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* Asterisks denote books of special distinction.
R Recommended.
Ad Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.
M Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.
NR Not recommended.
SpC Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.
SpR A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.
Wiggle
by Doreen Cronin; illus. by Scott Menchin

Got a crowd of children who can't sit still? Have we got a readaloud for you! In this exuberant picture book from the author of Caldecott Honor book *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* (BCCB 9/00), bouncy, galloping meter and a beaglish canine protagonist encourage listeners to wiggle, wiggle, wiggle through the day.

Leading off with the questions "Do you wake up with a wiggle?/ Do you wiggle out of bed?", the book explores a whole catalogue of ways to wiggle—the jolly mutt wiggles (or considers wiggling) with gorillas, with his breakfast, in his polka-dotted underwear, and on the moon. Compact tetrameter alternates freely between questions ("Can you wiggle with your toys?") advice ("Wiggle slowly when with polar bears"), and invitation ("Would you join me for a wiggle?"), with tongue-twisting repetition and alliteration combining with funny references to maximize the silliness quotient. The final pages, spattered with stars and sporting a snoring sleeper, end the book with a bedtime comment: "I think we're out of wiggles now./ See you wiggle soon!" In spite of the book's obvious narcoleptic intentions, the vivacious rhymes have such an energetic message that it will be difficult to get listeners to sit still during the reading, much less fall asleep soon afterward. That's all right, because there are plenty of other times that would be improved with a good wiggle, and sometimes a rowdy pre-bedtime wiggle is just what the doctor/dad/babysitter ordered.

For all their wiggly intentions, the illustrations are crisp and clear, confining their wiggle-indicating to flurries of movement lines and a generous sense of joyous urgency. The assertively uncluttered, digitally rendered illustrations in sunny golds and lemons over complementary pastel backgrounds command attention from a distance, a real boon to large readaloud audiences. The spreads make clever use of texture and visual depth through the use of scattered photographs of real objects interspersed on several planes with cartoon drawings that feature offset, colored fill, lending the impression of movement to most of the spreads. (Paradoxically, more peaceful layouts feature the likes of gaping-mouthed crocodiles and a pride of polar bears.) The wide-eyed, large-bodied figures evince a streamlined yet solid charm reminiscent of P. D. Eastman's characters, adding to the humorous appeal.

The real power of this book lies in the fact that it absolutely nails its preschool audience: images, text, and message are perfectly aimed at delighting bouncy youngsters with surprises and laughter, and the experience only gets better with repeated reading—even the adults present will want to shake out a wiggle or two. This effervescent offering simply howls for listeners and viewers to shimmy along, preferably at every storytime over the course of a season . . . or many sea-
sons. With the magnetic appeal of its bold illustrations and chantable rhymes, this could well be the book remembered and sought out in decades to come, when our present young ones are toting around their own toddlers.

It’s a wiggle worth sharing again and again. Get plenty of copies in rough-and-tumble covers for lending, and after storytimes, expect to hear listeners chanting the text from memory as they trundle away. (Imprint information appears on p. 485.)

Timnah Card, Reviewer

NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

AMATO, MARY  The Naked Mole-Rat Letters. Holiday House, 2005  [266p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 4-7

Only a few weeks into seventh grade, Frankie is already learning things she’d rather not know—what it’s like to not get the lead in a play, for example, or (even worse) that your widower dad is secretly falling in love with someone in far-off Washington, D.C. Rather than let her world fall apart, normally honest Frankie begins snooping in her father’s email and eavesdropping on his phone calls. What she finds out—that her dad is long-distance dating Ayanna Bayo, the naked-mole-rat keeper at the National Zoo, whom he met on a business trip—soon has her skipping school, forging email, and lying to her friends, teachers, and neighbors in order to thwart the course of true love. Quirky and self-absorbed, Frankie is a drama queen who will stop at nothing to ensure a desired outcome. Her frustrated yet affectionate interactions with her two pesky younger brothers give her emotional roundness, and romantic developments with the town bad boy are a fitting catalyst for her eventual acceptance of the zookeeper as a potential friend, evident in her journal entries and her continuing email to Ayanna (and Ayanna’s graceful responses). Frankie’s small town is just the kind of place to seethe with the gossip that brings Frankie’s high flights to ground; meanwhile, the open ending, in which the future of her father’s relationship with Ayanna remains unresolved, is satisfying in its thematic conclusion and its realism. Over the top as Frankie is, her drive and humanity are captivating, and her nonstop, exponentially compounded missteps make a humdinger of a story. Admirers of Sharon Creech will sign right up for this one. TC

ANDERSON, M. T.  The Serpent Came to Gloucester; illus. by Bagram Ibatoulline. Candlewick, 2005  [40p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 3-6

Between the summers of 1817 and 1818, sightings of an apparently playful sea serpent were reported along the Massachusetts seaboard, sightings that were un-
usual not for their object but, as the closing note observes, “only because so many people saw the monster.” In 1817, people adopted a live-and-let-live approach, but the following summer fishermen went out for the hunt, harpooning what they were certain was the creature but finally pulling a mere mackerel onto the shore. Anderson revisits the event through the memory of an old man, whose recollection takes the form of a ballad shared with his grandson. The author brings effective pacing and flashes of potent imagery to his storytelling, but his reluctance to adhere to a consistent scheme of rhyme or rhythm is a mixed blessing. Readers are spared what could be a lengthy stretch of monotonous doggerel, but those attempting a readaloud will occasionally find challenges: “When it left, we were sorry and sulked./ We sat on the piers and the docks./ As the haddock were caught and the boats were caulked,/ We looked for the beast from our widow’s walks.” Ibatoulline’s acrylic gouache illustrations are more uniformly successful, from the Delft-tile-styled endpapers to the painterly town- and seascapes rendered in the sober browns and muted blues of Dutch and Flemish masters but brightened with gentle humor in the portrayal of Gloucester’s startled, breathless citizens. Middle-graders on patrol for sea monsters should, overall, be well pleased with this tale “from the ancient and wrinkled old sea.” EB

ARAKI, MIE Kitten’s Big Adventure; written and illus. by Mie Araki. Gulliver/Harcourt, 2005 40p ISBN 0-15-216738-2 $15.00 R 1-4 yrs

Responding to her mother’s invitation to look at a purple butterfly passing by the window, a kitten goes off into the great big world to catch the winged creature. This proves a considerable task, as the butterfly is always just a little too high or too low, and despite the kitten’s advances, she can’t seem to paw it down. When the butterfly ducks into the open window and passes behind the fishbowl, it is magnified to an enormous size, and a freaked-out kitten (“Scaredy kitten!/ Raised-haired-y kitten!/ Where-oh-where-is-Mama kitten!”) goes flying back to the safety of her mother’s side. Both tone and premise resemble Henkes’ Caldecott-winning Kitten’s First Full Moon (BCCB 3/04); the tension of a world that is both enormously exciting and a little bit scary propels the simple plot, and the softly cadenced rhyme matches the tiptoed advances of the young kitten. Using ink on watercolor paper, Araki employs water for most of her shading, dropping blobs of moisture onto fields of color and allowing the patchy results to add dimension to the simple illustrations. Thick black outlines, white space, and an abundance of energetic swooshes around the action imbue the tale with a sense of vigor while still maintaining its intimate premise. The gentle trajectory of the kitten’s efforts and ultimate surrender are perfectly matched to the eager advances of a toddler, and little ones are certain to identify with her bravado. HM


Fourteen, “freakishly short,” and bullied by his monstrously large twin brother, Kurt, Arty Moore has had enough. He decides to brave the bowels of his high school to enlist the help of a boy he calls Kerouac, only to find that Kerouac heads a shadow organization called Affront, which regularly takes on assignments to help people with problems similar to Arty’s. They’ve just been waiting for Arty to ask, and they eagerly launch a revenge plot against Kurt, as well as welcoming Arty into
their community, gaining him an unprecedented measure of popularity. Meanwhile, the rich, mysterious Leslie, "a girl with a body like a centerfold and a brain like a search engine," has unfathomably started to pay attention to Arty. Arty doesn’t question these boons nearly closely enough, and as a result he learns more about the subtleties of bullying than he bargained for. Auseon writes with a sardonic tone and an ear for the odd detail reminiscent of M. T. Anderson; the text is peppered with postmodern, thematically resonant weirdnesses, like the theft and lynching of a large statue of a boxing turtle, a walk-in freezer off Leslie’s kitchen full of frozen animal corpses, and strange high-school denizens inhabiting strange dens. Arty’s voice has the sideways anger and ironic self-awareness of a hyper-intelligent kid with a physiology that prevents him from being taken seriously. Kurt, as it turns out, is more complex and vulnerable than Arty realizes, and between conversations with Kurt and with Kerouac, Arty learns that, even though he is small and he has undoubtedly been victimized, he is also more than capable of being a bully himself. This twist on the typical bully tale would partner well with Cormier’s The Chocolate War (BCCB 7/74), Gardner’s Inventing Eliot (3/04), and/or Giles’ Shattering Glass (5/02) to provoke multifaceted discussions about the thin line between victim and bully. KC


Newly invaded by the military might of the Hrum Empire (modeled on that of the ancient Romans), the Middle-Eastern-style land of Farsala is left without its former ruling class, the deghans, in this second volume of the Farsala Trilogy (following Fall of a Kingdom). The few hundred deghan warriors who survived the Battle of the Sendar Wall skulk in hiding while Jiaan, the bastard half-peasant son of their dead commander, does his best to rebuild their strength. His half-sister, the deghass Soraya, works covertly as a kitchen maid in the main Hrum encampment, trying to track down her enslaved mother and little brother. Kavi, the peasant peddler who betrayed their father’s battle plans to the Hrum in the previous volume, now works as a double agent, pretending to spy for the Hrum while in reality organizing an efficient resistance movement. Chapters devoted to each of the primary characters are told from their points of view; occasional insertions from a myth-like retelling (which interprets events very differently than do the character-focused chapters) call into question the validity of the mythical version. Emphasis is placed instead on the experiences of the three young people whose exploits give rise to the myth in later years. The characters learn and grow in exciting and realistic ways throughout their ordeals, and their individual paths are handily and persuasively interwoven. The result is a compelling and thought-provoking exploration of the nature of narrative as well as a full-bodied adventure-fantasy novel. A map is included. TC


If it came as a surprise to Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, 2002 chairman of the Senate’s Science and Technology Subcommittee, that Title IX was more than a sports law, can most citizens be blamed for equating it solely with the fate of women’s athletics? Blumenthal goes a long way toward dispelling this misconception, re-
minding readers of its original mission within a larger 1972 Education Amendments bill, to assure that "no one could be closed out of any educational program or activity receiving federal money simply because of sex." After explaining the genesis of the legislation and describing the political machinations of its champions and adversaries, Blumenthal discusses how evolving guidelines and interpretations brought girls' school athletic programs into its purview, and how periodic retrenchments regarding Title IX threatened not only newly established sports programs but the civil rights of minorities as well. Legal wrangling doesn't always make captivating reading, and the profusion of boxed insets (which are vital to absorbing the total picture of Title IX influence) distracts from the continuity of the main text. Overall, though, there's a wealth of well-organized information covered here, and the stories of individual battles won and lost and social commentary in the form of popular cartoons help keep things light and lively. This is essential, if challenging, reading for YAs concerned with athletic and academic gender equity and, with its ample bibliography, annotated source notes, and index, an excellent springboard for further research. EB

**Booth, Martin** *Soul Stealer*. Little, 2005 242p ISBN 0-316-15591-8 $14.99 Ad Gr. 5-7

Twins Pip and Tim (from *Doctor Illuminatus*, BCCB 12/04) return for further battles with malicious masterminds, aided by their friend, the six-hundred-year-old boy Sebastian. Having defeated the evil alchemist de Loudeac over the summer, the sister and brother expect an uneventful entry into seventh grade. Instead, their homeroom teacher, the chemistry master, turns out to be another power-hungry holdover from the Middle Ages, and the class bully is his familiar, a Neanderthal-type known as a wodwo. The intrepid trio must first divine what these mysterious villains are up to—plotting to flood the world with raw evil via the power lines radiating from the Jasper Point nuclear plant—and then foil them posthaste. Booth lets his main characters in for some actual slashing and hacking this time, as the children repeatedly come face to face with the bad-tempered wodwo. However, the story is laden with unnecessary excursions into mystical alchemical tangents, making it more a tired theme park ride through a haunted mansion than an adventure fantasy. Villains are all too easily defeated, and Sebastian's brief undercover stint as a "normal" seventh-grader fails to mine much humor from the situation. Nonetheless, a surprise showing by de Loudeac sufficiently maintains the narrative line begun in the first book to engage many continuing readers, and the promise of a third title will keep appetites whetted. An author's note gives some historical background. TC

**Burchill, Julie** *Sugar Rush*. HarperTempest, 2005 [288p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-077620-X $17.89
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 9-12

After her careless mother leaves the family, fifteen-year-old Kim is forced to change schools: she goes from private Preston High to public Ravendene Comp, where "all the girls were on the Pill at eleven; all the boys skilled thieves and fraudsters by ... twelve." Then she and her best Preston friend have a spat that leads to Kim's artful adoption of a new best friend at Ravendene—Maria "Sugar" Sweet. Entranced by Sugar's high-adrenaline, lowbrow life, good-girl Kim gets sucked...
into Brighton's underground party scene, where the drinks and drugs are second in intoxication only to Sugar herself. Soon, Kim and Sugar are lovers as well as friends, but sex clearly means different things to each of them: for Kim, it's about love; for Sugar, it's about fun. The more possessive Kim becomes, the more slippery Sugar gets, until the only thing the Gordian knot of their relationship can do is snap. This candid look at loyalty and betrayal among teenage girls of different economic classes and races nails several characteristics of its subject, from the spot-on description of adults who try too hard to be hip, to the in-depth analysis of friendships that require either "worship or all-out war," to the sharp, contemptuous way the girls deal with each other. Yet none of the girls are as shallow as they appear, especially Sugar, who despite her rapacious glee is also one of the most vulnerable, enigmatic, and honest of the characters. Burchill's heavily British prose is fast, breezy, and sometimes disorganized, but just like the characters, it flaunts itself as the latest thing. The rather anticlimactic finish aside, this is a sometimes gritty, sometimes glossy look at love and friendship. KH

