

BAYA Reviews
Bay Area Young Adult Librarians

Volume 1, Issue 3

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Recommendations

- * Titles suitable for YA
- M** Mature, ages 16-20
- Y** For younger teens, 11-14
- H/L** High Interest/
Low Vocabulary books
- B/A** Borrow from adult
- R** Rejected (no reviews)

Guidelines for Reviews

www.baya.org/reviews

Book Review Chair Teresa Parham / Book Review Editor Gary Morrison

Brooks, Kevin. **Candy**. Chicken House/Scholastic, 2005. 364 p. 0439683270, \$16.95.

Candy, Kevin Brooks's latest novel is a story of true love. It is also a tale of suspense, brutality and intense longing. Joe, an average high school boy from a wealthy suburb, meets Candy, a teen prostitute, in a London train station. Joe falls hard for Candy; she is both beautiful and intriguing. He is determined to save her from her dangerous pimp and her hopeless life of drug addiction and prostitution. Joe tells his story in retrospect, and Brooks's writing is simple, yet vivid, giving Joe a believable voice. The ending is a bit vague; a sequel from Candy's view would give the story a more complete feeling. A compelling read for older teens. Doreen Irby, Pleasanton Public Library

* Rylant, Cynthia. **Boris**. Harcourt, 2005. 74 p., 0-15-205412-X \$16.00.

This small, physically beautiful book will be adored by a limited audience: cat-loving young women who don't mind looking forward to middle-age and the changes it brings. In a series of 19 free verse poems, an unnamed narrator (Rylant) ends up adopting a gray cat from the animal shelter, despite her initial reluctance, and is completely besotted with her new roommate. As always, Rylant's poetry is matter of fact, yet precisely balanced, making for truly accessible poems that encourage the reader to weigh each word and savor the images. The poems that speak of cats and their marvelously cruel and beautiful habits will appeal to many, but the poems that address the narrator's coming to terms with middle age ("Nothing left but character, / and that won't get you a / good table at a restaurant / or a warning / instead of a speeding ticket.") speak to a much older audience. Beautiful cover photographs of Boris, creamy paper, and a dark grey elegant font make a gorgeous package for quality poems- of limited appeal to teens, but well worth knowing about for the right patron. Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

H/L Mac, Carrie. **Charmed**. Orca, 2004. 107 p., 1-55143-321-4. \$7.95

A suggestive cover (young woman pulling up her tank top to reveal her midriff, above low-slung pants) and the teaser on the back cover ("Izzy is caught in the sex trade- with no way to escape") might lead the reader to expect steamy sex scenes. Some may be disappointed by the lack of gratuitous graphic sex, but Mac has created a touching portrait of an angry, alienated teen girl who gets pulled into prostitution without any idea of what's going on. Izzy's mother is absent (working at a logging camp as a cook), and she is left at home with her mother's sleazy boyfriend Rob. Bored with her overweight unpopular friend Margaret, Izzy is easy prey for the ultra-cool Cody Dillon, who makes Izzy feel special, but then abandons her to the abuses of his "friend" Barrel, a pimp. Izzy's initial rape by a customer goes almost unnoticed, as she is slipped a date-rape drug to assure her compliance. Izzy ultimately escapes her prison, makes her way to a hospital for treatment, and ends up healing herself and her relationship with her mother, who reappears and takes Izzy away to the logging camp. Despite the too-quick resolution of an easy happy ending, there is much to recommend this title for reluctant readers- high interest plot, solid characterization, and brevity. Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

* Mac, Carrie. **The Beckoners**. Orca, 2004. 192 p., 1-55143-309-5. \$16.95

This incredibly disturbing, graphic and powerful novel about bullying has no place in a middle school collection, and should be offered with caution to those with weak stomachs. However, Mac paints an entirely believable portrait of a vicious girl gang in small town Canada, and their effect on a new girl at school, 15 year old Zoe. Zoe initially agrees to be initiated into the Beckoners because she's scared of them, but slowly and realistically summons the courage to defy them. She eventually takes a stand to protect her friend April, who is ostracized by the entire school and attacked by the gang. Complex characterizations create fascinating characters: April may be a victim, but she is also clearly a difficult and stunted person. Even the gang leader Beck has elements in her that inspire the reader's pity – as well as disgust. Though the ending seems a little forced, with the bullies finally arrested, the harsh reality of the story needs the balance of redemption, acceptance and justice. Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

