



Brande, Robin. *Fat Cat*. Knopf, 2009. 330 p.
9780375844492, \$16.99. M

Cat's high school science project: emulate the diet and lifestyle of prehistoric humans and see if their ways have a positive effect on the modern day human body. A pudgy, junk food addict, she'll use herself as the test subject. That means no processed food and no technology for the next seven months. She intends to win first place in the science fair and beat classmate, and former best friend, Matt. And, by the way, they're not talking because of something he said in the seventh grade. Put aside the unbelievable premise that brainy Cat thinks her project, which is basically a diet, could ever win a science fair, and this story is an engrossing read, a healthy addition for teen romance sections. Reader's will keep reading to see if Cat can stick to her plan and are left wondering throughout the book why Matt and Cat are no longer friends. The plot will be novel for techno teens who can imagine through Cat what it would be like to give it all up.

-Shawna Sherman, Hayward Public Library

Brian, Kate. *Ex-Mas: A Love/Hate Story*. Simon & Schuster, 2009. 216 p. 9781416991519,
\$9.99. Y

This holiday romance is as light as a snowflake and is bound to meet someone's need for something sweet and seasonal. Three years ago, Lila Beckswith broke up with her dour, hipster-y boyfriend Beau in order to scale the mountain of Southern California high school popularity. Now a senior, she is about to throw a blow-out party to cement her legacy when her Christmas-obsessed little brother discovers that global warming is threatening the North Pole and runs away with his best friend to try to save Santa. Who is this best friend? Beau's little brother of course. Lila and Beau begrudgingly take off together after the two boys so they can get them back before their respective parents come home and ground them both forever. And, this being the kind of book it is, you better believe that in the course of racing up the West Coast these two exes start remembering the things that drew them to each other in the first place. For the most part I found this book to be well-written and fun though I was disappointed that the basic premise - which carried the potential for broad comedy and outlandish action - largely takes a back seat to Beau and Lila's rekindling romance. However, the pair are such winning and true-to-life characters that readers after a romantic read won't be let down.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

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)

Guidelines for reviews:
baya.org/guidelines.html

d'Errico, Camilla and Sanders, Scott. *Camilla d'Errico's Burn*. Simon Pulse, 2009. 160 p. 9781416978732, \$9.99. M

A grim science fiction comic book about a young boy named Burn (who names their kid "Burn?") who is fused physically and psychically to a killer robot whose goal is to wipe out humanity. d'Errico's artwork shows a strong manga influence, though it's more sketch and stylized than your typical Japanese fare. That quality gives the look an edge that matches its dark subject matter. There is some grisly violence, as well as a few moments that are surreally disturbing. It's not all futureshock, however; at the core of this story is a message about making choices and controlling your own destiny. I wish that the world of the book had been more fully developed, but ultimately I found this to be a satisfying - if brief - sci-fi yarn.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Gold, Rozanne. *Eat Fresh Food: Awesome Recipes for Teen Chefs*. Bloomsbury, 2009. 160p. 9781599904450, \$17.99. *

Gold and a team of teen chefs have created an excellent cookbook for teens. The focus is on healthy eating and the recipes call for fresh, natural, and unprocessed ingredients. The theme fits nicely into the "eat real food" revolution popularized by Michael Pollan and Mark Bittman. The recipes are easy to prepare; I made three of the dishes successfully. Beautiful color photographs of the appetizing dishes and the diverse group of teen chefs add to this great book. Teens will be drawn in by the opportunity to create meals designed by their peers.

