



Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Chains*. Simon & Schuster, 2008. (320p.) 978-1416905851. \$16.99.

* Y On the eve of the Revolutionary war, Isabel and her little sister Ruth are poised to be emancipated. Their dying Mistress Mary promised them their freedom upon her death, but when Mary's uncaring brother comes to settle the estate, he instead sells Isabel and Ruth to a new family in New York City. The Locktons' prove cruel owners, and Isabel faces her worst nightmare— she and 5-year old Ruth are soon separated. Isabel struggles to maintain the overwhelming responsibilities of keeping house for the Locktons' under the physical and emotional blows she's been dealt. *Chains* is an absorbing novel about trust and betrayal, cruelty and kindness, and the steps one will take in the name of freedom. The details of daily domestic life during revolutionary wartime are riveting, especially descriptions of the quartering of soldiers and the excesses of the wealthy. This is definitely not boring historical fiction, and would be an excellent accompaniment to any middle school revolutionary war curriculum.
-Kelly Keefer, San Leandro Public Library

Aronson, Marc. *Unsettled: The Problem of Loving Israel*. Ginee Seo Books, 2008. (192p.) 978-1416912613. \$18.99

M Marc Aronson, author of *Race: A History Beyond Black and White*, brings an unabashedly personal perspective to *Unsettled*, an accessible and thought-provoking history of the state of Israel. Though not Israeli himself, Aronson has strong family ties to Israel. This sort-of-insider and sort-of-outsider status gives him a good vantage point from which to interrogate the ideologies and actions that echo through Israel's history. Though the story that Aronson tells is more-or-less historically linear, the book's chapter titles take the form of tough, provocative questions – such as "Can Israel Occupy Conquered Lands and Be True To Its Ideals?" and "How can Israel be a Strong State, A Jewish Homeland, and Truly Democratic?" – that drive the telling forward. Of course these questions cannot be answered definitively by anyone, but through his book Aronson delivers an even-handed and full yet remarkably clear exploration, grounded in reverence and respect for the ideals of the region's beleaguered peoples.
-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Black, Holly and Naifeh, Ted. *Kin: The Good Neighbors, Book 1*. GRAPHIX, 2008. (144p.) 978-0439855624. \$16.99

M Rue Silver's mother has disappeared, and her father has been arrested under suspicion of killing one of his graduate students. Things get worse when Rue starts seeing things that shouldn't be there – strange people with animal heads and vines that cover whole buildings overnight. You see, Rue's mother is a faerie, and Rue's father broke a promise that he made to her father, The Faerie King, who is eager to take revenge for this slight. However, he won't be satisfied punishing Rue's family; he has plans for the entire human race...

Holly Black creates an appealing world in which hip, sexy humans mingle with magic and ancient elves,

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 review)

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and the mysterious disappearances that drive the story promise intrigue and suspense. Too bad, then, that this book *just isn't any good*. The characters are flat and under-developed, the dialog is stilted, and the terrible threat that the bad faeries supposedly pose is never revealed. Worst of all it seems that Black has no idea how comics work as a story-telling medium, and the story clunks along with no sense of pacing or purpose until it... ends. The book sports some moody and evocative black-and-white art by Ted Naifeh, but with nothing to back it up, it feels like an afterthought.

If you've got teen readers in your library that are dying for more Holly Black, then by all means pick this up. However, there are much better fantasy comics out there and I'd advise pushing your patrons toward something – *anything* – else instead.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Booth, Coe. ***Kendra***. Scholastic, 2008. (292p.) 9780439925365. \$16.99

M Living with her grandmother for most of her life, Kendra anxiously awaits the day her mom, who's been away at school, will make a home for them both. But when her mom graduates and doesn't offer to take her, Kendra is disappointed. Kendra rebels against her grandmother's strict rules and starts a risky sexual relationship with the boy her 15-year-old aunt lusts after. When her grandmother finds out, Kendra may just get what she wants. This book will appeal to readers interested in urban fiction. The plot is rich with drama common in this genre including a fight scene where a girl's hair weave is pulled out. But it also has unique, uplifting elements – Kendra's mom graduates with a PHD from Princeton; Kendra designs sets for the school play. The sex is a little shocking to read at first, especially for a freshman character, but it fits into the story nicely, even if the ending romance may be a little hard to believe.