H/L Kyi, Tanya Lloyd, **My Time as Caz Hazard**. Orca Book Publishers 2004 \$7.95

I hadn't read an Orca Soundings book before and, with all the praise and the potential (high interest/low reading level, good covers), I was excited to do so. However, I found this title to be disappointing. Too much (suspension, learning disabilities, shoplifting, suicide, bullying, betrayal) happens in these one hundred pages. The teen voice is authentic. In fact, this reads like a teen beginning to write wrote it-rambling, arc-less, and jam packed with action. Brian Boies

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necessarily a happy ending, as Steve prepares to meet his father again and introduce him to Stella, his girlfriend at Burnstone Grove.

Y Hightman, Jason. **Saint of Dragons**. HarperCollins, 2004, \$16.99, 291 p., ISBN: 0060540117

Reviewer: Teri Titus, San Mateo County

The author starts with an interesting premise: that there are indeed dragons, but that they have evolved so they can look almost human, and that they are evil. Simon St. George has spent most of his 11 years at boarding school feeling abandoned by his parents. Then two men arrive claiming to be his father. Simon is a descendant of St. George of dragon-killing fame and he and his father, the last dragon-killing Knight, must once again face the enemy. Simon's father, ignoring Simon's protests, takes him along in search of the last dragon. However, once he is vanquished, it turns out that there are dragons around the world that are plotting evil and it is Simon's destiny to fight them. This is a fast-paced read with little in the way of character development, although Simon's inability to please his father (Simon means well, but often makes a situation worse by his actions) will strike a familiar chord with some readers. The action is non-stop and more like a video game than literature. Those looking for another Eragon will likely be disappointed, but those looking for a video game-like experience will relish the action.

* Bone, Ian. **Song of an Innocent**. Dutton, 2004, \$16.99, 262 p., ISBN: 0525472827

Reviewer: Teri Titus, San Mateo County

BAYA Pick

A request for an interview plunges 19 year old Freda 10 years back into the past when she was one of several hostages held at gun point in a Family Value restaurant. Freda's voice alternates with a third person recounting of John Wayne Grady's actions. After eating in the restaurant with her parents, nine-year old Freda returns to get a prize that had been left out of her meal. She enters the restaurant just as Grady is taking over; without her parents she is easily used by Grady as a showcase for his rant against society and, surreptitiously, by the manager Constantine to write a record of the events on napkins. All these years she, with the help of her possessive mother, has kept the existence of the napkins secret, but now someone else knows. Freda has to face the past in order to grow into an adult. The recounting of her time as a hostage is at times harrowing and her confusion regarding whom to trust is understandable. This is an intense book that would be a good choice for a book discussion group.