-Christianne Selig, San Leandro Main Library

Hale, Shannon. *Forest Born*. Bloomsbury USA Children's Books. 2009. 400 pages. 9781599901671. \$17.99 *

Forest Born is the fourth tale by Shannon Hale set in the world of Bayern. Beloved characters reappear in this delightful tale of magic. Rin has a tree-speaking ability. This power delights and frightens her. By modeling herself after Queen Ani, Rin gains confidence with her gift. In a tale about the balance of good and evil in one's nature, Rin learns that it is up to the individual to decide how her gifts will be used. *Forest Born* is a truly ingenious tale of magic.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Jones, Patrick. *The Tear Collector*. Walker Books for Young Readers. 2009. 272 p. 9780802787101. \$16.99 *

Cassandra is a grief vampire who feeds off the tears of her peers. She is known at her school as a shoulder to cry on. She does not feel the emotions of normal teens. When she starts to fall in love with an average guy she must decide if she will remain true to her family. This story could have been stronger, there are times when the plot seems a little slow. Much of the drama feels contrived. Overall it is an interesting story that fans of the supernatural will want to read.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Larbalestier, Justine. *Liar*. Bloomsbury U.S.A. Children's Books. 2009. 371 p. 9781599903057. \$16.99.

Told from the point of view of a compulsive liar, *Liar* is a psychological mystery with a dash of supernatural. Compelled and fascinated with telling lies, Micah is a self-described liar. When her classmate and secret boyfriend Zach is found dead in Central Park, everyone suspects Micah, the liar, as his killer. Micah takes readers through the last few days of Zach's life, spinning a web of strange and dark secrets and perhaps even some truth. Though much too frustrating for reluctant readers, *Liar* is an intriguing and mysterious story that will fascinate readers who are willing to savor the layers of *Liar*.

-Laura Calverley, San Mateo County Library

Lieb, Josh. *I Am a Genius of Unspeakable Evil and I Want To Be Your Class President*. Razorbill, 2009. 304 p. 9781595142405, \$15.99. Y

I Am A Genius of Unspeakable Evil has my vote for funniest book I've read all year. It is a pitch-perfect and absolutely hysterical novel about 12-year old Oliver: a malicious super-genius (and the third richest person in the world) who pretends to be the most pathetic loser in the history of middle-school as cover while he hatches his evil schemes. He secretly controls not just his school but a good portion of the world and has never met a bully or African dictator that he would let stand in his way. In order to satisfy his desire to crush his father ("Daddy" is perpetually disappointed in Oliver, and Oliver has a little bit of an Oedipal complex), the young criminal genius decides he's going to become the next class president. The first-person narration from Oliver is filled with cynical observations about the world and more than a few barbs directed squarely at the reader, but the tone of the book never gets bogged down in meanness. This one has huge crossover potential: middle-schoolers will laugh at Oliver's antics, high-schoolers will get a kick out of the book's wry observations about school, and I bet more than a few adults will be taken in by the sly political references and humor (author Lieb is an executive producer on *The Daily Show*). This one definitely deserves a spot on your shelves.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Nelson, Blake. *Destroy All Cars*. Scholastic Press, 2009. 218 p. 9780545104746. \$17.99.

17-year old James is anti-new clothes, anti-new stuff, anti- ANY car (even a hybrid Prius) – basically anti all “useless crap” that “consumer Americans” think they need every day. He knows the world will soon end due to America's consuming habits, and spends lots of time envisioning it, then writing about it in his journal, to old girlfriends, and for his AP English essays. It is the varied narrative devices – short stories, English assignments, emails and recounted dialog – that really makes this book stand out, though it covers much of the standard (and well-liked) boy-meets-girls-then-loses-girl plot. James is a funny character and *Destroy All Cars* is an amusing read that delivers a sobering message in a light-hearted fashion.

-Kelly Keefer, San Leandro Main Library

Nelson, Kadir and Obama, Barack. *Change Has Come: An Artist Celebrates Our American Spirit*. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2009. 64 p. 9781416989552, \$12.99. *

This slim volume pairs snippets of Obama's campaign speeches with Nelson's sketchy illustrations to tell the story of how the country came together to grant Obama victory in the 2008 election. I imagine that this book, with its celebratory tone and emphasis on the populist content of Obama's campaign rhetoric, probably read much differently when it was first published on the eve of Obama's Inauguration than it does after a year of bad news and widespread disillusionment with the president's ability (willingness?) to pursue progressive policies. There's no actual information nor do we get any complete text of the speeches, so the educational value of this is minimal. This book is little more than a souvenir.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Nuttall, Tom. *You Are One-Third Daffodil: And Other Facts to Amaze, Amuse, and Astound*. Bradbury Books, 2009. 187p. 9780767932462, \$10.99. B/A

