

BAYA Reviews
Bay Area Young Adult Librarians

Volume 2, Issue 1

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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 D. Kimmel / Book Review Editor D. Carton

Dines, Carol. *Queen's Soprano*. Harcourt, 2006. 318 p. 0152054774
\$17.00

* **HOT PICK** * Angelica's voice is called 'a miracle' and 'a gift from God', but 1680's Rome condemns her to singing in private, or in a nunnery. She sings behind closed shutters, and crowds gather to hear her. She is taken with one admirer in particular, a French artist but he does not measure up to her mother's expectations. When she attracts the attention of a cardinal, she is in danger from the Pope's police but her mother, intent on Angelica making a good marriage, is oblivious to the charged political situation. After a brief

stay in a nunnery, Angelica finds refuge in the area of Rome that is under the control of Queen Christina of Sweden. Angelica's yearning for the French artist finds sympathy in the Queen's court, but the romance is not straight forward, and there is no predictable 'they all lived happily ever after' ending. This is a lush, historical tale, based on actual events. Romance, danger, and historical details make for an engrossing read. Highly recommended.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Erlbaum, Janice. *Girlbomb: a halfway homeless memoir*. Villard, 2006. 252 p. 1-4000-6422-8 \$21.95

M At fifteen, Erlbaum voluntarily left her home, which she shared with her spineless mother, abusive stepfather and infant stepbrother, and moved into a teen shelter that was at times as terrifying as her home life. Angry girls looking for a fight, noise, lack of privacy, strict rules and shelter supervisors who turned a blind eye to problems were the norm. Erlbaum returned briefly to live with her mother when her stepfather moved out, but had to leave permanently when her mother took him back. What emerges from this memoir is a damaged yet resilient spunky teen, who acts out her anger in various self-destructive ways, including drug use and promiscuity. However, Erlbaum writes from the perspective of the grown woman she is now- confident, self-aware and willing to share her story to help others- and this viewpoint tempers the many unsavory escapades she recounts. A powerful cautionary tale to offer to older readers.

Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

Fox, Annie, M.Ed. and Ruth Kirschner. *Too Stressed to Think*. Free Spirit Publishing, 2005, 161 p.
1-57542-173-9 \$14.95

* *Too Stressed to Think* provides teens with a tool kit for dealing with stress plus activities for building and practicing these stress-busting skills. Real-life stories and quotes from teens, plus a caring and helpful tone add to the appeal. The book accommodates the reader that skips straight to the section on boyfriends/girlfriends or school by reiterating suggestions made earlier in the book, without being too repetitive for the teen who reads from cover to cover. A list of additional resources includes helplines, books, and websites. Although the book includes multicultural examples and a successfully broad definition of parents, it will best serve mainstream, middle class teens.

Christy Thomas, Oakland Public Library, Chavez Branch

Garner, Alan. *Owl Service*. Odyssey, 2006 (orig. 1967) 219 p. 0152056181 \$6.95

Y This is a reprint of an award-winning title that was originally published in 1967. Step-siblings Roger and Alison are on holiday at an old family home in Wales; it is meant to be a time for the recently married parents and their children to become a family. The help on the remote farm is odd, and at times disturbing. When they find some old plates in the attic, their housekeeper reacts strongly. Alison discovers that if she copies the design and repositions it she can make paper owls which keep disappearing. Gwyn, the housekeeper's son, is new

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to the valley but knows much about it from his mother. He and Alison, and to a lesser degree, Roger try to untangle the odd events that happen. It is Gwyn who begins to see the parallels with old Welsh tales. Although there are many haunting images, this is not an easy book to read. There are a number of loose ends, and at times the young characters are simply not very sympathetic. Some of the dialog with its dated slang is difficult to follow. Those who are looking for Harry Potterish owls are likely to be disappointed as the role of the owls is not very prominent. For libraries with sophisticated middle school fantasy readers.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Hanamori, Pink and Michiko Yokote; translated by William Flanagan. *Pichi Pichi Pitch*