* Stevermer, Caroline and Patricia C. Wrede. **The Grand Tour: Being a Revelation of Matters of High Confidentiality and Greatest Importance, Including Extracts from the Intimate Diary of a Noblewoman and the Sworn Testimony of a Lady of Quality**. Harcourt Children's Books, 2004. 480 p. \$17.00. ISBN: 015204616X. *The Grand Tour* picks up right where *Sorcery and Cecilia* left off, with Kate and Cecilia leaving on their honeymoon trip with their new husbands. As soon as they have crossed the English Channel they have several unsettling magical encounters with strangers. Undaunted, they travel on to Paris, where they settle in to polite society and attempt to make sense of their experiences on the road. Realizing that their strange encounters are part of a larger conspiracy the quartet set out across Europe in search of answers. After traveling to many cities, they race back to Rome to stop a magical ceremony that will anoint a new Emperor of Europe in the shoes of the recently defeated Napoleon. As in *Sorcery and Cecilia* the narrative switches back and forth between the two young ladies, telling their personal stories as well as progressing the plot. Kate's story is told through entries in her daily diary, and these entries share her emotional state as she adjusts to married life, as well as the details of the plot development, giving readers delightful insight into her character. Cecilia's story is told through testimony given in a deposition to a board of inquiry (presumably after the story ends) and tells only of her actions, sharing almost none of her emotional state and leaving her character much less developed. So, while we learn about her exploration of her growing magical abilities, we get almost no sense of her relationships with the others, including her husband. This, combined with a somewhat weaker plot than the first novel, makes *The Grand Tour* less successful than its predecessor, although still an entertaining read. While worth recommending to those who liked the first book, this sequel doesn't live up to the charm and wit of *Sorcery and Cecilia*. [Marie Richardson, City of Mountain View Public Library]

Y Whitesel, Cheryl Aylward. **Blue Fingers: A ninja's tale**. Clarion Books, 2004. 252 p. 0618381392, \$15.00. Koji and Taro are 12-year-old identical twins enjoying a hard but happy life on their family's farm in feudal Japan. When Taro saves a master dye maker from drowning in the river he is offered an apprenticeship. For reasons later revealed, Taro's parents send Koji instead but he performs poorly and is soon dismissed. Ashamed to go home, Koji hides in the woods where he is kidnapped by a ninja and taken to a training camp. Here he begins to train in the ways of the people who call themselves *grass*. The long episodes of training, and the rather tame mission the ninjas eventually undertake, may bore older readers. However, those interested in the code of the ninja and their training will enjoy this well-researched tale. An *Author's Note* at the end of the book discusses the historical facts on which the story is based. A glossary of Japanese terms is also included. The book contains mild violence. Kate Brown, Benecia PL

* Metz, Melinda. **Raven's Point**. HarperCollins, 2004. 244 p. 0060523719, \$16.99

Jane's brother, Elijah, is in a coma. Her parents are fighting bitterly and the new boy at school, Seth, doesn't know

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Y Say, Allen. **Music for Alice**. Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004. 32 p. 0-618-31118-1, \$17.00.

Say's lovely picture book is one important story of the Western United States during the latter half of the 20th century. It traces Japanese American Alice's life from her childhood on a California farm, through her adulthood with her husband, Mark, in the Pacific Northwest, and into her old age. Alice and Mark avoid internment after Pearl Harbor by agreeing to work for white farmers. They are taken to an area near desert in Eastern Oregon where they not only fix up an old house, but turn desert into a thriving gladiola farm. In language that is spare, but evocative, Say conjures the voices of the primary protagonists, Alice and Mark. Although Mark is not much of a dancer, Alice never really stops thinking about dancing, something extremely important to her as a child, until he dies. Say's fine, muted paintings are portraits and produce a peaceful pace without much movement until the final spread, when each of us, even Alice, is delighted and surprised by the power of memory and of dance. Alan Bern, Berkeley Public Library

* Armstrong, Jennifer, ed. **What a song can do: 12 riffs on the power of music**. Knopf, 2004. 200 p. 0375824995, \$15.95

Armstrong (*In my hands: memories of a Holocaust rescuer, Shattered: stories of children and war*) pulls together an uneven but sometimes engaging collection of short stories by well-known YA authors with music as a theme. Unfortunately, sometimes the stories feel like the music was inserted, rather serving as an inspiration. There are a few standouts: Ron Koertge's clever and satisfying "Variations on a theme" explores the musical motivation of band members, J. Alison James' "The audition" is delightful wish-fulfillment for classical musicians, and David Levithan's title story addresses his character's coming out in tender, lyrical terms. Many stories fall flat despite good intentions, but most teens will find at least one story that truly speaks to them.

Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

* Clark, Catherine. **The Alison rules**. HarperTempest, 2004. 264 p. 0060559802, \$16.89

Clark (*Truth or Dairy, Frozen Rodeo*) turns serious in this long but ultimately satisfying three handkerchief weeper. High school sophomore Alison is pulling away from everyone- she's broken up with her (loser) boyfriend, has removed photos from her bulletin board, won't hang out with her dad and brother, and resists her attraction to the new boy at school, Patrick Kirk. But her mouthy, feisty and loving friend Laurie won't let her alone, and gradually we realize that Alison's withdrawal comes from her mother's recent death from breast cancer. Predictable, yes- you can smell the "surprise" tragic ending very early on- but Clark's eye for the details of teen life and dialogue will hold readers through a slow start to the over-the-top conclusion.

Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library, North Branch

YA Wittlinger, Ellen. **Heart on My Sleeve**. Simon & Schuster, 2004, \$15.95, 219 p., ISBN: 0689849974

Reviewer: Teri Titus, San Mateo County

BAYA Picks

In an appealing format of emails, instant messages, and hand written letters, the author explores relationships during the end of senior year. Chloe and Julian meet at a pre-college weekend in April, and immediately recognize the other as soul mates. Although exchanging email with Julian, Chloe hesitates to tell her friends about him, causing a breakdown in trust, especially with long-time, perhaps boyfriend, Eli. Julian is being pressured to go out with Nina, a local girl. Both Chloe and Julian also learn more about their families as Chloe's sister reveals that she is a lesbian, Julian's sister unexpectedly gets married, and their mothers reveal something of their marriages. Julian & Chloe know a lot about each other's lives, but do they really know each other? Not surprisingly, their late summer meeting is a let down, but both draw on friends, family, and their own resilience to forge ahead into the next stage of their lives. This is a fairly light novel, yet with a perceptive exploration of relationships that teen readers can relate to; the characters have individual voices and the multiple viewpoints give depth to the story. An added touch, which may date the book more quickly, but is nonetheless intriguing, is that Chloe uses song titles for all of the subject lines in her emails and a 'play list' is included in the back of the book (Dar Williams is one of her favorites.)

M Rapp, Adam. **Under the Wolf, Under the Dog**. Candlewick Press, 2004, \$16.99, 320 p., ISBN: 0763618187

Reviewer: Teri Titus, San Mateo County

At the urging of his therapist, Steve writes down the events leading up to his being a Gray Grouper at Burnstone Grove. As Steve explains, the Red Groupers are the drug addicts and the Blue Groupers are the ones who have attempted suicide, but the Gray Groupers don't fit either group entirely, but he could fit into both groups. His journal is titled "A Pretty Depressing Time in My Life" which is somewhat of an understatement. Several months earlier Steve's mother had died of breast cancer, but he, his brother, and his father can not really come to terms with their grief, so each suffers alone. Steve trashes his father's TV repair shop. He is aware that his brother is using a lot of drugs, but he is also unable to function, and often says something inappropriate, or flies off into an act of violence. Then he finds his brother nude and hanged by his own necktie. With no friends or family to turn to, he is taken in by 10 year old June, but he abandons her on a Greyhound bus. There are flashes of dark humor in this intense and bleak story and those who are fascinated by how the mind works will be intrigued by Steve's story. There is some hope, but not

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she's alive. Of course, Seth has his own problems, including bulimia and seeing dead people. Tavia, Elijah's former girlfriend, completes the group of teens who are forced to fight the ancient evil buried on the island where they live. The characters in this horror story are likeable and realistic and the mysteries are intriguing. The multiple story lines are simple and easy to follow, but they do detract from the reader's emotional involvement with the characters. The book is extremely violent, containing rape, self-mutilation and parent's plotting to kill their children. There are also several nauseating descriptions, including one of a mucus monster emerging from Elijah's mouth. A fun read for older teens with strong stomachs. Kate Brown, Benecia PL

* Lawrence, Michael. **A Crack in the Line**. (Withern Rise, v.1) HarperCollins/Greenwillow, 2004. 323 p. 0-06-072477-3, \$15.99 (trade); 0-06-072478-1, \$16.89 (lib. bdg.)

