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Scat

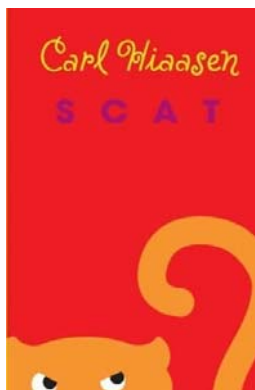
Donna Cardon

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Hiaasen, Carl. *Scat*. Knopf, 2009. ISBN 9780375834868. \$16.99. 384 p.

Reviewer: Donna Cardon

Reading Level: Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction; Detective and Mystery Stories; Adventure;

Subject: Wilderness areas--Juvenile fiction; Florida--Juvenile fiction; Wildlife conservation--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

Nick has the toughest biology teacher in the world. Mrs. Starch is not intimidated by anything or anyone, including the tough, pencil-eating, pyromaniac misfit, Duane. Then one day Mrs. Starch disappears when a fire breaks out during a field trip to the Florida Everglades. Nick and his friend Marta suspect that Duane, nicknamed Smoke because of his history of setting fires, is involved. As they investigate the matter further, they find themselves in the middle of a desperate struggle to save an endangered panther cub.

This book is full of interesting characters in complicated situations. Even the secondary characters are fully realized. The faithful friend, fire investigator, low-down crook, minion, bum father, and eccentric environmentalist all have a past and a story to tell. While the characters in this story are perhaps stronger than those in his earlier children's novels, (*Hoot*, 2002 and *Flush*, 2007 Knopf Books for Young Readers) the climax sequence stretches the boundaries of believability and logic. Why, exactly, did Nick have to climb the tree to return the panther cub? Despite the improbable ending, there is much here to interest upper grade school and middle school readers, both boys and girls, who might have interests in animals or the environment.

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