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**The Big Picture**

**Runaway Radish**
by Jessie Haas; illustrated by Margot Apple

Where are the horse and pony books of yesteryear? Not only were there stirring tales of Olympic-bound girls and horse-taming boys, there were endearing, accessible tales of kids goofing around with their own little fuzzballs, Billy riding down the trail on Blaze, that allowed the deprived to wallow in the alluring details of barn perfume and horsey ways. Equibibliophiles nowadays mostly have to resort to fantasy, which gives them the chance to slay dragons but deprives them of the homelier thrill of real possibilities.

Stubbornly and almost single-handedly bucking that trend is Jessie Haas, a knowledgeable equestrienne in her own right who's been contributing not only longer horse books (Working Trot) but also genuine middle-grade titles for those not yet into triple-digit pages (Beware the Mare, BCCB 7/93, etc.). Now she turns her attention to younger readers still, that underserved population that's beyond easy readers but desperately hoping for pictures, big print, and actual events, and she's given them the present about which many of them dream: a pony.

Radish is pretty much the quintessential pony, in fact, sassy and smart and small. He first belongs to young Judy, acting as her most important instructor ("He taught her that if she asked nicely, he would almost always do what she wanted"), but he's eventually outgrown and replaced by Horton, a full-sized horse ("Radish bit Horton, but Horton didn't care"). He is then passed on to little Nina, whom he also educates ("The school taught Nina how to ride. Radish taught Nina other things"), until, inevitably, she also outgrows him and replaces him with Count, a full-sized horse ("Radish tried to chase Count away. But Count was too big. He didn't even notice"). Unsuited for retirement, Radish causes a bit of havoc (he takes off for his old home at Judy's) that brings his former riders together; Judy and Nina put their heads together, trying to figure out how to keep Radish from a life as eternal hand-me-down ("But in a few years the next little girl will be too big too.... Little girls always grow up"), and realize that he'd be perfect for a summer camp. There he provides the important lessons he has taught Judy and Nina to years of campers, including, finally, Judy's young daughter.

This is a proper pony book, scratching all the horse-yearning itches just right. Radish isn't anthropomorphized, and he doesn't need to be—he's a desirable and memorable character in his own equine right, whose personality shapes his owners' schedules and habits ("He made Nina win whether she wanted to or not. After a while Nina got used to winning. After a while she even learned to like it") and who enjoys pushing his young charges beyond their limits ("Most of the time she couldn't even catch him. Radish liked that"). The pony-bonding depicted will cause barn rats to sigh in recognition ("She smelled his warm smell. She listened to him eat") or slaver in envy ("They swam in the pond. Radish was..."
the diving board”; “Sometimes she hated everybody, and they hated her too. Then she went away on Radish”). The smooth-gaited text has a simplicity so deft and careful that it’s easy to underestimate; it will entice young readers trembling at the move beyond early-reader series, and the rhythm will help make the book a pleasing readaloud (Radish’s different pleasurable successes at eluding his owners’ authority turn “Radish liked that” into a repeated refrain).

Apple (perhaps chosen for her name, in the absence of capable illustrators named Carrot) hasn’t been known for her equines before, but she takes to the task like a duck to a horse trough. Her soft pencil illustrations (there’s usually one per page) have Garth Williams textures with Wesley Dennis expressiveness, giving Radish, the “good bad pony,” plenty of perky oomph whether he’s gunning with laid-back ears for an indifferent Count or bouncing down the road; he’s got that roly-poly-pony look even when he’s shined up for a show, and it’s particularly evident when he’s fuzzed up with his winter coat.

There is, of course, an inherent risk in this kind of book, in that even as it satisfies it induces yearning (and for parents, even as it satisfies it induces begging). It’s a delicious quandary, and it’s nice that young readers will again have a chance to experience it. (Imprint information appears on p. 408.)

Deborah Stevenson, Associate Editor

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ALPHIN, ELAINE MARIE  
*Ghost Soldier.* Holt, 2001 [220p]
ISBN 0-8050-6158-4 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys

Alexander Raskin is already upset that his divorced father is dragging him down to North Carolina to visit a widow in whom he has a romantic interest, and Alexander’s distress compounds when he learns that Paige Hambrick is helping Dad find a job in the area and that her elder child, Nicole, holds as dim a view of Mr. Raskin as Alexander does of Mrs. Hambrick. Possibly because of the emotional turmoil, or possibly because of the proximity of Civil War battlefields, Alexander begins to see ghosts, a phenomenon that hasn’t plagued him since his understanding mother was still in the household. A particular spirit, young Rebel soldier Richeson Chamblee, attaches himself to Alexander in hopes that an “out-of-timer” can help him learn the fate of his family and finally rest in peace. Alexander’s triple challenge is touching and at times quite funny as he tries to put the brakes on Dad’s romance, help Chamblee track down family artifacts in the many local history museums, and appear normal and sane while being verbally badgered by a very insistent and loquacious ghost. Readers drawn to the ghost plot will not, however, necessarily find all of the historical research into the Chamblee family quite as interesting as Alexander does, and the plot strains considerably as the pieces fall
too neatly in place and Paige Hambrick proves sympathetic beyond reason about Alexander’s visitations. There’s much charm, though, in the notion of an invisible buddy, and smart, observant Richeson Chamblee is just the ghost kids would want hanging around. EB


Reviewed from galleys Ad 5-8 yrs

Sophie Le Beque is the cover cat for *Fancy Cat* magazine, and she lives a sheltered, pampered life. On a rushed and reckless limousine ride, her carrying cage is thrown from the back seat and down the Paris Metro steps, where Sophie falls into the rush-hour hustle and bustle of the train station: “Pointy blue heels scrunched her toes. Scruffy tennis shoes smashed her tail. ‘MEOWCH!’ shrieked Sophie.” No more cushions, catnip, and trout for Sophie—she sleeps on the concrete floor and survives by eating bits and pieces of dropped or discarded éclairs, baguettes, and quiche. Ultimately, the abandoned cat finds her way to the surface and the sunny streets of Paris, where she meets Jacques, a street musician. The two join forces: down in the Metro Jacques plays, Sophie dances, and the many passersby fill Jacques’ hat with coins. The progression of Sophie’s adventure is slowed by an overlong text, and there are lapses of logic that may puzzle listeners (doesn’t anyone look for Sophie? How does she sleep through the whole night in the noisy subway station? Why doesn’t she find the stairway sooner?). Davis’ mixed-media (watercolor, acrylic, colored pencil) illustrations pick up the pace of Sophie’s sojourn in the subway however, and give a sense of time rushing past along with commuters. Compositions and colors are arresting: when the action segues from under to over, the cat’s-eye view of a claustrophobic crowd of passing feet gives way to a wider perspective of lighter, airier, above-ground streets. Sophie herself is a roundly solid ginger cat with femme-fatale eyelashes and zigzag markings, Jacques is a bow-legged fiddler with a curly moustache and goatee, and the streets of Paris have never been so clean. Despite the lengthy text, some listeners may think that the dancing Sophie is the cat’s meow. JMD


A small raccoon is inadvertently separated from his mother and siblings when the abandoned rowboat in which he is foraging breaks loose from a mudbank. The simple text follows the raccoon on his brief voyage, noting other animals he encounters, describing his actions, and, in the end, reuniting him with his family a short way downstream. Arnosky’s forays into easy natural science (*Rabbits & Raindrops*, BCCB 3/97, and others) succeed because he keeps his very young audience firmly in mind and he generally avoids any overt anthropomorphism. His watercolors do give a rather Disneyesque impression of natural life in the woods—his raccoons have big dark eyes worthy of a *Dondi* comic and his alligator has the scary hide of a sea serpent—but these depictions inject a little emotion into what could have been a very bland landscape. Despite a palette that leans heavily on acid greens and yellows, young viewers will be drawn to the uncluttered compositions. This useful woodland drama is a smooth (and smart) storytime cruise. JMD
AUCH, MARY JANE  I Was a Third Grade Spy; illus. by Herm Auch. Holiday House, 2001 86p
ISBN 0-8234-1576-7  $15.95  R  Gr. 2-4
Josh has barely recovered from hypnosis into a feline state (in I Was a Third Grade Science Project) when he and his buddies Brian and Dougie discover an unresolved and disturbing issue from that escapade—Brian’s dog Arful can now understand and speak Human. Brian’s all for hypnotizing Arful back into normal doggy-ness, but his friends realize that Arful is their shoo-in victory for the upcoming school talent show. They send Arful on a covert reconnaissance mission to discover what their nemesis Emily is cooking up for the girls’ act (Arful gets it hopelessly wrong), and they then put together their own ventriloquist act featuring Arful, who again gets it hopelessly wrong, but this time on stage. Arful and Josh narrate alternating chapters, and, as one might expect, Arful’s contributions are the sprightlier due to his, well, unique point of view (“I don’t like girls. They have a sickening, soapy smell. It’s enough to make me throw my biscuits”). Readers who missed out on Josh’s science-fair disaster can easily catch up in the somewhat overextended opening chapter; from there on it’s lots of plain ol’ the-boys-versus-the-girls fun. EB

BLOCK, JOEL D.  Stepliving for Teens: Getting Along with Stepparents, Parents, and Siblings; by Joel D. Block and Susan S. Bartell. Price Stern Sloan, 2001 199p
Library ed. ISBN 0-8431-7569-9  $13.89  R  Gr. 7-12
This breezy guide to living in step covers a considerable amount of ground, such as stressing out over a parent’s impending remarriage, jealousy of any number of players in the drama, dealing with stepsiblings and new half-siblings, and incendiary problems such as attraction to a stepsibling and inappropriate attention from a stepparent. Doctors Block and Bartell (the first a stepchild himself, and both psychologists) work with stepchildren, and they use both their experience and the voices of clients for insight into the complexity of step-relationships. The advice is straightforward and workable, and while the tone is generally optimistic, there’s acknowledgment of some hard facts: sometimes avoidance is a legitimate approach, and sometimes things don’t get better and there are ways to live with that. The main emphasis, however, is on talking to your parents, stepparents, or somebody who can help, and there are suggestions aplenty for figuring out what to say and how. Summary quotes, featured stepkid complaints, lists of solutions, and self-enlightenment quizzes (quick and painless) help structure and enliven the book; unfortunately, there are no source lists (not even websites), and there’s no index for quick research by the desperate. Nonetheless, parents may find a look at this guide useful for their own information, and the main audience—stepkids, whether in support groups or on their own—will find this both reassuring and helpful. DS

