



Allen, Crystal. *How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba Sized Trophy*. Harper Collins, Inc. 2011. ISBN 978-0061992728. \$11.55. \*\*\*

Lamar is a god of bowling; unfortunately he lives in a town that's crazy about basketball and his older brother Xavier is a superstar in the sport. This means that Lamar is perpetually living in his brother's shadow. So when Xavier beats him up, Lamar decides to get even at Xavier's basketball game. This bad prank creates some serious trouble for Lamar but also changes his life for the better. In all fairness, Lamar's *Bad Prank* is an after school special; this means it's a story with a fairly obvious moral to it. However, while most of these types of stories come off as corny and boring, this book mixes humor and family drama well enough to make it a quick but entertaining read. Ages 9-13

- Daniel Gaghan San Jose State University MLIS Graduate, 2010

Blundell, Judy. *Strings Attached*. Scholastic Books, 2011. 320p. ISBN 978-0545221269. \$17.99. \*\*\*

With an intriguing premise and a romantic, noir-ish atmosphere, *Strings Attached* starts strong but sadly fizzles in the Third Act. It's the 1950's and 17 year-old Kit Corrigan moves to New York with dreams of becoming a big-time dancer. Though her first gig in the chorus line of an off-Broadway flop is a bust, she soon receives an amazing offer: a free apartment in the Village and a shot at being a Lido Girl -- a dancer in the floor show of a high-class night club. The catch is that accepting the offer puts her in the debt of Nate Benedict, a mob-connected lawyer who also happens to be the estranged father of her jealous and violent ex-boyfriend Billy. At first, Nate just wants Kit to keep tabs on Billy who is due home from boot camp before shipping off for the Korean War. Then Nate starts asking for other favors and before she knows it, Kit is implicated in a murder, all over the tabloids, reconsidering her split with Billy, and untangling a mess of long-hidden family secrets.

Blundell is a terrific stylist, nailing the tone and the period details to successfully transport the reader into the past. She quickly establishes Kit's world, her dreams, and her

**Recommendations:**

<b>M</b>	Mature, ages 16-20
<b>Y</b>	For younger teens, 11-14
<b>H/L</b>	High interest/low level books
<b>B/A</b>	Borrow from Adult
<b>R</b>	Rejected (no review)

**Ratings:**

- \*\*\*\*\* - Hard to imagine a better book!
- \*\*\*\* - Better than most
- \*\*\* - Liked it
- \*\* - Readable
- \* - How did this get published?

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predicament in a way that modern readers will understand. The tumultuous relationships and character histories are revealed slowly through tantalizing and effective use of flashback (it could have been more obvious when a chapter was a flashback, but careful readers should have no problem creating a timeline). Kit's world slides out of control slowly and believably, though the reader is giving just enough hints about what's going on to create satisfying tension.

So, with all these nice things to say, why am I less than thrilled? Because of the end. A major, totally random catastrophe late in the book suddenly ramps things up to bombastic, melodramatic extremes. It's like the author decided the very human-scale drama just wasn't enough and decided to employ a deus ex machina. I also hated how the resolution to the story ended up happening entirely outside of Kit's influence. She started as such a strong, interesting, and headstrong heroine, but she's in the back-seat during the entire Third Act. Add on a heaping helping of last minute reveals and I found myself getting increasingly frustrated during the last 50 pages as the story seemed to "go off the rails" (you'll get the bad joke there if you read the book). I had been planning on book-talking this for some class visits; the end made me change my mind.

- Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Cook, Kristi. Haven. Simon Pulse. 2011. 401p. 978144240760. \$16.99 Y \*\*\*

Violet has a "gift," she has psychic visions. She always kept these secret until coming to Winterhaven, a boarding school for students with paranormal gifts. At school Violet is drawing to the brooding Aidan who not surprisingly turns out to be a vampire. The story drags as the reader slowly learns about Violet's powers as well as Aidan's secret identity. The final battle leaves the reader disappointed because it seems to resolved too easily without much casualty. Overall Haven leaves much to be desired while setting the scene for a sequel.

- Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Public Library

Fisher, Catherine. Sapphique. Dial Books. 2011. 462p. 9780803733978. \$17.99 Y \*\*\*\*

In the sequel to Incarceron, Finn has escaped from the prison (Incarceron) and is learning his new duties as the next in line to the throne. However his path is not without dangers. Finn's friends are still trapped inside Incarceron and must fend for themselves against the sentient prison. The two story lines interweave to create a brilliant vision of trust, deception, and hope. While the story has a dark feeling throughout the ending leaves the reader with a spark of hope. This story will appeal to fans of science fiction dystopias.

- Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Public Library

Hautman, Pete. *The Big Crunch*. Scholastic Press, 2011. 288p. ISBN 978-0545240751. \$17.99. \*\*\*\*\*

Many of Pete Hautman's best-known works have been intense stories dealing with serious topics. Unlike a book like *Godless* or *Sweet Blood*, *The Big Crunch* is a quiet and completely real book about something that could -- and probably will -- happen to anyone: a long-distance relationship. The story centers around (and is told in alternating chapters from the perspective of) June and Wes, two high school kids who never plan on falling in love with each other. In fact, June's father has been moving her family to a new town every few months for most of her life so permanent relationships are out pretty much entirely. But circumstance throws June into Wes' life and no sooner do they figure out that they like each other than circumstance comes back to tear them apart. Can their burgeoning romance survive?

This book is entirely believable and real, which for some readers might be a strike against it. There's no melodramatic sentimentality or grandiose intentions, and this is not a match forged by Destiny. Instead, Hautman pulls off the trick of letting the reader see the relationship between June and Wes develop slowly. We're right there during their first innocuous and unconscious flirtations, their first kiss, the dawning acknowledgement of the depth of their feelings, and the realization that those feelings will be tested. *The Big Crunch* should also be that rare romance that will appeal to boys as much as girls since Hautman captures Wes' reactions so perfectly. It's a fine, true love story for readers who want to see a love that's a bit more realistic than *Twilight*.

- Jack Baur, Berkeley Public Library

Jaffe, Michele. *Rosebush*. Razorbill. 2010. 326p. 9781595143532. \$16.99 \*\*\*\*\* Y/M

Someone is trying to kill Jane and it may be someone she knows. Or maybe Jane is crazy. After recovering from a hit and run accident, Jane must figure out who tried to hurt her and why. This psychological thriller dealing with the intricacies of friendships and popularity will keep the reader intrigued. The characters are well fleshed out and the plot has many clever twists. Jaffe has created yet another successful novel.

- Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Public Library

Keaton, Kelly. *Darkness Becomes Her*. Simon Pulse, 2011, 273p. ISBN 9781442409248. \$16.99. \*\*\*\*

Ari grew up in various foster homes, but at 17 she's ready to find out why her mother abandoned her. She's shocked to learn that her mother was in a mental institution and committed suicide. Ari's always known she was a freak, with too light eyes and hair that grows back immediately no matter what she does. She was hoping that her mother might give her some answers, but the note she leaves for her simply tells her to run. Hoping to find

more answers at the place where she was born, Ari heads towards New 2 (paranormal New Orleans that was destroyed by hurricanes 13 years before). There Ari finds friends and even a half vampire, half warlock love interest. I was able to figure out Ari's heritage early on because I've watched Clash of the Titans a dozen times, but teens might be surprised. There are a mix of gods and monsters and the city creates a great atmosphere. Teens will enjoy this book, especially those who are looking for a strong heroine that can kick butt. Bad language throughout the book gears this towards older teens. The sequel should be coming out in February 2012.

- Kelly Brennan Young, Santa Clara County Library, Gilroy Library

Moulton, Courtney Allison. Angelfire. Katherine Tegen Books. 2011. 453p. 9780062002327. \$17.99 Y \*\*

Ellie, the Preliator, has the ability to kill demons (Reapers). Her destiny is to destroy them before they send human souls to Hell. Her sexy guide is the offspring of an angel and he feels it is his duty to protect her. What should be an interesting romance fails because Ellie is extremely unlikeable and irritating. The convoluted plot flips between Ellie's normal life and her new demon life. The pace leaps forwards at times and then stutters at others. If you are looking for the next Twilight, look somewhere else.

- Sarah La Torra, Redwood City Public Library

Nelson, Blake. Recovery Road. Scholastic Books, 2011. 320p. ISBN 978-0545107297. \$17.99. \*\*\*

Before she went into rehab, 16 year-old Maddie had the nickname "Mad Dog" and a drug-fueled-party-girl reputation to go along with it. Now she's focused on staying clean and getting her life back together during a stint at a halfway house in a closed rehabilitation community. While in recovery she makes a new best friend in Trish and - even though it's strictly forbidden - sparks up a secret romance with Stewart. Maddie and Stewart fall in love, and when she gets released from rehab a few weeks before he does, she's determined to ensure their relationship lasts. What neither Stewart nor Maddie count on, however, are the stresses that come with living clean, including the pressure of old friends and the tragedy of relapse. Nor can they predict the different directions their lives will take as Maddie, for the first time, starts worrying about her future.

