxxx

Bless This Mouse, by Lois Lowry, illus Eric Rohmann

Blink and Caution, by Tim Wynne-Jones xx

Blood Red Road, by Moira Young

Bumped by Megan McCafferty

Cinderella Smith by Stephanie Barden, Illus. Diane Goode

Clarity, by Kim Harrington

Close to Famous, by Joan Bauer xxx

The Dark City, by Catherine Fisher xx

Death Cloud (Young Sherlock Holmes: The Legend Begins), by Andrew Lane xxxx

Delirium, by Lauren Oliver xx

Department 19, by Will Hill

displacement, by Thalia Chaltos xx

Divergent, by Veronica Roth xxx

The Emerald Atlas, by John Stephens xxx

Entwined, by Heather Dixon

Eona, by Alison Goodman

The Emperor of Nihon-Ja (*Ranger's Apprentice*, Book 10) by John Flanagan

Exposed, by Kimberly Marcus xxxxx x

Fallen Grace, by Mary Hooper

Five 4ths of July, by Pat Raccio Hughes

Flip, by Martyn Bedford xx

Flutter, by Erin Moulton

Forgotten, by Cat Patrick xx

The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of her Own Making, by
Catherynne Valente

Glorious Adventures of the Sunshine Queen by Geraldine McCaughrean xx

The Great Hamster Massacre, by Katie Davies

Hammerin' Hank Greenberg, by Shelley Sommer

Hidden, by Helen Frost

I'll Be There by Holly Goldberg Sloan

Invisible Inkling by Emily Jenkins xx

Jersey Tomatoes Are the Best, by Maria Padian

Junonia, by Kevin Henkes xxxx

The Last Little Blue Envelope by Maureen Johnson

The Lemonade Crime, by Jacqueline Davies xx

Lexie by Audrey Couloumbis

Luck of the Buttons, by Anne Ylvisaker

Magnolia League by Katie Crouch

Mercy, by Rebecca Lim

Million Miles From Boston, by Karen Day

Missing on Superstition Mountain, by Elise Broach, illus. Antonio Javier Caparo xxx

Torn (*The Missing*: Book 4) by Margaret Peterson Haddix

No Passengers Beyond this Point by Gennifer Choldenko

Noah Barleywater Runs Away by John Boyne xx

Okay for Now, by Gary D. Schmidt xxx

Orchards, by Holly Thompson xx

The Penderwicks at Point Mouette, by Jeanne Birdsall xxxxx

Phantoms in the Snow by Kathleen Benner Duple

Pick-Up Game, edited by Marc Aronson and Charles R. Smith Jr

Pirate Captain's Daughter, by Eve Bunting xx

Resisters by Eric Nylund

The Romeo and Juliet Code by Phoebe Stone

Ruby Red, by Kerstin Gier xx

The Running Dream by Wendelin Van Draanen xx

Scorpia Rising: An Alex Rider Mission, by Anthony Horowitz

The Secret of Rover, by Rachel Wildavsky

Shark Wars, by Ej Altabacker

Sharks & Boys, by Kristen Tracy

Shine, by Lauren Myracle xxx

Small Acts of Amazing Courage, by Gloria Whelan

Small As An Elephant, by Jennifer Richard Jacobson xx

Small Persons With Wings by Ellen Booraem

Sparrow Road, by Sheila O'Connor

Strings Attached, by Judy Blundell xxx

Stupid Fast by Geoff Herbach

Tighter by Adele Griffin

Time-Traveling Fashionista, by Bianca Turetsky

Trapped, by Michael Northrop xxxxx x

True (...sort of), by Katherine Hannigan xx

Vespers Rising (Book 11 of *39 Clues*) by Rick Riordan et al

Viola in the Spotlight, by Adriana Trigiani

Visconti House, by Elsbeth Edgar

Warp Speed, by Lisa Yee

We Are Not Eaten By Yaks, An Accidental Adventure by C. Alexander London xx

What Happened to Goodbye by Sarah Dessen xxx

Where I Belong by Gwendolyn Heasley xx

Where She Went, Gayle Forman xxx

Where Things Come Back, by John C. Whaley

The Wise Man's Fear: The Kingkiller Chronicle: Day Two, by Patrick Rothfuss

Withering Tights by Louise Rennison

Words in the Dust, by Trent Reedy

World Without Fish by Mark Kurlansky xx

Top Scoring Titles

Beauty Queens, by Libba Bray

9780439895972 \$18.99

Scholastic May 2011

Core audience: Ages 12-15, mostly girls

Between Shades of Gray, by Ruta Sepetys

9780399254123 \$17.99

Penguin, March, 2011

Core audience: Ages 12-16

Blink and Caution, by Tim Wynne-Jones

9780763639839 \$16.99

Candlewick, April 2011

Core audience: Ages 14+, especially boys

Delirium, by Lauren Oliver

9780061726828 \$17.99

Harper, February 2011

Core audience: Ages 14+, mostly girls

Exposed, by Kimberly Marcus

9870375866957 \$16.99

Random House, February 2011

Core audience: Girls ages 14-17

Glorious Adventures of the Sunshine Queen by Geraldine McCaughrean

9780062008060 \$16.99

Harper Collins June 2011

Core audience: Ages 10-14

The Lemonade Crime by Jacqueline Davies

9780547279671 \$15.99

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, May 2, 2011

Core audience: Ages 8-12, both boys and girls

Missing on Superstition Mountain, by Elise Broach, illus. Antonio Javier Caparo

9780805090475 \$15.99

Holt, June 21, 2011

Core audience: Ages 7-11, both boys and girls

Noah Barleywater Runs Away by John Boyne

9780385752466 \$16.99

David Fickling Books/Random House, May, 2011

Core audience: Ages 8-12

Okay for Now, by Gary D. Schmidt

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, April, 2011

9780547152608 \$16.99

Core audience: Ages 10-13, especially boys

The Penderwicks at Point Mouette, by Jeanne Birdsall

9780375858512 \$16.99

Random House, May, 2011

Core audience: Ages 8-12, more girls than boys

Trapped, by Michael Northrop

9780545210126 \$17.99

Scholastic, February, 2011

Core audience: Ages 13 up

True (...sort of), by Katherine Hannigan

9780061968747 \$16.99

Greenwillow/Harper, April, 2011

Core audience : Ages 8-12, both boys and girls

THE COMPLETE REVIEWS

Angelfire, by Courtney Allison Moulton

9780062002327, \$17.99

Harper, March, 2011

Core Audience: YA Paranormal action fans.

Notable Aspects: Terrific action scenes. Forehammering

Review: *Angelfire*, though a stock tale of an ancient warrior reborn over the centuries to slay the enemies of mankind, has four great strengths which will make it a teen paranormal crowdpleaser. First, Moulton has a real gift for writing action scenes. Second, the heroine, Ellie, is likable, easy to relate to, and a ferocious reaper slayer. Third, the romance between Ellie and Will, which has been simmering intermittently for five hundred years, is hot stuff. Fourth, the nasties in the book are big fun.

The overview here is that Ellie is an ancient slayer, the Preliator, who, when she is killed in the line of duty, is reborn without the knowledge of who she is, barring some strange dreams, until she comes of age and is brought back up to speed by an assigned Guardian, in Ellie's case Will.

While its strengths make *Angelfire* a fast paced, enjoyable read, there are a number of diminishing flaws at work. One thing I like about Ellie is that, even when she accepts who she is, she is unwilling to subsume her present identity as a teenager. I would have given a great deal though, in the scene where Will brings her up to speed, if she had said, "Oh my God, I'm Buffy." This would have been a lighthearted way to give a shout out to readers, who will definitely be thinking that very thing. The concluding action scene, two

ships with opposing parties racing to intersect out in the ocean where an evil sarcophagus is set to be thrown into the ocean depths, comes off as a B movie ending at best. Also the romance between Ellie and Will takes an unfortunate turn at the end with Will playing the 'our love is unobtainable and hence I yearn in vain' card. Also, the book is filled with forehammering. (I suggest here the adoption of a new term, forehammering, the hammering into place of a future plot element with repetitive references that no one but the characters in the book are able to miss.) In this case the forehammering involves the fact that Ellie's dad has been on boarded into the reaper camp. Several years ago he all of a sudden stopped acting like her father and started acting like a reaper. Ellie wonders what is wrong with him.

All in all *Angelfire* is likable and fun, and should make for the start of a popular trilogy.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 8

Beauty Queens, by Libba Bray

9780439895972 \$18.99

Scholastic May 2011

Core audience: Ages 12-15, mostly girls (pub note says 13 yrs plus. I don't think they are parents.)

Notable for humor, treatment of stereotypes, ideas of sexual equality, self esteem, family issues

Review: Picture a deserted island with a planeload of crashed beauty queens concerned only about their soggy spangled clothes and washed-up cosmetic cases. They continue practicing to be perfect little gorgeous man-pleasing contestants. Then picture the arrival of gorgeous male pirates from "Captains Bodacious...Getting More Bodaciouser..." reality show. Throw in some nasty cosmetic industry plans to sell guns (on island) to a slobbering foreign potentate, a plot to kill the girls...well you get the idea. It's an outrageously wacky plot line but the story is a gem! Too funny to not make a movie real soon, Bray takes on the culture of beauty over substance, the whole pleasing- the male-thing, pushy parents looking to soothe their own egos through their children, the question of reality shows, acceptance and joy in one's sexuality, racial stereotyping, role of advertising, disabilities. It's over the top but it's so meaningful. The girls find that it takes an island to find themselves, a place where no one is watching them and shaping them into something they aren't. Each one learns what she wants to be and they all pull it together to survive as individuals and as a unit. Except for Miss Texas, all rah rah from the start, who goes running off the deep end into the jungle, warrior woman, still thinking about her dress. (Texas?) The humor will have readers chuckling all the way through; the romance and suspense will keep the pages turning; and the outcome for readers will be

thought-fodder for all. Yup, I really liked it. (Not sure though about the cover. Advertising the stereotype to sell books?)

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop Rating:9

I wholeheartedly agree with Sue, with one minor difference. I hated the cover...before I read the book. Once I'd finished the book I realized what a brilliant visual metaphor the cover is - I am a convert.

Love Love Love *Beauty Queens* - and I second the rating of 9!

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes Rating: 9

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 9

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books Rating: 9

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 9

Between Shades of Gray, by Ruta Sepetys

9780399254123, \$17.99

Penguin, March, 2011

Core audience: Ages12-16

Notable: strong historical detail and setting, well developed characters

Review: It was not until 1991 that the citizens of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia gained their freedom from Russia and were able to speak openly about the hundreds of thousands who perished as a result of Stalin's ethnic cleansing in that part of the world. The few who risked recording their stories through journals and drawings buried them for fear of being found out.

Between Shades of Gray, based on a true story, is told through a beautiful and talented sixteen year old girl whose world is destroyed by Russian soldiers who violently burst into their home one night. Lena, her mother and younger brother are taken away for no apparent reason, other than that Stalin had declared academics, artists, lawyers and many others "enemies of the state". Unimaginable for us now, people were transported thousands of miles into Siberia and lived under horrific conditions, or died, for ten or twelve years. When finally returned to their countries, life remained difficult as the areas were still occupied by the Russians. *Between Shades of Gray* is a heartbreaking, yet wonderful story of love, determination and just how far the human spirit can carry one. I truly loved all aspects of this book.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating: 9.5

I loved this book as well and think it could certainly have some cross over appeal to adults as well - a beautiful, heartbreaking story. I'll second the rating.

Laura Lucy, White Birch Books Rating: 9.5

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 9

Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 9

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 9.5

Bless This Mouse, by Lois Lowry, illus Eric Rohmann

9780547390093, \$15.99

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, March, 2011

Core audience: Ages 7-11, both boys and girls

Notable Aspects: Characters, plot, humor, leadership, ecclesiastical setting and ritual without sectarian content.

Review: Once again Lois Lowry nails it, this time with an animal story. The setting is a church, rather in the Episcopalian or Roman Catholic style, where a tribe of mice lives happily but carefully. Mousemistress Hildegard sees to necessary precautions, and her concerns are endless: overpopulation, careless youngsters, possibly difficult attention from one of the more senior male mice, and above all, the prospect of cats attending the upcoming Blessing of the Animals. The setup allows Lowry to address all kinds of social issues without ever treading on sectarian boundaries. There's plenty of humor, ingenuity, suspense, and a delightfully appropriate ending.

Carol Chittenden, *Eight Cousins* Rating: 9

Blink and Caution, by Tim Wynne-Jones

9780763639839, \$16.99

Candlewick, April 2011

Core Audience: 14+

Notable Aspects: Successful Second Person Narrative

Review: Patrick Henry's adjuration to "Give me liberty or give me death" was not, as I understand it, made as a negative assessment of overly controlled Young Adult fictional narratives, nonetheless we can be sure that reading *Blink and Caution* would have provided a healing balm for Henry's soul. And why is that you ask? It's true that the book is strikingly written entirely in the second person, and brilliantly so. Still, that is not the source of the peculiarly invigorating quality of liberty which infuses *Blink and Caution*.

The answer lies in Tolkien's observation that 'I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.' This observation applies as much to fiction as it does to historical narratives. A reader's freedom lies in applicability to experience as opposed to purposed narrative domination, regardless of genre.

Blink and Caution begins with two separate storylines, both involving young teenagers living on their own in the runaway underworld of Toronto. Having each left their homes due to traumatic circumstances they live in dangerous places without the normal structure and limits imposed by a caretaking adult. This unregulated world is the antithesis of true

liberty. They are stifled by their freedom and live in a suspended state. *Blink and Caution* is the story of how their lives became intertwined, and how they provided each other with the fulcrum to climb back into life.

Caution shot her beloved brother Spenser in a freak shooting range accident, and has run off and descended into a world of numbness and self-recrimination. Blink, whose lack of fixity in his home environment drove him into the streets of Toronto, is hopeful of finding a sanctuary, despite his anchorless and desperate existence. The thriller overlay of the story begins when Blink stumbles onto a staged abduction of a corporate executive, which lands him into danger and sends him on the run. Meanwhile, Caution uncovers some details regarding her drug-dealing boyfriend which shock her into action and send her on the run as well. The two storylines merge in the second part of the book.

Wynne Jones' characters share a coexistent self-sufficiency and vulnerability which draws powerfully and steadily on the reader's affections. The suspense in the second half of the book carries the book along briskly to its exciting conclusion. What makes *Blink and Caution* exceptional, however, is a combination of youthful authenticity and mature reflectiveness achieved by having a mature second-person narrator describing two very authentic teenage minds. The idea of numbness as a spiritual state in which a suspension of life allows the healing of time and the appearance of levers, of opportunities to revisit the flash points of trauma from a different angle, is a powerful means of connection to readers. Some readers may experience *Blink and Caution* as an exciting trip across the surface of the story. Those who answer the simultaneous pull to integrate more deeply into the narrative will find that they can take out as much with them as they can carry.

In the end Blink and Caution do not go off and live happily ever after together. They are minors and they go back to imperfect, but genuinely caretaking home environments. In the resumption of limits their new freedom can be sustained, and it is a freedom they have earned. Their bond, and the promise of a future connection and an enduring relationship is far more powerful for being realistically framed. True independence lies not in the removal of limits but in strength of character and self-awareness to develop as human beings within limits. *Blink and Caution* does not have a magical happy ending, it has a magic coursing through it much deeper than that.

Kenny Brechner: DDG Booksellers Rating: 9.5

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 8

Blood Red Road, by Moira Young

9781442429987 16.99

McElderry (S&S), June 2011

Core Audience: fans of Hunger Games, City of Ember, et al. Some romance with kissing, no sex. Plenty of violence.

Notable for: A clever post-apocalypse dystopia that may stand out from the crowd. Excellent sibling dynamics.