BLOOR, THOMAS  The Memory Prisoner.  Dial, 2001 132p
ISBN 0-8037-2687-2  $15.99  M  Gr. 6-9
Maddie Palmer went into her house when she was two years old and hasn’t come out for thirteen years. Her younger brother, Keith, is her “eyes and ears,” reporting the minute details of his day to his housebound-by-choice older sister. Their lives are shadowed by the Tower Library, a gloomy edifice that looms over the entire town, and by chief librarian Lexeter, who, by dint of controlling the medical, criminal, and municipal records, controls the townsfolk. When Keith is cho-
sen to be apprentice to Lexeter, Maddie becomes obsessed with the library and its secrets, and she determines to unearth them. Bloor’s first novel has promising elements—the mysterious disappearance of Maddie’s councilman grandfather, Maddie’s self-imposed isolation, the brooding Tower Library itself—and his ability to evoke an atmosphere infused with menace is considerable. The action is predicated on the mysteries that demand to be solved, and, for approximately the first two-thirds of the novel, the pace is steady and the suspense is palpable. As soon as Maddie leaves the house (to save Keith from a homicidal bully), however, the plot stalls irretrievably. Maddie’s taking of the Tower (Library) and her defeat of Lexeter are sadly anticlimactic, and the solutions to secrets so long hidden are disappointing. The author implies sinister forces at work in the town of Pridebridge (similar to Bradbury’s evocation of evil in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*); unfortunately he is unable to satisfactorily develop or sustain those implications. Characterizations are initially intriguing but ultimately too shallow to support the weak conclusion. JMD

**BLUMENTHAL, DEBORAH**  *Aunt Claire’s Yellow Beehive Hair*; illus. by Mary GrandPré. Dial, 2001  [32p]  
Reviewed from galleys  Ad 6-9 yrs

A little girl journeys into the joys of family history in this well-intentioned picture book. Annie, the young narrator, explains, “I want to know about the family who came before me, the ones I see only in pieces, in scattered pictures, family who can’t come to my house or eat with me. I want to reach into the past and bring them closer to me.” To this end, one rainy afternoon Annie and her Grandma Marilyn search through old shoe boxes, backs of drawers, and old straw baskets looking for “memorabilia.” Ribbons, photos, medals, pieces of lace all elicit stories of family members past and present: “We work to fit everything together, to make an album that tells our family’s story.” GrandPré’s illustrations bring past and present into focus; her pastels feature smiling relatives from bits of story and memory reaching from photos and gazing out from within the golden haze of the past. The story itself is pointedly programmatic, but the message is certainly a worthy one, and the friendly demeanors of the characters leaven what could be a serious overdose of nostalgia. More family stories themselves as opposed to talking about family stories would have given this title a little more child appeal; still, in the hands of a properly enthusiastic adult, this may spark some attic rummaging. JMD

**BOWEN, GARY**  *The Mare’s Nest*; illus. by Warren Kimble. HarperCollins, 2001  [44p]  
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028407-2  $17.89  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028408-0  $17.95  
Reviewed from galleys  Ad Gr. 3-5

In mid-nineteenth-century Vermont, an itinerant painter travels from town to town, offering to paint people’s animals. Business isn’t great, but he discovers something interesting: animals are disappearing. He’s entrusted by a little girl with the charge of looking for her mare, Morganna, and as he wanders he finds that rabbits, cows, and sheep have disappeared—but the thief never takes white animals. White livestock becomes very valuable, and there’s an auction at the state fair of the theft-proof animals; it soon becomes apparent that the white animals
are, in fact, the stolen critters, and that they've been altered by their thief, a professional whitewasher (about whom the other animals had been trying to alert the artist all along). The rural details are atmospheric, but the story, written to go with the art, is short on spirit of its own, instead rambling from town to town, painting to painting; the tidbit that the first letters of the theft sites aggregate to form the word "whitewasher" isn't sufficient to add excitement. Folk artist Kimble's paintings on wood have some of the sinewy line and green tones of Stefano Vitale's work, but there is also a personable solidity to the animals portrayed and a lushness to the Vermont landscape that gives the visuals individuality. The artistic interest may offer curricular approaches to this title, and some youngsters may be intrigued by this offbeat historical narrative. DS

BURLEIGH, ROBERT  Lookin' for Bird in the Big City; illus. by Marek Los.  Silver Whistle/Harcourt, 2001  32p
ISBN 0-15-202031-4  $16.00  R  5-8 yrs

In this poetic reimagining, the late Miles Davis "narrates" his teenage quest for Charlie "Bird" Parker among New York's jazz clubs. Bird himself is elusive, but fictionalized Davis discovers the unique expression of Parker's sax as he soaks up the ambient noises of the city: "And so I took the ferry/ . . . and heard—I/ notes that clanged like buoy bells,/ and tumbled like the whiteness of the wake,/ 'cause Bird's horn had those sounds inside it,/ and I wanted them, too." Although this is not a strictly biographical offering on the order of Jonah Winter's Once Upon a Time in Chicago (about Benny Goodman, BCCB 1/01), there is just enough plot for young listeners to follow along to the climactic meeting between the jazz giant and the aspiring novice, and Bird's whispered "Take yourself a solo, kid" should evoke empathetic satisfaction missing from more abstract jazz picture books such as Raschka's Mysterious Thelonius (BCCB 10/97). Los presents an intriguing sawtoothed skyline, softened by a color-infused haze and turbocharged with neon blues, purples, golds, and oranges that permeate thrumming subway tunnels, workaday ferries, and illuminated storefronts. Davis' trumpet fairly emanates its own golden aura, the rising young star's instrument in perfect balance with Bird's silver sax. Pair this with Isadora's venerable Ben's Trumpet (BCCB 7/79) for variations on a musical mentoring theme. EB

CALDWELL, V. M.  Tides; illus. by Erica Magnus.  Milkweed, 2001  311p
Trade ed. ISBN 1-57131-628-0  $15.95
Paper ed. ISBN 1-57131-629-9  $6.95  Ad  Gr. 4-8

This sequel to The Ocean Within (BCCB 1/00) documents the second summer Elizabeth Sheridan spends with her cousins at Grandma's seaside home. Caldwell offers new readers a recap of the events of last summer when twelve-year-old Elizabeth "hadn't been a Sheridan" and fills in subsequent events, such as the ceremony that made her adoption official. Like the earlier book, this one emphasizes the comfort the Sheridan children take in Grandma's clear rules and consistently applied punishments. This year, however, eldest cousin Adam rebels against them. Bit by bit, he estranges himself from the family that couldn't save him from the depression that followed the deaths of his two best friends right before their high-school graduation. Readers share the ever-present tension that poisons the simple pleasures of this close-knit family, benefiting from Elizabeth's insider/outsider insights into her new family's diverse emotional responses to a situation that seems
beyond even the wisdom and persistence of the family matriarch. The faltering of
the adults both frightens and empowers Elizabeth, who in a variety of ways saves
the day, after first overcoming her fear of the ocean to rescue the only other dis-
tinct child character, five-year-old Petey. From a literary perspective, the novel
suffers from purposiveness: didactic content—including oceanographic facts con-
veyed in an environmental subplot and cultural data attached to overtly multicultu-
ral characters—is too clearly laid out in stilted dialogue and in Elizabeth’s inner
thoughts (printed in italics). The situation of these characters is realistic enough,
however, and the emphasis on the ethics of family life may engage serious-minded
readers. FK

CARLSTROM, NANCY WHITE What Does the Sky Say?; illus. by Tim
Ladwig. Eerdmans, 2001 32p ISBN 0-8028-5208-4 $17.00 Ad 4-8 yrs
As the title suggests, this is a rumination on the natural and spiritual in a Q&A
form. The philosophy is admirable, but the poetic text is sometimes hindered by
conceptually difficult or ambiguous language (“What does the sky say on a Satur-
day night before going out with the mountains in orange silk?”) and unclear logic
(the autumn sky says, “Sing and you will always find your way home”). The little
girl is a deliberately universalized figure placed in a sentimental landscape of water-
color, pastel, and acrylic illustrations that, along with the omniscient narration,
emphasize her isolation from people to focus on her relation to the cosmos. The
tie to the declaration in Psalm 19 (which follows the text proper) that “the skies
proclaim the work of God’s hands” is a bit tenuous as an afterthought, but Sun-
day-school teachers and others may well be attracted to the model attitudes of the
main character, the book’s statement of faith, and its overt message that under the
sky’s “wide roof . . . surely there is room for everyone to live in peace.” FK

CHOLDENKO, GENNIFER Notes from a Liar and Her Dog. Putnam, 2001
216p ISBN 0-399-23591-4 $18.99 R Gr. 4-6
Ant (short for Antonia) MacPherson is an overlooked middle child in a family
where stark favoritism is shown toward her two sisters, Elizabeth and Kate. Ant’s
mother basks in their talents (ballet and beauty) in part to keep her mind off of her
fickle husband, whose frequent career upheavals and subsequent “fresh starts” have
kept the family from living in the same place for more than a year. Ant’s response
to her mother’s negligence and her father’s absence (all his jobs seem to involve
plenty of travel) is to avoid telling the truth at all costs, particularly when it’s about
something meaningful to her, and nothing is more meaningful to Ant than her
aged Chihuahua-mix dog, Pistachio. When her mother refuses to take Pistachio
to the vet, Ant takes him herself, giving a false name and address so that the bill
won’t catch up with her. One of Ant’s sixth-grade teachers intervenes and slowly
helps her realize that lying is making her life more complicated than telling the
truth. The happy resolution (Ant’s father opts not to change jobs again and her
mother starts to notice her) is somewhat pat, but the strength of Ant’s voice will
engage readers despite the slightly flat ending. Choldenko’s writing is snappy and
tender, depicting both Ant’s bravado and her isolation with sympathy. Although
there are plenty of bad girls out there in middle-grade literature, Ant will win a
following for her unusual candor in the process of lying and learning to live with
the truth. KM

Locked within an enormous clod of frozen tundra are the remains of the Jarkov mammoth, named for the Dolgan (indigenous Siberian) teens who discovered its protruding tusks on a hunting expedition. Although the woolly mammoth—along with answers to scientists’ many questions regarding its life and demise—is currently on ice in a Khatanga cave, the tale of its discovery, excavation, and transportation to safe lodgings provides plenty of interest. Chorlton starts with a somewhat awkward, occasionally repetitive presentation of background materials on various kinds of mammoths, but once the researchers arrive on the scene the interest picks up. Scientists disagree on how much of the mammoth remains below ground and whether soft tissue is extant, and their disagreements directly influence retrieval strategies. Once it’s determined to remove the estimated bulk of the entire animal, serious challenges arise ranging from acquiring and powering jackhammers in remote Siberia to finding a helicopter that can convey the great weight hundreds of miles to Khatanga. The possibility and ethics of cloning are evenhandedly treated, and the Dolgans’ attitude toward the whole procedure is also acknowledged (“They watch the team’s efforts with some amusement, wondering why anybody would waste so much time digging out an object that has no practical value”). Lots of scrapbook-style photos document the expedition, effectively drawing browsers into the action. EB