Del Rey, 2006. 181 p. 0345491963 \$10.95

* Graphic Novel; publisher's rating: T ages 13+

Lucia, the new girl at school, is really a mermaid. The background for the series is that there are seven mermaid princesses and seven pearls to protect the seven seas. Lucia had saved a boy from drowning and he has not forgotten the beautiful singing; naturally, he turns out to be Kaito, the boy she has a major crush on. Of course there is a villain who wishes to control the seas, Gackto, who is searching for the pearls. The story is a little convoluted and hard to follow in places, but fans who have out-grown Sailor Moon will enjoy this typical big-eyed manga. Most of this first volume is about the developing attraction between Lucia and Kaito, with the mermaid angle secondary. Short asides from the author about herself are almost as interesting as the manga. Vol. 2 is due July 2006; and vol. 3 is due Oct. 2006. An additional purchase when you just can't get enough of cute girl manga.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Jaffe, Michele. *Bad Kitty*. HarperCollins, 2006 268 p. 0060781092 \$17.89

* Jasmine has a penchant for ending up in the middle of brawls, riots, and other mayhem, and it is truly not her fault as this hilarious novel shows. On a family vacation to Las Vegas (family includes her dad 'the Thwarter', her 25 year-old stepmother Sherri, her aunt and uncle, and her 'evil' cousin Alyson along with her 'evil hench twin' Veronique). It starts when a three-legged cat lands, claws out, on Jasmine, causing her to heed eight-year old Fred's plea to "Don't let them hurt my Kitty.....Run!". As Jasmine says, things just happen to her, and somehow she is involved in solving a murder and saving Fred. And of course there is her major crush on Jack to contend with (she really hopes Jack isn't one of the bad guys). Jasmine's slangy recounting of her adventures will appeal to Georgia Nicolson fans (*Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*, etc.) and thanks to the evil hench twins, and Jasmine's friend Polly, there are enough brand names and cattiness to attract *Gossip Girl* and *A-List* fans as well.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Kerr, M. E. *Your Eyes in the Stars*. HarperCollins, 2006. 229 p. 060756837 \$16.89

* Jessica collects wanted posters which is understandable considering her father is a prison warden. John Dillinger is her favorite. A German family has recently moved across the street; soon Elisa and Jessica are friends exchanging gossip about the prisoners, especially a young lifer who is very musically talented. Racial stereotypes expressed by some of the characters reflect the mid-thirties time period. Most of the novel is an introspective look at a budding friendship and the growth of two girls. The latter part is told in letters. Elisa and her family went back to Germany to care for a sick relative and are unable to leave. Elisa writes to Jessica that she has joined a Hitler youth group. After a while there are no more letters. Ten years later, Jessica hears from Elisa's mother that Elisa was really in the resistance, the youth group was her cover, and that she was killed during the war. Although the novel starts leisurely, the ending has a strong emotional impact. There are lots of good points of discussion in this book, making it a good group discussion choice.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Korman, Gordon. *Born to Rock*. Hyperion, 2006 272 p. 0786809205 \$15.99

* While not as laugh-out-loud funny as the *Son of the Mob* titles, this is still amusing. When he was 10 Leo saw that the father's name on his birth certificate was not his dad's name. His mother refused to tell him anything,

and his dad said it was something that happened before they met. Leo hasn't thought it about much, but then he comes across the name again. His friend since toddler hood, Melinda, has posted an essay about punk rock on her website. Melinda is a big goth-punk fan; Leo is president of the Young Republicans. Somehow, they have remained pals despite their differences. From Melinda's website Leo learns that his bio-dad is a famous punk rocker. Leo can't stand punk music, noise to him. But he is curious about his bio-dad, and that starts a chain of events that leads to him losing his scholarship to Harvard, becoming a trainee roadie for the Concussed US tour of vintage punk bands, and most distressing of all, a cavity search. Leo does a lot of growing up during the summer, and discovers people he has known all his life, are not quite what he thought they were. Korman delineates the various dad-son relationships well. Leo's family is supportive and realistic; and Leo is a sympathetic character who sometimes makes debatable choices. (Review based on uncorrected proof.)

