1994

Student Reviews

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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Wolff, Andrew B.; Lewis, Sara; Hales, Marianne; Blakesley, Lori; VanOrder, Alison Miner; and Hale, Judith (1994) 'Student Reviews,' Children's Book and Media Review: Vol. 15 : Iss. 1 , Article 6. Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol15/iss1/6

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Student Reviews

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This book review is available in Children's Book and Media Review: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol15/iss1/6
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Reviewed by Andrew B. Wolff

T. J. and Grandma Ruth, who has Alzheimer's disease, find themselves at the mercy of a crazed arsonist who is determined to avenge the loss of his store. Later they are surrounded by a group of bullies who insist on badgering Grandma Ruth. Kehret takes a look at what real courage is, as T. J. learns to stand up for himself, his grandmother, and their beliefs.

The book is a quick read, full of action and suspense. It is targeted at adolescent boys who enjoy basketball, adventure, and mystery. It successfully teaches about having courage and personal integrity.

*Night of Fear* suffers some because Kehret attempts to make T. J. act older than he really is. She also seems to be stretching reality as the night's events predictably end—they all live happily ever after. Even so, while the book isn't perfect, it is worthwhile, and most younger readers (12-13) will enjoy reading it.

★★★★


Reviewed by Judith Hale

Saya is the exceptional girl of Hashiba, her village. Found ragged and starving at age six, she was given to an elderly couple in the village to raise and has grown up to be beautiful but different. She is mistaken for a reincarnation of the legendary Water Maiden, a servant of the Goddess of Darkness and the priestess of the Dragon Sword, by the demigod Prince Tsukishiro, son of the God of Light. When Prince Tsukishiro takes Saya to his palace, she is drawn into the war between Darkness and Light, and she cannot decide where her loyalties are. Even when she decides to leave the Prince and side with the Darkness, she is drawn to the Light, a fatal flaw of all the Water Maidens which threatens to undo her. Then she meets Chihaya, the third Child of Light, and...
together they learn their true potential in the outcome of the war. When Chihaya becomes the Dragon Sword and Saya his priestess, they bring about a reconciliation between the Goddess of Darkness and the God of Light, and subsequently bring peace to the land of Toyoashihara.

Saya and Chihaya represent adolescents on the verge of adulthood as they battle with their changing selves and struggle to find their identities. This story illustrates their rites of passage into adulthood and follows closely many of the minute adjustments necessary for full initiation into the adult world. The action is reasonably paced and the imagery vivid, and the plotline is interesting enough to keep the reader involved and unwilling to put the book down. Ogiwara has effectively captured the magic of Japanese myth in a setting easily identifiable by young adults of all nationalities.

✦✦✦✦


A 12+ FI

Reviewed by Alison Miner VanOrden

The main character of *Harris and Me* has never had a real home. His parents both drink, and he is passed around from one set of relatives to another. Then one summer he ends up on a farm with his Uncle Knute, Aunt Clair, and cousin Harris. At first he is unsure about farm life, but Harris immediately pulls him into the action, showing him how exciting farm life can be. He barely escapes Harris’ daring escapades—wrestling 300-pound pigs, dodging a killer rooster, and fighting off a dangerous cat. When it’s time for him to leave the farm, the young boy realizes how secure and accepted he has felt and knows he has finally found a home. He can’t wait to come back next summer.

*Harris and Me* contains one-after-another daring escapades and exciting farm experiences. Paulsen writes with irresistible humor that will entertain young adults of all ages and convey the hope that all children can find a home as happy as a home with Harris.

✦✦✦✦


B 5 FI

Reviewed by Lori Blakesley

Twelve-year-old Ion is determined to find his parents. For ten years Ion has lived with his grandmother while his parents have been held as political
prisoners. Ion lives in a small village in an Eastern European country. Despite the turmoil of the ongoing revolution and the risk of leaving his dying grandmother, Ion decides he must search for his parents. Leaving his small village, Ion ventures out into the cold, rugged world. With help, Ion finally makes it to the prison from which his parents are about to be released. Ion’s dream is realized when he leads his parents back to their village in time to help his grandmother.

This is a suspenseful story about a brave young boy who risks his life for family, freedom, and community. Because of Ion’s long search and the outcome of the recent revolution, his family and village are able to rejoice together in their newly found freedom.


Reviewed Marianne Hales

A 9+ FI

A spin-off of Pullman’s popular Sally Lockhart trilogy, *The Tin Princess* takes two of the characters from that trilogy (Jim Taylor and Adelaide) and adds a third character, Becky Winter, a citizen of a tiny European kingdom called Razkavia. Along with her mother and grandmother, she is in exile in London. She has always dreamed of adventure and romance, and when she becomes the tutor of the Razkavian princess (also in London), Becky’s dreams of adventure and romance become a reality. Princess Adelaide becomes Queen when Prince Rudolf is crowned King and then assassinated. But it’s not as simple as that. Adelaide, who rules as though she were born to rule, is being undermined from within by Baron Godel and even by her friend Count Thalgau. Jim, Becky, Adelaide, and a group of Razkavian citizens battle to keep Razkavia free from the conquering Germans and Austrians. Even though they are not successful, there is still hope for Razkavia in the end.

This book is nearly three hundred pages long, but it is a fairly quick read because it is so fast paced. Instead of spending the last twenty pages winding down, Pullman keeps the action going until the very last page. At times the characters sound unbearably stuffy:

We shook hands, and that handshake was my guarantee of honor, because I’m not just any foreigner, I’m an Englishman, by God, and I’ll thank you to remember it. . . . My loyalty is freely and wholeheartedly given to the king and queen, given for life, and God help the man or woman who doubts it. (p. 80)
But that is easily overlooked once the action gets going and the reader is caught up in the suspense of the novel. Like Queen Adelaide, who wins the hearts of the Razkavian people, Pullman enchants us with her story and keeps us turning the pages from one exciting plot twist to the next.


Emily Gold wants to be as good as her last name . . . but sometimes things go wrong. No matter how hard she tries, being developmentally disabled sometimes keeps her from behaving properly. She desperately longs to be a "grown-up" and have a baby of her own, like her brother Tom and her sister-in-law Phyllis, but her father wants Emily to remain his baby. Though only fourteen, Emily is preoccupied with sex and how babies are made, as well as her involvement in the process.

This book reads somewhat slowly and doesn't have an active plot line. It is told from Emily's point of view, and this allows the reader to be placed in the mind of a "retarded" person, and to view the world as she does. The story instills an empathy and understanding for the mentally challenged and could help teens who have never been exposed to handicapped people.