When twelve-year-old Natalie considers becoming a published author, her enterprising friend Zoe becomes her agent. Masquerading under the pen name Cassandra Day, Natalie produces a manuscript called “The Cheater”; new literary agent Zee Zee Reisman, aka Zoe, represents her, funneling the manuscript into the receptive hands of children’s book editor Hannah Nelson (Natalie’s mom). Neophyte English teacher Ms. Clayton is persuaded to act as advisor to the “publishing club” and CRO (chief rental officer) for Zoe’s literary agency. There’s excellent plotting and insightful character development here, but it’s unfortunately undercut by uneven execution, with intrusive narrator comments and unfettered coincidence impeding the book’s effect. Will kids be sucked in by the possibility of a peer’s work not only being published, but being good enough to get the attention of a New York publishing firm (with a little help from an agent who is a first-class player)? The answer will lie in the loyalty of the readership: has the formula gotten old, or will diehard Clements fans, still grateful for *Frindle* (BCCB 10/96), be satisfied by the enormous empowerment he offers his young characters? EAB


Artemis Fowl is a twelve-year-old multimillionaire genius whose family made its fortune through skullduggery and chicanery, and the boy is determined to follow in his ancestors’ larcenous footsteps. With the help of Butler (bodyguard, enforcer, and family retainer), Artemis gets his hands on a copy of The Book, a Bible of fairy law and lore. He kidnaps a fairy (Captain Holly Short) and demands a ton
of 24-karat gold in ransom; the fairies, apparently no strangers to extortion, send in an elite strike force to rescue the hostage. Fairy folk notwithstanding, Colfer's novel is more suspense than fantasy, and the rising action supports the pace. The paramilitary humor leans a tad toward the adult, but the characters' motivations are easily recognizable, and readers will appreciate Artemis' growing conscience, Holly Short's compulsion to heal even the deadly Butler, and the camaraderie of the ground troops. Opening characterizations appear shallow but are later refined to include more psychological nuance, and the plot/concept holds together well. This is an action novel that's bound to build a fan base among more hardware-oriented fantasy fans. JMD

DIETERLÉ, NATHALIE  *I Am the King!*; written and illus. by Nathalie Dieterlé. Orchard, 2001 26p ISBN 0-531-30324-1 $15.95 R 4-7 yrs

The king in question is actually Little Louis, a bunny whose mother gives him a "beautiful golden crown." This goes to his head figuratively as well as literally, and he becomes a bit of a tyrant, deciding to "change all the laws of his kingdom" (the king doesn't go to school or take a bath, and he only eats chocolate). Finally his subjects—er, parents—revolt and send him to his room. Dieterlé's oversized pages show His Rabbity Highness to good advantage: Louis is a plain brown bun, with lines reminiscent of Matt Groening's lagomorphic Binky, so his reign is all the more endearing. The pared-down compositions and thickly applied gouache allow for a tight and effective focus, and details such as Louis' proclamations to the monsters that lurk in scary bedroom locales (under the bed, behind the curtains, and outside the window) make clear that Louis has been yearning to subjugate some of these subjects for quite awhile. The end (wherein after apparently surrendering to anti-king forces Louis becomes a wolf) isn't as well grounded as it might be, but children will adore Louis' absence of capitulation. This is gleeful and apt in its depiction of a youngster's happy tyranny, and kids longing to rule the hutch will revel in it. DS


The court has sentenced sixteen-year-old Nick to counseling and the writing of a journal as a consequence of an incident with his girlfriend, which Nick terms "a slap." Through his journal, he recalls the beginning and progression of his relationship with Caitlin, until his desire to control her leads him into violence. Interwoven with the written flashbacks is Nick's account of his attendance at group therapy, where he and other perpetrators of domestic violence attempt to understand and redirect their impulses, and his reluctance to accept his exclusion not only from Caitlin's life but from the life of his best friend, Tom. Flinn's use of Nick as narrator is unusual and provocative, and there's impact as well as insight in his long refusal to acknowledge his own culpability; Caitlin's vulnerability to this unhealthy relationship is also credibly grounded. There's a programmatic side to much of the narrative, however, with the therapeutic education predictable and the information about Nick's own abuse at the hands of his father overly pointed. As a counterpoint to titles such as Sarah Dessen's *Dreamland* (BCCB 10/00), this offers a complementary view of the danger possible in relationships. DS
George, Jean Craighead  *Nutik & Amaroq Play Ball*; illus. by Ted Rand. HarperCollins, 2001 38p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028167-7  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028166-9  $15.95  R 4-7 yrs

*Nutik, the WolfPup*; illus. by Ted Rand. HarperCollins, 2001 38p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028165-0  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028164-2  $15.95  Ad 4-7 yrs

This pair of picture books, spun from the ideas and characters of George's Julie books (*Julie's Wolf Pack*, BCCB 10/97, etc.), relate how Julie's younger brother, Amaroq, came to adopt wild wolf Nutik as a pet (*WolfPup*) and how the pair, in pursuit of amusement and a missing football, find themselves far from home at nightfall (*Play Ball*). In *Nutik, the WolfPup*, George accurately captures the heartache of a child who, against his sister's advice, becomes emotionally attached to the wolf cub he prepares for release into the wild; however, in a wishful and improbable twist, Amaroq bravely returns Nutik to his pack, but the wolf rejoins his human household. For listeners who accept the premise of such an easily domesticated wolf, *Nutik & Amaroq Play Ball* offers a solid storyline that blends authentic tension (the friends stray further and further from home as day winds to a close) with an introductory lesson on tracking (Nutik finds the direction home by observing birds' flight and feeding patterns). Gentle anthropomorphization pervades both tales (“'Come home. Come home,' they [wolves] howled”; “Nutik wagged his tale to say 'Yes' in wolf talk”), and Rand's expressive Nutik comes pretty darn close to cute. Vibrant pencil and watercolor naturescapes convincingly portray the breadth of subtly undulating land and sweeping sky, however, and visually demonstrate how Amaroq and his family share rather than dominate their environment. EB

Haas, Jesse  *Runaway Radish*; illus. by Margot Apple. Greenwillow, 2001 56p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029159-1  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16688-1  $15.95  R* Gr. 2-4
See this month's Big Picture, p. 399, for review.

Hall, Katy  *Ribbit Riddles*; by Katy Hall and Lisa Eisenberg; illus. by Robert Bender. Dial, 2001 40p (Dial Easy-to-Read Books)

Primary-grades professionals will doubtless be familiar with the riddling team of Hall and Eisenberg, who've produced an eminently readable series of joke books in the past few years. Here, in a volume appropriately dedicated to Kermit, they turn to frogs, employing such standards as “Why are frogs such great baseball players?” (it is, of course, their talent at catching flies) as well as newer material. A good chunk of the riddles rest solidly on the conflation of frogs and toads, which will elicit the scorn of picky young naturalists, and frogs seem inserted in rather than central to a jest or two, but this is still an enticing pondful of jokes. Bender's art employs layers of cell-vinyl paint on acetate, and the result is a luminous, slightly creepy style that will draw youngsters who had felt they were beyond frog jokes. Imaginative details and the gleam of the protruding eyes in every illustration ensure energetic effects that'll make kids slow down and look at the pictures. Riddles are always an easy sell, and the art lifts this title above the mundane in a way that readers will appreciate. DS
HOLMES, BARBARA WARE  *Following Fake Man.*  Knopf, 2001  228p  ISBN 0-375-81266-0  $15.95  Ad  Gr. 5-8

Homer is tired of his widowed mother’s refusal to answer questions about his deceased father, and his rising impatience with her deliberate avoidance gives birth to rebellious thoughts and, finally, actions. On an unexpected vacation to Maine Homer finds the first hints to his own history and his first real friend. Friend Roger acts as mastermind and comic relief, concocting a plan to discover the identity of “Fake Man,” an obviously disguised tourist living in a derelict cabin and given to mysterious ferry trips. Homer follows “Fake Man” and discovers his true identity: he is Owen Castle, a famous artist trying to remain anonymous, who knew Homer’s father and who tells the boy the truth about his father’s life and death. The story has a prickly undercurrent of suspense; Homer’s stubborn refusal to take silence for an answer and his dogged determination to discover what he needs to know propel the action. Most of the novel is told from Homer’s point of view, with intermittent chapters/commentary offered by housekeeper Madeleine, Roger, and even, in the end, Homer’s mother, Catherine. The sometimes interruptive nature of other characters’ interpolations doesn’t overshadow Homer’s objective; his voice and his dilemma draw the reader effortlessly into his world. The revelation about Homer’s father is handled with an elegance that makes the overexplanatory dénouement clunky by comparison. Having held her child-characters in gentle hands throughout, Holmes suddenly tosses them aside to concentrate on the shallowly developed grownups and their grief, a choice that makes the conclusion disappointingly programmatic. Still, Homer’s is a resonant, believable voice, and his journey to his own past will sweep readers along. JMD

HONEY, ELIZABETH  *Fiddleback.*  Knopf, 2001  [224p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-80579-6  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 5-9

Like Honey’s *Don’t Pat the Wombat* (BCCB 7/00), *Fiddleback* is narrated—and, ostensibly, illustrated—by an Australian preteen: this one is a writer-to-be named Henni, who will be heading into junior high after the Christmas holidays. Her fast-paced, staunchly un-Americanized text is enlivened by annotations, hand-lettered lists, letters to God, and charcoal line drawings that quietly segue into more sophisticated sketches of the landscape and the people that came together so eventfully during the wild multifamily outback vacation Henni chronicles. Notable events range from the domestic to the societal (a modern lost boy plaintively follows the group in an effort to contact one of the campers, his social worker) and the ecological (a sensitive gully is threatened by a shortsighted lumber man with his eye on the valuable fiddleback markings of an ancient tree). Oh, and a baby is born. Strong characterization and an even stronger appreciation for the mundane keep this walk on the wild side from becoming the script for *FernGully IX.* Henni’s rhetorical question is just: “Why aren’t the good things ever news? FIVE KIDS HAVE ACE TIME SKINNY-DIPPING IN RIVER.” The novel is anchored by the characters’ offbeat humor and their calm steady look at the messier miracles of life: for example, two chapters focus on the delayed postpartum delivery of the placenta (aka “play center”), after which all of the assembled—men, women, and children—“had a good cry.” Though its resolution is unrealistically tidy (thanks largely to an outback codger ex machina), this kid-friendly mixture of back-to-basics fun, thoughtful asides, and a dash of turbulence will suit many readers. FK