Review: After her father is killed and her twin brother Lugh is abducted, 18 year old Saba and her little sister (9) Emmi have assorted adventures trying to rescue him. About a third of the story takes place in a Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome kind of town (dirty, lawless, backwards) called Hopetown, where a captured Saba becomes the cage fighter known as the Angel of Death (because she never loses). A notable difference between this book and Hunger Games is that it is not the children who kill each other. A fighter who loses for the third time "runs the gauntlet" and is killed by the crazed mob of spectators, many of whom are high on something called chaal. After escaping Hopetown with some new friends, the book takes a Tolkien-like turn, with a long trek through the mountains. Lugh is rescued, but not before several of the companions are killed. Jack, the love interest, "has things to do" and takes off on his own, helping to set up several possibilities for book two. The siblings are reunited. The book read fast and easily, and I was always engaged and interested. The language bothered me, though. Saba speaks in a very primitive way, which was a little grating. At one point, Jack corrects her about something she's saying incorrectly, but most of the characters aren't speaking substantially more grammatically, so I'm not sure why he brought it up. Young should either have explained more or left it alone for us to figure out. (Or maybe this is something else for book 2.) There are no books (except a few very old ones) or schools. Things have deteriorated quite a bit from our present - we're called Wreckers - and found junk is called Wrecker tech. The villain of the piece was great. His name was Vicar Pinch, but he dressed and tried to act like Louis XIV.

Saba grows in some believable ways. Her mother died giving birth to Emmi and Saba has always resented and disliked her little sister. Their relationship improves gradually. Her anti-social behavior is also understandable. Outside her family, there have been almost no people in her life until the story begins, and brother Lugh is the golden boy, especially in her eyes. On balance, a good effort that I think young people will enjoy.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers, Kinderhook Rating: 7.5

Bumped by Megan McCafferty

9780061962745, \$16.99

Balzer+Bray (Harper Collins), 4/26/11

Core audience: ?

Notable:

Review: In a society where only teenage girls are able to conceive and give birth, Melody, beautiful & smart is a highly sought-after prospect. She has been reluctant to make a 'Preg' and is running up against her expiration date. That she has an identical twin (separated at birth!) who runs away from a religious community to see her is just one of the many annoying clichés in this offensive tale. There probably is a thread of useful commentary on some aspect of contemporary society but I wasn't able to find it.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 3

Cinderella Smith by Stephanie Barden, Illus. Diane Goode

9780061964237, \$15.99

Harper, April 2011

Core Audience: Girls, ages 8 to 10

Notable Aspects: friendship, jealousy, family, elementary school, girl drama

Review: Josephine-Kathryn Smith aka "Cinderella" earned her nickname at an early age because she was forever losing a shoe, a habit that becomes the cornerstone of this delightful book. It is the beginning of a new school year. Cinderella is planning her back to school shopping trip when she is interrupted by her neighbor, Charlie Prince, the basketball obsessed boy from next door. He is returning one of her sneakers that he found. Their brief conversation leads to the inevitable question "who'd you get for a teacher?" and the discovery that they both have the new teacher, Mr. Harrison. School is going to be different this year. Cinderella will be a "second-floor" kid at her elementary school and changes are happening. No name tags, group tables instead of desks, and friend group dynamics are shifting. Dial in a new girl in class and new attitudes (smug, mean, snarky) and then ratchet up the tension with a dance competition where only one girl can be the Pumpkin Blossom Fairy and you have the perfect petri dish for elementary age angst. I like the innovative way Cinderella attacks her problems. They are thoughtful and creative without being mean. Perfect for fans of Judy Moody.

Kathleen "Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating 7.5

Clarity, by Kim Harrington

9780545230506, \$16.99

Scholastic, March 2011

Core Audience: girls 14+

Notable aspects: Murder mystery, psychic abilities, teen romance, sibling relationships

REVIEW: "When you can see things others can't, where do you look for the truth?"

This paranormal murder mystery will have teens reading on the edge of their seats.

Clarity "Clare" Fern sees things. Things no one else can see. Things like stolen kisses and long-buried secrets. All she has to do is touch a certain object, and the visions come to her. It's a gift.

And a curse.

When a teenage girl is found murdered, Clare's ex-boyfriend wants her to help solve the case - but Clare is still furious at the cheating jerk. Then Clare's brother - who has supernatural gifts of his own - becomes the prime suspect, and Clare can no longer look away. Teaming up with Gabriel, the smoldering son of the new detective, Clare must venture into the depths of fear, revenge, and lust in order to track the killer. But will her sight fail her just when she needs it most?"

I was reluctant to read this at first, assuming that it was yet another ho-hum addition to the whole Vampire, Werewolf, Angel trend - so NOT my thing. I found myself loving that *Clarity* has aspects of the "paranormal" as intrinsic parts of the story but that it falls well outside the "I don't care if they NEVER publish another paranormal romance" category for me - in a GOOD way! I was more than pleasantly surprised to discover a well-crafted mystery with enough interesting characters, plot points and story elements - in addition to the psychic ones - to keep it from falling into the void. Each member of Clare Fern's family has a different psychic gift, which is the basis of the "paranormal" piece of the story. The teen characters are realistically portrayed. Clare's relationship with her brother Perry and her conflicting feelings about her ex-boyfriend and the new boy in the picture were convincing, I struggled a bit with the trio of cliché blonde cheerleaders (added as a foil for Clare?) and the police department that would sanction a bunch of teenagers' investigation into an active murder case, but these were really the only points that didn't ring quite true,..not enough to change my mind about the book.

This is a quick yet satisfying read. There is some violence - it IS, at it's heart, a murder mystery. Sex is a topic, but isn't portrayed explicitly.

My core teen girl readers have responded to my gentle (or maybe not so) nudging and are reporting back that they like the mystery and the little bit of edge that the story has, but what we all like the most is that the story is believable. The characters are well-written,

the plot is well-developed, the relationships are interesting, the dialogue is comfortable - and it doesn't hurt (for us) that it's set on the Cape!

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes Bookstore Rating: 8

Close to Famous, by Joan Bauer

Isbn# 9780670012824 \$16.99

Viking (Penguin), Feb. 2011

Core audience: Girls Grade 5+

Notable for issues of self-esteem, family ; strong female character

Review: Joan Bauer's books are always a "safe choice" for gift buying. Although her modern realistic kid characters face real problems, they do so with aplomb, spunk and charm.

Foster dreams of a place on the Food Network and she bakes and distributes fantastic cupcakes and pastries every chance she gets. When she and her Mom leave their little rented place in the middle of the night to escape Mom's Elvis-impersonator abusive ex-boyfriend, they find themselves in Culpepper, W. Va. There Foster finds a way to bake cupcakes to change their lives. In fact, all the main characters find ways to change their lives for the better, proving that cupcakes are "soul" food. Mom was a back-up singer and learns that she is good enough to sing solo. Wayne, of Angry Wayne's Bar and Grill softens up. Famous now- reclusive actress Charlene finds the get-up-and-go to return to Hollywood for another great role. First, she helps Foster learn to read better! Foster helps her friend Macon find the courage to make a video about problems at the local prison. Foster is making the world a better place "one cupcake at a time." And, yes, there is a connection with the Food Network!

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 8

I know what Sue means about "safe choice" - serious issues are handled in Bauer's books, but always with a light touch. It's wonderful to sit down with a new Bauer. I lose some sleep, but only because I need to finish, not because she makes me depressed about the state of the world. No question it's easy to love a writer whose website suggests, "Order your copy today from your intrepid local bookseller." Plus I really want to try the cupcake recipes, which are on the website but not in the book.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Rating: 8

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

The Dark City, by Catherine Fisher

9780803736733, 16.99

Dial/Penguin, May 2011

Core Audience: 12 and up fantasy readers

Notable Aspects: A fantasy realm map so nifty even Dianna Wynne Jones might approve of it.

Review: *The Dark City* is the first book in the four volume *Relic Master* series. These books were originally published in the UK between 1998-2001 and entitled *The Book of the Crow* series. The individual books, with the exception of book 4, *The Margrave*, have been retitled as well. They have not been published in the US before. Penguin is taking the unusual approach of publishing these four books in four successive months.

Following their successful import of Fisher's *Incarceron*, Penguin clearly reasoned that Fisher's backlist should be mined because there must be more gold in them than hills. Happily there is.

The Dark City is set in the land of Anara. Anara, like 43% of other fantasy realms, is ruinously ancient, its great works constructed by an earlier race, the secrets of whose crafts are lost. The Makers have left behind powerful and dangerous artifacts called relics, which only the relic masters can manage. The Relic Masters, however, have been driven from power by a reactionary group called The Watchers which considers the works of the Makers to be evil. The Watchers have driven the Relic Masters underground and are actively hunting them to extinction. The people of the countryside, like 78% of fantasy realm country dwellers, have a better sense than their city dwelling cousins. They sympathize with the Relic Masters and need them. There is also a second race in Anara, somewhat aloof from the humans, called the Sekoi.

Fisher sets up strong male and female lead characters from different sides of the tracks with intersecting fates. Raffi is a Relic Masters apprentice. Carys is a young Watcher sent from the city to hunt Raffi and his master Galen. All of Fisher's great strengths are on display in *The Dark City*: sharply detailed characters, rugged and convincing action, crisp writing, and a strong conceptual backdrop which conveys both purpose and meaning. These books are written for a slightly younger audience than *Incarceron*, are a slight notch below it in terms of sophistication and excellence. Nonetheless they are probably more accessible to an even broader audience.

The Dark City is certain to launch many readers into this series. A truly big question for buyers is how much the readily available cheap UK paperbacks in the US online used book market will impact sales of books 2,3,4. Penguin has taken two measures to hold the line here. One of course is to release the books in swift succession. Secondly, they have divided a large detailed map of Anara into four sections and put one section on the back side of the dust jacket of each successive volume so that you need all four books of the US editions to collect the whole! map. Hard to say how things will play out but this is a terrific series and well worth promoting.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating. 8.75

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.5

Death Cloud (Young Sherlock Holmes: The Legend Begins), by Andrew Lane

9780374387679, \$16.99

Farrar Straus Giroux/MPS, February 2011

Core audience: Mystery/adventure readers, 10 + (boy oriented, but adventuresome girls should like it as well)

Notable: True to Doyle's originals, this mystery requires logic, observation, deductive reasoning. A smart, plucky girl character. Friendship and loyalty. A promising debut to a new series.

Review: A quick pace, dangerous twists, and interesting details make this a lively mystery. Young Sherlock, forced to spend a summer break from boarding school with an aunt and uncle whom he doesn't know, finds himself embroiled in a mystery that begins when he observes a mysterious cloud and finds a man's blister covered body. A second, identical, death raises the fear of plague; but Sherlock and a new, streetwise friend, Matty Arnatt, suspect foul play, not disease. An eccentric American, Amyus Crowe, hired as a tutor for young Sherlock, teaches him to observe his surroundings closely and to use deductive reasoning. With Mr. Crowe (and his daughter) aiding and abetting, Sherlock and Matty follow the clues, odd as they seem, to uncover and thwart a monstrous plot that endangers England itself.

The mystery, when revealed, is a bit far-fetched. The journey to the solution, however, is entertaining. In his afterward, the author admits that Doyle revealed few clues about Sherlock Holmes's youth and hopes that his attempt at filling the void is in keeping with the original stories.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 6

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 7

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

What is it about Sherlock Holmes? He's a drug addict. He's not a nice guy. He's not even good looking. (OK, the hat is VERY COOL.) Even his author didn't like him. So why is he endlessly fascinating? I don't know, but count me among the smitten. So far, my favorite series for young people is Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes* books, but *Death Cloud* was fun, too. I don't think the final cover choice (think Justin Bieber) was a particularly good idea, and I agree with Ellen that the denouement was far-fetched, but I'll cheerfully read the next one.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Review: 7

Delirium, by Lauren Oliver

9780061726828, \$17.99

Harper, February 2011

Core Audience: Ages 14+, mostly girls

Notable Aspects: dystopia, romance

REVIEW: Lauren Oliver is back after her smashing debut in *Before I Fall*. *Delirium* is a delicious dystopian story that centers on a United States where love has been diagnosed as a disease and teens are required to be "cured" when they reach adulthood. Positively eerie and utterly un-put-downable. An easy sell to fans of *Before I Fall*, but I like that Oliver is branching out instead of writing the same book all over again. I have high hopes for her career, showing this kind of diversity so early on with such high-caliber writing. You can also hand this book to girls who liked *The Hunger Games* for the characters and the romance, not the violence.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

Department 19, by Will Hill

9781595144065, \$17.99

Razor Bill/Penguin Group U.S.A., March, 2011

Core audience: Teens who can handle graphic violence

Notable: Unique science fiction

Review: Department 19 is a secret organization that is trained to fight vampires. Jamie Carpenter, after his father is killed and his mother is kidnapped, finds out that his father was a member of Department 19. Knowing the stories of Dracula and Frankenstein will help you to understand the background and quest of Department 19 to wipe out the vampires who are trying to resurrect Dracula. Jamie undergoes intensive training so that he can be part of the mission to rescue his mother. The plot is complicated by a traitor in the organization, Jamie trusting a vampire, his mother's turning, the death of his mentor and many other violent and bloody events.

It is a well-written novel for readers who enjoy an action-filled video game-like story.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.5

displacement, by Thalia Chaltos

9780670011995, \$16.99

Viking, June 2011

Core Audience: 12 and up, primarily girls.

Notable Aspects: A novel told in verse that appears to be prose.

Review: Reading through *displacement*, Thalia Chaltos' second novel told in verse, a question formed in my mind. Is this a novel told in verse or is this a short story told with really big margins? Reading passages aloud at random with a prose cadence I found that, with an exception here and there, the book was in fact a short story told with really big margins. For example,

"I wearily go in for my mug

and without thinking

pluck a postcard from

right up near the front."

does rather well as prose. "I wearily go in for my mug and without thinking pluck a postcard from right up near the front."

This question answered I found that, in the genuine hydra manner, two more had formed to take its place. Did it matter that the poems weren't really poems, and secondly, can that statement be defended since modern poetry is subjective enough that calling something a poem might be enough to make it one? It's true that we've come a long way from the old days, for example from Lord Grenville's ball where, when a young lady remarked to Sir Percy, "why Percy it rhymes" he responded, "yes my dear, it's a poem." Nonetheless, I think it fair enough to assume that poems cannot also be perfectly workable prose with more line breaks. We can easily see that converting prose into verse is not a uniformly good idea. For example no one would greet War and Peace, a verse novel, now 30,000 pages, with open arms. One could argue that the format encourages success in teen readers and so forth, but I think that undermines the value of the YA verse novels that really are constructed of poems. There are flashes of poetry in displacement, but just too few to justify the format. In any case this story of a teenager working her way through the doldrums brought on by the haunting quality of her sister's death by running off to the tabula rasa of a new, grittier town, is a solid exploration of the quality of guilt, combined with the super imposition of circumstances to suspend life.

Kenny Brechner: DDG Booksellers Rating: 6

Displacement by Thalia Chalitas

978-0-670-01199-5 \$16.99

Viking, June 9, 2011

Core Audience: Ages 12 & up

Notable aspects: language, phrasing, pacing

Review: When I started reading

Displacement, I

was not sure
about the prose format for
this book but
as the novel developed I
decided that it was appropriate. It's not

that many sections of the book could
stand alone as poems but more that the
space between the sections
of prose allowed
for the brain to spend more time
on
each phrase.

There were stunning
snippets that will stay with me. Vera,
recalling a brief visit
from her mostly absent mother,

“I was left to pendulum
slightly unbalanced
by the lack of weight
on her end
of the swing.”