-Shawna Sherman, Hayward Public Library

Booraem, Ellen. ***The Unnameables***

Rejected

Cashore, Kristin. ***Graceling***. Harcourt. 2008. (471p.) 9780152063962. \$17.00

M Imagine a world where people born with different colored eyes have special abilities, "graces." Some people are amazing swimmers, others are talented chefs. Lady Katsa's grace is that she can kill anyone barehanded. Katsa's uncle uses her as an enforcer to make his subjects bend to his will. Katsa meets another graced person and who causes Katsa to question her destiny. The writing is superb and will have the reader begging for more. Do not despair, the author plans to write a companion novel in the future. Fans of Tamora Pierce's novels will be mesmerized by this new author.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Cohn, Rachel. ***You Know Where to Find Me***. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008. (204p.) 978-068-987-8596. \$15.99.

*** M** After the suicide death of her cousin and best friend - the beautiful, smart and rich Laura – Miles begins a downward spiral that alarms the people around her. Overweight, drug-addicted and caustic, Miles is not happy and is determined to remain that way. This is a difficult book to read, as Cohn brilliantly portrays Miles' feelings of sadness and anger. The plot is slim, this book is mostly about character development, and Miles isn't a particularly likable character. A tough sell to the casual reader, nevertheless this book would be good for any teen who has had a close encounter with this kind of loss.

-Marie Richardson, City of Mountain View Public Library.

Collins, Yvonne. ***Girl v. Boy***. Hyperion Books. 2008. (320p.) 9781423101574. \$15.99

*** M** Luisa Perez is not interested in school spirit; in fact her friends and she avoid all extra-curricular activities if possible. However, when her English teacher asks her to write for an anonymous column she becomes intimately involved in school activities. In a story where boys are pitted versus girls, readers will laugh out loud at the different points of view. This light read will engage a wide range of readers.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Chima, Cinda Williams. **Dragon Heir**. Hyperion Books for Children. 2008. (499p.) 9781423110705. \$17.99

* *Dragon Heir* is the concluding novel in the Warrior Heir trilogy; however, this is a standalone story. Jason Haley is looking for a way to stand out, while Madison Moss just wants to be normal. In a magical world that exists in our world, events are coming to a head in the small town of Trinity, Ohio. There will be a battle between those who believe in free will and those who want a traditional feudal society. As the story progresses new challenges and revelations keep the reader on the edge of her seat—a story that is well worth the page length.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Duey, Kathleen. **Skin Hunger**. Simon Pulse, 2008. (368p.) 978-0689840944. \$8.99

Y *Skin Hunger* is an intriguing fantasy novel (the first in an apparent trilogy) that tells parallel narratives to introduce readers to a mysterious, magical world. One story focuses on Sadima, a teenage girl with the ability to talk to animals, who keeps house for two aspiring magicians working secretly in a time when magic has been outlawed. The other is about Hahp, a young boy born generations after Sadima, who is fighting to stay alive in a dark and dangerous underground school for magicians.

This book is full of compelling mysteries and heroes that teens will relate to. I liked the way that the two stories were developed through alternating chapters, though the abrupt switching may throw off some readers. While the book was generally well-written, much about the world that the characters inhabited remained hidden or under-developed by its end, which came abruptly and seemingly arbitrarily. Still, I was left hungry for the next in the series, which sadly won't be out until August!

Oh, and as for the title, I still don't know what "Skin Hunger" means, but it sure sounds creepy!

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Green, John. **Paper Towns**. Dutton Books. 2008. (305p.) 9780525478188. \$17.99

M Quentin is in love with his neighbor Margo. They used to be good friends when they were young, but as they grew older they went their separate ways. One night Margo shows up at Quentin's window and draws him into an insane series of pranks to get back at her ex-boyfriend. When she disappears, Quentin must follow the clues she left behind to find her. Once again John Green uses wit and humor to deliver a fascinating love story. Some sex issues might make this a book more appropriate for older readers.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Haddix, Margaret Peterson. **Palace of Mirrors**. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. 2008. (297p.) 9781416939153. \$16.99

Y *Palace of Mirrors* is a companion story to *Just Ella*. Cecilia has known all her life that she is the true princess of Suala. She has trained and studied to one day take the throne when the time is right. The only problem is there are 11 other "true princesses." Fans of *Ella Enchanted* will enjoy this tale of intrigue and strong females. While the story is lacking somewhat on setting, the well developed characters and plot will keep the reader interested.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Hopkins, Ellen. **Identical**. McElderry Books, 2008. (565p.) 9781416950059. \$17.99