The narrator and his brother, Leo, love their mother's office: she works in the bug lab. The best part of Mom's office is Max, the hissing cockroach ("When most people see him . . . they back away. Sometimes they scream"). When there's a party to celebrate a new endowment for the building, Max the fearsome slips out of his cage, and the boys have to mount a bug-hunt to find him before he disrupts the ceremonies; the lady who helps them recover Max proves, unsurprisingly, to be the honoree who provided the endowment. The plot turns may be expected, but the entomological theme is an unusual one. The text has a lively buzz and many tasty insect tidbits, and the vocabulary shrewdly evades complex scientific terms and offers reinforcement in the form of Leo's fondness for buggy turns of phrase ("And Mom will be mad as a hornet"). Holub's watercolor, gouache, and acrylic illustrations have a solidity unusual in an easy reader: the palette is springlike, but there's a new-wavy spikiness to the characters, and bug eyes, especially on the insects, evoke echoes of Victoria Chess's beady-eyed beings. Plenty of early readers will welcome this change-of-pace story about a cockroach on the loose. DS


On a dark (and soon to be stormy) night Jonathan looks out his bedroom window and sees two eyes glowing from the branches of a tree outside: "He races downstairs and throws open the screen door. 'The stray cat's afraid of thunder!' he tells his grandparents." The cat slips inside, carrying a newborn kitten. The determined feline makes a second trip out into the increasingly violent weather; the boy, anxious for the cat's safety, waits by the open door until she returns with another kitten. The third time the mother cat is assisted by courageous Jonathan, who dashes outside "to help them battle through the rain. One boy, one cat, and a third small kitten—wet as water, black as night." This is a simple, suspenseful story successfully told, and youngsters will immediately get caught up in Jonathan's nighttime adventure. Hartung's watercolors are a study in blue and yellow, the blue shadowy darkness inside and outside made more intense by the contrasting yellow glow of the electric and (after the storm cuts the electricity) candle light. Jonathan himself is a freckle-faced hero in pajamas and slippers, who braves storm, dark, and rain to help the mother cat and her kittens. Include this in any storytime that needs an added frisson of danger. JMD


Austin's got a great life—he's "The Pride of the Panthers," his high-school football team; he's got good friends; he's got any girl he wants. Since nothing bad has happened to him, he can't figure out why he doesn't want to get out of bed in the morning, doesn't want to take the trouble to eat, doesn't really care about anything that happens. What he thinks he may care about is Heather Mackenzie, the pol-
ished, controlled beauty who only goes out with college boys; soon they're dating, and only Heather, coolly and masterfully sensual Heather, can pull Austin out of the morass in which he flounders. As he begins to get a glimpse of the vulnerable girl underneath, wounded forever by her father's suicide, he thinks perhaps he can confide in her about his possibly suicidal depression and also heal her by making her realize that neither his nor her father’s darkness is a condemnation of her. Jenkins (author of Breaking Boxes, BCCB 11/97) paints a perceptive and understanding portrait of a kid bogged down in a depression that so drains him that he has little energy to understand or articulate it; Austin's second-person narration effectively conveys his distance from his happy-party-guy persona and his football efforts in the face of a new and often-troubling coach. Heather is more than a mere functionary; the book elicits real sympathy for the pain and betrayal that causes her commitment to an unshakable cool, and that commitment is evocatively depicted (even when having sex, she is comfortable only when causing Austin to lose control, furious when he arouses her to the point of surrendering the upper hand over the situation). More intense than Barbara Shoup's also excellent Wish You Were Here (BCCB 11/97), this is both a nuanced exploration of a complicated relationship and a sensitive treatment of a young man struggling against a strong and frightening tide. DS

JENKINS, STEVE  
ISBN 0-618-03376-9  $16.00  Ad  Gr. 2-3

Jenkins presents an array of animals and their varied ways of communicating, from screeching to thumping. Although the main text is little more than a catalog of various purposes and techniques of animal communication, he strengthens the presentation by organizing the animal behaviors into categories, such as warning other members of a group about predators, expressing intent (playfulness, dominance, etc.), marking territory, and mating. Each brief description of animal communication is accompanied by an illustration of the animal engaged in the aforementioned behavior; while these descriptions are clearly written, the overall textual brevity allows for no more than a sampling of animal activities. Readers may be puzzled by some of the behaviors described (why does the female orb-web spider sometimes eat the male, despite his communication of intent to mate?), and the ending is abrupt, with little sense of summary or closure. The clean lines and engrossing textures of Jenkins' cut and torn-paper collages are both visually enticing and technically outstanding, however, taking care to replicate animal features and forms as accurately as possible in an unusual medium. Young readers may go on to investigate some of the many animal approaches to interaction after tasting the tidbits offered here. KM

JOOSSE, BARBARA M.  
Ghost Wings; illus. by Giselle Potter. Chronicle, 2001 34p
ISBN 0-8118-2164-1  $15.95  Ad  5-9 yrs

The little girl narrator is very attached to the grandmother who keeps her safe from imaginary monsters, teaches her how to make tortillas, and accompanies her to the "Magic Circle" where monarch butterflies nest in great numbers. Her grandmother becomes "thin as smoke" and dies on the day the butterflies leave, and the little girl grieves. Her grief is alleviated by the ceremonies associated with the Days of the Dead and by the return of the butterflies that "carry the souls of the old
ones." While the child narrator’s loss will elicit sympathy, the story itself is didactic and predictable. References to the migration of the monarch butterflies and the Days of the Dead accumulate with awkward purposefulness and add to an already lengthy, somewhat stilted text. Potter’s mixed-media (watercolor, colored pencil, and ink) illustrations are missing their usual vitality; the colors are washed out, and the compositions lack variety. Still, the little girl herself is often very expressive, especially in scenes featuring her smiling, gray-haired grandmother, and the magic of the monarchs cannot be denied. Notes on the Days of the Dead and monarch butterflies are included, as is a “Guide to Using this Book” that features questions and activities about feelings, memories, and butterflies. JMD

Reviewed from galleys

Whereas Dadey’s *Shooting Star: Annie Oakley, the Legend* (BCCB 6/97) courted the tall-tale crowd, Krensky offers a more traditional but equally satisfying picturebook biography that candidly touches on some of the more somber aspects of Oakley’s early life—her father’s death and her unhappy stay with a harsh farming couple—as well as her driving ambition to invent herself as an entertainer and the crowd-pleasing stunts and trick shots that made her a legend. Krensky’s text is peppered with presumably authentic quotes, but although he alludes in a concluding note to some of Oakley’s writing, no specific citations are given. Photorealistic faces emerge from Fuchs’ misty earthtoned paintings, and startling bursts of luminescence bring featured objects and visages into sharp relief. As both artwork and textual approach stand in such vivid contrast to Dadey’s rollicking rendering, these complementary views could serve as an inviting and accessible starting point for discussion of how heroes become larger than life. EB

Reviewed from galleys

Ebon’s energetic, imaginative, fun-loving father is the life of the family, and when Dad slips into a coma out of the blue, Ebon, his two siblings, and his mother are devastated. When a determined Ebon, with the aid of his loyal friend B.J., makes sure Dad’s beloved haunted house is ready for Halloween, he hears a voice directing him that could only be his father’s. Soon his father’s presence becomes even stronger, and he’s visible to and joking with all his kids; in spite of a psychologist’s claim that what he’s seeing and hearing are the manifestations of grief, Ebon knows it’s his father’s spirit. He also realizes that the more palpable Dad’s spirit gets, the harder it is for his body, so he plans a way to get spirit and body together to have his father home well and in one piece. It’s an intriguing plot idea, and LaFaye makes Dad a glamorous and exciting figure despite his unreliability, so readers will join Ebon in wanting him back. The somewhat talky narrative doesn’t focus well, however, with themes abandoned (it’s never really pursued that Ebon is by comparison the normal kid of the family until he finds this special gift of communicating with his father) and mood uncertain—Dad’s quite a blithe spirit upon return, creating comic consternation, which humor doesn’t balance well with the family’s sadness and fear; the logic of the resolution is also somewhat murky. This not-
A quite-ghost story may still suit young readers with a taste for exploration of the ineffable. DS


Plumbing is lucrative for its practitioners, but it’s also historically interesting, and Lauber (who authored What You Never Knew about Fingers, Forks, & Chopsticks, BCCB 12/99, in the same series) gives a chipper overview of centuries of glugs, splashes, and smells. She covers bathing and elimination customs from Stone Age humans through the fairly bath-happy days in Egypt and Imperial Rome (“The Ancient World: Clean Is In”), then onto the somewhat more redolent days in Europe and then our conveniently plumbed lives today, stopping along the way to address cultures less immediately instrumental in our lavatorial arrangements. Though some of the fun facts provided aren’t so factual (the Millard Fillmore credit for the first White House bathtub, treated as truth here, was an H. L. Mencken fiction), there’s a good overview of enticing and repelling tidbits, with some clear points about the roles of technology, medicine, and economics in human habits. Manders’ layered-glaze illustrations provide all the browsable details titillating young readers could hope for, with dribbles of chamber pots and the odd nekkid rear end ensuring continued interest (though informative details and diagrams are also a significant component of the visuals). Kids not ready for Penny Colman’s Toilets, Bathtubs, Sinks, and Sewers (BCCB 2/95) will be happy to make this their bathroom reading. A bibliography is included. DS


With this title Lawrence concludes what is now termed his High Seas Trilogy (The Wreckers, BCCB 6/98; The Smugglers, 7/99). John Spencer is once again entrusted with his father’s cargo, bound this time for the New World. Commanded by a coast-hugging captain afraid of the open sea, the Dragon is only a few days out when she takes aboard a mysterious man named Horn who appears to be the sole survivor of a shipwreck. Whether Horn is a dreaded Jonah or the Dragon’s salvation remains to be seen, but it becomes clear that the man was once involved with pirate Bartholomew Grace (currently in pursuit of Captain Kidd’s legendary buried treasure), and his prior entanglement eventually puts the entire crew of the Dragon in harm’s way. It takes some fancy seamanship for Lawrence to bring the plot about, landing the Dragon finally and safely along the shores that nearly witnessed Spencer’s demise in The Wreckers. Major characters are hastily disposed, John’s revived romance with Mary fizzes with jarring alacrity, and the wind seems to have died abruptly in the trilogy’s billowing sails. But The Buccaneers still boasts its share of gruesome and eccentric characters—from the one-eyed gunner who “couldn’t hit the sponge if it was still in the barrel,” to the dastardly Grace whose noseless face has “melted” into a horrifying mask. There’s peril aplenty as John evades Grace and his henchmen and cuts out the prize ship with which they intend to firebomb the British navy. John Spencer’s final literary voyage may not be quite up to the previous two, but all in all it’s still a pretty grand adventure. EB
LEVY, ELIZABETH  *Big Trouble in Little Twinsville;* illus. by Mark Elliott. HarperCollins, 2001 89p
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028590-7  $14.95  Ad  Gr. 3-5