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

McNab, Andy and Robert Rigby. *Traitor*. Putnam, 2005. 265 p. 399244646 \$15.99

* This first in a series was originally published in the UK under the title "Boy Soldier"; UK television rights have been sold. Danny, an orphan, thinks he has done well on a qualifying course to enter the army, but he is told he will not be selected because of his grandfather. Danny never met his grandfather, Fergus, and all he knows is that he was in the army. Now he finds out that Fergus was in the SAS and a traitor who escaped from a jail in Colombia. Angry at his fate, Danny sets out to find Fergus, just at MI6 hoped he would. Assisted by his friend and computer whiz, Elena, he does find Fergus and learns that the real traitor is the one who set Fergus up, and questioned Danny about his grandfather. Lots of action as MI6 follows Danny and as Danny and Elena try to free Fergus. Danny is a likeable hero thrown into a situation not of his making, but he learns quickly how to survive. This action spy thriller is reminiscent of Tom Clancy, but does not talk down to a teen audience. It would make a good book talk choice.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Miller, Sarah. *Inside the Mind of Gideon Rayburn*. St Martin's, 2006 304 p. 0312333757 \$22.95

* This is a quirky, but enjoyable, take on how a girl can really understand a guy. The narrator abruptly realizes she is inside Gideon's mind; she sees the world through his eyes and experiences his thoughts; and comments on them. Although there is no explanation for how this happened, the conceit works. Gideon is new at Midvale Academy and is anxious about fitting in. His roommates are ultra-cool but seem to accept him (they introduce him to drugs on his first day) and soon have a bet going about when he'll sleep with a certain girl. Gideon is somewhat clueless, but is able to make a place for himself. And the narrator, whose identity isn't revealed until the end, falls in love. Girls will be intrigued to find out how 'guys really think' and there is a large marketing campaign to get the word out. (Review based on uncorrected proof)

Teri Titus, San Mateo County

Nazario, Sonia. *Enrique's Journey*. Random House, 2006. 293 p. 1400062055, \$26.95.

M Every year, thousands of Mexican and Central American teenagers illegally ride the tops of trains through Mexico, trying to get to the U.S. Along the way, most are injured, robbed, beaten or raped--and some are even killed. In this deeply researched book, journalist Sonia Nazario recounts the treacherous experiences of these young people, focusing on the story of Enrique, a Honduran teen who makes this life-threatening trek. The book is written in a vivid style that is usually more narrative than journalistic. Young adult readers will find a gripping mix of grisly details, suspense and hope in this gritty, true teen story. Especially recommended for libraries serving Latino communities; also available in Spanish.

Christy Thomas, Oakland Public Library, Chavez Branch

Nissel, Angela. *Mixed: my life in black and white*. Villard, 2006. 228 p. 0-345-48114-3 \$12.95

M **HOT PICK** Nissel is the daughter of a Black Panther mother and a white father. She currently works as the

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consulting producer of the television comedy, *Scrubs*. Growing up in Philadelphia in the 1980s, she here recounts her experiences as a biracial child, teen and woman with wit and poignancy, emphasis on the former. She describes her efforts to fit in both black inner-city neighborhoods and white prep schools, criticized by black and white peers. College leads to black activism, and post-college life includes a brief stint working at a strip club, where she capitalizes on her "exotic" look. Major depression, and how to survive it, is a prominent theme, but is always buoyed by Nissel's lively voice and spirit. This is a real find: a story that makes clear the issues biracial people face yet avoids whining.

Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

Reiss, Kathryn. *Blackthorn Winter*. Harcourt, 2006 335 p. 0152054790 \$17.00

* Juliana's first glimpse of England is depressing. Her artist mother has returned to her home country with her three children. Juliana is afraid her parents are heading for divorce, and she misses her dad. The small village is grey, and there seems to be constant rain. The one bright spot is Duncan, their landlord's step-son. Although she has opted for home schooling, Juliana does start to make friends, and learn the differences between the English language and American. Liza, an old friend of Juliana's mother, helps with their resettlement. Unfortunately, Liza is very unpopular in the village, and when she is murdered there are few tears shed. A local hoodlum is arrested, but Juliana isn't sure he is guilty. Trying to discover the real murderer, she ends up suspecting almost everyone in the village, and ultimately is in danger. Juliana has always known that she was adopted, but has no memories before the age of five; only occasional flashes of feelings. Her investigation into the murder helps uncover her own memories. This is a conventional, but very satisfying mystery with the added appeal of Juliana discovering her past, and being able to move on.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Robinson, Nigel. *The Unofficial Narnia Quizbook: 1000 questions and answers about C. S. Lewis's enchanted land*. Gramercy, 2005. 150 p. 0-517-22800-9 \$7.99

* This title is not approved by the C. S. Lewis Estate, but is bound to appeal to many fans of Narnia, who have been coming out of the wardrobe(!) since the release of the movie earlier this year. Robinson is a film reviewer and writer of TV and movie tie-ins. He sensibly groups the questions by book, and also gives separate categories for topics such as Aslan, Reepicheep, some regions such as Archenland, witches, wizards and werewolves and C. S. Lewis himself. The answers are at the back of the book, so it's harder to cheat. Questions range from way easy- "Which Queen of Narnia was given a magic cordial from Father Christmas?" (from *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*) to fairly esoteric- "What was the Bight of Calormen?" This title will have limited appeal, but those who reach for it will have a great time sharing it with others.