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

Divergent, by Veronica Roth

9780062024022, \$17.99

Katherine Tegen Books/Harper, May 2011

Core Audience: Ages 14+, girls & boys

Notable Aspects: dystopia, romance (not too intense - totally ok for boy readers)

REVIEW: Instead of trying to re-phrase the plot summary from the catalog copy, here's the Edelweiss link:

<http://edelweiss.abovethetreeline.com/ProductDetailPage.aspx?sku=0062024027>

This is one of the best books I've read in recent memory, and in my opinion it's the first to rival *The Hunger Games* as far as writing quality, depth of plot, character, and intensity are concerned. And it's certainly NOT a copycat. It's hard to believe that Roth was a college student when she wrote it - I'm simply blown away by her skill. It's the first in a trilogy, so there's more to come, and not soon enough. You can hand this to any Hunger Games fan and rest assured that they will not be disappointed.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9.5

Core Audience: Ages 14 & up, quite a lot of violence

Notable aspects: Captivating, fast-paced

Review: *Divergent* is set in a future Chicago that has disintegrated into a segmented, segregated society built on philosophical/ideological factions. Sixteen-year-olds take aptitude tests that help them determine what faction they will choose to live in: Abnegation (committed to selflessness), Erudite (pledged to learning and knowledge), Candor (valuing truth and honesty), Amity (seeking peace and friendship) or Dauntless (committed to bravery and fearlessness). That decision also determines most other aspects of their future lives. At the end of her aptitude test, Beatrice learns she is a Divergent -- having thoughts and behaviors for more than one faction -- but must still choose just one faction.

While I found the characters to be somewhat thinly sketched and their world to be too neatly arranged for full believability I still enjoyed this book. I liked that the story used the idea that humans instinctively attack and/or conquer those who are different. I was

easily swept along with the whirlwind that Beatrice navigates. Fans of *The Hunger Games* will find that *Divergent* is their new favorite series.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 9

Divergent, by Veronica Roth

9780062024022, \$17.99

Katherine Tegen Books/HarperCollins, May, 2011

Core audience: ages 11-14

Notable: Action, cruelty, explicit violence, dystopia

Review: This book will be a commercial success: it is essentially the draft of a screenplay. As a work of literature, of meaningful addition to coming-of-age writing, it's a deep disappointment, filled with cliché, clumsy plot, and bad grammar, despite the hand of a respected editor at the helm, and elements that open opportunities for insight, imagination, and style.

The story: In a world where society is defined by membership in a "faction" (a tribe of sorts), the available choices are Abnegation, Dauntless, Amity, Candor, and Erudite; and the miserable, reviled underclass known as "factionless." Beatrice (aka Tris) has grown up in Abnegation, whose selfless mores have been entrusted with governing the entire polity. At age 16 when she participates in the ritual of choosing her adult faction, Beatrice chooses to leave Abnegation, and instead joins Dauntless, a gang of ruthless thrill-seekers. In the process she learns that she's Divergent, i.e. with loyalties to more than one faction, a stringently forbidden outlook. Much of the book is spent on the rigors of training and initiation, proving physical courage. Some Dauntless retain shreds of mercy; some do not. Despite pain, humiliation, death, and gruesome injuries, there is also romance. Then well into the second half of the book, a nefarious conspiracy emerges: the Erudite are trying, with a little help from their Dauntless buddies, to wipe out the Abnegation. And they might have done so if (spoiler alert) Beatrice's mother and father hadn't suddenly revealed themselves as double agents and saved the day. Blam! Blam! Blam! the book ends. While you await the sequels, the gun lobby thinks they might have a message of interest to you.

The whiff of ideas is tantalizing, but we never get a real mouthful. Selflessness, courage, amiability, honesty, and erudition are all valuable human capacities. So are initiative, creativity, optimism, generosity, sociability, and a host of others. Confining the characters to five, and making the plot turn on that confinement, is an interesting notion, provided we know why those five and why so strictly enforced. Otherwise it's just a silly bit of costume, as symbolic as pink and blue booties.

I try to ignore grammatical stumbles when reading ARC's, but the mis-uses of "lay" began to add up like bricks in the path. There were other verbal potholes too; let us hope someone filled and patched them before the final version went to press.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 6

The Emerald Atlas, by John Stephens

9780375868702 \$17.99

Alfred A. Knopf, Random House, April 2011

Core audience: boys and girls in middle school

Notable for adventure, humor, fantasy

Review: Three orphans are shunted from orphanage to uncomfortable orphanage for ten years! Quite accepting of whatever befalls them, they now find they are alone at the isolated mansion that is to be their new home. They find an old green atlas and before you can say "Screecher!" they find themselves time-traveling through lands with strange beasts, dwarves, prophecies, and an evil Countess who is looking for that same Emerald Atlas! All manner of adventures ensue in a great caper that is reminiscent of Lemony Snicket's strangeness . Suspenseful and humorous, with its own fully drawn locales the book will enthrall, enchant and keep readers up to all hours! With lots of questions still unanswered, we know there will be more.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford) Rating : 8

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 7.5

Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 7.5

Entwined, by Heather Dixon

9780062001030, \$16.99

Greenwillow, March, 2010

Core audience: Ages: 10-14

Notable for: fairy tale retelling, romance & magic, family dealing with loss

This new retelling of “The Twelve Dancing Princesses” sometimes felt a bit rushed or helter-skelter to me, but the charming characters, a slightly offbeat portrayal of royal life, and the portrayal of a family struggling to deal with the loss of a wife and mother ultimately won me over.

Princess Azalea is the eldest of eleven (soon to be twelve) princesses, and during her mother’s illness, she finds herself hosting the annual Yuletide ball and supervising her somewhat unruly sisters. The sudden death of the queen during childbirth brings a sad end to the Christmas festivities, and the princesses find themselves more and more lost as they deal with the business of mourning and the equally sudden departure of their father, who leaves to join his soldiers in war. Azalea is left to care for the younger girls while dealing with her own grief and confusion, but the discovery of a secret passage that leads to a magical garden where the girls go to dance, night after night, brings one bit of joy to their lives. The increasingly sinister nature of the Keeper of this magic garden and the eventual return of the King--along with his decision to find a suitor for Azalea--threaten to plunge the family into deeper grief.

The princesses’ antics and the suitors and their foibles are very funny; there is a sweet (and chaste) romance for Azalea; and the changing relationship between the girls and their father, from mistrust and anger to acceptance and love, all combined to make this a story I’d be happy to recommend to young romantics.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop Rating: 8

Eona, by Alison Goodman

9780670063116, \$19.99

Viking/Penguin Group USA, 02/2011

Core audience: Ages 13+, girls and boys who like dragon stories, strong female characters and battles and some romantic tension

Notable: Descriptions, plot

Review: This is a satisfying sequel and conclusion to the epic story of the female Dragoneye once known as “Eon” but revealed to be Eona, the female Mirror Dragoneye - the first in hundreds of years. This is a fast-paced tale of mystery, elaborate plot twists, deceit, loyalty, power and even love. The descriptive, detailed writing which includes

intertwines fantasy with Asian empire history brings the Empire of the Celestial Dragons alive pulsating with drama.

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

The Emperor of Nihon-Ja (*Ranger's Apprentice*, Book 10) by John Flanagan

9780399255007 , \$17.99

Philomel, 04/19/2011

Core audience: Ages 10-12, Girls and Boys who enjoy adventure stories with some fantasy

Notable: Interesting Plot, Adventure

Review: This is a satisfying final adventure. While not every future detail is resolved (do Will and Horace each marry the girl they love? do they eventually become mentors? does Halt ever retire?), it is full of suspense and action. Horace plays a major role, but so do Will, Halt and Alyss and Evanlyn. They work together to put together and train a force in order to fend off the master Senji warriors and save the emperor.

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.0

Exposed, by Kimberly Marcus

9870375866957, \$16.99

Random House, February 2011

Core audience: Girls 14-17

Notable: Verse form, teen issues, characters, plot, strong ending

Review: Note: plot specifics are deliberately vague here to avoid spoiling a stunning read. Each page of this remarkable verse novel is a complete, satisfying poem that moves the plot forward. Liz, age 16, is a budding photographer; her best friend Kate is promising dancer. One Friday evening when they're hanging out, they have a tiff that becomes the turning point in a set of difficult interpersonal conflicts that change both of them, and their families. Liz narrates the story, and the author handles Liz's account so deftly that we can see her growing and maturing in a believable curve. Though her experience is not universal, it's one that's so common, so close at hand for many teens, that I expect it to

become a standard on high school reading lists. Full disclosure: the setting for the book is very local, though renamed, and so accurate I gasped in recognition.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 9

I agree with Carol and Carol about Exposed--a very powerful and beautifully written book. So add my rating of 9.3 as well.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Books Rating: 9.3

Kim lives here in Dartmouth and I read it months ago and agree w/ you both about it. REALLY well done. She has a contract for three books, I believe and a kids picture book coming up with I believe, Penguin. Pretty cool.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books

Two of the many things I know almost nothing about are verse novels and Cape Cod. For the former, I know which ones I like and which ones I don't, but am no judge of the form. For the latter, I have been a whole twice, and if the ferry in this story hadn't gone to Martha's Vineyard, I wouldn't have had clue one where they were. These facts are only (potentially) of interest because if this book works for me - and it did - it has to be for things other than form and setting. I agree with Carol and Kenny - the writing is powerful and absorbing, the characters are believable and likable, the outcome completely realistic, its near perfection for high school discussion. My one quibble would be the final scene, which I found disappointing. A chance meeting on the beach - really? At least no one walked off into the sunset. Otherwise, very fine.

Rondi Brower, blackwood & Brower Rating: 8.5

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 9

Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 9

Fallen Grace, by Mary Hooper

9781599905648 \$16.99

Bloomsbury/MPS, February 2011

Core audience: teen girls who like historical novels and mysteries

Notable for historical detail, strong female character, suspense, very Dickensian in genre

Review: Grace Parkes and her intellectually-challenged younger sister have a very hard life in Victorian London. They are orphans living hand to mouth (when lucky). Grace gets a job at an undertaking establishment as a professional mute mourner. Nothing there is as it seems. The unscrupulous and powerful owners have plans to fraudently claim a huge inheritance owed (unknown to her for some time) to Grace. With the help of a very interested young lawyer, Grace finds a bit of romance and the help she needs to claim what is hers. I loved the way seemingly minor events, notices and characters play big parts in the outcome. Chapters begin with newspaper notations, tombstone epitaphs or bits from Dickens' Dictionary of London adding to the sense of historical detail. Events appear contrived and that's quite Dickensian. With the fast pace and suspense, readers will gallop to the finish. In the end, and quite ironically, Grace gets revenge on the very man who caused her own feelings of "Fallen Grace". A very satisfying read.

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

Five 4ths of July, by Pat Raccio Hughes

9780670012077, \$16.99

Viking Penguin, May 2011

Core audience: Gr 7 + who like historical fiction and boys with family issues

Notable for historical facts about American Revolution and for portrayal of angry teen whose feelings skew the way he sees things (contemporary issues no matter when they occur!)

Review: Starting in 1777, Jake celebrates the Fourth of July for five years. Each time we see vignettes of a boy hurting for attention from his father, whose approval is hard to come by. Jake is brash, disrespectful, called "Mal-the bad one" by friends and family. As a young man he makes unmerciful fun of the servant girl at the home of friends. As the years go by, their relationship changes to one of passion and love. When their small seaside town is attacked by the British, Jake is taken aboard a British prison ship, where he is kept for more than a year. Factual and eye-opening, the very unpleasant details are very real and the story, previously a bit slow, really takes off. By the time Jake escapes and is brought back to health by a kind Tory couple, he has had a chance to think on the

meaning of war, what is really important in life and how his behavior has contributed to some pretty horrific events. The ending finds a penitent Jake, his now -freed servant girl, and his family ready for a loving new start to life together. (There is a brief, gently-portrayed scene in the reeds where a child is conceived before Jake is taken prisoner.) The Jake character will be familiar to modern teen boys and the historical facts will be new to those who think Boston is the center of it all and that the Patriots were always right!

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

Flip, by Martyn Bedford

9780385739900, \$16.99

Wendy Lamb Books/RH, April 2011

Core Audience: Ages 14+, mostly boys

Notable Aspects: somber 'Freaky Friday' plotline, British author/characters

REVIEW: In a twisted case of 'Freaky Friday,' Alex wakes up in the body of another boy in an unknown house miles from home. Six months have mysteriously passed. Who is this boy and why is Alex in his body? This book will appeal to teenage boys (an elusive beast) and possibly even reluctant readers (due to short chapters and fast-moving story). Though I didn't love this book it certainly kept me interested and turning the pages until the end.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 6

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 8.5

Flutter, by Erin Moulton

978-0399255151, \$16.99

Philomel, May, 2011

Core Audience: girls, 8-12

Notable: sisters, relationship with nature, family life, folklore

Review: Moulton's novel introduces us to Maple, sister to Dawn, Beetle and the new baby Lily. When Lily is born prematurely Maple sets off to find her a miracle cure. Through family stories and songs she has heard of the Wise Woman and feels sure that she will find her in the woods in Vermont. She sets off on this journey in the middle of the night, with her older sister tagging along. But it is not as simple they might have first imagined. After each tragedy and setback to the master plan occurs, our heroine seems a little older and wiser than her nine and half years. The sisters run into a bear, skunk and poachers, not to mention jumping into the back of a truck and coming face to face with dead animals. Moulton gets points for being unique, I don't know that I've ever read a scene such as this in a chapter book before. In fact Maple's name and voice are very original, she will certainly join the legion of spunky girls who have come before her. She has inherited quite the fictional birthright, and lives up to the expectations that Caddie or May Amelia have set before her. I noticed though, that when things got tough Maple often faints or things go black and then she wakes up. Afterwards the reader finds out what happened in the meantime. Once, maybe twice is okay, anymore than that is just repetitive and predictable. The tag line also reads "The story of four sisters," perhaps in some way to suggest a similarity to the Penderwicks. It may be an "incredible journey" but given their ages and the setting of the story we only come to know the older two. (One sister is a toddler, the other an infant) All that is fine, but made me feel a bit as if the cover had been misleading. Those few quibbles aside this is a book filled with adventure in which the sense of family and relationships is solid and strong. It is that joy and love of nature that motivates our dear Maple to find the water that promises to work miracles for her sister, and we can't help but root for her every step of the way.

beth reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 6.5

Forgotten, by Cat Patrick

9780316094610, \$17.99

Little, Brown (Hachette), June, 2011

Core Audience: romantic girls, 12-15

Notable: Memory reversal; sweet teen romance

Review: One concept makes this book work: London Lane, age 16, can "remember" the future, but the past resets to nil every day at 4:33 a.m. When she meets a cute boy and he's smitten, she doesn't recognize him next day - but she can see him in her future. This is a tricky concept, and works more believably in some portions than others. Its finest moment is in response to his query, -- after many chapters of kissing, quarreling, making up, eating pizza, kissing some more -- about whether or not she sees them having sex. The book will be a hit (when it reaches paperback) with romantic teen girls who aren't troubled by the well-worn plot elements of childhood trauma, family secrets, and

repressed memory. One of the best parts of the book is a subplot about a best friend who engages in risky behavior (dating a married teacher). London can foresee the outcome that her friend wants to deny; they quarrel, and London tries to figure out a way to change the future and save her friend the heartbreak.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 7.5

Forgotten, by Cat Patrick

9780316094610 / \$17.99

Little Brown, June 2011

Core audience: high school girls

Notable aspects: interesting premise and characters

London Lane loses her memory every night, so she makes notes to tell her everything that happened from what she wore the day before to what homework she needs to do to what her friend has told her. She can, however, "remember" the future, so she knows who people are because she sees them in the days and weeks and years ahead. Then she meets Luke and is confused because she really likes him but can't see him in the future. What does this mean? And why is she having dreams about a cemetery? This is a high school friendship/romance book with an intriguing twist.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop Rating: 7.5

The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of her Own Making, by Catherynne Valente

9780312649616, \$16.99

Feiwel & Friends, May, 2011

Core Audience: girls, 9-12

Notable: intensive vocabulary, unique and interesting characters, quests

Review: In the line of fantastical young women that goes back to Alice and Dorothy-- both obvious comparisons-- comes September. Through a chance meeting at the kitchen window she meets the Green Wind and discovers that her help is needed in Fairyland to retrieve a talisman in the enchanted woods. She accepts and the quest begins. This is my

type of book, the kind where I underline and find something that makes my eyes get big at the way in which a talented author chooses her words and strings them together. Alas, not everyone who writes for children possesses this skill. Each time I run across a phrase, sure that she has outdone herself, another sentence comes along that causes me to pinch myself. Cause surely it must be a dream; which is precisely what Valente is aiming at in her first novel for young readers. With a nod to Lemony Snicket with his out of this world vocabulary and intrusive narrator, this is one of those decisive novels you either love it or hate it. Judging from this bit so far you can guess in which camp I fall. But I can certainly see how some readers would think differently, especially concerning the illustrations. I happen to love Ana Juan, her New Yorker covers make me smile and her picturebooks are fresh and engaging in a weird stylistic way. She brings her wild imagination and talent for creating imagery to the chapter titles. Some of the characters are creepy, but that just makes it that whole package much more of an original. In regards to style and storyline characters, the reader is in store for quite a few delicious surprises. Who wouldn't love a soap golem named Lye, or Wyverary named "A through L" with an encyclopedia for a father? There's nothing else out there quite like this, and that's what makes me happy to recommend this book to someone looking to get out of a reading rut. The story holds your attention from start to finish and the dialogue and descriptions are charming and thoughtful. Come take the journey with September. Your Leopard awaits, but don't pull too harshly, she bites.

beth reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 8

Susan Savory, Bunch of Grapes Rating: 8.5

Glorious Adventures of the Sunshine Queen by Geraldine McCaughrean

9780062008060 \$16.99

Harper Collins, June 2011

Core Audience: Grades 5-8

Notable for adventure, strong female character, humor,

Rip-roaring and feisty is this tale of adventure aboard an old dilapidated paddle steamboat in the 1890's. Twelve-year-old Cissy and two classmates leave their Oklahoma town during a diphtheria outbreak in search of their favorite teacher who is now living on a Missouri River steamboat with her husband living the showboat lifestyle. They meet up with quirky actors, nasty gamblers, Hell-fire Reverends, plucky Dixieland musicians and a great calliope! Besides lots of action, McCaughrean 's wonderful language, full of lyrical imagery and colloquialisms, not to mention full-blown soul, will keep readers' eyes glued to the pages to the end! Oh, and that strange plot twist toward the end....!