Any older sibling will admit to despising a younger sibling at times, but ten-year-old Eve thinks she has double the trouble, because she has twin redheaded five-year-old sisters, Amy and May, who invade her space, copy her style, and demand attention. While Eve’s bond with her stay-at-home accountant father helps to soften the blows, it will not save her from the Twin Convention in Twinsville, where “singletons” are the exception. Luckily, two sisterly cousins gang up with Eve for solidarity. Mayhem ensues when Eve encourages the twins to enter the talent contest with an ear-splitting act, but the cousin singletons come to the rescue, masquerading as the Three Stooges Triplets to save the day. Without being pedantic, Levy’s story brings a refreshingly modern family to the forefront. Unfortunately, this is a one-joke book, with Eve muttering the same phrase at the beginning as well as at the end (“I only ordered one”), and the style is facile and overexclamatory. Nonetheless, the plotting is fast and the tone is breezy, and beleaguered older siblings may find a hero in the clever Eve. Kids may wish to pause here for a diverting read.  EAB

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028487-0  $14.89

Crocodile is hungry, and when he sees plump Hen foraging for food down by the river, he’s all set to indulge his appetite. Hen, however, has different ideas: “My Brother, don’t eat me,” said Hen. She had so little fear of him that she looked at him with one eye. She looked at him with her other eye. Then she looked away.” Crocodile doesn’t know what to make of the nervy chicken, and he goes away not only hungry but perplexed by Hen’s claim that they are brother and sister. Finally, he concedes that he and Hen are siblings (because chickens and crocodiles both lay eggs, explains Lizard); that is why, to this day, Crocodile doesn’t eat Hen. Lexau’s simple text conveys the bewilderment of Crocodile and the cool insouciance of Hen, as well as the obvious humor engendered by their encounters. A concluding note mentions the *pourquoi* tale (“Why the Crocodile Does Not Eat the Hen”) Lexau used as her source. Cushman’s illustrations feature an impressively toothy, yellow-eyed crocodile and a plump white hen on the banks of a blue river; appearances by local fauna (monkey, giraffe) add interest to the cartoony compositions.  JMD

LOWELL, SUSAN  *Dusty Locks and the Three Bears;* illus. by Randy Cecil. Holt, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-8050-5862-1  $15.95  R 5-8 yrs

Lowell transports Goldilocks to a wood in the Wild West in this adaptation of the old tale. Dusty Locks arrives at the cabin of the three grizzly bears (“One was a little bitty bear cub, just knee-high to a bumblebee. One was a mild-mannered middle-size mama. And one was a great big humpbacked gray-haired grizzly, nine feet tall and cross as two sticks”) just after they set out for their walk. She lets herself in and wrecks the usual havoc, eating their breakfast beans, climbing into
assorted chairs, and curling up in baby bear's bed. The bears return to discover the mess and the messer, upon which "the dirty little desperado" runs home to her mother, who dunks, bathes, scolds, hugs, and kisses Dusty Locks "into a whole new girl entirely." This latest title doesn’t have quite the easy flow of Lowell's previous reimaginings (Little Red Cowboy Hat, BCCB 6/97; The Elves and the Bootmaker, 12/97), but the retelling has some tasty turns of phrase. Cecil’s acrylics provide a necessary subtext: Dusty Locks is a disreputable-looking little housebreaker who, on the dedication page, is pursuing a panicked skunk, and the bears themselves have pop-eyed demeanors that make them look perpetually surprised. Listeners with a yen for western regalia may appreciate being regaled with this new version of an old tale. JMD


The Emergency Vets television program has appeal for young and old alike, and this title capitalizes on that appeal for the young. Eleven-year-old Megan, a summer intern at the veterinary hospital, tells of the people who work there, the pets who come in, and their worried owners; she also has a blossoming friendship with Rick, a boy her own age whose dog is in the hospital. The animal-hospital stories are inherently absorbing, and viewers of the show will recognize some of the patients; the solid details of veterinary work will secure the attention of budding vets. There’s also some confusion, however: Megan is a real girl (the niece of the senior surgeon), but she didn’t write this narration and didn’t, in real life, have these experiences, which calls into question the factuality of the rest of the human details here. Also forced is the plot thread involving an abandoned dog, who ends up going home with Megan. A more authentically documentary approach would have served the subject better, but this is an unintimidating extension of the show, and even non-watchers may appreciate the insight into veterinary medicine. Black-and-white photographs in an eight-page inset are on the gray side, but they give faces to the personae. DS


A prince determined to marry a princess of his own choosing tells his royal father he’ll never marry unless he’s told a story with an ending he doesn’t know. Meanwhile, across the sea, a princess determined to marry a prince of her own choosing sets sail with her royal parents. A storm sweeps the princess overboard, where she grabs hold of a trunk swept off the deck and eventually makes her way to shore: “She was lost, hungry, alone. And curious. What was inside the trunk?” The trunk contains a dry sailor suit and a small pouch of silver coins; the princess dons the clothes, pockets the cash, and sets off. The happy ending is never really in doubt: the princess meets the prince and tells him her story, and the two of them fall in love (“They were each marrying the person they had chosen to marry, but neither had guessed they were also marrying the very one they’d been destined to marry from the start”). This original tale has a strong folkloric base, but there are no fragile folktale females here. Root’s pencil and watercolor illustrations eschew gauzy images in favor of robust ones; full-page and full-spread paintings feature a
believable bunch of bold, natural-looking characters instead of fey fairy folk, and
spot art and ornamental capitals decorate the text pages. Judicious trimming of
the wordy text would result in smoother storytelling, and slightly stronger charac-
terizations (while the princess is obviously a desirable mate due to her adventurous
nature and storytelling prowess, the prince is less clearly so) would make the play-
ners more memorable, but this is a dandy tale for telling or reading aloud. JMD

Morrison, Taylor  *The Great Unknown*; written and illus. by Taylor
Morrison. Lorraine/Houghton, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-395-97494-1  $16.00 Ad  Gr. 3-5

In picture-book format, Morrison relates the story of Charles Willson Peale’s un-
earthing, reconstruction, and exhibition of a nearly complete mastodon skeleton,
emphasizing its novelty and intellectual impact among early nineteenth-century
viewers who resisted the concept of species extinction in the natural order of God’s
“perfect” creation. Morrison doesn’t generate much excitement in his, ahem, bare-
bones account (“The skeleton helped to prove the argument that animals could
become extinct. The bones existed, but the animal did not. In 1806, the French
naturalist Georges Cuvier named the animal mastodon, which means ‘nipple
tooth’”), and the cramped typeface, occasionally set into stodgy black line boxes,
sits uneasily alongside or amid brawny but static scenes. For a more complete,
albeit less densely illustrated, overview, refer readers to Janet Wilson’s *The Inge-
nious Mr. Peale* (BCCB 6/96), but if brevity is the order of the day, this title will
prove serviceable. EB

Myers, Walter Dean  *The Journal of Biddy Owens: The Negro
Leagues*. Scholastic, 2001 142p illus. with photographs (My Name Is
America)
ISBN 0-439-09503-4  $10.95  R  Gr. 5-9

Seventeen-year-old Biddy Owens is equipment manager for the all-Negro baseball
team, the Birmingham Black Barons. He wants to play baseball, and to that end
he observes the players, practices his game, and writes in his journal about life on
the road. Owens does more than describe the day-to-day trials and tribulations of
a baseball team in the Negro Leagues in 1948; he also describes the lives of south-
ern blacks dealing with Jim Crow laws, the effects of racism in the world at large,
the beginnings of desegregation, and his own journey to self-awareness. Myers
gives Owens an honest but not overly reflective voice; the character’s observations
about race, family, and baseball have a concrete specificity that makes them appear
factually as well as emotionally true. Biddy Owens is more interested in baseball
than anything else, but he knows he’s not big-league material; stops on the game
route that include encounters with students from all-black colleges such as Spelman
and Morehead give him broader ideas for his future. Myers gives his fictional
main character/journalist a life that informs the history rather than the other way
around. A historical note about the Negro Leagues is appended; an appendix of
black-and-white historical photos of the real-life Birmingham Black Barons is also
included. JMD

Na, An  *A Step from Heaven*. Front Street, 2001 156p
ISBN 1-886910-58-8  $15.95  R  Gr. 6-9

Even as a little girl, Young Ju understands that there are family tensions, that her
father is an unhappy man, and that his wife and his mother are hoping for better things. Young Ju’s parents hope to find it by taking their daughter and moving from Korea to Mi Gook, the United States, which is a “step from heaven.” That step is farther than anticipated, as the hoped-for financial success isn’t forthcoming and Young Ju’s father continues his abusive ways. As the years go by, Young Ju grows more Americanized, becoming, along with her brother, the translator of English and of America for her family and resenting more and more her father’s rigidity and abuse. This is a quietly but effectively told story, with the first-person present-tense narration broken up into brief titled sections that are more vignettes than chapters; they’re sufficiently connected to create a poignant overview of a life undergoing extraordinary change as Young Ju loses a country, a grandmother, and, ultimately, a father (her father, after being arrested for assaulting Young Ju’s mother, leaves her for another woman). Na has a streamlined, unaffected style that offers childlike focus without being babyish (after wishfully telling her second-grade classmates that her very-much-alive younger brother is dead and reveling in the attention, Young Ju says, “I play with my fuzzies, scratch and sniff my stickers, and think about how nice it is that my brother is dead”). A contemporary and personal immigrant tale, this will make an affecting counterpoint to well-worn stories of Ellis Island.