Alaric and Naia are both sixteen, identical in almost every detail except their gender. Each of them live in a Victorian mansion called Withern Rise separated by alternate realities. In one of these realities, Alaric's mother was killed in a horrific train accident. He and his father have been muddling through in the aftermath of their loss in a cold, dreary house. In Naia's reality, Alex Underwood survived the train wreck and the family is thriving in their warm, loving home. In both realities, there is a glass globe called a folly with a tiny replica of Withern Rise inside it made from the wood of the "Family Tree". The folly is the vehicle that allows Naia and Alaric to travel to each other's reality. The concept of this book is a fascinating one, along the lines of the Gwyneth Paltrow movie "Sliding Doors", which explored two versions of a reality shaped differently by a moment's hesitation. *A Crack in the Line* held more promise than it delivered. The pacing was slow, with occasional promise of becoming more lively and suspenseful, there were details and characters that seemed to come out of nowhere and weren't adequately explained and I couldn't wait for it to end! Having said all of this, I'm sure it will find its audience, especially for those readers who want to know how Alaric and Naia will reconcile being stranded in one another's realities. Many of the unexplained details are sure to be fleshed out in subsequent volumes. For teens that are looking for this kind of story, I would recommend *To Say Nothing of the Dog* by Connie Willis over this title.

Betsy Levine, San Francisco Public Library

* Haas, Jessie. **Hoofprints: Horse Poems** Greenwillow Books, 2004

Jessie Haas invited the reader to, "Saddle up, ride back with me. You take the Thoroughbred you have lessons on: I'll ride by fat Morgan." Travel back in time 65 million years or so to when the horse's first ancestor appeared on multiple toes. In 104 poems Haas traces the evolution of the horse. To fully understand the poems one needs knowledge of history, mythology and horses. Appended are a bibliography and glossary including horse terminology, mythology, places and people. A book for the true horse lover. Marianne Pridemore, Santa Clara County Library

Y Bloor, Edward. **Story Time**. Harcourt, 2004, ISBN: 0152046704, 424 p., \$17.00

Despite a promising main premise satirizing the 'test, test and more test' mentality of current school philosophy, this book is disappointing due to an over abundance of plot threads. Eighth-grader Kate and her sixth-grader Uncle George are assigned to a new magnet school. George is ecstatic because he is obsessed with getting into a good college. Kate is depressed because she had been looking forward to being in Peter Pan in a production at the public school; Whittaker Magnet School does not have time for such activities as everything is about testing. So far so good, but throw in a possible haunting, Kate's search for her father, a nursery rhyme book with extraordinary powers, a Presidential visit along with a top-secret Laser Canon, and any sharp satirical focus is lost, although there are enough amusing scenes to keep the reader going. The characters of Kate and George are engaging, and those who like sprawling stories will find something to like here; others may become impatient with all the distractions.

Teri Titus, SMCL

Y Meyer, L. A., **Bloody Jack; Being an Account of the Curious Adventures of Mary "Jacky" Faber, Ship's Boy** Harcourt, 2004, ISBN: 015205085X, 301 p. \$6.95

Introducing Jacky (formerly Mary) Faber, a spunky heroine in a rollicking adventure reminiscent of a time when rollicking adventures and even spunky heroines reigned. Following the deaths of her father and mother, young Mary Faber is left to fend for herself in 1797 London. By joining with some other street urchins she learns survival skills, but when the leader of her small band is killed she seeks a life of greater safety. Disguising herself as a boy she is taken on board the HMS Dolphin as a ship's boy. She learns to obey orders, and acquits herself honorably when the ship is attacked by pirates. However, as time goes on, it becomes harder to maintain the Deception; and she has fallen in love with Jamie, another ship's boy. There is enough blood and guts to give this an authentic feel for the rough and tumble way of life of an orphan, and a sea-faring one at that. Despite losing some rough edges, Jacky will be a challenge to her next home, the Lawson Peabody School for Young Girls in Boston. Teri Titus, SMCL