I did not get as much out of this book as I had wanted to. It's written well enough and I thought that the relationship between Maddie and Stewart was handled realistically and unpredictably. I appreciated the focus within the narrative on the way that recovering addicts support - and at times depend on - each other. However, aside from that, I don't feel like I really learned anything about either addiction or recovery. Addiction felt like an artificial roadblock employed in service of the story rather than a real thing the characters

were grappling with. On top of that, the only characters that we see abusing drugs or alcohol experience over-the-top and preachy-feeling fates. By not offering much psychological insight into these young addicts, *Recovery Road* comes off as contrived even while offering a believable and unconventional story of romance. It feels like a missed opportunity.

Riordan, Rick. *The Lost Hero*. Hyperion Book. 2011. ISBN 978-1423113393. \$18.99. \*\*\*\*

*The Lost Hero* is a spin-off series from the Percy Jackson books that follows three demigods, Jason a demigod suffering from amnesia and who is not entirely what he seems, Piper a girl that can talk a BMW dealer into giving her a car but can't talk to her father and Leo a mechanical whiz running from his past. These three friends are forced into a continent spanning quest that leads them to a truth that shakes the very purpose of the Half-Blood Camp. *The Lost Hero* has many similarities to the Percy Jackson books, namely Greek gods, monsters and a quest to save the world; however, there are several big differences. The first is that this series seems to be written for an older audience; teen angst is more prevalent within this book, whether it's dealing with a romance that might never have happened to godly or mortal deadbeat parents. Another departure that *Lost Hero* has from Percy is that it is told from the third person perspective of three different characters, which adds a degree of freshness to the series. These similarities and differences will appeal to both Percy faithful and new readers alike.

- Daniel Gaghan San Jose State University MLIS Graduate, 2010

Rylander, Chris. *The Fourth Stall*. Walden Pond Press. 2011. 314 p. ISBN 978-0061994968. \$15.99. Y \*\*\*\*

Sixth grader Christian Barrett runs a tidy little business out of the fourth stall of an unused bathroom at his school. He's a fixer, and so good at solving his fellow student's little problems he's earned the name MacGyver or Mac for short. You need test answers, a forged note, or passes to an R rated movie, then Mac, along with his best friend and consigliere Vince, is the guy to see. The business that they started in Kindergarten has been do successful, they've earned enough money to buy tickets to the World Series, should their beloved Cubs hang on and beat the Phillies. But then Fred walks in to the stall one day and pleads with Mac to help him escape a beating by the notorious Staples, a legendary bully who operates a gambling ring that has ensnared many kids at the school. As Mac's plan to protect Fred and take out Staples goes awry, revealing the weaknesses of business and threatening his friendship with Vince, he'll need all his smarts and courage to succeed with this job, his toughest yet.

If you can imagine a blend of *The Godfather*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and a Sam Spade novel, then you will have a feel for Rylander's story, which is a great read for middle school boys. While this book is a humorous mystery and a good escape, the story also reveals the true problems faced by Vince, Staples and other kids from the wrong side of the tracks. The book is

full of great role models for boys: Mac is a great hero, flawed and courageous. Vince is smart, loyal, and funny. The book doesn't shrink away from the bullying and violence that many boys face in school. While the story does drag a bit in the middle, the laughs and the mystery will pull readers through as they root for Vince and Mac to succeed.

- Chris Selig, San Leandro Public Library

Wilkinson, Lili. *Pink*. Harper Collins. 2011. 304 p. ISBN 978-0061926532. \$16.99. M \*\*\*\*

Ava seems to have it all. She's at the top of her class in high school. She is dating the beautiful and sophisticated Chloe. Her open-minded parents even threw her a coming out party and seem to prefer that she dress all in black. So why is she throwing it all away? Because she's never really felt that she belonged; she's not comfortable in her own skin. To find her way, she'll transfer to academically challenging private school, wear pink, and maybe even date boys. What could go wrong? Everything. Ava finds that she has just as much trouble fitting in at the new school. Keeping secrets from Chloe and her parents leads to disasters. But with the help of a few new friends and some old fashioned grit, Ava will learn that a little uncertainty in life can lead to a satisfying conclusion.

Ava has an authentic teen voice with authentic teen thoughts; she doesn't know where she fits in or how she really feels about girls and boys, and she doesn't make all the right moves. Wilkinson provides excellent character development for Ava and for many of the witty and intelligent minor characters. Ava struggles with her sexuality, gradually learning to be OK with bisexual feelings and not being sure. The dialogue is crisp, and while the book is set in Australia, that fact comes through only in the slang and some of the expressions. In some respects this book is probably a better fit for your average teen librarian than for your average teen (name-dropping Anais Nin and DH Lawrence; using vocab like inconoclasm and Deleuzian theory.) But for the teen who can slog through (or perhaps enjoy) those aspects, they will benefit from reading a truly great book about a lost and insecure young woman who is hell-bent on finding herself and making amends for all of her screw ups along the way.

- Chris Selig, San Leandro Public Library