**Byrd, Robert, ad.** *The Hero and the Minotaur: The Fantastic Adventures of Theseus; ad. and illus. by Robert Byrd.* Dutton, 2005 [40p]
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 3-6
Theseus, secretly the son of Aegeus, king of Athens, grows to be a brave and somewhat reckless youth before leaving home to meet his father in the city. On the way, he overcomes several monstrous tyrants on the road, bringing his exploits to the attention of Aegeus, who welcomes him with open arms, recognizing his son by the golden sword and sandals he carries. Later, Theseus takes on the Minotaur and frees the people of Athens from the gruesome sacrifice forced upon them by King Minos—fourteen youths as fodder each year for the bloodthirsty beast who lives in the labyrinth. Byrd's retelling is loosely constructed, with a bit of characterization thrown in to tighten the slack threads; nevertheless, the tale is jauntily presented in a literary style that is both lively and direct. The author even embroilers this traditionally male-oriented tale (which leaves Ariadne to the amorous advances of Dionysus while Theseus beats a hasty retreat back to Athens) with a few pro-female embellishments to placate modern readers. The framing of the story as an account of Poseidon's protection of Theseus works less well; the sea god makes only a few brief appearances, mostly in the illustrations, in order to foreshadow his swift but late-in-the-game takedown of the giant bronze statue, Talus, on Theseus' behalf. Byrd's line-and-watercolor illustrations, replete with wavering hatching that gives the spreads depth, rely on sideways poses reminiscent of ancient pottery decoration that, paradoxically, serve to flatten the images. Hutton's *Theseus and the Minotaur* (BCCB 10/89) may be a more dynamic treatment, but this is an attractive, easily available option. TC

**Chambers, Veronica** *Celia Cruz, Queen of Salsa; illus. by Julie Maren.* Dial, 2005 [40p]
Reviewed from galleys R 6-8 yrs
The charismatic chanteuse who helped mold the character of salsa music on the world stage is the recipient of this reverent homage. The story follows Cruz from her childhood in Havana, through her difficult choice between singing and teach-
ing careers, and on to her international distinction as a powerful artist whose vocal zest, richness, and flair continues to win dedicated listeners even after her death in 2003. The prose occasionally dips into the saccharine, especially in Celia’s musings, but it also incorporates some evocative imagery (“But when she sang... Her father heard thunder. Her cousins heard the call of the sea. Her neighbors heard a hummingbird”). Though there’s a little confusion in the timeline (an encouraging comment from her conservatory professor is quoted before the book mentions her admittance to Cuba’s National Music Conservatory), the story effectively traces the general outline of the superstar’s life, and the author’s enthusiasm for her subject and appreciation of her accomplishments lend verve to the chronicle. The mixed-media illustrations feature a palette of deep, rusty browns and hot mango, lime, and turquoise that suits the rustic style of the figures and the Caribbean focus of the text. Cutouts of printed music staves punctuate the vibrantly colored scenes, emphasizing at every turn Cruz’s dedication to the vocal art that made her famous. This respectful offering will make a useful companion to Brown’s bilingual My Name Is Celia/Me llamo Celia or standalone introduction for kids who’ve not yet encountered this musical icon. No sources are given, but an author’s note, glossary, and selected discography are included. TC


Whereas many film history books focus on stars and auteurs, glitzy special effects, or the evolving technical cornucopia of cameras and sound recording, Clee traces the myriad forms of visual entertainment that influenced modern cinema. Even more importantly, he evokes the kinship between modern moviegoers and their forebears—the mutual eagerness to be tricked by visual illusion, the common demand for increasing realism, the same restlessness to move on to the next novelty. Although technical advances are clearly explained, readers are likely to deem more memorable the descriptions of audience reaction to the inverted still images in the fifteenth-century camera obscura, the panic engendered by projections of raised spirits at eighteenth-century phantasmagoria, the mind-boggling handcraftsmanship that produced nineteenth-century panoramas, and early twentieth-century reformers’ efforts to censor “naughty” nickelodeons. Clee screeches to a halt with the nascent film industry’s move to Hollywood but leaves readers with a rich lode of end materials for further research, rounding out book sources with a host of websites and clear annotations concerning their scope and navigation. Black-and-white photos and reproductions abound, and an index will be included. The 791s simply can’t live without this, dahling. EB


Of the many tales of valor emerging from both camps of the Civil War, the doomed attack of the Massachusetts 54th on Confederate Fort Wagner ranks among the most celebrated. Under command of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the regiment
of African-American soldiers demonstrated to skeptical countrymen their fierce determination to fight for their own cause. The book follows freedman William Carney into the battle as, suffering from multiple wounds, he keeps the Union flag in view of his comrades and raises it over the South Carolina fort. Clinton spins the tale with some obvious fictionalization, particularly pre-battle dialogue, and lays the patriotic sentiment on thickly: "Sure, son, keep your eyes on the flag," said Carney. "Like hundreds before us and thousands after, just follow those Stars and Stripes, and you can't go wrong." Evans' heavily brushed paintings pursue the same tack, posing soldiers against minimal backgrounds in compositions more reminiscent of monumental statuary than living warriors. The Union defeat and retreat speed by so quickly that listeners may need to be reminded by the ending notes or an alert adult that the Massachusetts 54th did not, in fact, carry the day and that the stricken Carney does survive the engagement. Nonetheless, Clinton renders a welcome service in bringing this story to a young audience, and the title should be a useful addition to Veterans Day programming. 


Mere months before graduation from charm school, gifted witch Hunky Dory discovers a more satisfactory way to use her impressive powers: fairy godmothering. To the despair of her teacher, her friends, and her mother—who has made a habit of bragging that Hunky will be "the wickedest witch wherever the four winds blow"—Hunky renounces witchery and takes up wishery, bestowing good gifts on everyone she can get her hands on. To her credit, Hunky soon realizes that giving people whatever they wish for isn't always wise, and that some wishes are best fulfilled through individuals' own hard work. Also, her own training in wicked witchcraft and her understandable desire to give the undeserving their just deserts keep interfering with her newly acquired do-gooder instincts, and her solitary situation—no longer witch, not yet an F.G.—leaves her unbearably lonely. Hunky's first-person narration strikes a balance between snarkiness and geniality that sets the stage for her later side-switching and eventual confused ambivalence toward both career paths. Snicker-worthy commentary peppers the pages, and the witches' contrariwise customs for expressing approval and affection (i.e., insults, complaints, and the hurling of projectiles) add a welcome dash of stoogery. Unfortunately, Hunky's philosophical ponderings slow the pace without developing her into a well-rounded character, and the plot loses steam once Hunky leaves the high-concept, Wittily chronicled charm school. Fortunately, the story has enough jovial conflict, gleeful intertextuality, and tasty quips that readers may still enjoy her journey. Reviewed from an unillustrated galley. 

**COLLARD, SNEED B., III** *The Prairie Builders: Reconstructing America's Lost Grasslands;* written and illus. with photographs by Sneed B. Collard III. Houghton, 2005 72p (Scientists in the Field) ISBN 0-618-39687-X $17.00 R Gr. 5-8

In a fortunate alignment of ambition and opportunity, Congressman Neal Smith, who wished to restore native flora and fauna in his home state of Iowa, acquired a large tract of cornfields in the 1980s and mustered federal support to open the
National Wildlife Refuge that now bears his name. Collard traces the efforts of two of the many naturalists who have helped reconstruct the region into a native tallgrass prairie. Once the land was thoroughly cleared and roads were rerouted, botanist Pauline Drobney directed the identification, collection, and replanting of indigenous seeds. With the grasslands and wooded savanna areas established, butterfly specialist Diane Debinski undertook the reintroduction of the dwindling Regal Fritillary, devising strategies to promote their propagation among the now flourishing wildflowers. There's far more to involve reader interest than dropping seeds and shoots into the ground: controlled burns fertilize the soil and control non-native flora; volunteer "seed seekers" roam the railroad right-of-ways for overlooked plants; unusually rainy seasons threatened to drown the newly planted prairie; and stubborn Regals cagily hide their eggs out of sight of vigilant scientists. Collard occasionally misses an explanation (readers may ponder whether "dancing the seeds" into the ground is a folk ritual or a tamping measure), and pictures sometimes stumble into position a page after the text reference, but these minor missteps do not hinder appreciation of the complexities of land reclamation. With the profusion of crisp photographs of the prairie in glorious bloom, readers may be tempted to keep this title tightly closed during allergy season. Glossary, index, and sources are appended. EB

Conly, Jane Leslie  In the Night, on Lanvale Street. Holt, 2005 250p ISBN 0-8050-7464-3 $16.95  R Gr. 6-8

Charlie (short for Charlene) and her best friend, Shannon, have had the run of their Baltimore neighborhood as long as they can remember. Lately, though, drug dealers have claimed the corner of Lanvale and Belair, and Charlie's neighbor, Mr. Healy, has been found shot to death on his front porch. Only Jim (a mentally ill former tenant of Mr. Healy's) is determined to track down Mr. Healy's killers, and he enlists the help of Charlie and her seven-year-old brother, Jerry, to gather testimony from frightened witnesses and to deliver calls for repentance to the dealers themselves. The eeriness of Charlie's encounters with the Second Coming-obsessed Jim and of her brother Jerry's unquestioning acceptance of all Jim tells him shrouds the daily rhythms of life on Lanvale Street in danger and mystery. Jim's illness, combined with the other adults' unwillingness to admit that anything is wrong on their street, keeps Charlie (and the reader) wondering whom to trust—especially when it becomes apparent that local boys were involved in the murder (and the drug dealing) and that Charlie's trusted adult friends, fearing reprisals, are covering up for them. Jim's fanaticism, Charlie's own Catholicism, and her friend Shannon's atheism offer the girls opportunities to explore questions of right, wrong, justice, and divine intervention in a natural context, while a tragic turn of events underscores the need to take a stand and take action even when answers to those questions are not easily available. The novel's meditative, measured pace allows the beauty of Charlie's life on Lanvale Street to permeate even scenes of destruction, emphasizing that this inner-city quarter is worth fighting to save. Readers looking for thoughtful detective stories with a dab of psychological drama will settle right in. TC


Heben, an exile from one of the Seven Clans who rule the desert isle of Merithuros, is saved from pirate slavers by a group of magic-using chanters that includes Calwyn
(from *The Singer of All Songs*), a gifted chanter with a talent for learning new kinds of magic. Eager for aid but still suspicious of his rescuers' talents, Heben recruits the chanters to help him save his brother and sister from imprisonment and death on Merithuros for the crime of using their magical gifts; in the process of their rescue, however, the chanters destroy the center of government and incite an apparently long-overdue civil war. Only a great sacrifice by Calwyn can heal the soul and ease the thirst of the parched land itself—a sacrifice which takes from her everything she holds most dear. Beginning several months after the previous title in the Chanters of Tremaris trilogy, this volume alternates between the challenges facing Calwyn and her group and the solitary reminiscing of Calwyn's love interest, Darrow, over his troubled childhood and adolescence. Two themes run through the tale: the liberation of chanters from the limits placed on them by centuries-old prejudice, and the death of the land of Merithuros as a result of its owners' wanton ecological malpractices. While the first theme appears in many different situations, the second is concentrated in the illness and near-death of Calwyn and one of her friends, a narrow focus that may cause that particular struggle to seem melodramatic. In addition, the blandness of Calwyn's character may distance some readers from the impact of her loss—especially since it seems highly likely she'll get it all back (and then some) in the third book of the trilogy. Still, fantasy lovers will recognize in this fast-moving epic a substantial offering in the traditional style. A map is included. TC


Matt and his best friend, Eddie, make a papier-mâché volcano for the upcoming third-grade science fair, but illness keeps Matt home one day after they build the model. When he returns to school, he is greeted by catcalls of "Diarrhea Boy"—as it turns out, his former best friend has let slip exactly why Matt was home. Hugely embarrassed, Matt storms home and cuts the volcano model in two, presenting Eddie with his half and a warning to stay away. The fair is just a few days away, but neither boy can enter with only half a volcano, which means that Matt won't win any prize money for a new skateboard and Eddie won't get the fifty extra-credit points he needs to pass science class. Providentially, Eddie's little sister needs rescuing from the roof, so the two friends have an easy way to mend their relationship. Matt is a lively, sympathetic protagonist, and his mixed feelings about his friend will find resonance with many readers. His verbal attack on Eddie in the cafeteria after the diarrhea incident is overly dramatic, and there's convenience in the boys' post-fair realization that friendship is more important than winning, but Cox as usual captures the middle-grades world with vividness and sympathy. Eddie is clearly a live-wire with a shortage of impulse control, the kind of kid who's both an appealing and a troublesome friend; the ease with which the friends renew their amity is consistent with the minor character of Eddie's infraction, and it's also realistic that the boys' unimaginative project doesn't win any prizes. Sims' pencil illustrations display rumpled, round-faced children with gawky, age-appropriate energy. That goofy vivacity blends well with the breeziness of the story, creating a book many children will enjoy. Instructions for making an erupting model volcano are included. TC
CRONIN, DOREEN  Wiggle; illus. by Scott Menchin.  Atheneum, 2005  34p
ISBN 0-689-86375-6  $12.95  R  2-4 yrs

See this month’s Big Picture, p. 475, for review.

DALEY, MICHAEL J.  Space Station Rat.  Holiday House, 2005  [182p]
ISBN 0-8234-1866-9  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 3-6

Genetically modified for intelligence and trained for espionage, Rat can read, type, use tools, and communicate with humans in a customized sign language; she can also reason and plan, abilities she relied upon when escaping from the lab where she was trained. During that escape, a wrong turn led Rat into the docked space station, where she was trapped when the station went into orbit. Now the station’s waste-management system has reported stolen food, gnawed wires have been discovered, and the station’s defense robot has been sent to destroy Rat. Luckily, two of the scientists have brought their twelve-year-old son, Jeff, with them, and in the course of Rat’s frantic evasion of the robot, Jeff is moved to intervene and save her life (causing the robot a meltdown). Told alternately from Rat’s and Jeff’s points of view, this succinct space adventure treats both rodent and human concerns with respect, anthropomorphizing Rat only so much as is reasonable considering her unique genetic makeup. In fact, it is Rat’s instincts as well as her intelligence that enable her to trust Jeff, an authorial choice that gives the whole story the ring of truth. Jeff’s own motivation to treat Rat as an equal springs from his neglect by his busy parents and his need for a friend, not a pet or a plaything. Even the secondary players—Jeff’s parents and the station captain—are given personalities, goals, and frustrations that enhance the robustness of the story. Brought to life with sympathetic characters, tight plotting, and brisk pacing, this far-out animal fantasy is light-years ahead of the competition. TC

DELANO, MARÉ FERGUSON  Genius: A Photobiography of Albert Einstein.  National Geographic, 2005  63p  illus. with photographs
Library ed. ISBN 0-7922-9545-5  $27.90
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7922-9544-7  $17.95  R  Gr. 5-9