Y Meyer, L. A. **Curse of the Blue Tattoo; Being an Account of the Misadventures of Jacky Faber, Midshipman and Fine Lady** Harcourt, 2004, ISBN:0152051155, 488 p., \$17.00

In this second novel about spunky Jacky, she tries to adjust to the stricter ways of Boston and the school for girls

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she attends, although she gets off to a bad start by being arrested soon after her arrival. How was she to know that Boston had laws against "Lewd and Lascivious conduct" and "wanton display of female parts" and that she was in violation when she played music and danced in public as she was used to doing on the HMS Dolphin? Jacky makes some friends, and some enemies, secretly performs at a pub, is busted down to serving girl, regains her place at school, helps solve a tragic mystery, saves her friend's family from financial ruin by taking the place of an ailing jockey, and rescues the Head Mistress from the burning school. Jamie is still her true love, even though she hasn't heard from him since she has been in Boston. She leaves Boston on board a whaler, not in disguise as a sailor, but as Companion to the Captain's wife. She hopes to find Jamie in England and discover if he has remained true to her. This is an all around satisfying adventure and romance; readers will look forward to further adventures of Jacky Faber with great anticipation. Teri Titus, (Belmont) San Carlos Library

Pattou, Edith. **East**. Harcourt, Inc, 2003. 498 p. \$18. ISBN: 0152045635.

The youngest of seven children born to a superstitious mother and a kind but poor father, Rose's wandering ways and exploring nature are at odds with the quiet, docile girl her mother would like her to be. When a talking white bear shows up at family farmhouse promising to improve the family fortunes and heal her ailing sister, teenage Rose accepts the offer and goes with the bear to his beautiful, lonely castle across the sea. Only when Rose discovers the truth about the white bear's existence does she realize what she must do to rescue him from his terrible fate. Part "Beauty and the Beast" and part action/adventure story, this retelling of the "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" fable is moderately successful. While the characters are likable and interesting, the pacing of the plot is uneven and the ending feels rushed, relying heavily on coincidences and luck to tie all the loose ends up. Recommend this book to those who have read *Ella Enchanted* by Levine or *Beast* by Napoli who are hungry for more fairy tale retellings. Marie Richardson, City of Mountain View Public Library

Reeve, Philip. **Mortal Engines**. HarperCollins Publishers, 2001. 310 p. \$17.89 ISBN: 0060082089.

Set in a distant future when cities and towns move about on giant caterpillar treads, consuming smaller cities for fuel, Reeve's debut novel is a mix of science fiction, action/adventure, and morality tale that is not entirely successful. The protagonist, Tom, a 15 year old apprentice historian, has never questioned the creed of "municipal Darwinism" until he finds himself abandoned in the Out Country with Hester, a girl who may or may not be a killer. Tom and Hester's struggle to return to London carries them through many situations that open Tom's eyes to the possibility of a different kind of life than what he has known. The character development is the strongest aspect of this book, which combines too many different plot devices and half-explained scientific premises to jell into a cohesive whole. In addition, the naiveté of Tom's character creates and overall tone that seems targeted to the younger teen audience, which makes the grisly murders of several lead characters shockingly jarring. Readers looking for original science fiction or fantasy are better off with Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy or Nix's *Sabriel*. Marie Richardson, City of Mountain View Public Library

* Plum-Ucci, Carol. **The She**. Harcourt, 2003. 280 p. 0152168192, \$17.00

For most of his life Evan has managed to avoid thinking about his parents' mysterious death at sea. Now, at 17, he is compelled to investigate the incident. Did a rouge wave cause their ship to sink or was it dragged to an ocean pit by the creature Evan calls *The She*? Some teens may not be satisfied with the vague conclusion but this mystery by the author of *What Happened to Lani Garver* and *The Body of Christopher Creed* will keep readers turning the pages. Evan is a believable and engaging narrator and his struggle with the issue of faith versus science will have relevance to many teens. Contains scenes with drug use, with and without serious consequences, and some strong language. Kate Brown, Benicia PL