Nixon’s latest mystery opens with a wallop as to-die-for handsome Enrique (Ricky) Urbino, talented teen baseball player, is smuggled out of his native Cuba to seek asylum and a promising career in the United States. As Ricky hides out at a cruise ship port of call, awaiting another illegal connection, the scene shifts to domestic skirmishes between sixteen-year-old Rose and her mother. Mom packs Rose off on a cruise with her meddlesome grandmother, Glory, and her bridge pals, and if you can’t guess that Rose will become embroiled with Ricky’s escape on that very same cruise ship, then you haven’t read a heckuva lot of YA mystery novels. Before Ricky can reach the golden shores, there are myriad plot lines to explore and resolve involving a shipboard romance (Rose and Ricky), shipboard friendship/flirtation (Rose and Glory’s friend’s grandson Neil), jealousy (Neil and Cuban expatriate and consummate flirt Julieta), dead bodies (Ricky is the suspected perp), and enough Castro bashing on Nixon’s part to send chilly U.S./Cuban relations to the deep freeze. Plotting is predictable, characters are substantial as celluloid (with frequent allusions to the film Titanic underscoring the cinematic qualities of dramatis personae), but teens looking for an undemanding beach read that follows all the rules will cruise right on through. EB


Saints Francis, Christopher, Valentine, and Patrick seem to hold the monopoly on picture-book trade, but here the two sixth-century figures who shaped the development of monastic tradition get their due. With little biographical data to go on (at least by modern standards of scholarship), Norris bases much of her
account on the writings of Gregory the Great, with their emphasis on miracles; Benedict’s life lends itself to more complete coverage than his sister Scholastica’s. Even within these constraints, Norris and dePaola present a smooth, reverent, but happily not stiffly pious tale of close siblings who reluctantly part, come to develop powerful spirituality within the settings of different monastic communities, and finally reestablish contact as adults who freely discuss “holy things” as they redefine and influence the way monastic communities should function. Benedict’s Rule may have had lasting impact, but it’s the images of Benedict dwelling in his hermit cave, thwarting his would-be poisoners, and arguing with his sister that will stick with the audience. As Benedict takes center stage throughout the text, dePaola cleverly keeps tabs on Scholastica by incorporating pictures of her convent activities over the years. Norris could (probably should) have included such helpful information as the dates of the saints’ lives, patron and feast day information, and a translation of the Benedictine motto, *Ora et Labora*. An author’s note does, however, expand on Benedict’s Rule, and this title will prove overall to be a fine addition to the 200s collection. EB

**ORENSTEIN, RONALD**  *New Animal Discoveries.* Millbrook, 2001 64p  illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-7613-2274-4 $23.90  R  Gr. 4-6

Readers who thought there was nothing new under the sun will have their eyes opened by Orenstein’s discussion of some animals recently identified for the first time. While most of the new discoveries are insects, they’re not included here due to the sheer volume of their new identifications; there’s no shortage of diversity, though, with subjects ranging from big fish to small frogs, Somalian birds to Vietnamese deer. Though the text is occasionally a bit disjointed, the book provides some evocative pictures of searches and discoveries, and it also addresses some of the touchier issues of species discovery—the requirement of a dead specimen, the “discovery” of an animal often well-known to the locals if not to the scientists, the deleterious effect of discovery upon a species. Sidebars address matters ranging from the Linnean system of classification to rediscoveries to scientist careers. Color photographs are plentiful, lasting even when the animals haven’t (the beautiful saola was unable to survive in captivity), and often providing glimpses of their habitat, too; thumbnail maps scattered throughout assist in location. There are no further references (except for the occasional mention in a sidebar), but an index is included. DS

**ORMEROD, JAN**  *Miss Mouse Takes Off,* written and illus. by Jan Ormerod. HarperCollins, 2001  [26p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-17870-7  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  3-6 yrs

The heroine of *Miss Mouse’s Day* returns here ready to go, as she and her family travel to Granny’s for a visit. Stuffed toy Miss Mouse provides a useful voice for projecting the feelings of her young mistress (and for young listeners) as she takes her first plane trip. The text calmly details the basics of a plane trip, such as boarding, stowing luggage (make sure Miss Mouse isn’t in the overhead bin!), fastening seat belts, eating meals on trays, and killing time aloft. There’s a little bit of confusion about the speaker, since the account is supposedly by Miss Mouse but it also refers to her by name at times, but this is still a compact and highly
accessible introduction to flying with the important message that you need to hang onto your toys. Ormerod's line-and-watercolor illustrations sometimes emphasize simplicity at the expense of character, but Miss Mouse's mistress is sweet and particularly realistic in her poses, as when she studiously concentrates on fastening her seat belt, and Miss Mouse herself is floppily companionable. The paneled format, which provides two discrete scenes on many pages, helps examine the experience without slowing down the pace. This is just the thing for early discussions of transportation or, more likely, for preflight preparation for new little travelers. DS

PELTA, KATHY  *Rediscovering Easter Island.* Lerner, 2001  112p  illus. with photographs  (How History is Invented)  ISBN 0-8225-4890-9  $23.93  R  Gr. 5-9

It's nearly impossible to consider Easter Island without immediately envisioning the potent image of massive, stylized stone busts (moai) keeping hollow-eyed vigil over their spare landscape. As Pelta ably conveys, however, this image—the product of archaeological reconstruction—represents only a fragment of the island's history, and possibly not the most impenetrable mystery the island has to offer. Operating within the focus of the How History Is Invented series, Pelta spends less time exploring the usual questions—"What were moai used for?" and "How were they moved into position?" and more time in examining how the many waves of Western explorers, exploiters, and expositors encountered the islanders (themselves immigrants to the region), affected their development, and constructed our current understanding of the Rapanui, as the islanders are more properly known. Although the book's layout is not as visually appealing as Caroline Arnold's *Easter Island* (BCCB 4/00), and Pelta sometimes evinces a more benign view of Christian missionary activity among the Rapanui than many readers will share, coverage is serious, generally evenhanded, and smoothly presented, making this a fine foundation for readers who enjoy digging up the past. Black-and-white and color photographs, maps, an index, and source notes are included. EB


Hannah is a young healer who lives in the woods with her companions: old Badger, Magpie, and three orange fox kits. The local villagers fear and revere her; they come to her for medicine for the sick, aid for the injured, and charms for the lovelorn. Occasionally, nameless knights pass her cottage, sent by a sorceress queen to seek the treasure of the Tanglewood; they enter the dark forest and never return. Hannah falls in love with one such knight, and together they conquer the Wizard who holds Hannah in magical sway, but not before he turns the young knight into a fox. Hannah embarks on a quest to disenchant her love; the quest is eventful only in that Hannah fails to make the connection between herself and the land's returning fertility, for in the course of her journey Hannah transforms from Brown Hannah to Green Hannah, from Green Hannah to Gold Hannah, from Gold Hannah to Russet Hannah, along with the changing seasons. On her love's island home, the young healer discovers her Ancient Mother, a tree nearly mortally wounded by the Wizard years before when he kidnapped her "floret," Hannah. Pierce (author of *The Darkangel*, BCCB 7/82) fills this exploration of the nature of the maiden-mother-crone triad with intricately entwining imagery. Unfortunately, imagery alone isn't enough to carry what is, essentially, an overextended meta-
phorical journey; the dénouement lacks tension and there is little to emotionally involve readers. Still, fantasy lovers who appreciated the linguistic complexity of McKinley’s *Rose Daughter* (BCCB 10/97) may travel along with Hannah on her journey to her roots. JMD

**PRESSLER, MIRJAM**  *Shylock's Daughter;* tr. by Brian Murdoch. Fogelman, 2001 266p ISBN 0-8037-2667-8 $17.99 Ad Gr. 7-10

Those familiar with Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* will recall Shylock’s daughter, Jessica, who absconds with her father’s money and with her gentle boyfriend, Lorenzo. The story here focuses not only on Jessica but on her foster sister, Dalilah (now a servant in the household), and on Shylock himself. Largely oblivious to her father’s troubles, Jessica relishes the Italian social glitter her Ashkenaz community forbids, but when her clandestine romance turns into marriage and conversion to Christianity, she begins to regret what she’s left behind. Dalilah, meanwhile, struggles to find her place as Amalia, the woman who has been Shylock’s housekeeper and Dalilah’s mother figure, sickens and dies and as Shylock’s life is turned upside down in business as well as at home. As with Julius Lester’s *Othello* (BCCB 3/95), this is an interesting concept with a problematic execution. Pressler effectively focuses on the life of Ashkenaz Jews in the Venetian ghetto, contrasting it not only with the existence of the privileged gentiles but also with the comparative freedom and riches of Sephardic Jews; the sociohistory is, in fact, more interesting than the exploration of *The Merchant of Venice*. The plot is convoluted and slow, impeded by the narrative shifts between third-person past (when following Jessica and Shylock) and first-person present (as Dalilah tells her own story), and none of the characters evoke more than fleeting sympathy. This sheds a bit of light on Shylock’s side of the issue, but it would really have been more effective as a straightforward nonfiction treatment. An extensive note about *The Merchant of Venice* and its historical realities is appended. DS


As a little baby, Johnny was left on Momma Mutton’s front step: “Momma’s weak eyes and warm heart kept her from even noticing” that her new little bundle of joy was actually a sheep (Momma is mutton in name only), and she raises him as a little boy. Johnny passes as a human but marches to his own drummer: when everybody else brings apples to the teacher, he brings marshmallows; when everybody else comes as witches and pirates to Halloween, he comes as a runny nose; rather than following in Momma’s steps and becoming a basketball player, he wants to go in for water ballet. The narrative marches to its own drummer, too—the stories caper along with a carefree weirdness in plot and style (“He had to use all his mutton powers to keep from crying”) highly unusual in this easy-reader format, and the warm, fuzzy touches (in the spelling bee, Johnny spells “love” as “M-O-M-M-A”; his Halloween runny nose ends up making friends with a girl costumed as a box of tissues) take place on top of such peculiarities that they’re devoid of sentimentality. Even the “be yourself” message (“He doesn’t even try to fit in. I don’t like that. He’s so him,” says an annoyed neighbor) takes on a new meaning when it’s about an ovine schoolchild who’s into water ballet. Clearly,
this ain't no *Henry and Mudge* —Proimos tosses in comic-strip panels and speech balloons, and there are echoes of George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* in the characters' longitudinal eyes and beakily Kilroyesque features; while the text fonts are a bit scruffy for the most beginning of readers, their dashed-off energy will amuse more experienced youngsters. Kids resistant to homilies about individuality will nonetheless scarf down this enjoyably odd leg o' lamb. DS

**Rees, Celia**  *Witch Child*. Candlewick, 2001 [272p]
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 6-9

Mary is a witch, like her grandmother before her, which is a dangerous thing in seventeenth-century England. Though they've largely passed unnoticed and have never engaged in the sort of destruction that witchhunters claim, Mary's grandmother ends up on the gallows and Mary flees to the Massachusetts colonies. She finds herself in the wilderness settlement of Beulah, where she makes close friends but also arouses suspicion with her taste for wilderness wandering and her friendship with a young Indian man; as community tensions and jealousy increases (a spoiled and demanding young woman and her coterie feel slighted in the romantic stakes) Mary's position grows more perilous, until finally she's the open target of witchcraft hysteria. Salemesque doings are generally intriguing, and Rees adds a twist in the notion that Mary is a witch, but it doesn't mean what the community thinks and the doings that particularly concern the town (maidens dancing about a fire and trying to curse people with dolls) are performed not by the witches but by the petulant daughters of the burghers. Mary's witchcraft is rather disappointingly limited (its manifestations here could really all be wishful thinking); her ahistorical unorthodoxy of independence and respect for Indians (fair if predictable in fiction) seem both more important and more, to her detractors, suggestive of her evil. That limit results in some thought-provoking ambiguities about her status, however, and Mary's blend of calm thoughtfulness and desperate need to conceal herself is suggestive of parallels as well as capably evoked. This will make both a pleasurable read and an intriguing discussion-starter, perhaps even in combination with Miller's *The Crucible*. DS

