

SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY/HORROR

4Q • 3P • M • J

Bloor, Edward. **Story Time**. Harcourt, 2004. 432p. \$17. 0-15-204670-4.

Take two bright middle school students, add a school that promises high test scores, blend in a mystery, top with a satirical look at education, and the result is the recipe for the newest offering by Bloor, author of **Tangerine** (Harcourt, 1997/**VOYA** August 1997). George and his niece, Kate, who is actually two years older than George, are invited to attend the prestigious Whittaker Magnet School. The school, which meets in the basement of the town's public library, prides itself on the achievements of its students who score higher on tests than any students in the country. Visits from the president and first lady to the Whittaker School are being planned as Kate and George become students. Kate, dismayed to discover that seating in each class is arranged by students' test scores, resigns herself to sitting in the last seat in the last row. Simply being made to feel inferior, however, is not the only bad thing happening at Whittaker. Kate and George soon learn that the tradition of "Story Time" carries with it some awful events from the past. The two must combine forces to unearth the deadly secret of Story Time.

Bloor successfully combines humor, mystery, and fantasy in this satire about the pitfalls of education. The satirical aspect of the novel might appeal more to teachers than to students. Middle school students will appreciate more the librarian who speaks only in nursery rhymes, the spirits who wreak havoc with what should be a peaceful story time, and the efforts of two powerless students who manage to solve the mystery at the core of the story.—Teri S. Lesesne.

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Horowitz, Anthony. **Eagle Strike: An Alex Rider Adventure**. Philomel, 2003. 272p. \$17.99. 0-399-23979-0.

In his fourth adventure, Alex Rider strikes out on his own. The fourteen-year-old MI6 agent is vacationing with his girlfriend, Sabina Pleasure, and her family in the south of France when he spots his nemesis, assassin Yassen Gregorovich. That afternoon, Sabina's parents are almost killed when their house blows up. Alex's investigations lead him to philanthropist-celebrity Damian Cray, but MI6 will not act on Alex's suspicions, forcing him to deal with the deadly Cray on his own.

Appealing and outrageous action is barely held together with a plot like a colander. Fans will enjoy it, although they might feel popcorn-bloated by the sloppy details that make this novel purely "B-movie" quality. Of course, this episode is no different than the others, and—as in a good B-movie—it is the character of the protagonist that will keep

readers engaged. Horowitz adds a new and darker element to Alex's character, promising a different relationship between him and the MI6 in future episodes.—Nina Lindsay.

In Alex Rider's newest adventure, Horowitz offers readers a story that is deeper and darker and more personal than its predecessors. The action again begins on the very first page and will keep readers enthralled until the end when Horowitz presents a startling revelation about Alex's true identity. As before, the villain is chilling, the gadgets intriguing, and the ticking clock adrenaline pumping. Alex himself is as charming, inventive, and refreshingly human as ever, guaranteeing that this installment will satisfy past fans and convert new ones, in the end leaving everyone to hope that Horowitz continues Alex's story in a fifth book.—Anna Hutchinson, *Teen Reviewer*.

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4Q • 5P • J • S • A/YA

McCaffrey, Anne, and McCaffrey, Todd. **Dragon's Kin**. Ballantine, 2003. 304p. \$24.95. 0-345-46198-3.

Especially appropriate for younger teens, this new book in the Pern series is set in an "Interval," when the Red Planet and "Threadfall" are not an immediate threat. When his father, elder brothers, and his father's watch-where are killed in a mining collapse at Camp Natalon, Kindan, now an orphan, must give up his dreams of being an apprentice to the new Harper, Master Zist. Instead he must raise and bond with a new watch-where, Kist. (Smaller than dragons, watch-wheres are useful in the mines because of their ability to "see" in the dark.) But Kindan's friend, Nuella, the blind daughter of Journeyman Natalon, understands the unique powers of watch-wheres, and she is entrusted with training them to communicate with dragons. With Kist, she rescues her father and other miners after another mine collapse.

The characters of Kindan and Nuella are engaging. The setting and camp rivalries are integral to the plot. Telepathic communication, as in other books about Pern, is a central theme. The introduction of dragonriders from Benden Weyr and information about the history, society, and culture of Pern will enable readers to connect back or forward to other books in the series. Although there is a lackluster quality to this novel, making it less powerful than others in the series, it could encourage teens to read McCaffrey's previous novels. Young adult librarians will want to consider adding this one to their collections for its appeal to McCaffrey fans and readers of fantasy and science fiction.—Hilary Crew.

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5Q • 4P • J • S

New Skies: An Anthology of Today's Science Fiction. Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Ed. Tor, 2003. 288p. \$19.95. 0-765-30016-8.

Nielsen Hayden is generally considered to be one of the two or three best science fiction editors working, and his new reprint anthology is the finest collection of SF short stories published specifically for young adult readers in recent memory. It includes such award-winning stories as Nancy Kress's *Out of All Them Bright Stars*, a quiet tale of human-alien first contact in a greasy-spoon restaurant, and Geoffrey A. Landis's *A Walk in the Sun*, which is about an astronaut trying to survive after her lander has crashed on the moon. David Langford's *Different Kinds of Darkness* concerns the lengths to which it might be necessary to go to protect children from terrorism, and Greg Bear's *Tangents* features a boy genius who accidentally triggers the entrance into our world of a creature from another dimension. Maureen McHugh's beautifully written tale, *The Lincoln Train*, depicts an alternate Civil War. Other highlights include Terry Bisson's caustic *They're Made Out of Meat*, in which two inorganic beings find themselves disgusted by the possibility of organic intelligence; Stephen Gould's *Peaches for Mad Molly*, a truly bizarre story set among people who live on the outside walls of a miles-high skyscraper; and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Arthur Sternbach Brings the Curveball to Mars*, which is about exactly what the title says.

Also included in this stellar collection are stories by Spider Robinson, Connie Willis, Jane Yolen, Philip K. Dick, Orson Scott Card, and others. This anthology is a must-purchase for all YA collections.—Michael Levy.

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3Q • 2P • M • J

Stahler, David Jr. **Truesight.** HarperCollins, 2004. 192p. \$15.99. 0-06-052285-2. PLB \$16.89. 0-06-052286-0.

Stahler builds his story on a truly interesting premise filled with possibility: A colony of future Earthlings uses genetic engineering to actively choose to live life blind. It is a notion filled with potential. Into this well-portrayed but unusual colony, a dark and dreary place devoid of light, the author places a good cast of characters. The protagonist Jacob goes about his schoolwork and chores; his mother teaches music to the high councilor's daughter, Delaney; and the central conflicts become apparent. Delaney is profoundly unhappy being blind and wishes that she could see. Jacob, on the other hand, is slowly developing his sense of sight. While Delaney longs to see, Jacob is shocked to begin to get a feel for what a sighted world would be like.

Unfortunately the story's premise never really develops any depth. There are no fascinating insights about anything that makes life different for this race of blind persons intellectually or emotionally. There is no amazing sharpening of senses, skills, or

philosophical enlightenment that is the byproduct of this dramatic alteration of the senses. During his brief time of sight, Jacob makes a few rather mundane discoveries: Farm workers occasionally steal fruit that they pick, others steal food where they can, and some are unfaithful to their spouses. What seems like a very interesting idea ends up being only a mildly engaging story.—Timothy Brennan.

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