*M Trueman, Terry **Inside Out** 2003, ISBN: 0066239621, \$16.89

BAYA Pick

As Zach Wahstead, a 16 year old diagnosed with adolescent onset schizophrenia, waits in the local coffee shop for his Mom to pick him up and bring him his meds, 2 male teenagers enter intent on robbery. So begins a quick, intense, compelling read by Terry Trueman, author of Printz Honor Award winner *Stuck In Neutral*. Told entirely from Zach's point of view the reader is drawn into his disease and confusion, as his condition deteriorates. All three main characters are sharply drawn and sympathetic, three souls whose desperation leads their choices. Unexpectedly funny and dramatic, Zach's thoughts and conversations with the voices in his head are disturbing and quite violent. Unputdownable. Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library

*Y Horowitz, Anthony. **Eagle Strike: An Alex Rider Adventure**. Philomel Books (Penguin Young Readers Group), 2004, \$17.99, ISBN: 0399239790 272p.

Alex Rider, the 14-year-old who works with MI6 is back, with always more outlandish impossible adventures to thrill your middle-school readers. This time Alex is up against music icon Damian Cray, a well-loved philanthro-

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pist, who wishes to rid the world of drugs in an extraordinary way. Headstrong Alex decides to do things his way, without the blessings or assistance of MI6. Middle-school boys love the Alex Rider adventures in spite of the unimaginable manner in which he accomplishes impossible ends. Highly recommended where you have middle school boys!

Larry Condit, Los Altos Public Library

* Ingold, Jeannette. **Mountain solo**. Harcourt, 2003. 309 p. \$17.00 ISBN 0-15-202670-3
 16 year old violin prodigy Tess has been closely managed by her mother since she was three. When she does not perform well in a long-anticipated concert (the coveted prize for winning a competition), she flees her manipulative mother and her relocated home in New York, for the open spaces, lack of pressure and looser parental controls of her father and his new family in Montana. Tess' story is interspersed with that of another violinist who once lived in the area Tess' anthropologist stepmother is researching. There's a lot going on here in terms of plots, but they twine together easily, if somewhat predictably. Ingold does a good job of capturing the pressure cooker environment of classical music performance, as well as Tess' joy in music, both weighty matters for young musicians. An appealing cover and large typeface make this a quick and easy read, and while more thoughtful readers may wish for more in-depth characterization, classical musicians will thrill to find a book that makes no apologies for their commitment to an art that often gets ridiculed by peers. Debbie Carton, Berkeley PL

M Block, Francesca Lia. **Wasteland**. HarperCollins, 2003. 150 pages. \$16.89 ISBN 0-06-028644-X
BAYA Pick

Block takes on the difficult issue of incest, with a twist. Marina and Lex are sister and brother, deeply connected spiritually. They find in each other the familial support their absentee father and disinterested mother do not provide. When their affection becomes physical, it is consensual, but so guilt-ridden that Lex eventually commits suicide. Readers seeking a cheap thrill of graphic sex between siblings won't find it here, and most readers will find the writing style confusing at first, with chapters told by alternating characters that are not always defined. Block incorporates Eliot's "Marina" and excerpts from "The Wasteland" to excellent effect, and casts her usual spell of language, evoking scents, tastes and sights of a dizzily beautiful and eerily false Southern California. This is certainly not a book for most teens, but it is a tour-de-force that deserves special recognition. Debbie Carton, Berkeley PL

*Y Ray, Delia. **Ghost Girl: A Blue Ridge Mountain Story**. Clarion Books, 2003. 216p \$15.00
 ISBN 0-618-33377-0