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028569-9  $15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028568-0  $15.95
Paper ed. ISBN 0-06-445203-4  $4.95  Ad  6-9 yrs

"There's a way," this book helpfully explains, "to tell if something is an insect." It then counts the ways: insects have an external skeleton (but so do some non-insects), insects have bodies divided into three parts, and insects have six legs. The text then explains which kinds of insects can properly be called bugs ("A bug is an insect with a mouth like a beak and a head that forms a triangle") and which are actually beetles ("Beetles are insects with a pair of hard wings you can't see through that hides a second pair of clear wings"). The book goes on to explain some other insect habits and to entice readers into guessing what in their backyards is an insect and what isn't. The text seems to be heading for a bullet-points approach it never quite employs, making it cumbersome, but the elucidation of characteristics is fairly clear. Jenkins' cut-paper art uses somberer hues than usual, but the illustra-
tions effectively convey the elaborate machinery of insect bodies. Unfortunately, there are no captions or diagrams translating the textual principles into the visual, so some of the concepts are difficult to apply to the artwork or the backyard (the different body parts are particularly challenging). Still, this is a more straightforward explanation than others for this age group, and many youngsters will enjoy just poring over the entomological images. Suggestions for further activities and research and a key to insects pictured are appended. DS


Life has been good since Mikey Donovan's mother married charter fisherman Billy Monks. Mom's happy, there's now an adoring younger brother, and Mikey gets along so well with his stepdad that he's deckhand on Billy's Crystal-C. The boat's been booked for three days by a pair of boorish amateur sportsmen who think they know more about deep-sea fishing than their guide, and after a first day out that yielded no spectacular catches, their tempers are running thin. Today's more promising, with a hard-won prize early on, but the men are after marlin, and when Mikey fumbles a steering maneuver things go sour. A record-weight mahimahi's finally hooked, but the men need assistance in landing him, thus disqualifying them from being named as record holders. They bribe Billy to falsify the records and, realizing that these men could either make or break his reputation as a charter captain, Billy goes along with the deceit and draws Mikey in as well. The tension of pursuing and landing huge game fish is palpably electrifying, matched only by the tension of the moral dilemma into which Mikey is inveigled—he loves his stepdad and realizes fully that the family's financial future rests with their patrons, but deplores both the immorality of the deed and the fact it diminishes Billy's character and his own. The Hawaiian setting is enticing, the action is gripping, and Billy and Mikey's ethical equivocation is a sad but realistic barb in the readers' gills that will trouble (and challenge) them for some time to come. EB


As in his previous collection, True Lies (BCCB 9/97), Shannon has gathered puzzle tales from around the world and retold them in an accessible and engaging format. He presents each short story with all the necessary clues before asking the reader to judge the truth or deceptive intent of a character in the story; a page turn then reveals the answers. In a brief introduction, Shannon explains that "dictionaries give us the definitions of words, but their meanings can still be confusing," and he illustrates this premise in tales that show plain folks around the world making sly trades and slick deals. Although the structured brevity of these retellings tends to homogenize the vast array of tales and sources (which are cited in detail at the back of the book), Shannon's adept translations of jokes and wordplays invite young puzzlers who might not otherwise look to tricky tales for their introduction into the world of folk wisdom. O'Brien's pen-and-ink illustrations give the characters a beady-eyed sameness, but their strength lies in their expansion of the jokes, as in the story of the old man who claimed "he was as strong as he was twenty years ago"
(who was just as weak in his youth); the illustration shows the man straining to lift a barbell with balloons on either end in place of weights. Readers who enjoyed testing their friends with Shannon's first volume of tales will be eager to get their hands on this one. KM


Now here's something that doesn't come along everyday—a prequel that far outstrips the original from which it was spun. If Sleator's The Boxes (BCCB 7/98) was more than a bit of a muddle, this is as gripping a work of science fiction as most middle-graders could desire. The science is grounded in astrophysical speculation concerning a naked singularity and its ability to generate wormholes in time, while the fiction is a deftly plotted family drama of sibling loyalty. Marco's younger sister Lilly is regarded as a delicate, overly sensitive child who sees things, but in this case the hole in her basement leading into a parallel world is no figment of the imagination. There, insect-like creatures engage in a perilous ritual to appease their deity, and they require Lilly's services as a medium to approach it. Since Lilly hasn't her brother's courage, he enters the mysterious realm and makes the encounter while Lilly psychically guides him from beyond. Sleator introduces all the necessary physics briefly and cogently and then allows the action to reveal the dynamics of the naked singularity as time slows in its proximity and the near-palpable tension inexorably builds. Readers unfamiliar with The Boxes need to start here, and if a third volume is in the making, one hopes it will be as satisfying as this latecomer prequel. EB


Alex is a young African-American boy and Loki is a young husky-esque little dog, and together they go off to the playground for some fun. They cavort on various pieces of equipment from wobbly bridges to slides, play tug-of-war and other games, and finally return home to a treat and a cuddle. The gimmick here is that the verso pages in each spread show Alex's point of view (Alex's talking head appears on an orange background next to his text and over the image he sees) and the recto pages show Loki's (Loki's head appears a green background under the image, and his writing isn't as good as Alex's—his pictures are also in black-and-white to indicate dogs' limited color vision). Though the text is a bit catalogish, this dual view results in some contradictions that will tickle young viewers ("Loki can be a naughty dog," says Alex as Loki hunts for snacks in a garbage bag; "Alex loves it when I dig out my own treats," says Loki), and they'll like it that Loki gets most of the best lines ("Alex never learns. Why doesn't he toss me a treat instead of a stupid ball?"). The layout doesn't have the electric energy of Smith's sports-themed titles (Tall Tales, BCCB 5/00), and the contrasting pages could have benefited from some additional visual connections; the pictures, especially Loki's action-blurred views of a towering (and photogenic) Alex, will redeem the spreads in the eyes of youngsters. There's entertaining originality as well as an appealing pair of subjects here, and kids will definitely want to write their own person/pet narration in response. DS
Spinelli, Eileen  
ISBN 0-689-80112-2 $16.00  R 5-9 yrs
Spinelli weaves a tale of self-sacrifice and generosity in this fable about a master spinner who "was no ordinary house spider. Sophie was an artist." Her webs are splendid, and all who know her expect that someday Sophie will "spin a masterpiece." When she comes of age, Sophie moves into Beekman's Boardinghouse, but despite her best efforts to spin webs both useful and beautiful, she is feared by most of the inhabitants. Sophie ultimately finds refuge in the knitting basket of a young mother-to-be; when the woman runs out of yarn and cannot afford to buy more, Sophie spins her masterpiece—a baby blanket full of moonlight, lullabies, and, finally, "her very own heart." Dyer's visual characterization of appealing arachnid Sophie has a grace and charm that holds this relatively slight, altogether sentimental story together. The watercolors feature a gamine, humanized Sophie gamely spinning for landlady, tenants, and cook; the perspectives are often from a spider's-eye(s) view, emphasizing the enormity of the world compared to the little spider's own size. Throughout the story Sophie ages; in the end, she is an old lady spider, her gray hair in braids, her dark cloak somewhat tattered, leaning on a bobby-pin cane. An adult frame of reference may be necessary to make the spare text (and Sophie's sacrifice) understandable to the youngest listeners, but readers and listeners of all ages will appreciate the little spider's tenacity as well as her big heart. JMD

Spinner, Stephanie  
Expiration Date: Never; by Stephanie Spinner and Terry Bisson. Delacorte, 2001 [144p]
ISBN 0-385-32690-4 $14.95  Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 3-5
Twins Tod and Tessa (from Be First in the Universe, BCCB 2/00) are delighted to find that Gemini Jack, interplanetary entrepreneur, is back in his spot at the Middle Valley Mall. Jack isn't back just to make some alien cash—he needs help from the twins to combat the invasion of planet Gemini by the Vorons, interstellar tourists who are descending upon his home planet in unmanageable droves. A fading rock drummer, the preternaturally nice Gneiss twins Nancy and Ned, two ornery Patagonian goats, and a joke-spouting security guard later, the balance of the universe is restored and everyone lives happily ever after—at least until the Vorons invade again. As interplanetary science fiction goes, this is pretty weightless, but it's also fast and funny. Tod and Tessa are a solid twin team, affectionate but not disgusting, and the Gneiss twins' goody-goody behavior is satisfactorily nauseating. Readers seeking sci-fi that's light and funny instead of dark and deep will appreciate Tod and Tessa's latest close encounter. JMD

Steig, Jeanne, ad.  
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028406-4 $17.89  R Gr. 7-10
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028405-6 $17.95
Steig adapts sixteen classical myths (including the stories of Prometheus, King Midas, Leda, Arachne, Venus and Adonis, and Orpheus and Eurydice) into tellable tales with an emphasis on the foibles of gods and men. Human weaknesses—
greed, envy, lust, vanity, hubris—afflict both mortals and immortals, and, while the gods emerge unscathed, most of the human characters are not so lucky. The author embraces the bawdy humor and sexual tragedy of the tales, considering those humans who were unfortunate enough to become entangled in the lecherous pursuits of the gods as well as those who were unfortunate captives of their own desires. Rhyming verse is interjected into the tales to serve as humorous asides to the action (the Chimaera, for example, “was rampaging about the countryside, dining on youths and maidens, which she preferred to the old and leathery. ‘Old folks have horrid gristy strips/ that bruise a monster’s dainty lips,’ she explained. And as she devoured the youths, she chanted gleefully ‘A tender maid for breakfast,/ A toothsome lad for lunch,/ Oh, the succulent flesh/ Of the young and the fresh!/ Crunch, crunch, crunch’”). William Steig’s airy line drawings feature imaginatively proportioned (occasionally bare-buttocked) heroes, cavorting (occasionally bare-breasted) maidens, and amorous gods in frequently hilarious positions. This is a witty, sophisticated piece of work, sure to remind adult readers more of Steig’s New Yorker cartoons than Sylvester and the Magic Pebble. JMD

THOMSON, SARAH L. *The Dragon’s Son.* Orchard, 2001 181p ISBN 0-531-30333-0 $17.95 R* Gr. 6-12