For middle-schoolers who associate Einstein with a wild mop of hair, an abstruse equation, and the moniker “genius,” Delano offers an appealing way to deepen the acquaintance. Without glossing over the physics—in fact, she makes a valiant effort to explain the theories that space and time are relative to the observer and that “there is a vast amount of energy bound up in a tiny amount of mass”—she focuses more on Einstein’s insatiable curiosity and freewheeling imagination, which led him to observe closely, and to think creatively, and ultimately to tip some scientific sacred cows. Delano sensitively presents the personal side of his life as well: his erratic success as a student, his renunciation of citizenships, his commitment to Zionism, his broken marriage, the uncomfortable knowledge that his career and fame stretched long past his most productive youthful years. The gallery of gray- and sepia-toned photos selected for the volume also help humanize this larger-than-life figure, as viewers see him lounging with his family, taking his oath of U.S. citizenship, posing in a feathered headdress with a group of Hopi, or merely scratching his chin in front of a messy desk. The chronology, resource list, and index will be of service to report writers, but general readers may find this biography surprisingly approachable as well. EB
Science advances in different ways, with scientists sometimes serving as their own subjects, and that's the focus of this collective overview. Dendy and Boring examine ten scientific advances that involved self-experimentation, such as investigations of human temperature and digestion, epidemiological exploration involving self-inoculation with disease, and exposure to high speeds and deep water. Names include the familiar (Pierre Curie) and the less famous, at least in the U.S. (Daniel Carrion, who died of his experiment with bartonellosis), locations vary from South America to Europe to the U.S., and results range from the lethal to the relatively benign. Thorough research, including primary material and interviews where feasible, informs each chapter and helps provide detail. Unfortunately, the writing is uneven, sometimes inclining toward choppiness and sometimes rendering concepts unclearly, and the occasional questionable assertion sneaks through (heart catheterization doesn't actually seem to be "the most-used medical procedure" at only a million per year); some of the figures discussed are rather a stretch, since Marie Curie didn't deliberately self-experiment and Stefania Follini wasn't actually a scientist. Though the ethics of experimenting on animals are frequently and sometimes digressively mentioned, there's little discussion of principle in experimentation on humans in general, and questions about self-experimentation itself are relegated to the conclusion. This is still an interesting examination of science in the front lines, and budding experimenters will be intrigued to see the lengths to which their predecessors have gone. Photographs and illustrations are scattered throughout; a timetable is appended, along with an extensive bibliography, source notes, and an index. DS
tragic affair with a man doomed to fall to Paigan; Ambrose, who sees Paigan clearly when others cannot, provides a reflective focus, fighting evil with truth and later poising himself for a solitary, wandering life, offering unbiased judgments to all who will hear him. This hefty tome effectively uses every one of its pages, spinning a delicately interconnected tale that gratifies on multiple levels and forming a luminous and memorable high fantasy story. Maps are included. TC

FRANK, LUCY *Lucky Stars.* Jackson/Atheneum, 2005 [304p]
ISBN 0-689-85933-3 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 5-7

Told alternately from Kira’s and Jake’s points of view, this novel of middle-school tribulations and romance begins when Kira’s shiftless musician father invites her to New York City for a visit, then saddles her with caring for his two young sons and singing in the subway to make money to support all four of them. Jake, skipping class in order to escape a domineering English teacher determined to break him of his stuttering, is enthralled by Kira’s powerful voice when he hears her sing. Kira then shows up as a new student at his school—having told off her father and arranged for a more normal life for herself—giving Jake the opportunity to make friends with her. Inspired by Kira’s skill and his own long-buried desire to sing, Jake negotiates a class schedule change so that he and his best friend (noisy, smart-mouthed, good-hearted Eugene Kim) can join chorus along with Kira. The convoluted, tension-filled climbing action and the growth of romantic feelings between Jake and Kira are deeply grounded in skillful characterization—both of them convincingly step up to the plate to determine their own fates, in spite of the bumbling efforts of the adults surrounding them. Best friend Eugene, who functions as both a facilitator and an obstructionist throughout the novel, takes over as storyteller for the final chapters, and his voice instills verisimilitude into an ending—in which he settles for a secondary role in the triad—that otherwise might have seemed overly pat. These plucky characters rival those of Joan Bauer, and they will find admirers aplenty among her fans. TC

FUNKE, CORNELIA *Pirate Girl*; tr. from the German by Chantal Wright; illus. by Kerstin Meyer. Chicken House/Scholastic, 2005 [32p]
ISBN 0-439-71672-1 $15.95
Reviewed from galleys R 5-7 yrs

Captured by pirate captain Firebeard and pressed into labor aboard the *Horrible Haddock,* young Molly refuses to give in to threats or queries for her parents’ contact information so a ransom can be demanded: “If I told you my mother’s name, you’d be so scared, you’d cry like a baby!” Instead, Molly peels potatoes by day and sends off bottled messages by night, while the pirates are sleeping off their evening revels. Her rebellion nearly lands her in the drink, but just in time the lookout sights another ship—that of Barbarous Bertha, a pirate queen whose name fills Molly’s captors with terror and despair. Bertha is, of course, Molly’s mom, and Bertha’s “ferocious crew” of don’t-mess-with-me mamas quickly takes over the *Haddock* and free the captive girl. This blithe yarn of piratical oneupmanship carries overtones of Little Red Riding Hood (Molly was traveling to visit her grandmother with a basket of goodies), but the focus is all on the power of the resourceful and sinister females in the tale—pugnacious Molly more than holds her own against Firebeard and his cronies until her scary mother appears on the horizon.
Told in conversation-packed prose, the story rolls off the tongue; readers-aloud with a penchant for the piratical “Aaargh!” will find numerous ideal opportunities for inserting these throughout. The gouache and line illustrations of pudgy, pouty Molly and the gangs of scraggly-limbed pirates deftly elaborate on the narration, illustrating textual points but adding manifold sight gags that develop the characters and strengthen the punch of the climax (in which Molly’s kidnappers cower before her as she displays her dishwater hands to their discredit). Read this with Oppel’s equally entertaining *Peg and the Whale* (BCCB 7/00) for a side-splitting salutation to strong-minded seafaring girls. TC

**GARFIELD, HENRY  
*My Father the Werewolf.*  Jackson/Atheneum, 2005  [240p]  
ISBN 0-689-85180-4  $17.95  
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 6-9

While walking Pismo Beach one foggy night, Ken Paxton is attacked by a werewolf as his teenage children, Danny and Miranda, watch helplessly. Luckily, an old man who’s been tracking the monster is able to save Ken; unluckily, he cannot stop Ken from becoming a werewolf for three nights every month. To isolate himself, Ken moves his family to Liverpool, Maine, where a nearby uninhabited island provides a perfect hiding place during the change. Danny rows his father to the island and back every full moon; while this keeps the town safe, the strain of keeping the secret starts to show, and as winter descends with freezing wind and ice, only time will tell if Ken will survive on the island alone. Garfield’s werewolf offering begins with a decidedly spooky, unhurried mood appropriate to its horror vein, and the Maine landscape descriptions enhance the eeriness. However, its fledgling credibility is wounded with the family’s comically docile acknowledgment of the existence of werewolves and Ken’s resulting plight. Furthermore, the generic third-person point of view doesn’t connect with any of the characters, preferring to report what they are thinking and doing without regard for developing distinct personalities; as a result, the events are observed from such a distance that they feel paraphrased rather than experienced. Still, Garfield proves he can write a taut thriller in the concluding third of the book when he tightens the story to a close-up view of Danny and his faceoff with his werewolf father over the safety of the town. Readers who want more credible werewolves would do well to check out Klause’s *Blood and Chocolate* (BCCB 7/97), but those obsessed with monster stories may nonetheless enjoy this tale’s stately spookiness. KH

**GUARENTE, G. A.  
*Hook, Line & Sinker.*  Razorbill, 2005  [208p]  
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10

Fifteen-year-old Fiona has a tankful of tropical fish in her bedroom, each bearing the name of a boy who did her wrong. As the story opens, Fiona is purchasing a new fish to symbolize the end of her latest relationship; upon exiting the pet store, she runs into Ty, her best friend from elementary school whom she hasn’t seen since. Ty, now a total hottie, convinces Fiona to audition for a community theater production of *Grease*. Unsurprisingly, she is immediately smitten, and so begins the cycle of crush and disappointment (he’s got a girlfriend, the sickeningly sweet Carla from Fiona’s class). The fish tank works to great effect as a device to explore Fiona’s romantic past, from Ska Boy, the spiky-haired band boy at the Jersey shore, to #1 Sashimi, the hunk behind the sushi take-out counter at the mall. Through
the recaps, the reader gets to know Fiona, and her buoyant personality and self-awareness make this a particularly pleasurable process. While Fiona does have a best friend (and she is slowly developing a friendship with Carla, who isn’t so bad after all), her character’s development is largely independent of anyone else; she is boy-crazy and dramatic and confident, and these characteristics all work to great effect in the course of the plot. A most satisfying ending (including a kiss with Jonas, the boy who works at the pet store) caps off this all-around entertaining and thoughtful exploration of one girl’s search for the perfect catch. HM

HALAM, ANN Siberia. Lamb, 2005 [272p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-74650-4 $16.95
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 6-9

Halam returns to the theme of environmental responsibility (also explored in Taylor Five, BCCB 3/04) with this science-fiction story about a future world so cold that humans live in indoor cities and wild animals are extinct. Yet a way to bring back the animals exists: scientists working for the government developed genetic seed banks called Lindquist kits that hold the “seeds of all the wild animals that once lived”; unfortunately, the government wanted the kits for another purpose, and members who resisted have been killed or imprisoned. Little Rosita’s parents are two such people: her father has been murdered, and she and her mother are sent to a prison camp outside the warm city in the freezing land beyond. There, Rosita and her mother plan for the day when they will escape and deliver the hidden kits to another city far across the ice, but after her mother is taken away, Rosita reinvents herself, calling herself “Sloe” and becoming a cynic who no longer believes in a better world. Still, Sloe is determined to honor her mother’s wish—but can she make the journey through the frozen wilderness alone? Sloe’s world is an extreme but telling extrapolation of environmental neglect, and her desperate journey has enough tense moments, where Sloe must outwit indifferent or villainous humans and battle harsh weather, to hold readers’ attention. Sloe’s maturation from naïve Rosita to a shrewd and determined girl is clearly shown, making the success of her impossible journey believable. While the semi-scientific, semi-magical Lindquist kits are compelling, they occasionally work a little too conveniently (i.e., the animals Sloe grows from the kits are always ones with the skills she needs to extract herself from a dangerous situation), but this does not detract from their purpose. Rather than tying up all loose ends, the conclusion offers instead a more realistic and equivocal outcome, but readers who’ve followed Sloe’s journey will warm to the tentative hope for her world. KH

HEARN, JULIE The Minister’s Daughter. Atheneum, 2005 263p
ISBN 0-689-87690-4 $16.95  R Gr. 7-12

In the England of 1645, twelve-year-old Nell, the granddaughter of the local cunning woman, is a Merrybegot: a child who was conceived during the pagan carousing on the first of May and who is therefore sacred to the powers of nature. Teenaged Grace, elder of two daughters of a Puritan minister and illicitly pregnant by the blacksmith’s son, cons her credulous younger sister, Patience, into blind cooperation and stages a demonic possession to explain away her pregnancy, naming Nell as the witch responsible for the curse. Soon Nell has a noose around her neck, and only a high-speed relay from piskies to fairies to young Charles II (pre-
HEMPHILL, STEPHANIE Things Left Unsaid. Hyperion, 2005 [272p]
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10

Junior year finds Sarah questioning her solid, unremarkable good-girl/high-achiever/expectation-fulfilling role, at first because she astounds herself by tanking SAT prep tests, but then because she makes a new friend, Robin (or, more accurately, her new friend makes her). Robin is a rebellious chain-smoker who dresses all in black and who cuttingly disdains just about everyone, and Sarah becomes her compliant sidekick (“I am always given advice/ and I am always taking it”) until Robin’s suicide attempt shocks Sarah into questioning their friendship and herself. The free-verse poems that tell Sarah’s story are subtle in their artistry and deft in their phrasing; while the emotions are sometimes handled with a heavy hand, they’re pretty heavy emotions as Sarah negotiates her way past near-tragedy to self-definition. Hemphill conveys with particular perspicacity Sarah’s believably complicated, terrifically important relationship with all three of her friends (old friends Amanda and Gina don’t exactly mesh with Robin, increasing Sarah’s anxiety level), demonstrating the way friendships can ebb and flow, shape you and hurt you, and effectively giving Sarah a history of adapting to her friends that makes her passive acceptance of Robin’s troubling ways almost inevitable. It’s also credible that Sarah’s push towards autonomy from her parents doesn’t actually correlate with genuine independence or sense of self (“I am the perennial member of everything,/ the leader of nothing, not even myself”), which are slower in coming and harder in earning. She’s therefore a sympathetic protagonist with whom it’s easy to identify, and teens exploring their own shifting friendships and identities will relate to her accessible verse story. DS

ISBN 0-689-86980-0 $16.95 Ad Gr. 8-12

Between 1943 and 1945, Jewish teenager Hannelore Wolff moved in and out of no fewer than eight concentration camps, ultimately surviving because her name found its way onto Oskar Schindler’s renowned list. While in the camps, Hannelore met Dick Hillman, a Polish POW, and the two were married shortly after liberation. This autobiographical memoir recalls the horror of Hillman’s experiences as
well as her individual capacity to maintain some semblance of hope during the
darkest of times. Hannelore’s physical movement through the story drives the
memoir; she is constantly facing a new set of circumstances, making new allies,
and attending to new jobs, and readers will find themselves deeply entrenched
in her day-to-day fight for existence. The love story of Hannelore and Dick is pow-
erfully recalled, and the juxtaposition of its tenderness and their horrific surround-
ings is quietly potent. Overall, though, the narrative is stilted, with choppy sentences
building on blunt statements, and while the frank tone is occasionally moving in
its very bluntness, more often it lacks emotional impact. Further, there is a repeti-
tion of details included in some recollections (the clothes she packed to bring to
the ghetto) and a complete lack of details in others (the explanation of Schindler’s
list is very unclear), which may alternately overwhelm and confuse readers. The
story’s content will undeniably pull readers in, however, and Hannelore’s quiet
strength, as reflected in her narrative voice, could inspire enormous respect in con-
temporary audiences. A map is included. HM

HIRSCH, ODO  Something’s Fishy, Hazel Green. Bloomsbury, 2005 207p
ISBN 1-58234-928-2 $15.95  R Gr. 3-5

Hazel Green (from Hazel Green, BCCB 10/03) returns to untangle another mys-
tery in this second in the series from Aussie author Hirsch. When a pair of gigantic
lobsters are stolen from Mr. Petrusca’s shop, the fishmonger goes into a decline far
deeper than the theft warrants. While pestering Mr. Petrusca about his strange
depression, Hazel discovers that the genial middle-aged man feels like a failure not
just because his reputation as “The Fishmonger of Distinction” is besmirched, but
because the lobster thief left behind a note that the illiterate Mr. Petrusca could
not read. Humiliated, and fearful that his weakness will be discovered, he refuses
to tell anyone else about the note and swears Hazel to secrecy. In typical Hazel
Green style, she spills the beans to her primary confidantes: the florist, Mrs. Gluck,
and the brainiac boy known as the Yak. With the Yak by her side, Hazel solves the
mystery of the missing lobsters, and at Mrs. Gluck’s insistence, she offers Mr.
Petrusca a way out of his self-imposed isolation. Hazel’s highly populated neigh-
borhood—replete with friends and enemies of all ages—forms a setting that is
both comfortably secure and socially complicated, qualities that infuse the story
with warmth and drama. Hazel herself is brash and witty, driven by curiosity,
honor, and loyalty, but at the same time she’s refreshingly willing to lie to and
tease her friends just for the fun of it. However, Hazel can take it as well as dish it
out, and she must, since the secrets she keeps bring her some formidable peer
pressure. Reminiscent thematically of that middle-grade powerhouse Harriet the
Spy (BCCB 12/64), Hazel’s latest quest for truth and justice shows her off as a
redoubtable, intelligent heroine, one readers will claim wholeheartedly as a stal-
wart friend. TC