-Debbie Carton, Berkeley Public Library

Segami, Akira. *Kagetora* vol 1 Del Rey, 2006 208 p. 0345491416 \$10.95

* Graphic novel; publisher's rating is 'T ages 13+'

Kagetora, a young but accomplished ninja, is summoned to Tokyo. Before he gets to his destination, he saves Yuki, a young, cute, and clumsy schoolgirl. He later finds that she is the daughter of the Toudou family, skilled for generations in the martial arts. Unfortunately, Yuki has a lot to learn before she will be ready to head the family. It is Kagetora's job to teach her, despite her clumsiness, and also to protect her. It seems an easy enough mission, but Kagetora is totally smitten with Yuki. This is a lightweight, but pleasing romantic comedy. It would be a good introduction to manga for newbie girl readers. There are hints of nudity, and of course cleavage, but nothing too extreme.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County

Shaw, Tucker. *Hookup Artist*. HarperCollins, 2005 197 p. 0060756217 \$16.89

* Lucas has the reputation of being a matchmaker, except he can't seem to match himself up with anybody. He'd fallen hard for Marcus, and when that didn't work out, he was ready to swear off romance. His two best friends are Cate, who has also sworn off romance, and Sonja who wants Lucas to set her up with a particular football player. Both Lucas and Sonja want to get Cate hooked up again, and at school registration they spot the perfect target: The Hottest Guy Ever. Derek is a transfer student, and Lucas also finds himself drawn towards Derek, but tries to put Cate's needs ahead of his own. This is a slight story, but the characters and set-up are fairly engaging. After a humiliating public display by Lucas, the romantic angles get sorted out to the satisfaction of all, although the friendship of Cate and Lucas hung in the balance for a while. Lucas is upfront about being gay, and is accepted by most students; he takes the occasional insults in stride and hides his hurt; his friends stand by him. This book would make a good beach read.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Sheth, Kashmira. *Koyal Dark, Mango Sweet*. Hyperion, 2006 249 p. 0786838574 \$15.99

* Jeeta has two older sisters, and two younger brothers. Being the middle child, she sometimes feels left out, particularly when her two sisters are a private gossip. Her quick wit and sharp tongue often bring her into conflict with her mother. She and her family live in Mumbai, and Jeeta's mother is very traditional when it comes to getting her daughters married promptly, and well. Namita, the eldest sister is a bit of a problem because she has an eye condition that will lead to blindness. Jeeta dislikes the whole procedure and knows that when her turn comes, her dark skin will make her less desirable. Sarina, new to Jeeta's school is the daughter of educated and well-traveled parents. She opens up a whole new way of looking at life for Jeeta, who now applies herself to her studies with the goal of going to college. She has also met Neel, Sarina's cousin; if her mother knew that there was a young man around, she would never let Jeeta go to Sarina's. Jeeta's new found confidence gives her the resolve to help one of her unhappily married sisters and come to a better understanding of her mother. Jeeta's advance into responsible adulthood is believable and satisfying. The background of a middle class family in India adds another dimension to the novel. There is a glossary. (Review based on uncorrected proof)

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Smith, Anna Devere. *Letters to a Young Artist*. Anchor Books, 2006. 227 p. 1-4000-3238-5 \$13.00

M Smith, a successful actor, playwright and teacher, offers aspiring artists advice and inspiration through this set of letters written to an imaginary young artist. Not the usual vocational guide, this book goes deeper, addressing such elusive subjects such as "presence", "empathy", and "authenticity", and challenging young people to use their art to impact the world around them. She enriches her guidance with interesting anecdotes, but many of them involve people or events that may be off the teen radar. Passionate and eager young actors, writers and artists will find morsels of wisdom here, but novices may ask for a more practical nuts-and-bolts book instead.