Drawing on the earliest surviving versions of Arthurian legends, most of them Welsh, Thomson weaves a series of complex tales from the first-person perspectives of four less traditionally central characters (who were often absent in later retellings), spanning narrative time from before King Arthur’s birth to just after his defeat. This unusual approach creates an intriguing portrait of the great king, which focuses not on the peace and prosperity he brought to the British Isles but instead on the intense despair felt by family and servants whose interests were sacrificed or ignored in the process of establishing Arthur’s successful reign. In the third story, for instance, Luned, servant to the broken lady Elen of an abusive and callous lord, manages to prevent the ascension of an even crueler lord and inadvertently conquers the region for Arthur by insisting that Elen marry Arthur’s trusted servant, Owain, while in the process losing her own beloved blacksmith. The final story shows Medraud, Arthur’s eldest son, bent on the vengeance that his embittered mother Morgan raised him to seek, as he deliberately destroys the peace of Arthur’s kingdom and finally engineers the destruction of Arthur himself. Despite the complex structure, Thomson’s retellings are straightforward and accessible, eschewing florid language in favor of action-packed storytelling, and emphasizing the personal losses and sorrows of well-developed characters who are caught in a time of tremendous change. Characters in each of these four stories appear in the other tales, creating a rich tapestry of perspectives on the legendary social changes of Arthur’s day. Legend lovers as well as fantasy readers will be captivated by these stories of Arthurian times as seen through the eyes of lesser-known players in the pageant. KM


Walton explores twelve different ways to dance, beginning each dance with the query “How can you dance when . . . ” followed by the answer: “How can you dance when/ Spring is in your shoes/? Dance like the king/ of the kangaroos.”
Uneven rhythmical chants in red italicized text follow the rhymed quatrains and encourage audience participation: “Arms, legs./ Pull 'em in!/ Push 'em out!/ Pull 'em in!/ Push 'em out!” or “Wave your arms wildly,/ Round and round all over.” Though the similes are evocative, they’re sometimes a stretch, and the rhythms aren’t as bouncy as the kids will be. López-Escrivá ably illustrates the movement with acrylics on paper, emphasizing the humor of the text with varying perspectives, expressive lines, and contrasting hues of greens, blues, pinks, and reds. The cadre of characters, variously engaged in leaping, marching, or slithering along, provide enjoyable focus. Grab this one to accompany the Hokey Pokey or Twist With a Burger, Jitter with a Bug. EAB


It’s hard to go wrong with food, even when it’s seasoned with a generous dose of marketing and manufacturing history. Whitman starts out with the difference between the food practices of the European settlers and the Native Americans they encountered, then goes on to discuss the evolution of home cooking, eating out, and food shopping, touching on icons ranging from Harvey Girls to Piggly Wiggly in the process. The condensation necessary for such a succinct overview is particularly clear when Whitman hits modern times, racing through McDonald’s and genetically altered crops, but it also helps accentuate the significant and sometimes surprising changes that have occurred in American eating. The book is particularly good at linking food changes to other changes (rail transport was key for the establishment of fruit markets, for instance) without losing sight of the essential gob-smacking pleasure of the subject. Curricular uses obviously abound, since there are connections here to everything from transportation to health, but there’s enough tasty detail that pleasure readers (especially the sort that read cookbooks for fun) might also want to take a bite. The brown ink makes contemporary photographs look oddly antique, but it’s effective for the text and older images; a selected biography and an index are included. DS

Winthrop, Elizabeth  Dumpy La Rue; illus. by Betsy Lewin. Holt, 2001 34p ISBN 0-8050-6385-4 $15.95 R 4-7 yrs

Dumpy is a pig who wants to dance, but his vocation isn’t exactly encouraged by his folks: “You’re a pig,” said his father. “Pigs don’t dance. They grunt, they grovel, they snuffle for truffles.” Dumpy is undeterred, because he is “a pig who knew what he wanted to do.” His enthusiastic dancing about the barnyard attracts a great deal of attention from cow, horse, fowl, sheep, etc. and, while the other animals appreciate Dumpy’s originality, his family hides in embarrassment. Ultimately, of course, Dumpy’s dancing wins everyone over, and “folks would come from high and low to see this most amazing show: The Barnyard Ballet of Dumpy La Rue, the pig who knew what he wanted to do.” While Winthrop’s rhyming text does go on a bit, the comic antics are consistently amusing. Lewin’s watercolors, rendered in a style reminiscent of William Steig’s and Sandra Boynton’s, imbue Dumpy and the rest of the farm animals with a rousing chorus-line energy that adds a great deal of humor to the sometimes-forced text. Expressive black outlines give each animal animation and definition, the compositions are clean and uncluttered, and the background colors alternate between clean white and
day-and-nighttime shades of blue. While the text may need some editing for a more rhythmic readaloud flow, the illustrations will carry even the most dance-challenged listener right along. JMD

ZINDEL, PAUL Night of the Bat. Hyperion, 2001 [176p]
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

Dr. Lefkovitz, leading “batologist” on an Amazonian research project, has just lost (literally) two members of his team when his wisecracking son Jake arrives for a visit toting his latest science project—an echolocator nicknamed Gizmo that can retrieve images through the dense canopy foliage. Jake has barely stowed his backpack before he’s up in the trees repairing walkways; there he discovers the mangled bodies of the missing men, and Hanuma—indigenous foreman, patient mentor, and font of ersatz tribal-style wisdom—is snatched up and carried off by a monstrous bat. This bat’s obviously got some serious issues with Amazonian researchers, and in the next dozen or so greased-lightning chapters it returns to munch on a number of other team members and stage a showdown with Lefkovitz and his son. Zindel’s a little hazy on the “why” of the bat’s behavior, dropping suggestions that range from human transformations (werebats?) to the just deserts of environmental meddlers (“You have to stop them from ruining the Amazon. From killing the rain forests . . . God, Pops, don’t mess with this bat”). Who cares—the real point here is the blood sucking, bone-crunching, disemboweling, brain-noshing bat itself and Jake and Gizmo’s brave (and ultimately illogical) vanquishing of same. What librarian hasn’t been asked, “Do you got anything gross?” If you have this title, the answer is emphatically, “Yes.” EB
Keyed to *The Bulletin*'s alphabetical arrangement by author, this index, which appears in each issue, can be used in three ways. Entries in regular type refer to subjects; entries in bold type refer to curricular or other uses; entries in ALL-CAPS refer to genres and appeals. In the case of subject headings, the subhead "stories" refers to books for the readaloud audience; "fiction," to those books intended for independent reading.

Abuse—fiction: Flinn; Na
African Americans—fiction: Myers
Airplanes—stories: Ormerod
Alaska—stories: George
Aliens—fiction: Spinner
American Indians—stories: George
Animal behavior: Jenkins, S.
Animals: Jenkins, S.; Orenstein
Animals—fiction: Bowen; Lexau;
                        Marino; Proimos
Animals—stories: Arnosky; Dieterlé;
                    Lowell; Whitman
Archaeology: Chorlton; Morrison;
             Pelta
Art and artists—fiction: Bowen;
                     Holmes
Art and artists—stories: Spinelli
Australia—fiction: Honey
Authors—fiction: Clements
Baseball—fiction: Myers; Nixon
Bats—fiction: Zindel
BIOGRAPHIES: Krensky
Brothers and sisters—fiction: Bloor;
                      Caldwell; Sleator; Spinner
Brothers—fiction: Horowitz
Bugs—fiction: Horowitz
Butterflies—stories: Joosse
Cats—stories: Arnold; Hutchins
Civil War—fiction: Alphin
Communication: Jenkins, S.
Crime and criminals—fiction: Bloor;
                    Bowen; Colfer; Flinn; Nixon
Dancers and dancing—stories:
                   Walton; Whitman
Death and dying—fiction: Holmes
Death and dying—stories: Joosse;
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Dogs—fiction: Auch; Choldenko
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Ethics and values: Choldenko;
                 Salisbury; Spinelli
Evolution: Morrison
Fairies—fiction: Colfer
Families—fiction: Caldwell;
               Choldenko; Honey; Na
Families—stories: Blumenthal
FANTASY: Auch; Colfer; LaFaye;
       Pierce; Thomson
Fathers and daughters—fiction: Levy;
          Na; Pressler
Fathers and sons—fiction: Holmes;
         LaFaye; Zindel
Fishing—fiction: Salisbury
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            Lowell; Shannon
Food and eating: Whitman
Football—fiction: Jenkins, A.
Friendship—fiction: Auch; Holmes;
Frogs—riddles: Jenkins, A.
FUNNY STORIES: Proimos
Ghosts—fiction: Alphin
Grandmothers—fiction: Caldwell
Grandmothers—stories: Blumenthal;
       Joosse
Grandparents—stories: Hutchins
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Health and hygiene: Lauber
HISTORICAL FICTION: Bowen;
         Myers; Pressler
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History, world: Lauber; Pelta; Pressler
HORROR: Zindel
Horses and ponies-fiction: Haas
Illness-fiction: LaFaye
Immigrants-fiction: Na
Insects: Rockwell
Judaism-fiction: Pressler
Kidnapping-fiction: Colfer
Korean Americans-fiction: Na
Latinos-fiction: Nixon
Libraries-fiction: Bloor
Mexico-stories: Joosse
Mothers and daughters-fiction: Choldenko; Pierce
Mothers and sons-fiction: Holmes; Proimos
Music and musicians-fiction: Spinner
Music and musicians-stories: Arnold; Burleigh
MYSTERIES: Bloor; Nixon
MYTHOLOGY, CLASSICAL: Steig
Nature study: Arnosky; Orenstein; Rockwell
Pets-fiction: Choldenko
Pets-stories: George; Smith
Pirates-fiction: Lawrence
Plumbing: Lauber
Prejudice-fiction: Myers; Pressler
Princes-stories: Martin
Princesses-stories: Martin
PUZZLES: Shannon
Racism-fiction: Myers
Rainforests-fiction: Zindel
Reading aloud: Shannon; Steig
Reading, easy: Eisenberg; Haas; Hall; Horowitz; Lexau; Proimos
Religious instruction: Carlstrom; Norris
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Sailors and sailing-fiction: Lawrence
Saints: Norris
School-fiction: Auch; Clements
SCIENCE FICTION: Sleator; Spinner
Science: Arnosky; Chorlton; Orenstein; Rockwell
Sisters-fiction: Choldenko; Levy
Spiders-stories: Spinelli
Stepfamilies: Block
Stepfathers-fiction: Salisbury
Storms-stories: Hutchins
Storytelling: Lowell; Martin; Shannon; Steig
Storytelling-stories: Martin
Storytime: Arnosky; Hutchins; Lowell; Walton; Winthrop
Suicide-fiction: Holmes; Jenkins, A.
Toys-stories: Ormerod
Transportation: Ormerod
Twins-fiction: Levy; Spinner
Urban life-stories: Burleigh
Vacations-fiction: Honey
Veterinarians-fiction: Marino
Voyages and travel: Chorlton
Voyages and travel-fiction: Lawrence
Voyages and travel-stories: Martin; Ormerod
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