M Kaeleigh and Raeanne are identical twin sisters who have very different ways of dealing with a family trauma of sexual abuse. Kaeleigh retreats inside herself; she reluctantly acquiesces to the advances of her molesting father and tries to be a good girl. Raeanne wishes Kaeleigh would fight for herself; she smothers her feelings about the family trauma with drugs, alcohol and promiscuous sex. It's imperative that they keep the family secret because their mother is running for Congress. But what is the secret and can they sustain it forever? In *Identical*, Ellen Hopkins once again writes a book tackling the darkest of teen issues: sexual abuse, drug use, and psychological trauma. Told from both girl's point of view, in Hopkins' trademark verse, the book offers insight into the deepest feelings of both girls with

clever shape poetry and transitions between chapters that show how the two girls, while different, may really be the same. This book is not for the faint hearted.

-Shawna Sherman, Hayward Public Library

Link, Kelly. *Pretty Monsters*. Viking Juvenile, 2008. (400p.) 978-0670010905. \$19.99

M Kelly Link is a magician, playing solely by her own strict but inscrutable rules. Her twisty, exceedingly bizarre stories may seem like simple prose, but they are actually openings to other worlds, brimming with fantastic possibility and streaked with black humor. She's one of those writers – like Jorge Luis Borges or Philip K. Dick or Neil Gaiman – whose stories are like puzzles that are never exactly solved but still feel *just right* in some secret way.

Included in this collection of short stories are: a wannabe poet who digs up his dead girlfriend to recover some poetry to discover a stranger in her grave; a magical town that takes refuge in an old woman's handbag; werewolves reading stories about humans reading stories about werewolves; a self-absorbed soccer aficionado locked in quarantine when the aliens come; a television show that might not actually exist about librarians locked in magical combat. Highly recommended for brave readers with a taste for something well beyond normal. DO NOT MISS the story "Magic for Beginners!"

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Moses, Sheila P. Joseph. Margaret K. *McElderry*, 2008. (176p.) 978-1416917526. \$16.99

Y 15-year old Joseph Flood has it hard. He is homeless, his dad is fighting in Iraq, and his mother is a crack addict who seems bent on destroying any shot at happiness either she or her son have. Joseph seems like a great kid – liked by his teachers, good at tennis, able to make friends and keep out of trouble – but he is constantly living with shame over his mother, and the fear that others will find out he's living in a shelter. His well-to-do aunt is ready to take him, but Joseph is afraid of what will happen to his mother if he leaves her on the streets alone.

This is obviously a book with Big Issues on its mind. Joseph's character is interesting because the torrent of emotions that he feels around his mother's bad behavior – anger, disgust, shame – is tempered by a strong sense of devotion that he feels towards her. As much as he wants his life to get better, he is not willing to leave her without help, and his feelings toward her vacillate constantly creating a gripping inner conflict. Sadly, the book also has overly simplistic writing and, despite his interesting emotional life, Joseph is never a particularly convincing character. He's supposed to be 15 but he speaks and acts more like an 8-year old and though he talks about the burden of responsibility, we never see him take any. That the book ends happily without Joseph ever having to make a choice about the life he wanted was especially disappointing. So this one's a mixed-bag: an intriguing premise that many teens will (sadly) relate to, a totally phony teen voice, and a book that shirks the very responsibilities that it hopes to illuminate.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Norwich, Grace. *Daniel Radcliffe: No Ordinary Wizard*. S&S, 2008. (118p.) 9781416967712. \$5.99.

Y Written in the style of a "Tiger Beat" magazine article, this effusive biography of actor Daniel Radcliffe will be popular but not meaningful – empty calories for fans. But teen girls deserve to have their book equivalent of junk food once in a while, and this will serve. The text covers his life, with most of the focus on his movie-making as the title character in the "Harry Potter" series, but it also mentions his stage success in "Equus." There is an eight-page insert of color photos on glossy paper that may disappear more quickly than Harry under the Invisibility Cloak.

-Penny Peck, San Leandro Public Library

Olsen, Ashley and Mary-Kate. *Influence*. Razorbill/Penguin, 2008. (272p.) 9780670073382. \$39.95.