HOOBLER, DOROTHY  The Sword That Cut the Burning Grass; by Dorothy and
Thomas Hoobler. Philomel, 2005 [224p]
ISBN 0-399-24272-4 $10.99  R Gr. 7-10

Reviewed from galleys

The fourth of the Hooblers’ samurai mysteries (The Ghost in the Tokaido Inn,
BCCB 9/99, et. al) finds fourteen-year-old protagonist Seikei squarely in the cen-
ter of the action, with his patron Judge Ooka’s role limited to sending him off on
his latest adventure. The teenage emperor has suddenly refused to carry out his
duties, and without the regent’s participation in the spring planting rituals, the
nation is in real danger of a failed harvest and widespread starvation. Seikei is
enlisted to visit the emperor and have a teen-to-teen talk with him about his re-
sponsibilities, but his mission takes a drastic turn when the emperor’s highest-
ranked security minister instigates a plot to overthrow a powerful local lord, win
favor with the shogun, and keep the youthful emperor under his control. Al-
though readers who have come to expect some gripping fight scenes won’t be
disappointed, the theme of noblesse oblige and coronation rituals steeped in ancient
mythology are equally engrossing. Established fans will be pleased to see Seikei
growing in confidence and maturity, and mystery aficionados ready to explore an
offbeat setting should be alerted to this successful series. EB

Horowitz, Anthony  
*Raven’s Gate.* Scholastic, 2005  [256p]  
ISBN 0-439-67995-8  $17.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

Orphaned at age eight, juvenile delinquent Matt Freeman, now fourteen, is impli-
cated in the stabbing of a security guard. He is sent by a government agency to a
remote farm in the care of Mrs. Deverill, an evil old bat who uses witchcraft to
thwart Matt’s every attempt to escape (and kill anyone who helps him). She and
the rest of her devil-worshiping village intend to sacrifice Matt on the Raven’s
Gate, formerly an ancient stone circle but currently the site of an abandoned nuclear
plant, so that his blood will set free the Old Ones, all-powerful demons who make
modern ideas of the Devil look wimpy. Matt has been targeted by the worshippers
because he is one of the original Gatekeepers, now reborn—five powerful beings
who sent the Old Ones into another plane and sealed the Gate in ages past. Matt’s
growing awareness of his own extrasensory and telekinetic powers adds tautness to
this deftly woven tale of prophecy, destiny, and near-apocalyptic struggle. While
some elements suggest Cooper’s The Dark Is Rising series, Horowitz typically
includes modern technologies and government cover-ups, which meld unusually
well with their mythical backdrop; in that setting, the motivations of the disparate
characters appear natural, and Matt’s eventual triumph over the powers that bind
him is riveting despite being foregone. The first in The Gatekeepers series, this
engrossing (and gory) fantasy will win fans from the get-go. TC

Hunter, Bernice Thurman  
*The Girls They Left Behind.* Fitzhenry &
Whiteside, 2005  [192p]  
Paper ed. ISBN 1-55041-927-7  $9.95  
Reviewed from galleys  

Seventeen-year-old Beryl begins her diary, a bridesmaid’s gift from her newly mar-
mied friend, in June of 1943, when most male friends her age begin to enlist in the
military and leave for postings in England. While Beryl is naturally concerned for
their safety, she’s also quick to seize the opportunity to reinvent herself on the
wartime Canadian home front, affecting the name Natalie, taking a hiatus from
school to work in the armament industry, and rising to the rank of supervisor on
an aircraft line. Natalie’s career advances, though, are clouded by news that her
beloved cousin Carmen is missing in action and presumed dead. Natalie is a con-
vincing diarist, more wrapped up in her own concerns regarding work and dates
and rationing than in patriotic ideals, and her pique at everything from lack of
steady dates to loss of her factory job to returning veterans rings true. Although
the chronology of the war lends some continuity to Natalie's story, no strong plot
line emerges to propel the action along. Carmen's miraculous reappearance at the
novel's conclusion seems a bit forced, and the author's daughter (who completed
the novel from a manuscript and notes left by her deceased mother) speculates that
the happy ending purposely "righted a terrible wrong"—the death of her own
cousin in World War II. This is a quick and undemanding offering, though, and
readers who may be daunted by denser historical fiction should breeze right through.

JUSTER, NORTON  The Hello, Goodbye Window; illus. by Chris Raschka. di Capua/
Hyperion, 2005  [32p]
ISBN 0-7868-0914-0  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  5-8 yrs

Nanny and Poppa spend most of their time in the kitchen, and when the story's
young protagonist arrives for a weekend visit, she always stops on the porch to
greet them through the big kitchen window. This window, however, is good for
many more things than greetings, both real (checking the weather in the morning)
and imagined (visiting with a Tyrannosaurus rex who, being extinct, doesn't come
around much). While the text is a little long and there is not much plot to this
playfully thoughtful celebration of childhood, Juster uses the physical window to
great effect in exploring the experience of staying with grandparents. Throughout
the child narrator's exposition on the window, she shares with the listeners her
observations about the house, and the items about which she comments are decid-
edly kid-oriented (the stepstool for washing her hands, the forbidden under-the-
sink cabinet). There is a delightful dose of preschooler ego ("When I get tired I
come in and take my nap and nothing happens until I get up") that is perfectly
matched by Raschka's chaotically uninhibited paintings, which similarly evoke a
kid-centered world. He uses color fearlessly to reflect the fantastical energy of the
child's narrative line, and his bold, splashy brushstrokes create an exciting and
fanciful world (though the facial expressions of the multiracial family are some-
times muddied in the process). This holds obvious potential as a story to be shared
by grandparents and grandchildren, but young audiences are likely to eagerly lis-
ten to anyone willing to read it to them. HM

KARAS, G. BRIAN  On Earth; written and illus. by G. Brian Karas. Putnam,
2005  32p

In Atlantic (BCCB 4/02), Karas treated the ocean, and now he's expanded to the
planet as a whole. In simple yet often lyrical prose, the book describes the Earth's
orbit, axial rotation, and axial tilt, explaining the effects we encounter in conse-
quence ("Shadows get long as day rolls into night.... Years go by, day by day. We
count them with calendars and candles"). Though young audiences may need a
little help in connecting the astronomical phenomena with their personal experi-
ence, the emphasis on the everyday (and everyyear) adds a homely touch to the
cosmic exploration. Karas' familiar illustrative informality, with na"ive touches in
draftsmanship and nubbly pencil textures roughening up the paint, additionally
renders the universe an accessible and even cozy place, while diagrams and visually
demonstrated concepts help convey the ideas. This would be a terrific introduc-
tion to planetary science, especially suitable for sharing at sunrise or sunset or while investigating the wonders of a globe. A succinct one-page overview closes the book. DS


Kimmel continues his project of introducing classic literature to young readers (see Don Quixote and the Windmills, BCCB 7/04) with the epic tale of Beowulf’s battle with Grendel. Beowulf’s early exploits involve killing trolls and sea serpents, and when the young stalwart hears of the monster menacing Hrothgar’s kingdom of the Spear-Danes, he fearlessly takes off to vanquish Grendel or die in the attempt. After giving up his armor so that no one can say he had an unfair advantage over the loathsome beast, he begins his anxious night in Hrothgar’s hall. When Grendel appears, he mistakes the unarmed and seemingly sleeping Beowulf for an easy meal, but he soon loses his appetite as he and Beowulf battle fiercely through the night. The battle sees Beowulf the victor as Grendel’s arm is wrenched from his shoulder and the monster slinks into the marshes to meet his end. There is nothing delicate or fussy about the illustrations; they have a chunky stolidity that emphasizes the broad strokes of the tale and the boldness of the hero. Fisher spares none of the horror as he shows the sea serpents munching on the men in their mouths, the blood-stained waters as Beowulf hacks away at them, or the triumphant Beowulf waving Grendel’s severed arm in victory as the monster slips away. However, the gore is contained in relatively small stains of bright red and hinted at in the vermilion endpapers. Beowulf has an appropriately clean-shaven, wide-open Norwegian countenance with striking blue eyes, and while the monster deviates somewhat from visual tradition, he is an aptly noxious green. The fatal ferocity of the final battle is mostly left to the written text, which has a grim formality throughout that suggests the high seriousness of Beowulf’s quest. Readers with a taste for mythic heroism and epic battle will find their appetites both whetted and sated in one fell stroke here. A note provides sources and historical background. KC


Krull inaugurates a new Giants of Science series, and if this volume is a reliable indicator, readers can expect it to combine the depth of a standard-length children’s biography with the gossipy details that make her Lives of... titles (Lives of Extraordinary Women, BCCB 9/00, etc.) so popular. While many middle-schoolers will recognize Leonardo as a painter who doodled remarkably prescient inventions on the side (or, heaven help us, as the catalyst for The Da Vinci Code), Krull focuses on his contributions to science, particularly his early use of what would later be termed “scientific method,” testing his ideas against real-world experience. At Krull’s hands, biography blitzes by at the speed of a well-paced novel, and Leonardo emerges as a fully fleshed character: restless (“In a case, perhaps, of Renaissance attention deficit disorder, he always wanted to be on to the next thing”), sexually ambivalent, witty and well-liked, driven to explore subjects few natural philoso-
phers would tackle ("It is hard to exaggerate the creepiness of Leonardo's anatomy studies"). Kulikov's full- and half-page black-and-white illustrations portray a gray-bearded Leonardo exuding wide-eyed, childlike curiosity, who's equally at home mounting an epic-scaled planetary entertainment for a wealthy patron or examining a draped cadaver in a shadowy, Gorey-esque stone chamber. Krull concludes with notes on the diaspora of Leonardo's notebooks, a list of resources (with children's works noted), and an index. This fairly begs to be booktalked, and it just might lure some fresh readers over to the biography shelves. EB


With a riot of color and an SUV full of fonts, surfer Lake regales surfer wannabes with tons of big-sisterly advice on how to line up, literally and figuratively, with the pack. There's a bit of boarding history and herstory, some tips on how to fit in with the locals, fashion hints tailored to retaining one's suit amid bashing waves, some serious consideration of surfing peril (from the remote possibility of shark attack to the realistic threats of skin cancer, infections, assault by loose boards, and come-ons by unwelcome guys), and a bevy of buff bods here for the emulating. About two-thirds of the way through, Lake gets around to actual surfing instruction, and just deciphering the directions for moving from sitting to upright stance while positioning the board in the sweetest part of a swell should convince readers that this has as much chance of turning them into master shredders as Arthur Murray footprints have of turning them into dancing queens. Still, Lake has a pretty good grasp of her audience, inviting girls to "be a surfer, or just be like one," and her comments on etiquette and lingo (glossaries included) that play up the need for courtesy and play down use of the term "dude" should minimize novice faux pas. Grab the sunscreen and "go West, young woman." EB


Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 9-12

Sixteen-year-old Anooshka Stargirl and her older sister, ZZ Moon, have the accidental fortune of meeting Orpheus, nerdy-cool rock star, one rose-tinted day in New York City. Though Moon is the crushed-out one at first, after this meeting Anooshka becomes obsessed with discovering the man behind the "beautiful, echoey voice"; lured by his music and his online writings, which eerily express exactly what she feels, she is sure they have a magnetic, almost mystical, connection. Eventually, she and Orpheus meet again, and again, and the enigmatic Orpheus becomes the only constellation in Anooshka's sky—until she realizes that stars, as close as they appear to be, can never really be touched. At first, Lane's prose calls to mind the surreal quality of a mirage, magically enticing but ultimately unfulfilling; as Anooshka says about Orpheus' lyrics, "The words pop out like stars, even if their meaning is obscure." However, as Lane descends into the depths of her Orpheus and Eurydice-inspired story, the self-consciously cool prose finds its groove, taking on the urgent, consumed mania of its narrator as she experiences the highs and lows of obsessive love for the first time. Anooshka's all-encompassing desire is
almost too intense to be real, but in such a mythical story, it’s more than appropri-
ate, and her willingness to believe that Orpheus’ emotional well runs deep rather
than dry is all too believable. Atmospheric black-and-white photos appear spo-
radically through the text, lending the book the ultra-cool, artistic feel of CD liner
notes. Readers familiar with the soaring heights, jangling nerves, and crushing
blows of voluntary enslavement to misplaced desire will no doubt find hope in
Anooshka’s ultimate redemption and recovery. KH

LANTZ, FRANCES The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became a Boy. Dutton, 2005 [208p]
ISBN 0-525-47437-4 $15.99 Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 4-6

Joanie's sick of being a girl, since it means the boys won't include her in the sports
she likes, her mother won't let her play seriously anyway, and her teacher thinks
her hobby of writing action adventure is gender inappropriate. She's therefore
exhilarated when a typo introduces her to her new fifth-grade class as John rather
than Joan and her tomboyish appearance allows her to carry off the gender switch.
Initially, her new identity gives her the openings she'd hoped—she's playing foot-
ball with the guys and making friends easily with Casey, a nice boy with a taste for
joke-telling and a gift for baking—but soon she finds that boydom has its own bad
side as her new comrades hassle hopeful girl athletes and pressure one another into
dangerous stunts. The premise is basically a sitcom-level contrivance, and the
book never makes it more plausible than that, relying, ironically, on stereotyped
figures to convey the prejudices against which Joanie struggles; Joanie's superhero
fiction, occasionally interpolated, breaks up the narrative flow without making
any real contribution of viewpoint or message. There's still some undercover al-
lure in the details of Joanie's gender-bending, and it's bolstered by a more nuanced
subplot about Joanie's fear for her ailing dog and the bonding she undergoes with
her mother as a consequence. This isn't exactly a deep psychological exploration,
but this light look into how the other half lives may intrigue girls who wonder
what the heck the guys are thinking. DS

LAROCHELLE, DAVID Absolutely, Positively, Not. Levine/Scholastic, 2005 [224p]
ISBN 0-439-59109-0 $16.95 Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 7-10