(This is a sequel to the wonderful *Stop the Train*, but ably stands on its own.)

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Rating: 8.5

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 9

The Great Hamster Massacre, by Katie Davies

9781442420625, \$12.99

Simon & Schuster, May, 2011

Core audience: elementary school age budding detectives (not for the squeamish)

Notable aspects: humor, spunky girl main character

This is not your usual death of a pet book. Anna and her brother Tom have finally been given the hamsters they have been wanting. But not long after they bring the hamsters home, they discover one hamster missing, the other nearly dead and 8 dead babies. Unwilling to accept their parents' explanation that the hamsters killed the babies and the cat killed the adult hamsters, the kids decide to investigate. The list of suspects includes various neighbors, the cat, and both hamsters. With help organizing the investigation from a neighbor who used to be a policewoman, the kids are on the case. The cartoon-like drawings by Hannah Shaw add to the humor of the book.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop Rating: 7

Hammerin' Hank Greenberg, by Shelley Sommer

9781590784525, \$17.95

Calkins Creek, March 2011

Core Audience: Boys, 10 +

Notable aspects: baseball enthusiasts, biography, great archival pictures that support the story, bigotry

Review: *Hammerin' Hank Greenberg* is the kind of book that you pick up for the cover and become immediately interested. The cover will snare boys and baseball fans, but the

story will also capture anyone who is interested in reading about a man who encountered jeers and taunts yet was able to see the smallness of the action and succeed despite the denigrating remarks. Hank Greenberg was the son of Romanian Jewish immigrants. He was born in New York City and learned "stickball" in the back alleys of Greenwich Village, before his family moved to the Bronx. At thirteen, Hank was 6', 3 and he took a lot of ribbing. Sports became his escape. He practiced whenever he could, and this discipline, coupled with his natural talent, was the foundation for his success. And according to Sommer's accounts, he was a gentleman with a kind heart and empathy for other athletes experiencing bigotry. The "Jewish Tiger" played most of his career with the Detroit Tigers. *Hammerin' Hank Greenberg* is perfect for young baseball enthusiasts, for kids who enjoy non-fiction, and the ideal book for biography assignments!

Kathleen "Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 7.5

Hidden, by Helen Frost

978-0-374-38221-6 \$16.99

Farrar Straus Giroux 5/11

Core Audience: Ages 11-15

Notable aspects: Authentic child voice

Review: This is a story told from the perspective of Wren Abbott, an eight year-old girl who was in the back seat of her mother's minivan when it is stolen by a man named West. The first part of the story tells of the girl left in the locked garage where her abductor left the minivan. The young daughter of her abductor discovers Wren in the garage and secretly leaves her food. Eventually Wren escapes. Years later, after the man is caught & convicted, the two girls meet at a summer camp. After reading the tense, authentic, first part of the book I had high hopes for the second half. Alas, the story comes to a too quick, too easy conclusion. An afterword states that this book was written in a form of verse invented for this book but my copy must not have been printed correctly because when I tried to read it again as instructed the verse made no sense.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 6

I'll Be There by Holly Goldberg Sloan

9780316122765, Little Brown Books for Young Readers

May 17, 2011, \$

Core Audience: Ages 12+

Issues: Family, loyalty, Family Violence, brothers, music, survival,

Review: *I'll Be There* is a story about human connection and relationships. It is also a story about actions and consequences. Sam Border and his brother Riddle were raised by their unstable father. They have led a nomadic life since the boys were very young (ages 7 and 2.) Always on the move, the truck was packed at all time, so they could leave in a flash whenever their father activities brought closer scrutiny. Sam, now 17 years old, has a passion for music. When they arrive in a new town Sam is often drawn to the music coming from a local church. It is during one of these impromptu visits that Sam meets Emily and Sloan's story unfolds. *I'll Be There* is realistic fiction with a punch. The writing is first-rate and the story is dynamic.

Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating 8.5

Invisible Inkling by Emily Jenkins

978-0-06-180220-1 \$14.99

HarperCollins, 4/26/11

Core audience: ages 7-12

Notable aspects: Illustration by Harry Bliss, humor

Review: *Inkling*, an invisible bandapat, is mistakenly drawn to the Big Round Pumpkin, the ice cream shop owned by the Wolowitz family, because he loves squash. Hank Wolowitz meets him when he is down on the floor reaching under the sink for his long lost Lego propeller. Instead of the propeller he gets a handful of invisible fur. After that first meeting they forge a rocky friendship based upon *Inkling's* search for squash and Hank's battle with the school bully. Both eventually get what they need in this clever story. It is the first of a series of adventures written about Hank & *Inkling*.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 7.5

Jersey Tomatoes Are the Best, by Maria Padian

9780375865794, \$16.99

Knopf/Random, March 2011 \$16.99

Core audience: Girls, 12+

Notable features: friends who are loyal and supportive of each other; having ambitions and working hard to achieve goals; communication; acceptance (of self and of others); a young woman's descent into anorexia/bulimia (the hows and whys)

Review: *Jersey Tomatoes Are the Best* is told in the alternating voices of best friends Henry (not Henrietta!) and Eva. A tennis champ and a talented dancer, respectively, the girls lives are controlled by domineering parents. Henry's father is her demanding, aggressive coach who has turned her into "the bitch" on the court. Eva's mother is a demanding, aggressive stage mother. Best friends, Henry and Eva support each other, console each other, encourage each other on.

When Henry has an opportunity to attend a tennis camp in Florida and Eva is accepted into a ballet program in New York, the girls find themselves separated for the summer. In Florida, away from the stress of training with her father, Henry thrives. Eva, however, stressed by her mother's intensity, is secretly starving herself. The additional pressure in New York worsens her disease. Henry, risking her future in tennis, rushes to get back to New Jersey where Eva has been hospitalized after having a heart attack. She is fighting treatment and still denying her illness. (These chapters are graphic and potent!). The book ends on a hopeful note...Eva on her way to recovery. Parents and daughters starting to communicate honestly and openly.

I would feel comfortable recommending this for a younger reader than some other books dealing with eating disorders. It's frank and honest, but less graphic and harrowing than some. Henry and Eva are solid, believable characters. Their parents are multi-dimensional; far more complex than the controlling adults that the girls believe they are. Yolanda, Henry's Latina roommate, adds multi-cultural depth to the story.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 8.75

Junonia, by Kevin Henkes

9780061964176, \$15.99

Greenwillow (Harper), June, 2011

Core audience: girls ages 8-10

Notable aspects: emotional authenticity, characters, strong ending

Review: Alice and her parents spend a winter vacation on Sanibel Island each year, and it always falls in the week of Alice's birthday, making it an important ritual for her. This year she turns 10, and she has very clear ideas about which familiar neighbors will come, which games she'll enjoy with her parents, and also that this is the year she'll find a rare junonia shell. Naturally, some things are different -- especially the presence of Mallory, a whiny, self-absorbed 6-year-old. Alice tries to make the best of the situation, and the reader assumes the story will conclude with finding a junonia. Henkes builds in some very satisfying surprises, though, and we send Alice home more mature than she arrived. Henkes' many gifts are crowned with his absolute emotional authenticity, including the charming and chilling preoccupations of smart, sensitive, educated adults.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 8.5

Junonia, by Kevin Henkes

9780061964176, \$15.99

Greenwillow/Harper Collins June 2011

Core Audience: Girls ages 8-12

Notable: family issues, rich setting

Alice Rice, nearly ten, and her family, travel from icy Wisconsin to Sanibel Island, Florida each year. They rent a small beach house in a neighborhood where they know all the neighbors and look forward to their yearly visit with them. This annual visit to Florida is full of rituals that Alice looks forward to all year. Her Mom's old friend Kate always joins them, which Alice particularly loves. One of Alice's favorite things to do while there is to hunt for shells, but the lovely and rare Junonia Shell has so far evaded her. This year Alice will turn ten while they are in Florida, which feels like a big birthday to her, putting her into "double digits", and she looks forward to spending it with those old friends. Soon after arriving, however, she is told that the kids who are always next door staying with their grandparents won't be there and even worse, Kate is bringing along a new boyfriend who has a young child! She loves having Kate to herself.

This book has all the sweetness and interest of other Kevin Henkes books, but I have to say (and I feel like this is terribly nervy of me to criticize Henkes who's writing I have loved) that this child seems so self-absorbed that many children may have trouble relating to her awkward coming of age and discomfort with her world. OK, she is only ten, and an only child and children are by nature self absorbed, but this child has WONDERFUL, attentive, caring, fun and interesting parents. They make a huge and creative deal of her birthday and she still can only dwell on the nuisance that this visiting younger child presents. She seems lacking in compassion, even for a ten year old and her parents seem aware yet tolerant of it.

Still, the book is worth reading, the shell illustrations on title page a real bonus. Maybe I am being harsh, but I came away from reading this slightly uncomfortable, rather than excited about yet another great Kevin Henkes.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating: 7

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 9

The Last Little Blue Envelope by Maureen Johnson

978-0-06-197679-7 \$16.99

HarperTeen 4/26/11

Core audience: Girls age 12& up

Notable aspects:

Review: At the end of *13 Little Blue Envelopes*, Ginny has her backpack stolen from a beach in Greece and with it the last of the 13 letters. In this sequel, Ginny learns that someone has the 13th letter and that he wants to make a deal for its return. This leads her back to England and another series of adventures. I loved the first book and was skeptical about the success of a sequel but Johnson pulled it off. Even with the familiar teen novel themes of thwarted romance and tangled friendships this story seemed to keep clear of cliché.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

The Lemonade Crime by Jacqueline Davies

9780547279671 \$15.99

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, May 2, 2011

Core Audience: Boys and girls ages 8-12

Notable Aspects: Law, Theft of Money, Classroom and courtroom settings

Review: In this sequel to *The Lemonade Wars*, the lemonade money is stolen from Evan, so his precocious sister Jessie organizes a court of law with the entire 4th grade to try the suspected classmate. Every chapter begins with an interesting legal definition and children will be drawn into the drama of setting up the court procedures as they read the story. The characters are very real and believable and the ending is perfect. Great story for a budding lawyer, this would also make an excellent book to read to a class. It should generate lots of discussion as children talk about the legal system and ways to handle situations when it appears that a classmate has hurt or stolen from another classmate.

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Bookshop Rating: 8

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 8.5

Lexie by Audrey Couloumbis

9780375856327, \$15.99

Random House, May 24, 2011

Core audience: ages 8-12

Notable aspects: emotional authenticity, deftly handles the issues that arise around divorce

Review: Ten-year-old Lexie loves her annual trips to the shore with her parents. She knows that this year will be different because her parents have divorced but she is still looking forward to spending beach time with just her Dad. Everything changes when her Dad invites new girlfriend Vicki and her two boys to the beach house. Of course, Lexie has hurt feelings, and disappointments with the change of plans. The adults are awkward too since this is the first time they have tried to be this new family. Lexie doesn't sulk or act out. She doesn't repress her feelings but she just gets on with trying to enjoy her vacation under the new circumstances. I was struck by how kind these characters were with one another. Everyone was trying in their own way to make it work. It was refreshing to read a story without the usual stress & pain that is often the story line of such a book.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8.5

Luck of the Buttons, by Anne Ylvisaker

9780763650667 \$15.99

Candlewick April 2011

Core audience: boys and girls in gr. 4-6

Notable for feel of depression-era life, themes of family dynamics, bullying, friendship

Review: For generations Tugs Button's family has groused about bad luck keeping them from achieving anything worthwhile. It is the depression and the family is dirt poor. Tugs doesn't let this stop her from hoping and trying for something better. One summer, she finds herself befriended by one of the most popular girls in her class, and the two of them win the July 4th three-legged race after much practice. She enters a raffle (after working to earn the tickets) and wins a camera. An essay she writes from the heart wins a blue ribbon, even though she had thrown it away in the library. She even uncovers the scheme of a newcomer to town to bilk the locals of their savings for a bogus investment in "progress". Tug's good luck makes her "aspire", feel the possibilities of life. With her dirty, unfashionable, ill-fitting hand-me-down overalls she is one spunky twelve-year-old who remains steadfastly loyal to her multi-generational maddeningly complaining family, but she refuses to be "just a Button". Tugs will be a character to remember in a story loaded with quirky characters, humor, and heart-tugging moments.

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

Magnolia League by Katie Crouch

Little Brown, #9780316078498 \$17.99

Core audience: older teen girls

Notable for good old hoodoo southern atmosphere, suspense

Review: At the age of 15, Alex's Mom dies in a car accident. They had been living a comfortable "green" life in a California commune. Alex's Mom's lawyer is sent to bring Alex to Savannah, Ga. The rather cold matriarch is the leader of a local mother/daughter group who rule local society. It is an inheritance thing. At first, likeable, gutsy Alex doesn't fit in with the debutante group but is almost seduced by the power of magic to alter beauty and control what happens to her peers. For example, she is suddenly more slender with gorgeous hair. The guy she likes becomes "infatuated" with her. Hoodoo is very important part of the lives of her friends within the League. In the end she doesn't quite succumb to the superficiality of her new station. On the night of her debut she has to do some quick thinking and decision-making. The ending leaves the outcome wide open. Bordering on the romance genre, the story is dripping with atmosphere. It would be a great summer read in paperback, and a fun addition for libraries, but I have mixed

feelings about this sort of read leaving readers needing to spend more hardcover money (in this economy) before coming to a satisfying ending. Readers will hope for a sequel-real soon. I do.