B/A The Olsen twins, former child actors, are now in their '20's and seem to spend more time in the tabloids than they do on TV or in films. This coffee table book comprises twenty interviews they conducted with fashion icons considered to have "influence," which is the meaning of the title. A few are

household names like designers Diane Von Furstenberg and Karl Lagerfeld, others are photographers, writers, models, and artists. The interviews are set down in simple question and answer format, as if they were transcribed from a tape recording, with the Olsens' dialogue in one font and the subject's answer in another; you learn as much about the Olsens as you do the person they are interviewing. Like a museum exhibit in book form, there are abundant color and b&w photos pertaining to each of the people interviewed, including new photos, archival photos, and photos of their work. This will be of interest to adults as well as teens, especially those interested in modern art and fashion design.

-Penny Peck, San Leandro Public Library

Sitomer, Alan Lawrence. *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*. Hyperion, 2008. (312p.) 9781423110729. \$17.99

M Cooking, cleaning, and helping a bed-ridden mother leaves Sonia Rodriguez no time to do the one thing that's really important to her: concentrate on school. In her culture, *familia* is more important than anything else, so even though her brothers and uncle sit on the coach while she does all the work, Sonia must suck it up and be the good Mexican girl she's expected to be. It's the least she can do for her father who works two jobs to keep the family afloat. Throw in other distractions like a predatory uncle and a potential love affair with a neighborhood boy: will Sonia ever finish high school? *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez* tells a story of Mexican immigrants that is not often told in Young Adult Literature. And even with its small faults — Sonia's hermetic life seems a bit unrealistic and her potential amore speaks in unbelievable syrupy language — the book is a must have for all collections.

-Shawna Sherman, Hayward Public Library

Uehashi, Nahoko. *Moribito: The Guardian of the Spirit*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2008. (272p.) 978-0545005425. \$17.99

Y Balsa is a bodyguard-for-hire, wandering through feudal Japan in search of redemption. After she boldly rescues the young prince Chagum from a raging river, Balsa is hired to protect him from a myriad of threats. You see, Chagum is the Moribito, guardian of eggs that a water spirit planted in his body. The existence of this spirit undermines his family's claim to the throne, so Chagum's father, the emperor, dispatches his secret army of assassins to kill the boy. However, if the spirit's eggs cannot hatch, the whole kingdom will face a disastrous drought. And then there is also egg-eating monster, Rarunga, who hasn't had a decent meal in 100 years... It's up to Balsa to protect the prince from these human and supernatural dangers and save the kingdom.

This beautifully designed novel is the first in a series of ten novels that have earned a large following in Japan over the past decade, and its story has been adapted into both *anime* and *manga*. It offers an intriguing and multi-faceted plot, well-developed characters, and breath-taking action scenes. The world of the novel feels full and alive, as much time is spent developing the histories and cosmologies of the people that inhabit it. Best of all though, Balsa is a great heroine; practical, smart, and sympathetic while also being brave and a formidable fighter. Teen readers are guaranteed to fall for this book and clamor for the rest of this series.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Volponi, Paul. *The Hand You're Dealt*. Atheneum, 2008. (168p.) 9781416939894. \$16.99.

* Sure to engage reluctant readers (especially teen males), this brief, fast-paced story concerns a high school student nicknamed Huck, who is out to beat his math teacher at a church charity poker tournament. At stake is a wrist watch, that passes each year from tournament winner to the new champion, which the teacher took off Huck's father who was in the hospital in a coma. Although there is a lot of cursing, younger teens and those that read below grade level will find this an easy page-turner. The math teacher resembles professional poker player and "bad boy" Phil Hellmuth (both are married to psychologists and act immaturely), and the descriptions of the poker hands sound authentic. A good book to recommend to teen boys who don't like reading, young poker or sports fans, and teens looking for "short fiction books."

-Penny Peck, San Leandro Public Library

Wasserman, Robin. ***Skinned***. Simon Pulse. 2008. (361p.) 9781416936343. \$15.99

* In the future, when a young person is fatally injured, their brains can be “downloaded” in a computer housed in a mechanical body. These machines look human but are not fully accepted in society. Lia Kahn was in a terrible accident that fatally burned her body. Her parents decided to undergo this procedure to “save” their daughter. Lia, once popular, must deal with losing her friends, her boyfriend, and the life she knew. This compelling story will find reader’s appeal with fans of Scott Westerfeld’s *Uglies*.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library