Sixteen-year-old Steven has a shameful secret: he square-dances with his mom—and
he likes it. Oh, and also, he might be gay. He's going to take care of that little
problem, however, and with the help of a sorely outdated library book on teenage
sexuality, he enacts a plan to become heterosexual: clipping magazine pictures of
women, mimicking the hockey team at lunch, snapping himself with a rubber
band when he thinks about guys, and, finally, engaging in serial dating. All this
gets him is a strained relationship with his best friend, Rachel, and the conviction
that there has to be something better than this. This coming-out story is enjoyable
in the way a good TV sitcom is enjoyable: while it's safe and a little old-fashioned,
it's also light, funny, and warm-hearted, with a cast of quirky yet recognizable
characters, a series of larger-than-life events, and an immediately likeable, sympa-
thetic protagonist. Don't come here looking to delve deep into teenage angst:
LaRochelle's impeccable comic timing leads to many snort-worthy moments, while
his sensitivity to the awkward work of developing any kind of sexuality in high school means that Steven's most crushing embarrassments resonate for only a chapter or two before he dusts himself off. Like any respectable sitcom conclusion, Steven's misguided plans to be straight lead naturally into his, and his parents', tentative acceptance of being gay—and he even gets a (sort of) date! LaRochelle's first book provides a nice counterpoint to less gentle, more tension-filled coming-out stories, making it a good addition for a younger audience. KH


Lester returns to his project of putting a human face on the history of American slavery (see *To Be a Slave*, BCCB 4/69) in this powerful fictionalization of the largest slave auction ever recorded. The story unfolds as a series of spoken and unspoken dialogues between the various participants, including Pierce Butler, the owner whose gambling debts force him to sell more than 400 slaves in the two-day event. His daughters Sarah and Frances, house slaves Mattie and Will, and their daughter Emma also get their say, among others. The format is remarkably easy to follow, and there is a clear distinction between what each character would and would not say out loud; in longer passages, major characters reflect on the events years later. Lester's dramatis personae fill familiar roles, but he makes them into iconic representatives and brings the tragedy home afresh; by pursuing the lives and fortunes of several characters, he is able to remind readers of the emotional costs and collateral damage of slavery for the slaves, the slaveholders, and their families. He also plausibly presents the possibility of divine retribution and re-reward through the characters' interpretations of such things as the torrential rain on the sale, the permanent loss of the slave seller's voice following the event, the eventual ruin and death of Butler, and the prosperity and happiness of Emma and of Sarah Butler, who opposed her father's lifestyle. Peripheral characters pose some of the most challenging moral problems in the text, including a man who takes his own life when he is sold away from his true love, and a father who, having come to appreciate the comforts of slavery under a generous mistress, struggles to gain his son's respect even as he threatens his chance at freedom. This will make for a stunning readers' theater or dramatic reading in classes or book groups, and it will occasion equally stunning discussion afterward. An author's note explains Lester's process of fictionalizing the actual events. KC


It's 1953, McCarthyism has embedded itself deep into the national consciousness, and thirteen-year-old Jamie has a secret: her parents are staunch supporters of the Communist party. When her father, a high-school teacher, is exposed on the front page of the *New York Times*, her own world is turned upside down; she is inexplicably switched from one homeroom to another, removed from the staff of the school newspaper, forbidden to speak to her best friend, and constantly plagued by the fear that her father will go to prison. In fact, he probably will; when called before Senator McCarthy and his committee, Jamie's dad's bold condemnation of their activities leads to a charge of contempt. The strength of this historical novel is that it does not attempt to be a story about Communism so much as an exami-
nation of the dynamics of discrimination and harassment; the bullying experienced by those adults who identify with the Communist party is wordlessly juxtaposed with the middle-school bullying that Jamie is experiencing as a result of her family's beliefs. Through most of the novel, Jamie is unable to understand why her parents insist on adhering to a political philosophy that endangers her family; in the final chapter, as she watches her father's testimony on TV, she comes to realize the significance of standing up for your ideals in the face of adversity, and this movement is believably executed. The characters themselves are, for the most part, more functional than memorable, and the long buildup to the inevitable revelation of party affiliation may lose some readers early on; still, young people today will find much to think about in this story of a time and a place where adolescent secrets held enormous global significance. An author's note and list of recommended reading are included. HM

LEVITHAN, DAVID  Are We There Yet?  Knopf, 2005  [224p]
Trade ed. ISBN 0-375-82846-X  $15.95
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 9-12

Danny Silver is a workaholic young ad executive, and his brother, Elijah, is a contemplative high-schooler when their parents cunningly arrange for them to take a vacation to Italy together. Their different personalities and the seven years that separate them result in markedly different responses to the trip: Danny treats each destination as a strict assignment, while Elijah relishes random wanderings and serendipitous encounters, including one with a compelling young woman, Julia. Throughout, however, they are acutely aware of each other, the significance of their unlikeness ("Most of all, he thinks,  My brother is so different from me. He is so wrong"), the lost closeness of their childhood, and, eventually, the possibilities still open for a relationship with a brother ("Do you make him a large part of your life, an equal to a wife or a best friend?... Do you let him know who you really are?"). Literal brotherhood is a strangely rare topic in young adult literature, and Levithan's exploration of this relationship is slyly witty, poignant, and lyrical. Though the third-person narration focalizes through both Danny and Elijah, the tone of the prose matches Elijah's sensibility more than Danny's in its dreaminess and measured pace, which allow for a slow evolution of the brothers' personalities and relationship as their travels through Venice and Florence reflect their travels through emotional terrain. The quiet acknowledgment of the way travel can make one more aware of oneself adds resonance and credibility to the story, and the book avoids the pitfall of overtidy resolution with brothers forever comrades, instead giving readers a pair of young men who have made an unexpected connection and who see possibilities for more in the future. Readers will yearn for their own life-changing travel, and they may be encouraged to reexamine their own sibling bonds. DS

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-027977-X  $15.89

Just before bedtime, alone with her cat in her room, a little girl wonders who loves her. Her wise pet reminds her of the people who love her even when she's cranky
and who demonstrate that love through the small and large acts of kindness they perform for her. He reminds her too that her friends still love her even when they fight and that her brother loves her even though he might not act like it. Reassured, both girl and cat drift off to sleep. The text wavers between soothing and sweetly dull, but its calm is offset by a very bouncy, spinnny, constantly in motion little girl with wild sprouts of black hair. The figures of both cat and girl sport a two-dimensional geometry of squared-off edges reminiscent of Laurel Burch's felines, but their palette is more subdued; in fact, the preponderance of various yellows dominates the visual field to the point of sallow monotomy, despite the frenzy of the figures. The motion of the pictures suggests that the little girl whirls through her days in various moods, not all of them especially lovable, as when she is hurling pasta around the kitchen or crossing her friends' names angrily off a list. She has her sweet moments as well, though, such as when she is dancing for her grandfathers or freeing a mouse that her cat has brought her as gift. All in all, this catalogue of unconditional love will likely appeal more to adults, but it could nestle into the hearts of little ones who know all too well at the end of the day that there have been moments . . . but that their people and their pets love them anyway. KC


After finding his mother sick in bed, a forlorn Jack goes out to the beach for a walk, and there he meets "the Grim Reaper, Old Man Death himself." Fearing that Death is headed toward his mother's cottage, Jack pummels the old man until he is small enough to fit into a hazelnut shell, which Jack then plugs up and throws out to sea. He returns home to find his mother recovered; however, she is unable to crack an egg, cut a vegetable, or kill a chicken (its head keeps flying back on its shoulders). When Jack goes into town for some chops, he gets a similar report from the butcher, who notes that "it's almost as if nothing will die anymore." Realizing the foolishness of his actions, Jack combs the beach until he finds the nut, releases Death, and sets the circle of life back on track. Adapted (according to a brief note) from a Scottish storyteller's version, this literally titled tale offers a comedic yet thoughtful examination of the interdependence of life and death. Jack's brash actions are consistent with his childhood fear of losing a parent, and the realization that these actions have a far greater impact than he had anticipated comes naturally in the course of the tale. Hess' paintings are characterized by broad planes of color (the stretch of sandy beach, the green slope of the hillside) and deeply expressive portraits that depict the confusion of a citizenry that can't seem to kill anything. Death himself is depicted as a bowlegged, white-bearded elderly man with a gentle wisdom behind his round eyes. Young listeners will appreciate that Death rewards Jack's repentant search with long life for his mother almost as much as they enjoy watching Jack take down Death in their initial encounter. Pair this with Rees' *Grandy Thaxter's Helper* (BCCB, 10/04) for an amusing comparison of avoiding Death's threat. HM


Nate's life changes the day he comes home to find police at the family farm and his father being rushed to the hospital with a gunshot wound to the head. Nate's
mother, devastated at her husband's suicide attempt, shuts down, leaving Nate to
guide himself and his little sister, Junie, through their days as best as he can; he's
also trying to protect his mother from police suspicions that she, not her husband,
fired the weapon. Most of all he's missing his father, and he tries to extract infor-
mation about his whereabouts from the tight-lipped adults. Once he finds out
that his father is in the mental hospital on the other side of Montana, he conceives
a strange plan: to win the science fair with a homemade cloud chamber, a project
he and his father had always talked about building together, and then see his father
on the trip to the nearby state finals. Maynard's quiet creation of atmosphere is
effective: the broad empty spaces of rural Montana lend an echoing desolation to
Nate's situation, and there's bitter authenticity in the judgmental insularity of the
small town, wherein Nate's father's actions make his family into social pariahs.
The episodic nature of the narrative and the emphasis on atmosphere, especially
the constant period references to mid-'60s culture, unfortunately make the book a
stately and distanced read; the tendency toward overt contrivance (the wise hobo
who steers Nate right is straight out of central casting, and it seems only the need
for a dramatic reveal kept the family, now pledged to a policy of full disclosure,
from telling the kids their father had lost his sight) undermines the story's credibil-
ity. Patient readers may nonetheless appreciate the difficult adjustment of Nate
and family to the tragedy, and all will sympathize with Nate's desire to make things
right again. DS

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-076031-1  $17.89
Reviewed from galleys  R Gr. 6-10

Though it usually drifts placidly among the picture-book set, Noah's ark has taken
occasional tacks into more turbulent YA waters, as in L'Engle's Many Waters (BCCB
11/86), more recently, Provoost's In the Shadow of the Ark (BCCB 10/04), and
now with McCaughrean at the helm. Although less libidinous than Provoost's
cast (and therefore in the scope of a slightly younger audience), these voyagers are
burdened with drama of equal weight and their actions transpire largely under the
lens of another marginalized woman, here Noah's apocryphal daughter Timna. A
number of characters "speak" their own chapters, but Timna's voice and judgment
dominate as she observes her gentle father's unrelenting service to his personal
vision of God, her brother Seth's increasing religious arrogance that verges on
unholy madness, her mother's stoic and sharp-tongued defense of her husband's
course, and brother Japeth's quiet resistance to family strife. Mostly, though, Timna
agonizes over her own rebellious act of sneaking a boy and his baby sister on board,
and she is torn between her natural impulse toward compassion and her suspicion
that she may be harboring a demon out to undermine the Lord's Earth-cleansing
work. McCaughrean's extra-Biblical characters not only expand plot possibilities
(and allow repopulation to proceed in a less incestuous fashion) but also promote
a more complex interpretation of the Genesis story than mere Divine vengeance.
The author's long experience in retelling religious myths is richly evident in the
animals' poignant testimonies (their view of the Creator varies according to their
status in the food chain) and especially in Seth's jubilant psalms of victory over
each sinner vanquished and each tribulation overcome. This isn't exactly strict
Scriptural interpretation, but those who are comfortable balancing fiction with
theology will find it a rewarding journey.  EB
McClements, George  *The Last Badge*; written and illus. by George McClements. Hyperion, 2005  40p
ISBN 0-7868-0956-6  $16.99  R  Gr. 2-4

In order to earn his place in his family's Album of Scouting Greatness, Samuel dares to dream the impossible dream: he will photograph the mythical Moon Frog, a species that appears only once every thirty years in a location that can only be determined through complicated astronomical calculations. It is so hard to locate that no one has ever done it before, which is why Samuel is convinced that finding it will earn him a coveted spot in the album. Meticulous preparations secure his success, but when he begins to consider the implications of how the scientific community will react to photographic proof of a new species, he decides to keep his find a secret, only to discover that this very decision connects him to the long line of familial scouting greatness. Mixed-media cutouts set on painted backgrounds supply kitschy support and plenty of gags for this hero's tale. Samuel has a comically retro, apple-pie-faced and knobbly-kneed sincerity as he pursues his heraldically ugly quarry, and sequential art entertainingly shows Samuel progressing through the requisite perils of a scouting expedition that follows a kid-made map, including landscapes both fantastic and grotesque. It's clear when we meet his gung-ho dad that the geekiness that drives Samuel to earn badges in Burping the Alphabet, Fever, Monkey Grooming, Toenail Clipping, and Thermonuclear Dynamics, among other feats of bravery and skill, runs in the family. All in all, Grizzly Scouting sounds like way more fun than the regular kind; where do we sign up?  KC

McCormick, Patricia  *My Brother's Keeper*. Hyperion, 2005  [192p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  Gr. 6-9

Toby Malone used to have a terrific big brother. The old Jake—the one who was MVP of the high-school baseball team, the one who played with Toby and their little brother Eli, the one who was easy to talk to—would never call Toby "dillweed" in front of his friends, or quit baseball, or steal, or get high. But since their dad left, Jake's become "cool and uninterested in things he considered immature," which seems to be everything that ever mattered to Toby. Toby, in an effort to protect his mother, knows it's up to him to cover for Jake, but the longer he does, the worse Jake becomes, until a dangerous series of events forces the family to confront their long-ignored problems. McCormick's latest offering after *Cut* (BCCB 1/01) is a sensitive portrayal of a loving family struggling with rebuilding after a massive upheaval. Toby's first-person present-tense voice, with its abundance of punchy fragmentary sentences coupled with breathless run-ons, captures the slightly scattered, exaggerated thoughts of a perennial worrier who is also quite funny. Toby is entirely convincing as a thirteen-year-old, from his sensitivity to the unspoken code of body language between guys, to his fear and elation at his crush on a girl, to his well-intentioned but misguided attempts to help his mother. McCormick has a knack for balancing humor and pathos and for crafting a nuanced family where not everything has to be said to be understood (Toby's attempts to be for Eli what Jake was for him, despite his own disappointment in his older brother, is one example). Readers who already know that the most meaningful moments are often hidden in the little ones will appreciate this compelling and compassionate story.  KH
As the British advanced on Philadelphia in 1777, townsfolk rallied to protect their church bells from troops bent on melting them down for ammunition and cannons. The State House bell, later to be dubbed the Liberty Bell, was smuggled out of town in a wooden cart, allegedly by John Mickley, and buried under the floorboards of a church. Here McDonald imagines Mickley’s son John Jacob recounting the episode to his younger siblings upon returning from his secret mission. The style is lively and dramatic, and the narrative adheres to the probable chain of events—the midnight ride, the meeting with Washington troops who escorted them to Allentown, the broken cart and the transfer of the bell, and the ultimate hiding place at Zion Reformed Church. Unfortunately, the book never addresses the mystifying question of how a 2,000-pound bell was lowered from its belfry onto a wagon at dead of night or transferred from cart to cart on the road (nor does it explain, for that matter, why John Jacob would entrust such a delicate secret to little children). Carrington envisions the scene as a comedy, with wide-eyed, cartoonish characters gasping and grinning at every turn. The bell is improbably “hidden” under a bright plaid hoopskirt (a closing note characterizes this as “lore,” but it also admits that “dirt, hay, straw, and manure were most likely used to conceal the bell”), and the creaky wagon that “groaned like a cow birthing a calf” passes a few yards from snoozing British sentries. Implausibility aside, McDonald’s youth-oriented perspective on this historical episode is likely to inspire genuine interest in young readers. EB