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

Mercy, by Rebecca Lim

978-1-4231-4517-2 \$16.99

Hyperion 5/11

Core Audience: Ages 13 & up

Notable aspects: Paranormal romance

Review: After waking up in the body of someone else, Mercy has to fit herself into the life of the body she is inhabiting. She finds herself in the middle of a mystery involving missing girls. Throughout the story we get threads of both the events of her current life as well as glimpses into the other side of her existence. There are romantic interests on both sides to complicate the story. Paranormal, angel romances are not exactly my cup of tea but it does seem as though this one is well done.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 7

Torn (*The Missing*: Book 4) by Margaret Peterson Haddix

9781416989806 \$15.99

Simon & Schuster, August 2011

Core Audience: grades 3-7

Notable aspects: likable characters, clever combining of historical and modern plot lines. Definitely part of a series, will not stand alone. Spectacular author's note.

I have long been grateful to Henry Hudson. He was the first European to sail up "his" river and that became the beginning of its further exploration and settlement. He is also credited with naming my long-time home of Kinderhook when he anchored there in 1609. The local Mohican children were curious about the new arrivals and Hudson noticed them and called the place "Children's Corner". But important as he is to New York State history, it is hard to get excited about him or really warm up to him. He was

clearly a very driven man, willing to defy both his employers and his crew. One of the most popular pictures of him makes him look creepy and more than a little crazy. So imagine my surprise to find Katherine and Jonah, two of the protagonists in Haddix's great *Missing* series, on board Hudson's ship in 1611, just as the crew is planning to mutiny. Jonah is taking the place of John Hudson, ship's boy and Henry's son; Katherine is invisible. Is Jonah really John? Will they "fix" time? Will Second (currently the series bad guy) create an alternate time-line that has a Northwest Passage in it and how will that change the future? What really happened in James Bay? Who makes it back to the present? Haddix makes this history come alive.

Quick series recap - In book one, a planeload of 36 unknown babies lands in the mid-west. Fast forward 13 years, and two of these "babies" are now Chip and Jonah. They start to receive messages claiming that they are part of the "missing" and that people are coming to get them. It turns out they are missing children of history, who were abducted and must now go back and fix things so history doesn't change. JB and Second are two time travelers from the future who have different ideas about how and whether this should be done. In book two, Jonah and his sister Katherine (not a missing or adopted child, but like any little sister worth her salt, not to be left out) accompany Chip and Alex to the Tower of London in 1483, where/when it turns out that Chip and Alex are the 13-year-old King Edward V and his 10-year-old brother, Richard, Duke of York. Book three (not yet read by me) concerns Jonah's love interest, Andrea, whose original identity is Virginia Dare of the Jamestown Colony.

Science fiction, time-travel, child-centered history, excitement, adventure, young people growing up, discovering their identities in both the past and the present. This is a strong entry in a wonderful series. Dare I say it - better than *Shadow Children*.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Rating: 8

Million Miles From Boston, by Karen Day

\9780385738996, \$15.99

Wendy Lamb, Random House, April 2011

Core audience: middle grade girls

Notable for sensitivity to stepmother situation, peer relationships

Review: Lucy's Mom has died of cancer some years back. Lucy, Dad and little brother go to the family cottage at Pierson Point on the coast of Maine for the summer. Surprise! A nearby cottage for sale has been purchased by her schoolmate, Ian's, family. Lucy and Ian's relationship at school has been rocky to say the least. Lucy is further aggravated by the visits of Dad's new girlfriend. Lucy is terse and rude to her. By summer's end Lucy

learns a lot about what is behind her own attitude and that of Ian. I really liked Lucy and her relationships with the others in the community and admired how she handled the young children who attended her morning "camp" sessions on the Point, and how she saved her earnings to buy a neighbor's kayak for her Dad's birthday. Readers will enjoy being with Lucy while she processes all the changes that are occurring. Reading this was like a taste of summer vacation in a seaside enclave! (I did think the (galley) cover could have looked a little more realistic. It looks like a "fake" computer image.)

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford) Rating : 7.5

Missing on Superstition Mountain, by Elise Broach, illus. Antonio Javier Caparo

9780805090475, \$15.99

Holt, June 21, 2011

Core audience: Ages 7-11, both boys and girls

Notable: Use of historical setting, careful adventure,

Review: When I began reading the book I didn't realize that there really is a Superstition Mountain east of Phoenix, AZ, and it has quite a historic reputation -- not a nice one. I should have read the Author's Note at the beginning, instead of the end: three teens really did go missing in the area in the 1940's, along with any number of explorers, hikers, prospectors, and schemers over the past century. Broach has woven those facts and legends together with brothers, smart Simon, 11, introspective Henry, 10, and spring-loaded Jack, 6, who are new to the area, and their lively neighbor Delilah, about Henry's age. Several adults warn them again and again not to go up into the mountain area near their new home. Between curiosity and their runaway cat, of course they do, and of course they come across three bleached skulls, which they dare not reveal because they weren't supposed to be messing around on the mountain. They try to find out more without blowing their cover, and finally decide they must find the skulls again and bring them down. That, of course, leads to a dramatic crisis that is only partially resolved in this, the first book of a trilogy. What I love about the book, what will make it a great one to hand sell, is the way the kids carefully think through their moves. They don't agree easily, so the reader sees the back and forth of decision making as they map out the area between responsible caution and necessary adventure.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 8.5

I am not yet finished this but will 2nd Carol's review/rating.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating: 8.5

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 8.5

No Passengers Beyond this Point by Gennifer Choldenko

Isbn #9780803735347 \$16.99

Dial (Penguin), February, 2011

Core audience: boys and girls gr. 4-7

Notable for family issues and pretty fast-paced confusion

Review: I so wanted to like this book as much as I've enjoyed Choldenko's previous Al Capone books. Not so much. Single Mom (husband already dead) loses the family home to foreclosure because she hasn't read the small print on her contract. Uncle Red will welcome them all to his Colorado home. Kids must pack and be on plane tomorrow. Mom will follow ASAP. Everyone is discombobulated and emotionally bereft. The plane delivers the kids to Falling Bird, a very strange place with feathered taxis and lots of cool gadgets. The kids are each given their own special house with promises of "no worries". Teen India is only concerned with texting her BFF at home and having the cool stuff. Twelve-yr-old Finn, bless him, is striving to reunite the family and figure out this strange not-quite-Utopian place. Loveable Little Mouse, wise beyond her years, thinks only of reuniting with her sister and getting back to normal, not paying much attention to her broken arm. There are tasks to fulfill (according to the helpful Mr. Chuck) in order to make sense of it all and get out of there. After lots of fast-paced action and strange props the adventure ends. India has come to her senses and realizes she will have nothing without her family. The three siblings escape on a weird cart. The ending is a real puzzlement with several possibilities. It involves a plane crash where only kids survive, a fireball, a dog and its owner Mrs. Bean. We learn from her that Uncle Red and Mom visit the kids at hospital and everyone ends up happy and well-loved. Was it all a dream? Darned if I know!

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

Noah Barleywater Runs Away by John Boyne

9780385752466, \$16.99

David Fickling Books/Random House, May,2011

Audience: 8-12 year olds

Notable: Use of language, language play

Review: Noah Barleywater, age 8, sneaks out of his house before dawn. He is running away from home where he is the seventh smartest in his class and the third fastest runner. He is leaving behind parents that he loves and a secret he would rather not talk about. As he travels on foot from village to stranger village, time and distance stretch, and his path seems to disappear. The odd plants and animals he meets along the way spur him to continue until he finds himself at a strangely constructed house. Inside he finds that it is a toy shop filled with a collection of beautifully crafted toys and puppets, all wooden, and an old man who offers him food and conversation. That conversation is as curious as the rest of the shop. It seems the toymaker has had some very unusual life experiences and as they exchange stories, Noah learns as much about himself as he does about his host. ***Noah Barleywater Runs Away***, like all good allegories, explores universal themes. There are frequent diversions into small stories within the story, Boyne has fun with the all of the secondary characters. His use of language is playful and smart. He uses words as carefully as a poet in this slim tale. My tiny quibble is that this is a book likely to appeal more to adults than the young children for whom it was written.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8.7

Noah Barleywater Runs Away, by John Boyne

9780385572466

Dave Fickling Books/Random House, May 10, 2011

Core audience 8-12 years old

Notable: smart, subtle language and layers of meaning

Review: Noah, age 8, runs away from a difficult reality he can't face at home, to a fantasyland where trees scold him and animals talk. He finds a toy shop in which all the toys are made of wood, including row upon row of puppets. The old and engaging shop owner, through telling his story and through gentle, savvy, and wise dialogue with Noah, leads him to return home. The chest of treasured memories the old man opens reads like a Pandora's box of what faces mankind. This allegory confronts the issues of fantasy/reality, immortality/mortality, and what it means to be human. My only reservations are that a child might need an adult to help understand the deeper meanings of the story, and it would have more impact if the reader knew the story of Pinocchio. The writing, however, is engaging, understated, clever, and poignant. Altogether this is a fine read.

Joyce Miller, Baker Books Rating: 9

Okay for Now, by Gary D. Schmidt

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, April, 2011

9780547152608, \$16.99

Core audience: Ages 10-13

Notable: Plot, characters, language, strong ending, ironic humor, artistic analysis

Review: *Okay for Now* picks up more and more steam as it goes. The strong, triumphal finish backs off from happily-ever-after with a twist of ambiguity that will feel just right to the target audience.

The story: Doug Swietek, about age 14, moves from New York City to a small town upstate, along with his older brother, their mean, hard-bitten, hard-drinking father, and sweet but ineffectual mother. A second brother, Lucas, is in Vietnam. Doug hates the town and everything about it, and works hard to appear tough, whether with his brother, teachers, or Lil, the smart-mouthed local girl who puts him down. Doug will do anything to avoid looking like a chump, though we see his heart of gold peeping out when he thinks nobody is looking. The town library owns a set of Audubon's *Birds of America*, from which one plate after another is being sold off. Doug, who has genuine drawing skill, is appalled, and makes it his mission to find and restore the missing plates to their home, along with surviving at school and at home, and working as a grocery delivery boy. He encounters various characters, has setbacks and victories, and accomplishes much of his goal, more or less plausibly. Several of the characters are fully rounded, and clever, surprising plot turns play them off against one another. A different Audubon bird heads each chapter (not sure how these will be reproduced in the final book), and as Doug studies and draws each one himself, he remarks about its character and its struggles, often reflecting his own.

There is so much more to enjoy than to criticize about this book. My one concern is the slow start that will lose many of the readers who don't connect quickly with the humor, pathos, and courage that sing out after the first 40 pages. Though there is an early reference to Holling Hoodhood, there is no real connection, other than audience, to *Wednesday Wars*.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 8.5

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 9

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.5

Orchards, by Holly Thompson

9780385739771, 17.99

Delacorte Press/Random House, February, 2011

Core audience: Middle school and younger high school girls

Notable aspects: Sensitive handling of bullying issue; Japanese setting

After Kana Goldberg's classmate Ruth commits suicide following bullying behavior by Kana and her friends, Kana is sent to spend the summer in Japan with her grandmother and extended family. While she is working hard in her family's orange orchard and slowly learning Japanese culture, she thinks about Ruth, about why she did what she did and how Kana herself could have acted differently. What she learns about herself and the world ultimately allows her to deal with another tragedy in a way which is helpful to her community as well as herself. *Orchards* is written in spare poetry and draws the reader into Kana's world.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Bookshop Rating: 7.5

Orchards, Holly Thompson

9780385739771, \$17.99

Delacorte/Random House, February 2011

Core Audience: girls 12+

Notable aspects: bullying, teen issues, Japanese culture, family

Review: When an 8th grade classmate commits suicide, Kani and her circle of friends are shocked, despite the fact that they often treated the victim unkindly and thoughtlessly. As the community wonders about the role the girls played in the death of their classmate, Kani's parents decide to send her to Japan to live with her mother's family and work in their orange orchard. This is both an attempt to relieve her from the speculation, and also

to encourage her to reflect on the situation. When she arrives at her family's home, she feels like an outsider; she is a half-Japanese, half-Jewish American, and has only visited a handful of times with her parents and younger sister. At first, Kani feels isolated and cut off from all she knows. But as the summer progresses, she gets to know her family and eventually lets her guard down, and in the process begins to deal with the emotions and guilt from the suicide back home. I really enjoyed this book, and read it very quickly. It was thought-provoking, engaging, eloquent, and the writing was simply beautiful. The fact that it is written entirely in verse gives the sense of stream of consciousness and adds intimacy and depth to the story and to Kani as a character.

Kaley DeGoursey, RJ Julia Booksellers Rating: 7

The Penderwicks at Point Mouette, by Jeanne Birdsall

9780375858512, \$16.99

Random House, May, 2011

Core audience: Ages 8-12, more girls than boys

Notable: Characters, language, tight plot, believable emotions, humor, human warmth

Can Ms. Birdsall meet our expectations yet again after setting the bar so high in the first two volumes? She can, and she does. In this round, the focus is on Skye, Jane, and Batty, their friend Jeffrey, and surrounding adults as they spend two weeks vacationing on the coast of Maine. Never mind where the other Penderwicks have gone; they'll be back. Skye is pressed by the weight of her responsibilities as OAP (Oldest Available Penderwick); Jane struggles with writing about the romantic adventures of her fictional heroine Sabrina Starr; Batty is collecting lost golf balls and discovering an interest in music; and Jeffrey faces a startling revelation that upsets him to his core. More than that we cannot say without spoiling the fun. At one level the pleasure of the book is a plot that ratchets forward like the days of a vacation; at another level it's the consistently developing characters; but for an experienced reader, it's also the economy of every single paragraph, the delicate balance among story elements, emotions, and charming undercurrents, and the sheer vitality of the whole.

Carol Chittenden, Eight Cousins Rating: 9

I'm so glad you loved the Penderwicks at Point Mouette, Carol. I didn't want to be the one to review it, although I, too, loved it. I wanted someone more objective to do so since Jeannie is a neighbor and friend of mine and of our store. But I will gladly add my rating of 9 to yours.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Books Rating: 9

Sue Carita, Toadstool Books, Milford, NH Rating: 8.5

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 9

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 9

Phantoms in the Snow by Kathleen Benner Duple

9780545197700, \$17.99

Scholastic Press, Feb. 2011

Core audience: Ages, 12+, boys,

Notable Aspects: adventure, history, skiing, covert operation, historical fiction, WWII

Review: *Phantoms in the Snow* is a story about a 15 yr. old boy who has spent all of his young life on a farm in Texas. When smallpox takes his parents, he is sent to live with his only relative, an uncle, who is in the military and stationed at Camp Hale in Colorado. Early on we learn that Noah's parents were pacifists. Their views became Noah's views so when he is thrust into the rough and tumble life of a soldier and into a climate and atmosphere that is the polar opposite of his experiences, well... tension and conflict abound. Noah's uncle, James Shelley, is a member of an elite team of outdoorsmen whose special talents are skiing, hiking and rock climbing, and cold weather survival. To fit into his new world Noah has to adapt, listen to the voices of the men around him, learn to master the skills of this select group then bring it all together and find a way to be at peace with himself. *Phantoms in the Snow* is based on the real life experiences of the soldiers from the U. S. Army's 10th mountain division during World War II. Veterans from this unique division returned home and formed the foundation of the US ski industry. Adventures, action, history...all are part of this fast paced story. Perfect for boys in middle school who like the *Alex Rider* series.

Kathleen "Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 7.5

Pick-Up Game, edited by Marc Aronson and Charles R. Smith Jr

9780763645625 15.99 (Candlewick audio 9781455800797, \$22.99)

Candlewick, February 2011

Core Audience: teens, esp. basketball fans; reluctant guy readers

Notable for: really capturing the rhythm of basketball and being a book-by-committee that actually works

Candlewick description: It's one steamy July day at the West 4th Street Court in NYC, otherwise known as The Cage. Hotshot ESPN is wooing the scouts, Boo is struggling to guard the weird new guy named Waco, a Spike Lee wannabe has video rolling, and virgin Irene is sizing up six-foot-eight and-a-half-inch Chester. Nine of YA literature's top writers, including Walter Dean Myers, Rita Williams-Garcia, Adam Rapp, Joseph Bruchac, and Sharon Flake reveal how it all goes down in a searing collection of short stories, in which each one picks up where the previous one ends. Characters weave in and out of narratives, perspectives change, and emotions play out for a fluid and fast-paced ode to the game. Crackling with humor, grit, and streetball philosophy, and featuring poems and photographs by Charles R. Smith Jr., this anthology is a slam dunk.

