



2005

### The Dark Hills Divide

Patricia Castelli

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Carman, Patrick. *The Dark Hills Divide*. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0439700930. \$11.95. 253 pp.

Reviewer: Patricia Castelli

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Not recommended

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Human-animal communication--Juvenile fiction; Forest animals--Juvenile fiction;

Magic--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Alexa lives in a walled city, completely cut off from the outside world, until her discovery of the key to a secret passageway makes her desire to explore the outside world a possibility.

Although this popular book received primarily good editorial reviews, the setting is sloppy and the main character has such an inconsistent voice she seems to be too old or too young for her twelve years. Her diction is quaint or kid-next-door slang, depending on the page. The introduction of the fantasy element more than halfway through the book (Alexa's ability to talk to animals) introduces yet another world that chokes reason. The setting--a world of small cities totally isolated by tall walls--makes it clear to readers that there are no farms, no mines, no forestry and no trade with the outside world. How then do these people eat, drink wine, clothe themselves, have books, glass, metals, roaring fires and, of course, horses (what about waste removal?). This is a book where the author has given no thought to creating a world worthy of suspending a reader's disbelief.