When your big sister is Judy Moody (from Judy Moody, BCCB 5/00), you can bet you’re in for some rough times, and it sure doesn’t help if you’re the shortest second-grader in your class. Stink is remarkably resilient, however, bearing up against such tragedies as Judy’s giving him hair gel that, instead of giving him sticking-up hair to make him look taller as advertised, turns his hair orange, and Judy’s losing his class salamander down the drain and then turning the garbage disposal on. He copes by drawing comics for each fresh disaster in his life and championing his favorite president James Madison, who also happens to be the shortest president in history. McDonald cleverly pits Stink’s earnest and slightly geeky personality against his sister’s more adamant one, and she introduces some characters we hope to see more of, especially Stink’s friend, Elizabeth (“call me Sophie of the Elves”), who looks like a small Edith Head. Reynolds’ illustrations, especially those that are featured in Stink’s comic books, add to the quirky humor and further develop mood and character with their perspective and energy. Readers of Judy Moody who requested that Stink have a book of his own will not be disappointed. KC

Andi’s sophomore year is a lonely one: her best friend has moved away, she’s
distant from her parents, her beloved older brother is away at college (after dropping out twice before), and at the moment her closest confidante is the cow she talks to on her way home from school. She’s therefore responsive to the attention when the man who regularly gives her a friendly honk as he drives by finally stops and picks her up. Thus begins a strange routine, in which Andi spends afternoons at a vacant house with Frank, dressing in sexy outfits he selects for her and receiving his sexual attentions; she ignores the fact that he doesn’t know her real name (she’s told him she’s Vanessa) and she knows nothing about him, she takes his voyeurism and fear of legal consequences for chivalry, and she decides that this is a significant, mature relationship wherein somebody is finally recognizing what she has to offer. For most of the book, Newman effectively walks a delicate balance, making Andi’s willingness to go with Frank both believable and understandable even as she lays out some clear indications that Andi’s being used; the problem isn’t specifically what happens (at least initially, when Andi is compliant), it’s that Andi believes it’s based on a meaning that isn’t actually there. The book undercuts its point by inexplicably setting the story in the early 1970s, making it ancient history to young readers, and by eventually turning Frank into an obvious villain, which unfortunately suggests that his malignity is the problem rather than the ludicrous power imbalance between a thirty-year-old man and a fifteen-year-old girl. Nonetheless, this is an emotional exploration of a vulnerable girl’s temptation into depths beyond her control.

NIELDS, NERISSA  Plastic Angel. Orchard, 2005 [208p]
ISBN 0-439-70913-X  $17.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-7

It’s the summer between eighth and ninth grade, and Randi’s summer mission is to start a rock band with her friend Gellie. Music would be a connection with Randi’s too-often-absent musician father as well as a possible route to popularity, but it’s also unfortunately a distraction from Gellie’s budding career as a model and actress, which Gellie’s mother considers paramount. Randi becomes increasingly invested in the band, Plastic Angel, and its possibilities, despite the fact that Gellie’s mother forbids her daughter’s participation and Randi’s own parents’ marital tension has erupted into separation. Nields is herself a musician, but that doesn’t result in any particularly compelling insider insights into the process; this is a fairly standard tale of young people whose suddenly emerging abilities would take them far if only their personal dramas would permit it. Randi herself has little character beyond her desire for approval and Gellie’s complicity, and the book tends to reduce people and situations to extremes for contrast. That’s not out of keeping with a middle-school viewpoint, though, so readers may cheerfully share Randi’s sweeping judgments; many will also share her yearning for musical self-expression, and they’ll get vicarious enjoyment from the young artist’s progress toward her dream. DS

NILSSON, PER  You & You & You; tr. by Tara Chace. Front Street, 2005 301p
ISBN 1-932425-19-5  $16.95 R Gr. 7-10

The yours in question in this offbeat Swedish import are twelve-year-old Anon, seventeen-year-old Zarah, and twenty-something Nils, whose lives run courses that are bound to intersect. In his blue galoshes, Anon is out of step with his peers; though bullied, he is nonetheless happy in his fantasies of his godlike father and of
Sara, a girl whom he has invented from a wallet he found abandoned near the bus stop. Zarah suffers from the malaise of the achingly beautiful; she gets whatever she wants but knows that everyone, from her sexy criminal boyfriend, Victor, to her co-worker Mia, with whom she desperately wants an uncomplicated friendship, desires her. Nils is searching for a reason to live by exploring what it would be like to die, spending the night in a coffin and talking his friend into burying him alive for a couple of hours. When Zarah wishes for life to surprise her, it does just that with Anon, who saves her, literally and figuratively, from a violent Victor, and with Nils, who offers her the strange complementary self for which she has been longing. Nilsson’s literary art blends the philosophical with the quotidian, producing a lyrical interplay that is never heavy-handed and is often quite funny. He inserts prose poems from an off-scene narrator who directly addresses the characters, querying their actions and motivations in order to lay bare the thematic resonances that connect the characters. The overt symbolism of Anon as a Christ figure (besides believing his dad is a god, he resurrects Zarah’s cat and appears to walk on water) and Zarah’s and Nils’ coincidental rebirths and yin-and-yang correspondence might be overbearing if the daydreaming messiah in blue galoshes weren’t so darned appealing and the plot so overlaid with existential joy. Theirs is a world in which to lose oneself for a pleasant while and emerge refreshed. KC

NYE, NAOMI SHIHAB  Going Going. Greenwillow, 2005  232p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029366-7  $16.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16185-5  $15.99  Ad  Gr. 7-10

Florrie’s passion for old things, especially “Old Buildings and Businesses run by Real People,” leads her to make a rather demanding birthday wish. She wants her family and, later, her friends and whomever else she can get to join her in boycotting all franchises for the sixteen weeks until the end of the year. She and her friends then hold rallies and put up signs all over San Antonio to promote small, family-owned businesses. The twin engines that drive this novel are Florrie’s eccentric personality and her obsessive and articulate commitment to the cause of preserving small businesses; there is, however, no real conflict within the story until Florrie’s sixteen-year-old heart finds itself drifting from her cause to a boy who doesn’t share her passion, but that is quickly dismissed as she recalls her first love for saving small businesses. Instead, Florrie’s efforts at combating the franchises are applauded for their idealism, inspiring front-page news stories, TV reports, and editorials, while a few brushes with the police end benignly. Thus, Florrie’s relentless activism is the plot, and it is only Nye’s poetic prose and her finely honed sense of character that prevent the agenda from overwhelming the reader, while the vivid depictions of the side streets and unique attractions of San Antonio offer additional allure. Despite the story’s weaknesses, Nye renders Florrie’s obsession in ways that may resonate with fans of Joan Bauer and that could inspire others to seek out and patronize the small businesses in their own communities. KC

OLSWANGER, ANNA  Shlemiel Crooks; illus. by Paula Goodman Koz. NewSouth, 2005  [36p]
ISBN 1-58838-165-X  $14.95
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 3-5

While Elias Olschwanger attends the synagogue one evening in 1919, two crooks
(unknowingly influenced by the ghost of Pharaoh, who is "still sore about losing his Israelite slaves") break into his saloon and attempt to steal crates of Passover wine. Fortunately for Elias, the thieves' horse (possibly under the influence of the ghost of the prophet Elijah, who could also "play a little dirty") chooses that moment to speak and yells out "Crooks! Crooks!", waking the neighbors and sending the thieves running. The style—colloquial English sprinkled with perfectly executed Yinglish asides—is inviting, and the action of the thieving is fast-paced, but the buildup to that point is long, rambling, and disjointed, including a humorous but tangential retelling of the Exodus story. The woodblock and watercolor paintings are uneven: some of the busier compositions overuse energetic swooshes and slashes, resulting in a feeling of frenzy even when the story is calm, but the iconic, standalone prints are effectively rendered, with bold black lines clearly defining planes of color. Despite the occasional lack in logical flow, this is an entertainingly executed tale that is shock full of subtle humor, and it is well suited to reading aloud. This story (first published in a magazine) is based in part on the life of the author's great-grandparents, saloonkeepers in St. Louis in the early part of the twentieth-century, and an author's note including the text of the newspaper articles that led to this story's composition is included. HM


Best friends Julia and Patrick want to come up with a prizeworthy animal husbandry project for the state fair. Since their townhouses only allow pets that live in cages, Julia's mom suggests raising silkworms as she did as a girl in Korea, and Patrick is off and running with the idea before Julia can articulate her reluctance for the project, which she feels is too Korean. She tries some minor sabotage, but Patrick is so excited that she doesn't have the heart to do much more than hope the project will fail. When things come together, however, she too becomes enthusiastic—until she realizes that in order to get the silk, they have to kill the worms they've carefully raised. Park has a sensitive ear for the nuances of self-doubt and burgeoning self-awareness that permeate junior-high experience, with Julia beginning to notice uncomfortable things about her parents, her friends, and herself that force her into moral decisions based on compromise and patience; for instance, she realizes that her mother harbors racial prejudices that are not in keeping with Julia's image of her. She further has to come to terms with her own selfishness and discomfort with her heritage as she works out what is more important—protecting her own prejudices or pleasing her friend. In between each chapter, Park produces little dialogues between her as a writer and Julia as a character, showing the give and take of the writing process and further exposing Julia's dissatisfaction with her seventh-grade self. Intended to reveal the conflicntual relationship writers sometimes experience with their creations, these interstitial dialogues are a bit on the cutesy side, but the story they interrupt is compelling reading as a narrative of friendship as well as of a fascinating science project. KC

PEARSON, MARY E.  A Room on Lorelei Street. Holt, 2005  266p ISBN 0-8050-7667-0  $16.95  Ad  Gr. 9-12

Zoe is "seventeen years old . . . going on a hundred" when she finally flees her home, where she's lone caretaker of her alcoholic mother, for a place of her own in
a house on Lorelei Street. It's a struggle for her to earn rent and expenses on her
waitress salary, especially since she's trying to keep up with school and the tennis
team as well as negotiate her thorny relationship with family and friends. At Lorelei
Street, however, she finds a champion in the landlady, Opal Keats, whose warm
support begins to bolster her gradual movement toward self-definition. Zoe's a
young woman fighting tough odds, and Pearson paints a dark picture of the ob-
cstacles she's overcoming: a grandmother who feels Zoe's job is to care for her
mother, a mother who's only interested in sex and alcohol, a father whose acciden-
tal death is suspicious indeed. As a literary character, however, she's fairly limited:
in action, she's mostly bitter and harsh, so she's sympathetic largely because of the
bad things that have happened to her and because of her yearnings; there's also
some sentimental overload in the portrayal of Zoe's grim existence and Opal's
plucky eccentricity that undercuts the effect of Zoe's growth. Pearson nonetheless
 crafts smooth and thoughtful prose, and there's honesty in Zoe's tendency to make
mistakes that degrade her (such as resorting to taking money for sex) even as she's
trying to better herself. Readers drawn to rescue dramas may particularly appreci-
ate this story of a girl who's trying against odds to rescue herself. DS

PELLETIER, ANDREW T.  The Amazing Adventures of Bathman; illus. by Peter
Elwell. Dutton, 2005 32p
ISBN 0-525-47164-2  $15.99  R 3-7 yrs
A tranquil Saturday night is interrupted by calls for help from the vicinity of the
bathroom. Never fear, though, because Bathman is ready to answer any challenge.
Shedding clothes as he thunders down the hall, a young boy leaps into the tub in
Sendakian splendor (though he is more modest than Sendak's infamous Mickey,
whom he greatly resembles). He assesses the situation, interrogates the witnesses,
and finally takes the plunge to save the hapless Ducky from the evil Cap'n Squee-
gee. Pelletier certainly knows his way around classic comic books; this squeaky
 clean protocomic features all of the elements of the genre it mimics, including
boxed text, advertising asides, and mock-heroic dialogue splashed with corny puns.
Spacious but animated full-color watercolors (what else?) keep the energy high as
our intrepid hero squares off against the foul villain, and comic elements, such
as direct hits with Tattoo Torpedoes in delicate places, will keep this narrative plenty
buoyant for young heroes of the bounding main, er, bounding bathtub. KC

PERRY, ELIZABETH  Think Cool Thoughts; illus. by Linda Bronson. Clarion,
2005  [32p]
ISBN 0-618-23493-4 $16.00
Reviewed from galleys Ad 6-9 yrs
It's a hot city summer, "so hot that chocolate bars melted before you could eat
them, and the pavement stuck to your sneakers," and to add insult to injury the
nights seem even hotter. Seven-year-old Angel tries to think cool thoughts, but
what really intrigues her is her aunt's childhood story of taking the mattresses up
to the roof and sleeping under the summer sky. Angel's mother gives permission,
and "Angel got to sleep on the roof in her underwear," listening to the grownups' 
quiet talk; the rising dawn brings not only a cool breeze but a much-welcomed
rainfall, in which Angel, her mother, and aunt luxuriate (after bringing the mat-
tresses back inside). The story recalls Hesse's lyrical Come On, Rain! (BCCB 4/99),
and Perry is similarly effective at evoking the oppressiveness of summer heat and
the painful slowness of time spent enduring it. The text runs on quite long for a picture book, which tends to compound rather than relieve the sultry atmosphere, but there's a lot of vivid scene-setting and quiet depiction of family relationships, especially the connections between Angel's mother and aunt. Surges of color, particularly candy hues of pink, violet, and orange, predominate in the acrylic-and-oil illustrations, making the family's soothing cocoa shades look rather cooler than their environs. The figures and backgrounds are strongly lined yet meltingly skewed, with the people's features possessing a cubist sharpness that plays against their curvy, rounded geometry; unfortunately, the high impact is often unrelieved by balance or shaping, resulting in busy and unfocused compositions, and the stylization of the figures dilutes their emotional impact. For those possessed of sufficient ice cream or air conditioning to keep the audience cool for the duration, though, this would make an atmospheric readaloud that may inspire intergenerational sharing of summer memories. DS

PRICEMAN, MARJORIE  

Priceman isn't the first children's author to capitalize on the kid-pleasing aspects of the Montgolfier brothers' balloon launch, with its basket full of barnyard passengers (see McGrory's Mouton's Impossible Dream, BCCB 4/00). With its imaginative reconstruction of the flight and the riot of circus colors, though, this promises to be the rendition of the historic feat to rivet young listeners. The opening spreads suggest a traditional nonfiction picture book approach, with an opening date—September 19, 1783—and historical background (delivered in present progressive tense and cadence similar to that of the Provensens' The Glorious Flight). But soon both text and illustration break into vertical panels as the airship rises aloft; text trickles down to a few words, then animal sounds, and then ... a wordless fantasy in which the voyagers muddle their way through a host of airborne dilemmas. A young archer takes a shot at the basket, clothes fly off a laundry line in an updraft, a church spire threatens to pop the balloon, and a dive-bombing fleet of birds tip the basket. There's a flood (don't ask—it makes sense) and some quick bailing, but not much can be done about the bird with his bill driven into the balloon; down the balloonists go in a quartet of panels that capture the toppling aeronauts startled silly. Now it's back to traditional text, the true ending of the tale, and an endpaper recap of the episode. Illustrations are chock-a-block with goofy shenanigans that demand several viewings to appreciate, and the emotive passengers should keep the audience cackling in delight. And who's to say it didn't happen exactly like that? EB