Christy Thomas, Oakland Public Library, Chavez Branch

Spradlin, Michael P. *Spy Goddess; v 2: To Hawaii With Love*. HarperCollins, 2005, 198 p. 006059411X \$16.89

* Although this is the second in the series, there is enough background information to catch up with the story for those who missed the first. Rachel is one of four students who are helping their teacher, Mr. Kim, defeat Simon Blankenship, an agent gone bad. The boarding school they attend is a cover for covert operations. Simon fancies himself as a re-incarnation of Mithras, a god of war and destruction. He thinks it is his destiny to obtain complete power. Mr. Kim and his students aim to prevent this, but Simon is out to destroy Rachel because he thinks she is the reincarnation of Etherea, goddess of light and Mithra's nemesis. Lots of over-the-top action, with some supernatural spookiness thrown in make, this a quick read for action lovers. Rachel is

a teen with attitude, which can wear a bit thin, but teens may respond to her with more enthusiasm.
 Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Triana, Gaby. *Cubanita*. Harper Collins, 2005. 195 p. 0060560215. \$16.89.

* Triana (author of *Backstage Pass*) tells the story of Isabel Diaz, a Cuban-American, who is working through her last summer before heading off to college at UM - that's University of Michigan NOT Miami. Isabel bemoans the fact that her mother focuses on Cuba so much as she'd rather identify as solely American. Through dating a young man five years older and having her mother go through a major life event, Isa grows up a lot over the summer. She learns to embrace her Cubano heritage. The dialogue is interspersed with phrases in Spanish - most can be understood through the context. While *Cubanita* maintains laughter throughout, some of the intended emotional scenes fall flat. Great addition if you have Cuban-American patrons and good for Spanish speakers as well. Second generation immigrants may be able to identify with Isa. Non Spanish speakers may connect with Isa's struggles in leaving home. Some teen sex.

Susy Moorhead, Oakland Public Library

Trueman, Terry. *No Right Turn*. Harper Tempest, 2005 165 p. 0060574925 \$16.89

* **HOT PICK** *When Jordan was 13, his dad committed suicide; Jordan was the only other one home at the time and found the body. For three years he has been withdrawn, keeping the feeling that his dad hated him at bay. Now that he is in high school he has come out of his shell enough to make one friend. His mother is also recovering, and goes out with Don, their new neighbor. He has a 1976 Stingray Corvette. Jordan is not overly interested in cars, but he is drawn to this one. After a ride in it, he has a yearning to drive it himself. He 'borrows' the car when Don is not around. He helps popular cheerleader Becka when she stranded along the road, and allows her to think the car is his. Naturally, he takes the Corvette out one too many times. He is giving Becka a ride, when a cop car tries to pull him over. He outruns it only to return home to find police cars at Don's house. Becka is furious with him, but to his surprise, Don covers up for him. Don's reaching out to him finally allows Jordan to face his dad's suicide, and accept that his dad was very depressed, not angry at Jordan. This is another winner from Terry Trueman. Jordan is a sympathetic teen, and the adults around him do their best to help. The relationship between Don and Jordan is believable and it is rewarding to see a positive adult - teen relationship. Highly recommended; good choice for reluctant readers.

Teri Titus, San Mateo County Library

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Random House/Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. 552 p. 0-375-83100-2, \$16.95 (trade); 0-375-93100-7, \$18.99 (lib. bdg.)

* **HOT PICK** In this luminous novel narrated by Death, we are introduced to Liesel Meminger, at nine years old, separated from her Communist parents by the Nazi-controlled government and placed with a foster family in a small village in southern Germany. In this drab working class neighborhood, Liesel finds beauty in the books she steals and the lives she touches - her rebellious friend Rudy, her loving, accordion-playing foster father, Hans Hubermann, the withdrawn mayor's wife whose books she steals, and the ex-prize fighter/hidden Jew in their basement, Max. Liesel's first stolen book was purloined from her brother's graveside - "The Gravedigger's Handbook" and this is the book that she and Hans use to teach her to read each night when she is awakened by nightmares. By telling her story through Death's narration, the author is able to move back and forth in time effortlessly and show the colors and sounds of Liesel's world. There are many powerful scenes that have stayed with me - boxing with the Fuhrer, Rudy in blackface running in honor of his hero Jesse Owens, the creative use of *Mein Kampf* and the defiance of leaving food on the ground for Auschwitz prisoners. This is simply one of the most powerful books I have ever read and one of the most difficult to do justice to in a review!

Betsy Levine, San Francisco Public Library