(Rondi note: Other authors are Bruce Brooks, Willie Perdomo, Robert Burleigh and Robert Lipsyte)

REVIEW: Poetry, basketball, photographs (not seen by me as I listened to audio excellently performed by Dion Graham and Quincy Tyler Bernstine), nine authors, two editors - it's a recipe for disaster, but it isn't. It really works. Give this to your basketball fans. These authors love the game, or they love the people who play it, and you can't help but appreciate the game yourself. It feels both immediate and timeless. They're writing about different people and different issues and different aspects of the game, but it's one place, one world, nearly seamless, even though the authors are all using their own styles. Give this to your poets. Smith's poetry sings - they can stand alone, or introduce chapters. Give this to your writers. Read Aronson's afterward, give them a time and a setting and see what they can do. This book has an amazing sense of place.

Reviewer: Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Ltd, Kinderhook Rating: 8

Pirate Captain's Daughter, by Eve Bunting

9781585365258 \$8.95

Sleeping Bear Press, March 2011

Core audience: middle grade girls

Notable for suspense, taste of the pirate life, lots of action

Fifteen-year-old Catherine's mother dies of long-term illness, so the girl convinces her father to let her set sail with him for the next three month trip on his pirate ship. It doesn't turn out to be the romantic life she had envisioned. She is savvy enough to manage on board, posing as a twelve-year-old boy whose job is to play a lively flute during chore time and when the men attack other ships. When her secret is discovered by a real stinker (literally!) on board, this violation of the official Pirate Code provokes the superstitious crew to acts of violence. There is enough realistic detail in Bunting's writing to keep readers totally enthralled. Young William provides just enough romance, and the suspense is there to the end! I read it in one sitting and couldn't turn the pages fast enough. Smart move to publish it in paperback, and yes, it is THAT Eve Bunting, a favorite writer of all sorts of young people's books!

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 7.5

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.5

Resisters by Eric Nylund

978-0-375-86856-6 \$16.99

Random 4/26/11

Core audience: age 8-14

Review: In a world where soccer is played from inside robot suits and the adults are all brainwashed, twelve year-old Ethan is kidnapped to save the day. This book reads like a video game which is no surprise since Nylund came to writing from video game designing. It is predictably fast paced with flying battles & weapons. There is a nice bit of ambiguity in the good vs. evil factions which adds some depth to the story.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 7

The Romeo and Juliet Code by Phoebe Stone

9780545215114, \$16.99

Arthur A. Levine (Scholastic), January 2011

Core Audience: preteen girls, maybe some boys

Notable aspects- historical fiction from point of view of a British girl sent to live in Maine for safety during bombing of WWII. Themes of friendship, family, belonging

Review:

[First, OFF the project, I want to say I am an unabashed Phoebe Stone fan and really looked forward to reading this. From the cover, you'd think it is a contemporary story much like a lot of others out there right now! Cliche cover! What a surprise- not contemporary, and mostly not on a grassy lawn- but in a very old Victorian house on a jagged cliff above a foggy, sandy beach with pounding waves! My sort of place- and I think THAT cover would be a real draw!]

Eleven-yr.-old Felicity is brought by her parents to Bottlebay, Maine to be safe from the bombing in London. They drop her off and leave abruptly. She is welcomed by Gram, Uncle Gideon (a local teacher) and her young Aunt Miami, who yearns to be someplace more exciting and goes around the house quoting Juliet at every opportunity. "Flissie" settles in nicely on the face of it, charming everyone, but loses no opportunity to acquaint her new family and friends with the behavior and beliefs of proper young British girls! She is a breath of fresh air to that old Victorian and its quirky occupants. She soon has a handsome young crush with whom she becomes best friends and plays detective, learning many truths about her family. (Her parents are secretly involved with anti-Nazi work on the continent. Uncle Gideon is involved, too. That's one place where the Romeo and Juliet code comes in.) Flissie learns that many things are not what they seem, including her parents. She also learns what it means to truly belong somewhere. The story is a real charmer, the tone fittingly from an earlier time. Flissie loves Frances Hodgson Burnett and this story has the same heartwarming feel. Preteens who enjoy reading about the past will settle right in and identify with Flissie and her new life by the sea.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford, NH Rating: 8.5

I agree, Sue, with both the review (and rating) and your comments about the cover.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Books Rating: 8.5

Ruby Red, by Kerstin Gier

9780805092523 , \$16.99

Henry Holt & Company, 05/10/2011

Core audience: Ages 13+ Girls and Boys who like fantasy and adventure with a touch of romance

Notable: plot twists, mystery, historical figures fictionalized

Review: 16 year old Gwen, as well as her eccentric family, is shocked when she learns that she, and not her well-trained and more appropriate (at least in the eyes of some) cousin has the "time traveling gene". So begin her adventures in quest of something (she's not quite sure what) in the company of Gideon who is as good looking as he is aggravating. She does have the gift of seeing ghosts which adds to the mystery and confusion! We also get glimpses of Paul and Lucy, 2 time travelers who have broken the rules and who have a connection to Gwen that she knows nothing about. This first book in the trilogy certainly ropes readers in.

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.5

An interesting twist on time travel...with people from different times plotting with/against each other. The hint of a master plot in which the teens are pawns, maybe catalysts, will keep people reading the series.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 8

The Running Dream by Wendelin Van Draanen

9780375866678, \$16.99

Alfred A Knopf (RH), January, 2011

Core audience: teen girls

Notable for determined, realistic female character, sensitivity to issues of disability, realistic depiction of what it means to adapt to and work with a prosthesis, issues of friendship

Sixteen-year-old champion runner Jessica is involved in a terrible motor accident and loses a leg. At first she succumbs to all the natural negative emotions of having an "ugly useless stump". She is a fast healer, does her therapy faithfully and, once home from a long hospital stay, she begins to hanker for lots more mobility. She begins to overcome

all sorts of little obstacles and with the wonderful help of her loyal best friend pulls it together to go back to school with her wheelchair. Everyone celebrates her return furthering her sense of confidence. As soon as feasible she is fitted with the first of many prostheses and gradually begins to feel more like her old self as her walking gets to feel more "normal". With the help of her track team and the local TV station, money is very gradually raised for the purchase of a running leg. A wonderful part of the story is her developing friendship with Rosa, a really cool kid who was born with cerebral palsy but is a math whiz and experiences life pretty much unnoticed from a wheelchair. She helps Jessica get back on track with math class. She voices Jessica's concern to "see the person, not the disability", a very powerful motivator for training and taking part in an upcoming ten mile community run. Rosa has always wanted to be part of the rush of "a finish line". Jessica trains to push Rosa, in a modified wheel chair, all the way to the finish line, and after working through immense difficulties during her run, Jessica sees all sorts of new "starts" for herself. Van Draanen is the author of *FLIPPED* and the *SAMMY KEYES* series for middle schoolers. She has only gotten better and given a wonderful voice to Jessica and shared some pretty deep insights with the rest of us.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop, Milford NH Rating: 8.5

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 8

Scorpia Rising: An Alex Rider Mission, by Anthony Horowitz

9780399250576 , \$17.99

Philomel, 03/22/2011

Core audience: Ages 13+ Girls and Boys who like spy stories and can handle realistic violence

Notable: Fast-paced, twists

Review: I have read all of the *Alex Rider* books and have enjoyed the espionage and adventure, but have been keenly aware of the increasing violence and evil in the real world setting. There is no fantasy world (*Harry Potter*) or future world (*Hunger Games*) – only a realistic world of today with truly evil antagonists. Water-boarding, infliction of physical and psychological pain as well as murder are described in detail. This final book in the series gives us a fast paced story with several twists and a final resolution of Alex's future in a very emotionally wrenching way. While the death of well known characters is not new in YA novels, that fact does not lessen the impact of the events in this book. I think fans of this series will both love, and to some extent, hate Alex Rider's final mission. It is definitely not for every teen, even though they may all want to read it.

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.5

The Secret of Rover, by Rachel Wildavsky

9780810997103, \$16.95

Amulet Books/Harry Abrams, March, 2011

Core audience: Ages 10-12, Girls and Boys

Notable: Interesting Plot

Review: Katie and David are all excited because their parents have gone to Katkajan to adopt a baby. Their parents are scientists who have made a top secret spy device with their reclusive Uncle Alex. When Katie and David learn that their nanny is in fact a Katkajan spy who is part of a group that has kidnapped their parents and their adopted sibling, they must reach their Uncle Alex to get his assistance in using the secret device and save their parents. It's a slightly unbelievable adventure with resourceful children and a happy ending.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7.0

Shark Wars, by Ej Altbacker

9781595143781, 12.99

Razorbill/ Penguin, June, 2011

Core Audience: 9-12 year old boys who can read at grade level but aren't into

Notable Aspects: Sharks, Mystical Siamese Fighting Fish

Review: *Shark Wars* is book one in a new paper over board series of animal fantasy adventure meant, with a big nod to Star Wars, to be along the lines of *Warriors* and *Guardians of Ga'hoole*. Sharks, we learn, have ruled the Big Blue in clans called Shivers since the dawn of time. The story, set in the present day, follows a young shark named Gray who has two problems, he's too big for his age and he's conflicted between wanting to fit in with the vicious sharks in his new Shiver and wanting to follow the lead of his tender conscience. Where can a young shark with an identity crisis turn to for spiritual guidance you ask? Fortunately for Gray there is a mystical Siamese fighting fish, (a cousin of Star Wars' Yoda), named Takiza, who has an eye on Gray. "Inside you, I see a shark who swims with one fin in the light and the other in darkness. Peace or anger? Only

you can decide which current you shall swim, so which shall it be." Grey, who turns out to be a Megalodon, rather than a Tiger Shark, chooses to put both his fins in the light and the current of peace which means war with the evil sharks of the Goblin Shiver and their nasty Tuna allies. Though not the most original fish in the sea Shark Wars will captivate the 9-12 year old boys who decide to swim in its derivative current.

Kenny Brechner: DDG Booksellers Rating: 6

Sharks & Boys, by Kristen Tracy

9781423143543, \$16.99

Hyperion

6/2/2011

Ages: 12 and up, grades 7-12

Notable Aspects: fiction, romance, twins, infidelity, betrayal, survival story, sharks, death

SUMMARY

Enid Calhoun is fifteen years old and her first significant romantic relationship is crumbling. Her boyfriend of one year, Wick, has suggested that they "take a break." Enid is half of a twin unit. Together with her brother, Landon, they have participated in a "twin studies group" at the University of Vermont since they were eight years old. The group is comprised of four sets of twins (Enid/Landon, Wick/Dale, Skate/Burr, Munny/Sov) with Enid being the only girl. Furthermore, the oldest pair are going to college in the fall and they have planned a "boy's party weekend" at their uncle's house in Maryland. After the boys leave, Enid gives into her impulsive nature and takes her mother's car and follows the boys to Maryland and secretly boards the boat where they are partying. The boys decide to take the boat out and watch the sunrise from the water. A predicted significant storm happens and the boat sinks. The teenagers are adrift in a raft and their survival depends on them helping each other.

REVIEW

Initially I thought this was going to be a book about an opinionated, selfish, whiny girl. I was going to leaf through, read the ending and be done with it. But something about Enid kept bringing me back. Despite her prickly exterior I was drawn to her, her thoughts, her reasoning, her questions. I came to admire her for her integrity. Her personal uncertainty endears her to us while her strength and loyalty command our respect.

Kathleen "Totsie" McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 7

Shine, by Lauren Myracle

9780810984172, \$16.95

Amulet (Abrams), April 2011

Primarily girls, 14+ (possibly some boys)

Notable features: Dark, powerful, sensitive, honest, well-crafted plot that unwinds slowly and carefully to an intense climax and satisfying finish. Friendship, trust, loyalty. Prejudices and intolerance and assumptions are exposed (and refuted). Cat is smart, strong and determined, though dealing with her own prejudices and pain.

Review: A remarkable coming of age story. A powerful book. "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." was one of the songs Cat and Patrick used to sing as kids. Traumatized and emotionally scarred several years ago, 16 year-old Cat has become isolated, shielding herself from further pain and confiding in no one. Not even Patrick, who once was Cat's best friend. Openly gay, but accepted by a circle of straight friends, Patrick, however, is comfortable in his skin; he shines. Now, however, he's in a coma, nearly beaten to death in a gay bashing. After the attack, Cat is ashamed of herself for not having been a better friend to Patrick. People believe that his attackers were probably out-of-towners. Cat is convinced the crime was not random, but was committed by someone right in the little, redneck hill town of Black Creek. She vows to solve the crime herself because she's sure the local sheriff will not. Cat's pointed queries stir up a dark, dangerous under-belly in Black Creek that is fueled by drugs and alcohol and (alarmingly) involves many people she knows. Several are Patrick's friends. A young man from the nearby community college, who has become a friend of Patrick's, shares Cat's belief that the crime was not random. In him, Cat finds an ally in her investigation (and, possibly, the person to help her heal). Together Cat and Jason discover Patrick's secret boyfriend and unravel the who and why of the attack.

Myracle has a deft touch with plot and characters in *Shine*. People are complex. Life is gritty and hard in a small, poverty stricken, Southern town. It is perhaps populated too stereotypically with "poor white trash"... an alcoholic father; a dead mother; an overbearing, macho father; a creepy, menacing drug dealer; the bimbo teen seductress; a slow-witted younger brother; a lazy sheriff...but the story doesn't suffer as a result.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 9

Shine, by Lauren Myracle

Abrams, April 2011

9780810984172, 16.95

Core audience: Ages 14 up

Review: Set in a small, close knit community in the south, *Shine* is the story of a group of high school students who have known one another, and each others families, since childhood. Cat, who has become a self described loner, had a very best childhood friend named Patrick. She stopped being a friend to him because she was undone by the advances of another boy in her brother's group of friends. Although Patrick is openly gay, and taunted often because of it by a group of kids he hangs with, he still is accepted by these kids. Cat's brother is part of this group, and through him she maintains a bit of connection with them. When Patrick is found near dead at the gas station where he works, it is assumed by the local police that it was done as a hate crime by someone from a nearby college. Cat, who regrets cutting herself off from Patrick, believes otherwise and sets out to find the truth. In doing so she uncovers several people and issues that may have connections to Patrick's attack.

I like the issues that Myracle raises in this book, and her handling of them as well. Teen sexuality, drug use, small town prejudice and incorrect assumptions, are all thought provoking. The characters are diverse and believable, but I am confused by Cat, around whom the story revolves. She seems to fluctuate between socially immature and inexperienced, and thoughtfully in control and rather mature. I didn't want to get stuck on this because I think this book is right on top of what teens need to read more of, yet I kept being surprised by her. It seems to teeter back and forth between gritty and innocent, and perhaps that is intentional, reflective of a the emotional state of a 16 year old girl. Still, I liked the book, and think kids will also like it.