REICHERT, AMY  
While Mama Had a Quick Little Chat; illus. by Alexandra Boiger. Jackson/Atheneum, 2005 40p ISBN 0-689-85170-7 $15.95  R  5-7 yrs

Rose, a redheaded moppet with glaring red-and-blue striped socks, repeatedly answers the door while her mother gabs on the phone, letting in a band of party suppliers, a troupe of partygoers, a magician, and a jazz band. What's a girl to do? Why, mingle with the guests, step in as the magician's assistant, and dazzle the band with her rhythmic virtuosity on the drums—then send the whole party out the door before Mama gets done chatting and goes to find Rose in bed, asleep.
The scads of cheerful guests and performers speak graciously and appreciatively to Rose, giving that long-suffering girl ample cause to finally capitulate and enjoy being the life of the party, and the pictures packed with widely smiling visitors bear out the happy-go-lucky tone of the text. Unfortunately, the effervescent rhyming couplets that constitute most of the story shift meter with abandon, making practice readings a must, and the intricately detailed illustrations will show to better advantage on a lap than before a group. In spite of these limits on the book's utility as a readaloud, this is an attractive tall tale with a winsome protagonist and dramatic illustrations. The elaborate scenes are filled with slickly cartooned, exaggeratedly fashionable people (though it's stereotypical that the jazz band presents the only people of color there). The figures float in washes of gray and blue strategically splashed with dabs of orange-red, with Rose's and her mother's hair and footwear, as well as guests' clothing and an array of paper lanterns, accenting the calmer colors and providing visual impact. Put-upon Rose is a natural successor to those kids who entertained another surprise visitor in The Cat in the Hat. TC


NASCAR meets science fiction in this story about hover-car racers, "part race-car driver, part fighter pilot, all superstar." Jason Chaser, fourteen-year-old hover-car racer, has just been invited to attend the International Race School, "the most prestigious racing school in the world," with his twelve-year-old navigator (and brother), the Bug. At school, lessons in race tactics and electromagnetic physics, hours of pit practice, and weekly school races prepare young hopefuls for a possible pro career. Competition from the best up-and-coming racers in the world, including Jason's old rival and the first female racer to be accepted into the School, is tough enough, but a string of sabotaged equipment leaves Jason at the bottom of the standings, and if he can't find the culprit soon, he'll be knocked out of the running for the all-important mid-year Sponsor's Event. The high-adrenaline, high-stakes world of hover-car racing comes alive in this Australian import, complete with in-depth descriptions of the look and handling of hover cars and three-dimensional race maps. A brief look at the advent of the hover car and its worldwide adoption is almost plausible in its simplicity, describing a world much like our own. The plot—part school story, part sports story—is conventional and characterizations are quick and dirty, but that's okay, since they both take a backseat to the pulse-pounding racing action. Accounts of the races themselves are detailed and drawn out for maximum intensity, giving a whole new meaning to the term "speed reading"; this first in a series should give young speed demons a future to cheer for. Raimondi's black-and-white action comics keep the look revved up. KH

RICHARDSON, JUSTIN And Tango Makes Three; by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell; illus. by Henry Cole. Simon, 2005 32p ISBN 0-689-87845-1 $14.95 R 5-8 yrs

A few years ago in Central Park Zoo, a pair of male chinstrap penguins, Roy and Silo, pair-bonded; when another penguin couple had an extra fertilized egg, the keeper gave it to Roy and Silo to incubate, and the result was a chick named Tango, who happily grew up with Roy and Silo as parents. Richardson and Parnell
turn this event into a sweet but not sappy story, writing with a matter-of-fact simplicity about penguin practices and Roy and Silo’s companionship and parent- ing. Though celebrity cover quotes and flap copy hint at well-meaning lessons, the text itself is blessedly light on heavy-handed extrapolation (just as well, since the idea of taking domestic patterns from the animal kingdom would lead to some infelicitous outcomes), instead focusing on the appealing story of the penguin pair and their family. Cole’s illustrations, watercolors touched with colored pencil, use the penguins’ contrasting black-and-white to good graphic effect, keeping other colors slightly muted. Though the occasional touch of anthropomorphism in the penguins’ facial expressions is superfluous, since the birds have no shortage of charm as they really are, the imaginative compositions provide plenty of liveliness. While this could introduce a discussion about various kinds of families, it’s also a cheerful and endearing animal story that should please any aficionado of the zoo’s penguin enclosure. DS

ROCKWELL, ANNE  
*Little Shark*; illus. by Megan Halsey.  Walker, 2005  32p  
Trade ed. ISBN 0-8027-8955-2  $15.95  R  4-7 yrs

Immediately after his birth, Little Shark’s mother and forty-nine siblings swim off and leave him “on his own in the deep and dangerous sea. Swim fast, Little Shark.” Little Shark may be a sympathetic newborn, but he’s also a formidable predator, and Rockwell keeps both aspects of the fish in audience sight at all times. While discussing the shark’s adaptations for tracking and consuming prey, she also explains their need for constant movement in order to take in oxygen and offers a few simple contrasts between sharks and other fish. Halsey’s painted, cut, and layered illustrations are well designed to maximize contrast within the underwater scenes; featured fauna and flora in each spread pop slightly to the foreground, while other marine life is painted onto the subtly streaked, waterspotted background. Other notable visual touches include an x-ray-styled comparative view of cod and human bony skeletons with a shark cartilage skeleton, magnifying glass close-ups of rounded fish scales and spiky shark denticles, and a spread that challenges viewers to identify the kind of shark Little Shark will grow up to be (blue shark, in case you wonder). Rockwell reassures listeners of Little Shark’s promising future: “See, no big shark has caught him. No fisherman has caught him either. Little Shark will reach twelve or thirteen feet long, as he keeps growing until he is old.” How old? That, and other information of likely interest to listeners, is buried in a closing note, and no remark is ever made as to the probable fate of Little Shark’s siblings. Still, this is a useful and attractive introduction to sharks that will be particularly suitable for children who squirm at the sight or thought of blood. EB

RODMAN, MARY ANN  
*My Best Friend*; illus. by E. B. Lewis.  Viking, 2005  32p  
ISBN 0-670-05989-7  $15.99  R  5-7 yrs

Six-year-old Lily sees seven-year-old Tamika at the pool every Wednesday and has decided that the older girl would make a great best friend. Tamika generally ignores her, preferring instead to play with the snobby Shanice, but that doesn’t stop Lily from going to great ends to win her attention (she buys a bathing suit just like hers and works on perfecting her dive). One day, when Shanice isn’t there, Tamika spends the day with Lily; subsequently convinced that they are now best friends,
Lily is stunned to be mocked by Shanice and her accomplice Tamika the following week. In the end, Keesha, a different Wednesday pool-goer, surfaces, and the promise of best-friendship looms bright for Lily after all. It won't take readers long to recognize that Tamika doesn't have a whole lot to offer in the friendship department; what stands out in the narrative trajectory of this story is the acknowledgment that even devotions that don't make the most sense can have a huge emotional impact on a little girl. Lily doesn't have a good reason to desire Tamika's friendship (short of liking her cornrows), but that doesn't make the rejection hurt any less. The first-person voice is laden with realistic angst and confusion as Lily treads the murky waters of befriending the older girl, and young listeners will likely be wholly satisfied to see Lily turn her attention to Keesha. Lewis' artfully rendered watercolor illustrations realistically portray the insular community of the public pool. The swimsuit-clad characters are perfectly proportioned (with six-year-old bellies sticking out from two-piece suits) and the plays of light and shadow against the moving water are skillfully created. Young listeners are likely to identify with the poolside politics played out in this tender story of the challenge of building summer friendships. HM

RUDITIS, PAUL  
Rainbow Party.  Simon Pulse, 2005  248p
Ad  Gr. 9-12

Gin has never been one to confuse sex with love, but she does seem to have a skewed idea about party games: after hearing about “rainbow parties” (where girls wearing different colored lipsticks perform fellatio on multiple boys, so that the boys end up with rainbows on their penises) on a TV talk show, she decides that this would be a good way to make some mischief, help her best friend overcome her shyness toward a certain boy, and gain a broader base of popularity than she currently enjoys. Beginning a couple of hours before the party, the book focuses on the ensemble cast of invited guests as they decide whether or not they will go to the party. This technique allows Ruditis to explore a variety of attitudes toward sexual behavior, including whether or not oral sex is technically sex or if it even constitutes any sort of intimate behavior at all. Reciprocity is also at issue in multiple ways: some of the girls agree that it’s unfair for the boys not to give as good as they get, and while Perry has serviced Hunter forty-seven times (but who’s counting?), would Hunter’s repaying the favor mean they were gay? For Gin, though, there is no question: oral sex puts her in control of her partner’s pleasure, and that’s exactly where she wants to be. Despite the salacious topic, Ruditis avoids shock and titillation; the party preparations and discussions are handled with an almost clinical detachment, and most of the would-be participants come to well-considered decisions that would probably please their parents (the addition of a raging case of oral gonorrhea completes Ruditis’ cautionary tale). The resulting text is more an attitudinal survey than a well-plotted narrative, but it guarantees readers will ask multiple questions as they consider where they stand on the issue. KC

SEYMOUR, TRES  
Auction!; illus. by Cat Bowman Smith.  Candlewick, 2005  [32p]
Reviewed from galleys  R  6-9 yrs

“Whee-oo! There’s going to be an auction!” announces Aunt Lou, flying into the kitchen with newspaper in hand. Perhaps the only other person as excited as Aunt
Lou is Miss Lodgson, her archrival in winning auction bids: “Nobody could outbid Aunt Lou and Miss Lodgson when they got going.” Told from the first-person perspective of a young niece, this is an entertaining romp of a tale through a local county auction, chock full of goods both desirable (a set of blue china) and not (a taxidermy groundhog). The plot, which mostly centers on this rivalry, takes a nice twist when the niece, much to the surprise of all the folks in attendance, hollers out a higher bid than either lady when a desired straw hat is on the block. The noise and excitement of the auction is effectively captured by the auctioneer’s running speech; his long strings of selling songs appear in bold type laid out in arcs that follow the curve of his bullhorn, and it is easy to hear his singsong holler in the reading. There is a subtle humor in the fact that the two ladies are outbidding each other just for the sake of outbidding (the stuffed groundhog goes for $175, and Uncle Bill is in a perpetual state of near-fainting as his wife’s useless catch increases), and while young listeners may not get that right away, they’ll still enjoy watching the competitors’ faces grow flushed as the bids escalate. Smith’s watercolor-and-ink illustrations capture the frenzied excitement of the special day; she is especially successful at making each of the random cast of characters look distinct. Despite the mandatory clutter of an auction, pages never feel overcrowded or messy. The intense energy of the face-off between Aunt Lou and Miss Logsdon is subtly captured in eye shifts, facial movements, and body language as well as in the dialogue. Storytime programs are likely to benefit greatly from the noisy addition of an auctioneer’s siren call. HM

SIDMAN, JOYCE  
Song of the Water Boatman & Other Pond Poems; illus. by Beckie Prange. Houghton, 2005 [32p]  
ISBN 0-618-13547-2 $16.00  
Reviewed from galleys  

Sidman, author of The World According to Dog (BCCB 3/03), turns to a different aspect of the natural world here in this collection of eleven poems of pond life. Featured denizens range from ducks to duckweed to dragonflies, many of them narrating their own verse (a paragraph of biological explanation accompanies each poem); there’s also a seasonal arc as the poems progress from spring through summer, fall, and winter. Entries vary effectively in style and format: “In the Depths of the Summer Pond” cleverly draws on “The House That Jack Built” to limn the food chain, “Song of the Water Boatman and Backswimmer’s Refrain” evokes sea shanties and, of course, the Volga Boatman, and duckweed introduces itself in the crisp free verse of “A Small Green Riddle.” Throughout, soundplay is employed with delicate exuberance, making these tasty verses for reading aloud as well as alone, and the generously scattered imagery is telling and inventive. Prange’s woodcuts recall those of her Minnesotan compatriot Betsy Bowen, but they evince their own style as well, particularly in the touches of intricate patterning in flora and fauna (the microscopic world of the water bear is especially elegantly conveyed); compositions are exceptionally dramatic as they balance fluid curves, open space of water and sky, and dense lines of landscape or creature. This would pair nicely with Marilyn Singer’s Turtle in July (BCCB 9/89), or it would serve admirably on its own as an atmospheric sequence to introduce kids to a world they don’t know or lead them to reconsider one they take for granted. A glossary of natural-history terms employed in the poems is included. DS
SIMMONS, MICHAEL  
Finding Lubchenko.  Razorbill, 2005  [288p]
Reviewed from galleys  R*  Gr. 7-10

Evan Macalister slides through most of his days with offhanded glibness and without major event; though he’s crushing silently on his good friend Erika, loudly resenting his wealthy father’s sternness and tight pursestrings, and secretly engaging in some lucrative larceny from his father’s medical-research firm, his life is largely undisturbed by significant achievement. All this changes abruptly when his father’s colleague is found murdered in his office and Dr. Macalister is arrested for the crime, which is apparently linked to illegal sales of the deadly smallpox virus from his lab. Evan knows his dad is wrongly accused, and what’s worse (in his eyes, anyway) is his own implication: one of Evan’s thefts from the building was the dead man’s laptop, which contains revealing yet cryptic messages about solving the smallpox thefts by meeting up in Paris with somebody identified only as “Lubchenko.” Filled with the desire to protect himself and some modest inclination to save his father, Evan cheerfully employs his father’s credit cards to get himself, his genius friend, Ruben, and of course Erika to Paris (and rooms at the Ritz, yet) in the hopes of finding the mysterious Lubchenko. This has some initial similarities to Simmons’ sparkling Pool Boy (BCCB 6/03) in the incarcerated parent and the resentful and smart-mouthed son, but those tropes turn here into a witty-edged adventure that’s just begging to be made into a movie, sardonic voiceover narration and all. The crime plot itself is weak in spots, since the players are pretty obvious from the get-go and Lubchenko, who handily cleans up the matter for the teens, is found largely through diligent Parisian hanging out rather than any clever footwork. That’s okay—it’s really Evan, the goofball moral lightweight who’s not entirely sorry that his dictatorial father has run into some trouble of his own, who makes the story here. His narrative voice, filled with laconic fragments and compact sentences, is relentlessly funny in its casual yet studied offhandedness, and he’s authentic in his ability to remain pretty much the opportunistic trouble-hound he is (his spree with Dad’s credit cards supports more than just detective efforts) despite the seriousness of the situation and despite his fairly accurate self-perceptions (“I am a fount of bad ideas. And I’ve never had a bad idea I didn’t follow through on”). Evan might be a questionable real-life friend, but he and his father’s credit cards are great literary company on this offbeat adventure.  DS

SORRELLS, WALTER  
Fake ID.  Sleuth/Dutton, 2005  [256p]
Reviewed from galleys  Ad  Gr. 9-12

Every time sixteen-year-old Chass and her mom move to a new town, they go to the public library and pick new names at random from a book, which is how she ended up with the unlikely moniker of Chastity Pureheart. Chass knows they are on the run, but she doesn’t know why; all she knows is that her mom believes music is bad luck. After a record three years in High Hopes, Alabama, Chass is beginning to feel settled and is secretly developing her natural musical talent. Then her mom disappears, and the police find her bloodstained car and six fake IDs at an abandoned house. Chass realizes her mother has run again and, with the help of two friends, Ben and Brittany, resolves to discover what her mother was eluding before it finds her. Sorrells has written a convoluted, fast-paced thriller with mul-
multiple mysteries that eventually converge into one dramatic showdown over an accidently taped murder confession. Chass has an appealing voice, and her authority issues and smart-mouth comments work well in the "at the mercy of the state" position within which she finds herself. Despite the fact that Chass stumbles onto clues more than discovers them and relies on adults more than the average youth sleuth, her investigation moves forward under her own steam and she turns up some chilling information. Chass' friends and the story's adults are perfunctory characters, and the perfect way the threads come together (everybody tells everybody else what they've been doing this whole time) is a bit of a disappointment. Still, none of this detracts much from the immediacy of the danger and the necessity of solving the mystery, and mystery fans will find this an entertaining choice.