April Sloane is twelve years old when President Hoover and the First Lady decide to build a school for the community of Blue Ridge, a small town nestled in the Appalachian mountains. This would be the first time April ever set foot inside a schoolhouse. However, family secrets, taunting from the other children and soon after the Great Depression, may never let April fulfill her dream of learning to read. Miss Vest, chosen by President Hoover to teach the children, sees herself in April and tries to help April's family realize the importance of learning to read. This story is full of hope, sadness, and small triumphs for a young girl who goes through hardship and pain in order to become literate. This is an historical novel based on a collection of letters between the real Miss Vest and the President Hoover written during the Depression. This book is for young adults thirteen and up. Ana Lara

* Peters, Julie Ann. **Luna**. Little Brown and Company, 2004, \$16.95 ISBN: 0316733695 248p.
 This is a marvelous book about the relationship between two siblings. The book is written during Regan's freshman year, when her brother Liam is a senior. Through brief flashbacks to events throughout the course of Regan's life, we see that Liam has always thought he should have been born female, and now in his senior year thinks of him/herself as Luna. As Liam attempts to come out in her transgendered personality, it causes Regan mental anguish and internal conflicts. These two teens are very well portrayed in this fine novel. Their parents are not particularly well developed, but are sufficiently drawn for this story. Much more than a novel about a transgender teen, this book is a bit about a dysfunctional family, about a girl's developing first relationship with a boyfriend, and mostly about the relationship between Regan and Liam/Luna. Excellently written, very entertaining, and highly recommended. Larry Condit, Los Altos Public Library

* Tashjian, Janet. **Vote for Larry**. Henry Holt, 2004 \$16.95 ISBN: 0805072012 240p.
 In this sequel to 2001's *The Gospel According to Larry*, Josh is tracked down by his neighbor from his earlier life, Beth, as he is becoming, of all things, a consumer. Josh had been living an anonymous life as Mark, in Boulder Colorado, living up to his anti-consumer beliefs, until he meets Janine, a clerk in a music store, who, through a gift of CDs, pulls him into society and away from his maximum of 75 possessions. Then Beth kidnaps him, convinces him to return to the life Josh Swenson left in Boston through his simulated suicide. What starts out as a campaign to get younger people to vote turns into a run for the presidency! Despite the implausibility of having a constitutional

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amendment to allow an 18-year-old to become president become law in a week, the story line works. Tashjian brings social and environmental concerns to the page (and to the attention of teen readers), and turns out a very entertaining and thought-provoking read for her teen audience. Larry Condit, Los Altos Public Library

*Y Janeczko, Paul. **Worlds Afire**. Candlewick Press, 2004 \$15.99 ISBN: 0763622354 92p.
 Through this story poem Janeczko introduces young readers to the Hartford Connecticut circus fire of July 1944. Janeczko uses the words of many different eyewitnesses – in a style similar to Ron Koertge’s *Brimstone Journals* (being reissued in paperback this month). Janeczko takes the reader through three phases of the story. First there’s the excited anticipation of the arrival of the circus, then the sudden flaming inferno and attempts to escape, and finally the sorrowful aftermath. Ideal for the middle/Junior High student looking for historical fiction, this book is (regrettably) too short to meet the minimum page requirements often set by teachers. In a page of acknowledgements at the end, Janeczko credits 3 books about the Connecticut circus fire, which may provide additional reading for students whose interest is piqued by this poem. Larry Condit, Los Altos Public Library

Watts, Leander, **Wild Ride to Heaven**. Houghton Mifflin, 2003, 169 p.; 0-618-26805-7; \$16.00
 Set in upstate New York nearly 200 years ago, this slim novel offers beautiful and rich language, highly developed characters, drama, and a plotline that eventually goes nowhere. Hannah lives with her half-mad father on woodland at a remove even from a small village--until he barter her as an indentured servant to a pair of nearly feral brothers. Hannah is rescued from them by the intercession of a young man not much older than she, a third brother who is albino. Because plot resolution here doesn’t seem to be in keeping with either the set up or the characters’ personalities, the book seems to fail as a novel. However, each brief chapter reads like prose poetry that would succeed in engaging those who like to explore metaphor and symbolism rather than the story arc. A marginal purchase. Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley PL

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