Mimi Powell, Baker Books Rating 7.5

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

Small Acts of Amazing Courage, by Gloria Whelan

978-1442409316, \$15.99

Simon and Schuster, April, 2011

Core Audience: girls, 11-14

Notable: Gandhi, standing up for what you believe in, friendships

Review: Set in the time of Gandhi our heroine Rosalind is British, living with her mother in India while her father is off at war. At the beginning of the novel we learn that she has lost her older brother, through the course of the story she saves a baby by stealing him and helps to liberate her aunt from the controlling sister. This is a young woman who fights for what she believes in. Everything comes together neatly at the end but you get the feeling that these characters that we have come to know and cherish have earned a happy ending. There is sadness and loss in each of their lives and they have managed to grieve and yet hope for a future. Whelan has done her research, the sights and smells of the bazaar are almost tangible, the caste system is apparent, and Rosalind's good friend is already married and hoping for baby--which may make a young reader have to puzzle out a way of life different from their own. Reading Whelan's book is like escaping to another country for a time. Like Rosalind's aunt I felt like casting off my old colors and wearing something richer and more vibrant. Though there are certainly differences between our lives, it's funny how being brave and the courage it takes to do so is difficult but rewarding in the end. That's true for all of us, not matter where we live.

beth reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 7.5

Small as an Elephant, by Jennifer Richard Jacobson

9780763641559, \$15.99

Candlewick, February 2011

Core audience: Boys and girls, ages 10 – 12

Notable: For Jack's courage and ingenuity. Friendship. Trust. A sympathetic and believable story in which Jack loves his mother despite her emotional instability and erratic behavior.

Review: Eleven year old, elephant obsessed, Jack and his mom are taking a quick, last minute vacation in Maine, at Acadia, before school starts back in Massachusetts. When he wakes up to find that his mother is gone, Jack thinks, at first, that she's gone to get breakfast or to find a better campsite. When she doesn't return and he can't find her anywhere on the island, he realizes that she's just gone and that he's alone in a strange place. His mother is having one of her "episodes." He should have recognized the warning signs. Loyal to his mom and not wanting to get her or himself into trouble, Jack tries to deal with the situation without asking for help (or even arousing suspicion). He has little money, but he is resourceful. On a public computer at the library, he checks his mother's YouPage....no news. He and his friend Nina connect via IM, but he signs off quickly when she starts asking awkward questions. With only a small elephant figurine he impulsively swipes from a store in Bar Harbor to give him courage, Jack heads south. If he gets caught, his mother will be in trouble and he'll end up in foster care. He's going to go to the Animal Kingdom in York and see Lydia, the only elephant in Maine. Then

he'll decide what to do next. Nina has obviously raised an alarm though and his picture is on the front page of the paper! Everyone in the world must be looking for him and he has to be even more careful not to get caught. In a sequence of events that stretches plausibility a bit, he does get to Animal Kingdom. There he sees Lydia and is reconciled with his grandmother, his mother's mother. Contrary to what his mother has told him about her, his grandmother welcomes him with open arms and offers a home and security. Together, he and she will be there to support his mother who has been found and is now hospitalized as she struggles to get well.

Ellen Richmond, Children's Book Cellar Rating: 8.5

I want to add my rating of 8.5 to Ellen's for *Small as an Elephant*. I thought that Jack was a really believable character (despite some of the convenient plot twists) and the story was engrossing and one that kids would be drawn to.

Nancy Felton, Broadside Books Rating: 8.5

Small Persons With Wings by Ellen Booraem

9780803734715 \$16.99

Dial Books (Penguin), Jan. 2011

Core audience: mostly girls gr.5-7

Notable for humor, gutsy heroine, snappy dialogue

Mellie used to have a fairy living in her bedroom and her mention of him to her kindergarten class made her the class laughingstock. Then he disappeared, but she couldn't shake the ridicule. Fast forward to seventh grade when her family inherits a very run-down inn gratis an eccentric uncle. They move there and find the bar area inhabited by all sorts of costumed "little persons with wings" who cause tremendous problems for the family. There is lots of clever repartee, often involving multiple languages (think Latin!) and literary references. Very frustrating and outlandish odd things happen to the family which will delight young readers looking for laughs with their fantasy. The friendship of the boy next door adds a touch of "romance". It was a fun story but very "way out there" for readers with a more practical bent. Sell it to girls who still enjoy fairies but might not want to admit it! On a more general theme, it's about a young lady who regains self-esteem, loses her stand-offishness and comes into her "grandeur".

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

Sparrow Road, by Sheila O'Connor

9780399254581 \$16.99

G.P. Putnam's Sons (Penguin) May 2011

Core audience: Middle grade girls

Notable for family issues, importance of dreams, creativity, and community

Twelve-year-old Raine's mom takes a summer job as cook at a small artist's colony, and they leave the safety and security of Grandpa's loving home. The first part of the book has an aura of foreboding as they try to settle in to this new and seemingly creepy place. There are lots of questions to be answered. Then we get to know the other residents. All that creepiness disappears. They are a quirky but lovable bunch. Raine begins to put hopes and dreams on paper. She learns her father is nearby, meets him, and discovers new truths about her family. Raine's mom learns to loosen the reins on Raine. There is a bit of reassuring romance for mom and an artist in residence who is seen as a father figure for Raine. Most important is the idea that art is something from the heart. As Diego tells Raine, do not think about being good. "GOOD will goof you up from the beginning. Art just has to be. Dream your dreams. Trust the words that come." It seems like most of the characters here did just that. They trusted themselves and each other and we enjoy the ride.

Sue Carita The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 8

Strings Attached, by Judy Blundell

9780545221269, \$17.99

Scholastic, March 2011

Core Audience: Ages 14+, girls

Notable Aspects: historical fiction, set in 1950, noir, organized crime, partially set in Rhode Island

REVIEW: Kit Corrigan moves to New York City from Providence, RI with dreams of becoming an actress, but gets more than she bargained for when she gets involved in the seedy world of organized crime. Oh, Judy Blundell, how I love thee. Her writing is simply magnificent. I can easily shelve this book with my adult fiction and the grown-ups probably won't even notice. Nikki from Scholastic described this book perfectly as A

Tree Grows in Brooklyn meets The Godfather, and I concur. *Strings Attached* is brilliant, and I liked it much better than *What I Saw and How I Lied* (and it has a better title!).

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 9.5

I listened to the audio read by Emma Galvin (Scholastic). Very well done. Usually in books that move back and forth from past to present, I find myself preferring one place/time over the other. Not here, as both were interesting, and I don't think young people will find it confusing.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers Ltd Rating: 7.5

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

Stupid Fast by Geoff Herbach

9781402256301 \$ 9.99

Sourcebooks June 2011

Core Audience: Ages 12 & up

Notable aspects: body image issues for boys

Review: Felton Reinstein, rising high school junior was a small kid — then he hit puberty & grew a foot overnight. He caught the attention of the track & football coaches, started working out & became the starting tailback of his high school football team. While all this is going on his mother has had a mental breakdown because her son now looks exactly like her late husband (Felton's father) who committed suicide when Felton was five years old.

I was confused by the language use in this book. Felton's new friends are all "Honkies." He repeatedly makes fun of his mother for attempting to correctly pronounce the name of a Venezuelan neighbor. He meets and falls for a girl who is identified as black but when he announces her existence to his mother he says, "Did you know some Africans moved into Gus's house?" Literally from Africa or do you mean African Americans?" his mother asks. To which he replies, "I don't know. They have masks [hanging on their walls]" When the black girl calls him on his characterization of his friends as all Honkies, he dismisses it and continues. The language usage is not any part of the story and no explanation is given for Felton's word choices.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 6

Tighter by Adele Griffin

9780375866456 \$16.99

Knopf Mat, 10, 2011

Core Audience: 12& up

Notable aspects: Not a bad recycling of Henry James

Review: Beginning as an homage to Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*, *Tighter* is true to the original in tone. Jamie, as James' Governess character is sent to Little Bly to look after young Isa. Unbeknownst to her, Isa's previous governess died in mysterious circumstance the prior summer. Jamie is struggling to get past an inappropriate relationship with a teacher and is abusing prescription medications she has stolen from her parents. The drugs contribute to the sense of Jamie as an unreliable narrator making it unclear whether her visions are of a supernatural or delusional nature.

As in the James story, we are not supposed to like some of the characters but one was particularly annoying. The housekeeper, Connie, has such a pronounced lisp that deciphering her conversation is difficult. I am fully aware that it is not politically correct to dislike a character because of a speech impediment (especially with *The Kings Speech* winning an academy award!) but I must admit that I found it tough going getting through *Tighter* for just that reason. This is a well-paced, nicely written mystery. Griffin's writing is reliably well crafted.

Reviewer: Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 7

Time-Traveling Fashionista, by Bianca Turetsky

9780316105422 \$17.99

Poppy, Little Brown, April 2011

Core audience: girls ages 12+ interested in fashion and some history

Notable for period fashion detail and a bit of history

Review: I really enjoyed this fast-paced tale! It wasn't Louise who intrigued me. She was there but not fully drawn. It was the vintage clothing that starred in this book. Louise's

knowledge of twentieth century fashion designers is fascinating. She rarely buys new clothing but frequents vintage shops on a regular basis. When she tries on a lovely dress in a traveling vintage sale she is transported to the Titanic just days before it hit the iceberg- in a persona of a famous young actress with a personality very unlike her own! Some of the most influential people of the time become her dinner companions. (It is the vignettes about the rich and famous there that add the most historical detail.) When she realizes where she is, she unsuccessfully tries to change the ship's course. Of course it is the dress from the shop that is her entree back to reality. The adventure was a lot of fun and made especially interesting by the full page sketches of dresses from the past (colored ones in the finished copy). Fashionistas will be eagerly awaiting another adventure-into the era of Marie Antoinette -coming in April 2012. This series will surely awaken interest in vintage clothing. (I am ready to go hunt up a shop!)

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford) Rating : 7

Trapped, by Michael Northrop

9780545210126, \$17.99

Scholastic, February, 2011

Core audience: Ages 13 up

Notable: Realistic dialogue, suspenseful

Review: Although the plot stretches credibility when students are left alone, especially in the metal shop, when a snowstorm is closing the school early, the book is very realistic taken as a whole.

In this day of "reality" television, the stranding of seven students in their high school for several days due to a huge Nor'easter in Massachusetts should have exceptional appeal for the young adult reader.

The book explores several themes, including male competition, adolescent sexual yearnings, group dynamics under stress, and the power of nature. As these students learn more about each other, their

stereotypical thinking about each other abates, and they begin to know each other as individuals, particularly as they each contribute to the group's survival. It is a riveting read as the group makes decisions that affect their needs and how they exploit the resources at hand. In the tradition of LORD OF THE FLIES, but much lighter in tone and plot, this great read is a window on the human condition when nature strips away the social facade we carry throughout our lives. As the characters look out over eight feet of snow, their sense of isolation increases as does their appreciation of their families. The

narrator in particular is forced to take a good look at himself and the true character of others in the group.

Joyce Miller, Baker Books Rating: 9

I couldn't agree with Joyce's review more. This is a wonderful read, especially with the winter we're having.

Josie Leavitt, Flying Pig Rating: 9

I will also throw in my love for TRAPPED! Finished it last night - quite a pageturner!

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books Rating: 9

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 8

Totsie McGonagle, Buttonwood Books & Toys Rating: 9

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

True (...sort of), by Katherine Hannigan

9780061968747, \$16.99

Greenwillow/Harper, April, 2011

Core audience Ages 8-12

Notable for: Character growth; unusual friendships; sibling relationships; learning how to manage your own bad or misguided behavior; child abuse and trauma dealt with in a serious way, but with a gentle touch

Review: Delly Pattison seems like your typical lovable troublemaker--she's spontaneous and acts on whatever idea comes into her head without considering the consequences;

she's got her own lexicon of words that are either amalgamations of other words or words with "delly" added in for flair (there's even a Dellyictionary at the end of the book); she's considered Trouble by everyone in town, including the (seemingly only) police officer in town and the requisite curmudgeonly neighbor.

Hannigan sets Delly apart from her mischief-making peers, however, by allowing her to take a journey of self-improvement. After one fight too many and the threat of transfer to a school for troubled kids, Delly realizes that her behavior is hurting others as well as herself and she decides to work at becoming a better person. It's not an easy task, and she stumbles at times, but is helped by her loyal younger brother, RB, and a blossoming friendship with the strange, silent new student, Ferris Boyd. Hannigan shows skill in moving Delly along the road to change while still celebrating her joyful spirit.

Delly is the heart and soul of True, but this story is also about her friendship with Ferris Boyd. Ferris is new in town and comes with two notices: she doesn't talk and she is not to be touched. Ferris keeps to herself and is easily frightened, but she has a gift for communicating with animals. As Delly learns to understand Ferris's silent form of communication, she also develops a vague notion that something isn't right. The problem is, Delly doesn't want to admit to this, so she stays in denial about the possibilities of her friend's home life. By the time she does face the truth of Ferris's situation, it is nearly too late, but by standing up for her friend, Delly is able to find the help needed to take Ferris out of harm's way.

Sandy Scott, The Galaxy Bookshop Rating: 9

Vicky Titcomb, Titcomb's Book Shop Rating: 8.5

Vespers Rising (Book 11 of *39 Clues*) by Rick Riordan et al

9780545290593 , \$12.99

Scholastic, 04/2011

Core audience: Ages 9-13 - 39 Clues fans

Notable: new suspense

Review: *Vespers Rising* is listed as Book 11 in the 39 Clues series, but in fact it is not a continuation of the story, but rather background details to incidents in the past with new twists. We find out that there is another family, the descendants of Damian Vesper, that are evil force impacting the Cahill family all these years. There are four chapters in the book, the first is 1507, Gideon Cahill; second is 1526, Madeleine Cahill; third is 1942,

Grace Cahill; and fourth is the present, Amy and Dan Cahill. The book sets the stage for the next series of books where the Cahills will need to work together as a united family for good against the Vespers. As a stand alone book, I'm not sure it was necessary and therefore it was a disappointment.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 6.0

Viola in the Spotlight, by Adriana Trigiani

9780061451058 \$16.99

Harper Teen, April 2011

Core audience: girls age 12+

Notable for issues of trust, family, friendship

Review: Fifteen-yr.-old Viola is back in beloved Brooklyn after a year of private school in the hinterlands (*Viola in Reel Life*). She becomes an intern for a famous stage director on Broadway, reestablishes her close friendship with Andrew, who seems to be ready for a new level, and has lots of qualms about lying to cover up for her best friend, Caitlin's, new boyfriend time. That's about as edgy as this story gets. Heartwarming is Viola's relationship with her extended family and its theatrical ties. Brooklyn seems almost a magical place, especially when her three roommates from Prefect School visit. Except that Viola almost seems too wise for her age in her little "asides" about things, I really enjoy her voice and cringed every time she lied to Caitlin's parents. It was with a sigh of relief when she finally came clean. Earning trust is a major step for all teens. For Viola, it is one more step in learning that friends and family come first, in learning to honor her inner voice.

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop (Milford) Rating: 7

Visconti House, by Elsbeth Edgar

9780763650193, \$16.99

Candlewick, February, 2011

Core audience: Mystery and Realistic Readers, Ages 10-12

Notable: Characterization

Review: Laura Horton is having a hard time to fit in at her new school. Her family has moved into what was considered in town as the haunted house. While her father the freelance journalist, mother, the artist and sculptor artist and their eccentric and artistic friends bring Laura much happiness and laughter, she is a loner at school. Leon who has moved in with his "odd" grandmother, is Laura's new neighbor and classmate. They soon become secret friends as they both try to uncover the mysterious history of Visconti House (Laura's new home) that was once a recluse's mansion. The story deals with learning to deal with new situations and standing up for yourself and being who you are in the face of peer pressure.

Janet Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

Warp Speed, by Lisa Yee

9780545122764 \$16.99

Arthur A. Levine (Scholastic) March 2011

Core audience: middle grade boys

Notable for bullying issues (peers and parents), humor, self-impowerment issue

Review: Marley Sandelski feels he is invisible to most of his classmates. He is resigned to the bruises from being shoved into lockers and the swirlies in the bathroom doled out by the bullies. His only friends are AV Club and Star War, Star Trek enthusiasts. By running faster than the local meanies he builds up his running skills and finds he loves the feeling of "orbiting through space at warp speed." Guys really into the whole Star Trek thing will enjoy the Captain's Log he keeps at the end of each chapter. His thoughts about himself and what he is experiencing are very endearing. He is a likeable kid often in the wrong place at the right time, and when at the end he changes the "invisible" word for "invincible," we cheer right along with him. Geeks, dorks and nerds come out on top in this one.