KH


Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt loved potatoes; to that end, he traveled the world on a quest to find the perfect potato dish, leaving many a business closed in the wake of his scathing reviews. In 1853, he arrived in Saratoga; there, after the persnickety Vanderbilt sent several potato dishes back to the kitchen, declaring them inedible, a fry chef named George Crum deliberately served his customer a plate of overfried, oversalted, thinly sliced spuds, and "he ate the whole plateful! Then he demanded . . . more? Yes!" While the invention of the potato chip may not seem the most riveting of picture-book topics, the balanced combination of fact (George Crum is in fact credited with having invented potato chips in Saratoga in the mid-nineteenth century) and legend (Vanderbilt never made the described quest, though he may have eaten in the restaurant where Crum worked) makes for a comical exploration of food history. Stowell's newsy narrative style is entertainingly dramatic, and it pairs nicely with Watts' stylized illustrations. Sweeping lines and curls accentuate the frenetic energy of Crum's culinary activity, and onomatopoeic asides ("Sizzle!" "Dice!" "Poof!") hand-lettered in a multitude of colors, further contribute to the lively action. An author's note, bibliography, and potato-chip recipe are included. HM

VAN DUSEN, Chris  *If I Built a Car*; written and illus. by Chris Van Dusen. Dutton, 2005 32p ISBN 0-525-47400-5 $15.99 R 4-8 yrs

It's a dirty job, but sometimes a kid's got to do it—apprise Dad that the family station wagon is not up to snuff. Jack breaks it as gently as he can: "This car is OK. This car is not bad. But it's just a car. Nothing great. Nothing grand. It's nothing at all like the car I have planned." As a true visionary, circa the late 1950s, Jack articulates his own superior design: a vehicle of epic size, with rear jet engines, jutting tail fins, and a bulbous Plexiglas dome. There's room enough for a swimming pool, living-room furniture, and a snack bar dispensing such delights as chocolate sodas and stringy cheese from an aerosol can. Should Dad become indolent from all this luxury, Robert the Robot will gladly take the wheel. It's road-, air-, and seaworthy, and it boasts an impact resistant polymer-gel body and an environmentally friendly exhaust system that can "capture the odor of burnt gasoline/ And change it to something more pleasing to noses—/ Like blueberry
muffins or freshly picked roses." Jack's fantasy is faithful to his era, inspired by the rockets and robots and Wienermobiles that litter his well-appointed bedroom in his tidily manicured suburban ranch house and appropriately tricked out in Melmac hues and dazzling chrome. Jack's (well, Van Dusen's) one anachronistic gaffe is a reference to "Belize" (not so named until 1973) as a destination—but, hey, just try to rhyme "British Honduras." When kids get an eyeful of Jack's new wheels, the cruise night competition's bound to lose some of its Turtle Wax luster. EB

VANOOSTING, JAMES Walking Mary. HarperCollins, 2005 [144p]
Reviewed from galleys

Everyone in Framburg, Illinois, knows Walking Mary, the elderly African-American woman who dresses in a tattered mink coat, meets every train that passes through the junction, and casts spells, according to rumor, on those foolish enough to look her in the eye. Teenager Pearl Keenan, whose nearsighted vision was miraculously improved when she locked gazes with the woman as a young child, may be the first to explore who Mary really is and to reach out to her in friendship. What begins as basic curiosity evolves into a daily appointment and, ultimately, a mysterious late-night disappearance that proves deadly. Part urban legend, part ghost story, VanOosting's short novel, based on an infamous character from his own childhood, is engagingly written and chillingly eerie. The objective narrative voice speaks both intimately and detachedly to the reader, and the chapters, which function somewhat independently, are each carefully woven both internally and with each other, resulting in a coherent cinematic recounting of events. The added perspective of Frankie, Pearl's devoted little brother, imbues the tale with an insider/outsider take on her unusual actions, and the uncomfortable family dynamic (it is suggested that Pearl's father molests her) helps to explain Pearl's odd and risky behaviors. Walking Mary is a fascinating, mystical character, and Pearl's eager advances at befriending her along with her girl-detective approach will readily engage even reluctant readers. HM

WALLACE-BRODEUR, RUTH Heron Cove. Dutton, 2005 138p
Ad Gr. 4-6

Sage's mother is "fixated on what she called her personal essence," constantly going off to take this course or that workshop; the summer that Sage is twelve, however, Mama's personal-improvement plans involve leaving Sage alone with her elderly great-aunts in distant Maine. Expecting the worst, Sage is pleasantly surprised by her aunties' warmth and welcoming and taken in by their knowledge of family history. Over the course of the summer, Sage comes to recognize how desperately she has longed for some semblance of family; her father, who didn't even know she existed, passed away earlier that year, and her mother has maintained an uncomfortable distance from her own parents and, as of late, from Sage. This contemporary novel has a quiet, period feel, due in part to the aunties' quaint ways and the descriptions of the sleepy little oceanside town of Heron Cove. Aunts Bea and Addie are kind, enthusiastic caretakers, and their unquestioned willingness to support Sage through her processes of self-awareness drives the sharing of family lore; Sage's devotion to them grows in response to this gentle care. While the story deals directly with the tragic family history of the aunties' abusive father, it
is less successful in facing the deeper issue of Sage's frustrations with her mother. When she ultimately realizes that, much as she loves Heron Cove, she wants to go back to her mother, she is left fearing that her mother may not want her. When her mother does return at summer's end, Sage's frustrations are neatly resolved mostly offstage, leaving readers wondering about the details of the resolution. This therefore lacks the edge of Horvath's similarly themed _The Canning Season_ (BCCB 7/03), but certain readers are likely to identify with the role that family history can play in helping an individual find identity. HM


A man who brings home a magical broom fails to give the broom the exercise she needs until a helpful veterinarian sets him straight. Thereafter, the broom not only sweeps the man's front walk every day, she dances with him through the night—until another man steals her and advertises her as "Marvelous Martha—the only dancing broom in captivity." Of course, the broom cannot be forced to dance, so she ends up chucked in the river, whence she is rescued by the man who loves her. However, having seen the world, the broom is no longer content with domestic sweeping. Instead, she sweeps away the clouds and polishes a rainbow before taking her rightful place as the sweeper-away of nighttime stars in the silent hours before the dawn. Told in lyrical prose, this could be a beautiful tale; however, transitions between story beats seem arbitrary, with the plot trajectory becoming strange and random midway. Consequently, the man and the broom become symbols rather than rounded characters, and their lack of personality leaves the ending flat and saccharine. The oil wash and colored pencil illustrations are rich in country reds, greens, and blues, overlaid with umber lights that give the pages a luminous glow. Unfortunately, the visuals evince the same hit-and-miss quality as the text: some spreads pull the viewer right into the page with freewheeling curves and fervent color (as does the emotive image of the man waltzing with his beloved broom), but others tend toward coyness in pose and a distancing graininess of texture. Some viewers and listeners will eagerly fill in the blanks themselves, but others will opt for a more dynamic bit of bedtime whimsy such as Tusa's _How to Make a Night_ (BCCB 11/04). TC


Interspecies romances hardly ever work out, but when a tadpole and a caterpillar base their love vows on the promise that neither of them will change, you just know from the outset that they are doomed. Sure enough, the shiny black tadpole betrays his faithful vow to his beloved rainbow-colored caterpillar by growing legs and arms and losing his tail. He assures her that he doesn't want these appendages, only her, but she will not be mollified by his pretty words. As she cries herself to sleep, he sinks to the bottom of his pond, sending his love to her in heart-shaped bubbles that pop poignantly on the surface. Some time later, she awakens with wings and forgiveness and returns to the pond to seek out her "shiny black pearl," whereupon their doomed fate becomes laugh-out-loud morbid. Ross' softly grayed watercolors with their squiggly ink outlines provide the perfect complement to this tale of love gone awry, filling the space around the lovers with little underwa-
ter vaudevillian gags—the fish chasing the tadpoles, followed by the newly limbed tadpoles chasing the fish, the tadpoles trying out their new arms by shaking hands and tipping hats, etc. He manages the perfect balance of loss, despondency, and bewilderment in the expression of the devoted frog waiting patiently for the return of his lost love. The sideways layout of the book aptly matches both the subject matter of a caterpillar hanging over a pond, the surface of which lands in the gutter of the page, and the twisted nature of the tale itself. The final joke still plays well the second and third time through, so expect calls for an encore. KC

Reviewed from galleys

Several different human stories converge in a small cathedral city in Northern France: eleven-year-old Alma, tired of perfunctory foster placements, seeks a permanent home; the children living with Madame Jouet fear that something terrible has happened to four of their foster siblings, who have disappeared; Barlach, the silent old streetsweeper, finds himself mysteriously drawn to the cathedral. It’s at the cathedral that the stories converge, because that’s where Malocchio, the cathedral’s guide and caretaker, has been holding the kidnapped children, whom Alma finds and determines to free—if she doesn’t end up becoming Malocchio’s victim herself. Wizowaty laces her story with tantalizing near-mystical elements and echoes of classic folk and written tales, and even the names of her characters (Alma, the soul; Malocchio, the evil eye) suggest symbolic or allegorical significance. The atmosphere of the small French town and the cathedral itself are effectively conveyed, with modern touches blending with the traditional ways of the area and the ancient echoes of the cathedral. The mystery itself, however, fails to jell: the extent and methodology of Malocchio’s crimes are unclear, and Barlach (who strongly evokes To Kill a Mockingbird’s Boo Radley) doesn’t end up playing that direct a role, so there doesn’t seem to be much point to his self-sacrifice; moreover, Alma is really the only vivid character, so the narrative shifts, especially to Madame Jouet’s flatly depicted group of kids, lessen the impact. Westall’s Stones of Muncaster Cathedral (BCCB 4/93) is therefore a considerably superior cathedral mystery involving missing children, but readers with a particular taste for moody and textured setting may still relish the dark happenings in picturesque surroundings. DS


His family’s farm in post-Revolutionary America is a mite boring for free-spirited Jacob (nicknamed Deb), especially since his mother won’t allow him to pursue his interest in hexes and charms. Disregarding her ban, Deb attempts a hex to cure himself of wanderlust. That hex appears to fail, but when Deb breaks his leg too badly to be healed, he fears the hex has worked all too well—in fact, his troubled dreams reveal that his soul is being stalked through the spirit world by a loony old man who keeps catching at Deb’s wounded leg and threatening to imprison him forever. Only Deb’s possession of Grandpa’s lucky silver penny keeps the wicked old coot (later identified as Old Scratch) at bay. The arrival on the farm of an otherworldly boy, Bray, further complicates the story; a true-hearted spirit, Bray has come in search of the silver penny he gave away long ago after saturating it
with his tears (thus giving the penny its potency). When Deb retreats into the
spirit realm, sunk in depression over his accident, he is trapped there by Old Scratch;
gerously, Bray offers his own pure self in exchange and sets Deb free. From that
point on, this offbeat frontier fantasy shows Deb laboring to come to terms with
the incapacitated body awaiting him at home while he trudges, quite whole, through
the hills and woods of an ethereal version of colonial America. A few coincidental
yet satisfying encounters with spirit strangers lead Deb to the point where he is
willing to give up the silver penny, rescue Bray, and resume his life where he left it
off. A disarmingly persuasive tale of a rambunctious boy who does his most-
needed maturing while wandering in the head, this unconventional story offers
readers a twisting, turning journey through the hinterland of the soul. TC

ZENATTI, VALERIE When I Was a Soldier; tr. from the French by Adriana

In this French memoir, Valérie, an Israeli citizen of five years, embarks on her two-
year compulsory tour with the Israeli Army. Apart from her natural reluctance to
leave her close friends, she enters the service with a fairly open-minded attitude
and a willingness to do what is expected of her. Nonetheless, separation pains
from family and girlfriends, an on-again/off-again relationship with her unfaithful
boyfriend, serious reservations about the justice of Israeli occupation in Palestinian
territory, and the possibility of failure in advanced secret-service training all take
their toll, leading to a physical breakdown and subsequent counseling but never
preventing her from carrying out her duty on a highly secret radio surveillance
team. Zenatti spends more time recounting her few months of training than her
stretch as a working corporal, and the single mission described here amounts to no
more than a couple of pages. There’s enough relationship drama behind the scenes
to carry the tale, though, and American readers whose familiarity with the Armed
Forces is limited to voluntary enlistment should be intrigued by the very concept
of universal compulsory service. EB

There’s a behind-the-scenes change happening at the Bulletin this summer: we’re
beginning a partnership with Johns Hopkins University Press, who will be han-
dling our subscriptions and advertising starting with the new volume year. This
change shouldn’t disturb our readers, since subscriptions will be automatically trans-
ferred, and renewal mailings will provide all the necessary updated information.
This partnership also means that the Bulletin will become part of Project Muse,
the electronic journals service; while we are discussing the possibility of remodel-
ing and remounting the Bulletin Online for independent subscriber access as well,
our current reviews will be available virtually to the many Project Muse subscrib-
ers.

We look forward to the new possibilities this partnership can bring, and we hope
you will continue to enjoy your Bulletin subscription.
Subject and Use Index

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.

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