Nuttall has compiled a list of facts on wide ranging topics ranging from birth to death and everything in between. Many of the facts will indeed astound and amuse teen readers. The fact featured in the book's title falls into that category, as well as facts like "one American in 6500 is injured by a toilet seat during their lifetime" and "If all the Lego pieces in the world were divided up evenly we would get 30 each." But too many of the facts are too esoteric for teens (like the facts about the origins of the estate tax or sources of tax revenue for the Chinese government), and there are only minimal illustrations. Put this one in the adult non-fiction section. If you're looking for a fun facts book for teens try *Take Me To Your Leader* by Ian Harrison (2007).

-Christianne Selig, San Leandro Main Library

Peterfreund, Diana. *Rampant*. HarperTeen. 2009. 416 pages. 9780061490002. \$17.99M

Sixteen-year-old Astrid has a natural immunity to the mythical unicorn blood. After being attacked by a vicious unicorn Astrid is thrust into an academy to learn how to be a unicorn hunter. While the concept of the story is great, there is a lack of depth in the supporting characters. In addition, the action takes a long time to build. However, this will still be an entertaining read for fans of the supernatural that are interested in a new type of fantasy.

-Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Library

Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: The Secrets Behind What You Eat*. Dial, 2009. 352 p. 9780803734159, \$17.99. *

The ideas from Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* are ably translated into simpler language for this Young Reader's Edition of the now classic text about our food and where it comes from. Through his exploration of 4 different meals (Processed, Industrial Organic, Local Organic, and Hunted/Gathered) Pollan succeeds in melding a personal narrative with observations of the political, economic, historical, and anthropological place of food in our culture. It's an incredible feat, and

while some may be frustrated by the fact that these observations are rarely coupled with direct, actionable suggestions of how we should eat, the book does consistently encourage the reader to eat “real food” and will likely spur many sharp young readers into thinking twice about heading to McDonald's for lunch.

-Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Resau, Lauren. *The Indigo Notebook*. Delacorte Books for Young Readers. 2009. 336p. 0385736525. \$16.99.

From Thailand to Guatemala to Morocco, Zeeta has grown up traveling the world with her jet-setting mother. When Zeeta moves to Ecuador, she is determined to find a man for her mother and make her settle down into a normal, stable life. But when new friends, a new boy, and a dangerously intriguing mystery send Zeeta on a journey everything, even Zeeta's desire for a normal, stationary life, changes. Although the mystery becomes a little too neatly wrapped up in the end, the likable characters, especially the smart and sassy Zeeta, and the exotic Central American locales will captivate and entertain readers. It is clear, that Resau has traveled a fair bit, and the travel elements of the book are delightful and wanderlust inspiring.

-Laura Calverley, San Mateo County Library

Smith, LJ. *Dark Visions: The Strange Power; The Possessed; The Passion*. Simon Pulse. 2009. 752p. 9781416989561. \$9.99.

Kaitlyn Fairchild's "Dark Visions" of the future make her an outcast in her home town, so when she's offered the chance to attend a special institute for psychic teens, she's off to California for a fresh start. There, Kait meets the four other "students", and learns to focus her powers. But relationships are tested as the teens soon discover that the institute is more than it initially appeared. What evil plots are hatching behind locked doors, and who can you trust?

Fans of Smith's other works – *The Vampire Diaries* and the *Night World* series among others – are sure to find lots to love here. Although more editing was in order to make the three novellas flow smoothly into a cohesive whole, the final product is an exciting page turner, with enough love, lust, fantasy, adventure, and bad guys, to keep any teen busy for days.

-Carol Marquis, Contra Costa County Library