Trekkies will enjoy this in paperback. Good read-aloud for some middle grade classrooms.

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

We Are Not Eaten By Yaks, An Accidental Adventure by C. Alexander London

9780399254871 \$12.99

Philomel (Penguin), February 2011

Core Audience- boys and girls grades 4-7

Notable for wacky humor, outrageous adventure

Oliver and Celia Navel would rather watch TV than do anything else. The problem is their parents are famous explorers and their home is a coveted apartment upstairs at the Explorers Club, where they constantly encounter Explorers of amazing adventure and caliber and are bored by it all! Luckily they are a spunky pair and, although not pleased by it, when thrown into an adventure of their own, they manage to survive Tibetan tigers, yaks, falling out of an airplane, and evil plans by an unscrupulous Explorer acquaintance. They even manage to (briefly) find their missing mother who has been searching for the Lost Tablets of Alexandria in Shangri La! Past-paced and very like The Series of Unfortunate Events in tone, this funny adventure has no easy denouement. Another installment must be on the way. It MUST!

Sue Carita, The Toadstool Bookshop Rating: 7

I agree with Sue's rating. This is a fun read!

Marilyn Racette, Book Ends

What Happened to Goodbye by Sarah Dessen

#9780670012947 \$19.99

Penguin, May 2011

Core audience- teens girls

Notable for teen female character, sensitivity to family issues

Review: Vintage Dessen, teen McLean is running from a very publicized and messy divorce. She and her Dad, whose job is to "redo" failing restaurants, move often. Each new town is an occasion for her to reinvent herself. She has had so many personas she hardly knows who she is until they land in Lakeview and her life takes a turn for the better. She meets a neat guy who helps her become her true self, and she eventually lets her mother back into her life. She becomes involved in a local project at her Dad's restaurant and makes some friends. She gets herself on track to go to college in the fall. Yeah, vintage Dessen, but a great read for teen girls who need to see there is an upside to life's problems, and a door to a better life. Will fly off shelves in paper....

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

Bina Williams, Bridgeport Public Library Rating: 7.5

As a Dessen fan, I enjoyed her newest offering but found it a little lacking. The restaurant plot is a bit too similar to the catering plot of '*The Truth About Forever*,' and the romance in this book doesn't even begin to blossom until the last pages. It's still a fun read (good clean fun) but not her best work.

Suzanna Hermans, Oblong Books & Music Rating: 7

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 7

Where I Belong by Gwendolyn Heasley

9780061978845 \$8.99

Harper Collins, February 2011

Core audience: Teen girls

Notable for self-discovery, light, feel-good story, lots of humor

Review: I am glad that this is coming out in paperback. It ought to sell well. Corinne has to leave her posh life and elite boarding school in Manhattan to live with grandparents in Texas when her Dad loses his job. Culture shock does her good and she eventually learns to fit in and enjoy the non-superficial new friends she makes. There's a bit of romance, really neat grandparents, lots of manure-shoveling (job=spending money, but certainly not at Barneys!), an unsatisfactory visit from her fickle old BFF, and lots of laughs for readers. By the end of the story, Corinne has a new set of values, Dad has a new job and the family will reunite in a downsized apartment back in NYC. Unsure that she wants to leave her new life in Texas, this (fashionista) "recessionista" will never be the same!

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

We hosted Gwen at RJ Julia last night for an event for *Where I Belong*. I adored the book; it was very fun, sweet, and light. Gwen was an absolute pleasure, and though turnout was small (9 people), almost everyone bought a book. Gwen's story is a bit of a publishing fairy tale, as she took an online "How to Write a YA Novel in 12 Weeks" course, and her book was purchased by Harper within 3 months of finishing the manuscript! Nice to see success coming to such a nice person. She is currently writing a companion novel, which focuses on Kitsy. Should be fun!

Kaley DeGoursey, R.J. Julia Booksellers Rating:

Where She Went, Gayle Forman

9780525422945, \$16.99

Dutton, 5/2011

Core Audience: *If I Stay* fans

Notable Aspects: Romance, emotional hyperbole.

Review: No one can deny that Gayle Forman's smashing novel *If I Stay* is a Y.A. masterpiece, guaranteed to make even the burliest of men a little misty-eyed. The story of Mia's car accident, the loss of her family and her boyfriend's everlasting devotion to her all combine to form an intense emotional rollercoaster ride that you cannot put down. While Mia's physical body is in a coma at the hospital, the aftermath of the tragic accident unfurls as Mia watches her situation from the outside. She must make a heart-wrenching decision: accept her death and be with her family or survive and recover to live a full life without them.

Where She Went, the sequel which is set to come out in April of 2011, appears to be *If I Stay*'s polar opposite. Adam, Mia's boyfriend, narrates *Where She Went*, hurling sob-story after sob-story at the reader about how betrayed he felt when Mia abandoned him for college in New York. Everything that is lovable about Adam in the first book, his sweet nature, humor and gentle demeanor, is lost in the second book and replaced with cynicism, bitterness, and a scathing tongue. The Jekyll in the first book that the reader adored is gone, now transformed into a hideous Hyde who happens to be a borderline stalker, keeping tabs on Mia through her old high school friends and newspaper articles. The first line of chapter five in *Where She Went* seals Adam's new identity as the biggest scumbag of all time, seen as he states, "I know it's really cheesy- crass, even- to compare my being dumped to the accident that killed Mia's family, but I can't help it. Because for me, at any rate, the aftermath felt exactly the same" (58). Now, call me a heartless harpy, but last time I checked in my handbook on relationships, no break up could ever be as horrific as losing your entire family in car accident. No amount of twisted rationale can change that fact.

The relationship between Mia and Adam is so perfect in Forman's first book and it is disturbing to see the dynamic between these two characters change so drastically. If you loved *If I Stay*, I would keep this book on the shelf.

Margaux Depue, DDG Booksellers Rating 4

I support Margaux's rating of 4. Not since Ged was recast as a men's group dropout in *Tehanu* has a likable male character become so odious overnight. This book comes off as told not so much from a different perspective as from a parallel universe. *Where She Went* delivers the kind of mental discomfort usual reserved for unhappy film versions of books. I wish that I hadn't been talked into seeing *The Return of the King*, and was able to expunge the image of a tide of green jello winning the Battle of the Pelennor Field from my mind, but I would retain it gladly in exchange for being able to unread *Where She Went*. *If I Stay* was compelling because it so deftly called upon the reader's heartstrings to fill in the book. In *Where She Went* wallowing in emotional pathology has become an end in itself, with the reader now a bystander rather than a participant.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 4

Joanne Bibeau, Storybook Cove Rating: 8.0

Where Things Come Back, by John C. Whaley

9781442413337, \$16.99

Atheneum, May, 2011

Core Audience: 14 & up

Notable: small town life, loss, relationship with nature, religious symbolism, obsession, suicide

Review: On the very first page, our narrator Cullen has seen not one but two dead bodies, so sets the tone for Whaley's glimpse into small town life in Arkansas through the eyes of a teen. I hesitate to include an adjective, as Cullen would probably not want to be labeled or qualified in that way. He would likely think my choice to be limiting or just plain wrong. Whaley's debut novel is unique and filling a niche that is wide open at the moment. It's not a fantasy, school story or one containing vampires or werewolves, rather it's a story about families and friendships that struggle to survive in the face of tragedy and hardship.

Cullen is an engaging character, though he doesn't even become the hero in his own fantasies, his friend Lucas always steps in to save him. Lucas, a popular jock has his own pain and suffering with the loss of his older brother. In fact, the whole town of Lilly, Arkansas has seen its share of devastation and tragedy. At this point in time, the town is rallying around the supposed sighting of the Lazarus bird, otherwise known as the woodpecker that is called The Lord God Bird. As someone who lives in a small town I can attest to Cullen's worldview, everyone knows everything about everyone else and even the smallest of events can be made big. Another event that shakes the town is the sudden disappearance of Cullen's 15 year old brother. Gabriel is a fabulous character. He's sweet and sincere, often described and paying attention to what he believes is important and not bothering to put his head up to look at other things. Yet once he is taken, Whaley deprives us of interacting with the kindest, most sympathetic character in the book. I understand that this device is needed to make the story work, but it also takes away the balance that has been established--too much sorrow and the reader might just decided not to finish. That being said, Whaley has written a story that feels honest and true. Looking around online I found the playlist that the author had put together of music that influenced him and would appeal to his character. It is this type of thorough understanding of one's creations, and breathing life into them if you will, that makes a whole reading experience for the reader. The characters come off the page and reside in our hearts and minds. Though I don't think this book will appeal to a huge audience, I do think that certain teens--who would also rather not be labeled--will gravitate to it, read it and pass it on. I look forward to meeting more of Whaley's characters in his next novel, for surely this is an author with many stories to tell.

beth reynolds, The Norwich Bookstore Rating: 7

Withering Tights by Louise Rennison

978006179931 \$16.00

Harper Collins 6/28/11

Core Audience:Girls, age 12 & up

Notable Aspects: Humor

Review: Tallulah Casey is the fourteen year-old cousin of Georgia Nicholson who was the star of the "Confessions of Georgia Nicholson" series. Tallulah has been sent to a quirky performing arts school on the Yorkshire moors, hence the title reference. While there she gets up to many of the same sorts of situations as her cousin did in her books. Fans of the Angus, Thongs . . . will eat this up too. Since Talullah is a bit younger the sex references are toned down but kissing & lady bumps still feature prominently.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 7

The Wise Man's Fear: The Kingkiller Chronicle: Day Two, by Patrick Rothfuss

9780756404734, \$29.95

Daw Books, March, 2011

Core Audience: This is an adult book with very high appeal to 16-18 year old YA fantasy readers. In terms of content I personally think it is totally appropriate for sophisticated kids because it deals with sexuality in a tasteful, veiled, intelligent, and substantive way. Also, the lead character is 16. Alcohol, while present in taverns, is neither glorified nor vilified, it is simply presented as part of the fabric of life. This book can only benefit and not harm older YA readers. Parents who feel that their children should never be exposed to life are, however, not a good handselling choice here, to be sure.

Notable : Highly original depiction of the principles and study of Magic. Unusually strong character development and substantive coming of age story for a fantasy novel.

Review: To those new to the Kingkiller tales, the backdrop of the trilogy is that its central figure Kvothe, now roughly thirty, but aged well beyond his time, the most feared of all magicians, has hidden himself from the world, disguised as an innkeeper in a backwater town, his only companion a young male apprentice, Bast, who it becomes clear is not what he appears to be either. Kvothe is discovered by a Chronicler who asks that Kvothe tell him his story, which he agrees to do over a three day period. Each book in the trilogy represents one day of his tale.

Wise Man's Fear both builds strongly on the foundations of book one, and also introduces new concepts and plot threads which will come to fruition in the concluding volume. Structurally Wise Man's Fear follows the pattern laid down in book one. Kvothe spends time in school, gaining knowledge and most of all searching for information on the group of seven ancient beings, the Chandrian, who killed both of his parents, and all the rest of their troupe of performers. He also spends time away from school, travelling on the road. What is most impressive in this second volume is that each section of the book has a completeness to it, as of a tale in its own right, which greatly strengthens the credibility of Kvothe being the subject of tales and rumors in the present day of the story. Fresh insight into the Chandrian is very intriguing; employing the principle set out by Diane Wynne Jones's Chrestomanci, and borrowed from there in J.K. Rowlings' Lord Voldemort, of a being, or beings, who it is dangerous to name. The reasons that Kvothe cannot find reference, nor people willing to speak of the Chandrian, is deftly conveyed. Most interesting of all is Kvothe's brief conversation with a ruinous, ill willed being in the shape of a tree which knows all futures, and which, it turns out, is certain calamity to converse with. Whoops.

At the close of *The Wise Man's Fear* there is a very real and satisfying sense of Kvothe having aged and developed before our eyes, and that all the intimations of his power and fatality are uncomfortably well founded. We begin to see that Bast and The Chronicler are playing dangerous games in their own right, and that not only will the tale of day three be on a grand scale, but that the very fact of its telling either portends a dangerous reawakening of his power, or a transfer of that power into less certain hands.

Having walked in the earthy taverns, dangerous byways, fey glades, and oddly silent mercenary school cafeterias of a compelling other world, the reader well understands that Rothfuss needed to linger there for a few years before completing book two. Book three, though, is another matter entirely. We expect to see book three on our shelves a year from today and no later.

Kenny Brechner, DDG Booksellers Rating: 9.25

Words in the Dust, by Trent Reedy

978-0545261258 17.99

Scholastic, January 2011

Core Audience: Grades 5-8, more for girls than boys

Notable for: more nuanced look at the US presence in Afghanistan than many books I've read without being political or beyond the understanding of the intended audience. Wonderful additional material, including pronunciation guide, recommended reading list, and author's note.

Scholastic description: Zulaikha hopes. She hopes for peace, now that the Taliban have been driven from Afghanistan; a good relationship with her hard stepmother; and one day even to go to school, or to have her cleft palate fixed. Zulaikha knows all will be provided for her - "Inshallah," God willing. Then she meets Meena, who offers to teach her the Afghan poetry she taught her late mother. And the Americans come to the village, promising not just new opportunities and dangers, but surgery to fix her face. These changes could mean a whole new life for Zulaikha - but can she dare to hope they'll come true?

Review: Parts of this book are almost too sad. One sees clearly how different the cultures are, how little real understanding and trust actually exist between Afghans and Americans, and after 10 years, how far we (and they) still have to go. Zulaikha is a great

character, living a really tough life as best she can. Even the good things that happen in her family are a mixed blessing. Thought provoking. Keep the handkerchief handy.

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Rating: 8

World Without Fish by Mark Kurlansky

9780761156079 \$16.95

Workman, April 2011

Audience: Reading level is at least 6th grade

Notable aspects: The comic panel pages

Review: At first glance I was excited to see a book on a subject about which I am passionate. The cover is appealing. There are lots of neat illustrations and photos. There are kid-friendly sidebars & even a comic serialized throughout the book. Writing from the alarming premise that over-fishing could threaten not just the ocean but the entire planet, Kurlansky had the opportunity to produce an important book for young people. He did produce a book packed with facts; unfortunately they are so randomly presented as to render them useless. I don't know if it was Kurlansky or the book designers but this book is very poorly put together. It is almost as if they wrote all the paragraphs on index cards, threw them all up in the air and then wrote the book in whatever order they picked up the cards! The first chapter, called "Being a Brief outline of the problem" brings up the industrial revolution in the second paragraph, gets to Darwin in the third and by the fourth is onto the taxonomy of the animal kingdom. I was very disappointed in a book I eagerly anticipated.

Kat Goddard, The Bookloft Rating: 4

Attached is the review of one of our customers. I asked her specifically to tell me if Kurlansky had his facts straight, but her review goes much farther. My own feelings are in the middle. I'm not sure it's a book best read linearly. Opening to a random section of large type often inspired me to read the accompanying small print. The sidebars are fascinating. Sitting down to read the book like a novel

makes my eyes glaze over. My own favorite part was the inclusion of the National Sustainable Seafood Guide put out by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch. It's approximately 2"x4" when folded, so could fit easily in your wallet. Then, at the fish counter, it is easy to read that your best choice for salmon is Alaska wild, followed by Washington wild, and that farmed salmon should be avoided. I want to be environmentally responsible, but I don't have time to be knowledgeable about every issue. My real problem is audience. Who am I selling this book to? Kurlansky fans with

children or grandchildren? School environmental groups? I don't know that a different format would make it easier for this book to find a home, but it is an

important topic about which we need to be more aware. Can I go unrated??

Rondi Brower, Blackwood & Brouwer Booksellers