

AMAZING, ASTOUNDING, AND ABSOLUTELY AUDIOBOOKS

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▶ PAM SPENCER HOLLEY

Because only the top audiobooks make the pages of VOYA, selecting “A+ audiobooks” is always difficult, especially in a climate of growth for audiobook production. This second annual list showcases works that exhibit excellence in production quality; perfect match of narrator to content; ability of audiobook to attract and hold teens’ interest; and that special attribute—often indefinable—that makes the work unique as well as necessary for every library collection. Their words will linger in the listener’s memory.

ADVENTURES IN WORLDS BOTH REAL AND UNREAL

Alexander, Lloyd. *The Prydain Chronicles*. Listening Library/Random House, 2004–2005. Narrated by James Langton, with an introduction read by the author. VOYA April 2005. 5Q 5P M J S

The Book of Three, Book 1. 2004. Unabridged; 5 hours, 3 minutes. 4 cassettes, \$35. 1-4000-9850-5.

The Black Cauldron, Book 2. 2004. Unabridged; 5 hours, 25 minutes. 4 cassettes, \$35. 0-8072-2317-4.

The Castle of Llyr, Book 3. 2004. Unabridged; 4 hours, 43 minutes. 4 cassettes, \$35. 0-8072-2391-3.

Taran Wanderer, Book 4. 2004. Unabridged; 6 hours, 29 minutes. 4 cassettes, \$35. 1-4000-8558-6.

The High King, Book 5. 2005. Unabridged; 7 hours, 24 minutes. 5 cassettes, \$40. 1-4000-8561-5.

When Taran’s famous oracular white pig, Henwen, escapes into the forest, she leads him to companions who help him restore order to Prydain, currently under the rule of an evil king. Alexander’s dialogue and plot provide a marvelous tale based on Welsh mythology to which Langton adds his own brand of warmth and comfort as he portrays the varied personalities of Prydainian folk. Written forty years ago, this series still enthralls listeners.

Dunkle, Clare B. *The Hollow Kingdom Trilogy*. Recorded Books, 2003–2005. Narrated by Jenny Sterlin. VOYA December 2005. 5Q 5P J S

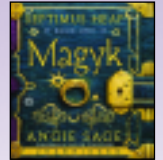
The Hollow Kingdom. 2003. Unabridged; 8 hours, 30 minutes. 6 cassettes, \$58.75. 1-402-5694-16.

Close Kin. 2004. Unabridged; 7 hours, 15 minutes. 6 cassettes. \$54.75. 1-402-5850-47. 7 CDs, \$72.75. 1-419-3323-84.

Mistakenly thinking that her sister Emily has been taken by goblins, Kate agrees to marry repulsive Marek, King of the Goblins, which leads the orphaned sisters into their new life spent underground. Sterlin’s amazing voice depicts softly hesitant Kate; boisterous, outspoken Emily; the virile tone of Marek; or the snake Charm, with its stretched-out esses and accentuated tees, bringing mystery and excitement to this strange world of goblins, elves and humans.

[**Editor’s Note:** At this time, Recorded Books has no plans to produce the final volume, *In the Coils of the Snake* (Henry Holt, 2005/VOYA October 2005).]

Sage, Angie. **Magyk**. *Septimus Heap*, Book 1. HarperAudio, 2005. Narrated by Allan Corduner. Unabridged; 12 hours. 10 CDs. \$27.95. 0-06-076083-4. VOYA December 2005. 5Q 5P M J S



Mistaken identities eventually sort themselves out with the recognition of Jenna as the daughter of a murdered queen and Septimus as the seventh son of a seventh son, as they together face an evil necromancer. The enchantment of their sparkling world is heightened by Corduner’s ability to adopt distinct voices for a wide range of characters, whether they be officious, evil, or compassionate.

Verne, Jules. **Around the World in Eighty Days**. Listening Library/Random House, 2004. Narrated by Jim Dale. Unabridged; 7 hours, 53 minutes. 5 cassettes, \$40. 0-307-20628-9. 7 CDs, \$55. 0-307-20682-3. VOYA December 2005. 5Q 4P J S A/YA



Phileas Fogg bets that he can travel around the world in eighty days and departs on a journey that will require conveyances ranging from elephant to trains, ships, and sailing sleds, unaware that he’s been accused of theft and has a detective on his tail. Dale’s engaging and recognizable voice from the Harry Potter audio renditions showcases his talent in portraying multiple characters. This 1873 classic, first released in audiobook format in 1955 by a fledgling Listening Library, was re-recorded in 2005 for their fiftieth anniversary.

HUMOR

Anderson, Laurie Halse. **Prom**. Recorded Books, 2005. Narrated by Katherine Kellgren. Unabridged; 5 hours, 45 minutes. 4 cassettes. \$39.75. 1-419-3509-78. 5 CDs, \$48.75. 1-419-3561-00. VOYA December 2005. 5Q 5P S

Learning that her Senior class’s dance may be cancelled, Ashley throws herself into reactivating the Prom and discovers that she’s a great organizer who is no longer content with her go-nowhere boyfriend. Kellgren doesn’t miss a beat of the humor in Anderson’s writing, highlighting the regional Philly accents and amusing banter of Ashley and her friends.

Mackler, Carolyn. **Vegan Virgin Valentine**. Recorded Books, 2004. Narrated by Katherine Kellgren. Unabridged; 6 hours. 5 cassettes, \$49.75. 1-419-3086-61. 5 CDs, \$49.75. 1-419-3320-66. VOYA August 2005. 5Q 5P S

Vegan Mara’s orderly senior year is thrown into chaos when her niece, V, daughter of Mara’s older, unmarried sister, comes to live with the Valentine family. Initially furious about V’s fun-loving, unconventional behavior, a less resolute Mara is revealed by Kellgren’s softening narration as Mara shifts priorities and eventually accepts V in this funny, coming-of-age story.

Peck, Richard. **The Teacher's Funeral: A Comedy in Three Parts.** Listening Library/Random House, 2004. Narrated by Dylan Baker. Unabridged; 2 hours, 42 minutes. 3 cassettes, \$32. 1-4000-9103-9. 4 CDs, \$40. 1-4000-9496-8. **VOYA** August 2005. **5Q 4P MJ**

In the early 1900s, Russell's greatest nightmare comes true when old Miss Arbuckle dies and his sister Tansy is named as the replacement teacher for his one-room schoolhouse, where life is never dull. Baker's rusty but reassuring voice and Indiana twang are perfect for this warm, folksy story of a bygone era.

Riordan, Rick. **The Lightning Thief.** Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book 1. Listening Library/Random House, 2005. Narrated by Jesse Bernstein. Unabridged; 10 hours. 6 cassettes, \$45. 0-307-24592-2. 8 CDs, \$60. 0-307-24531-4. **VOYA** December 2005. **5Q 5P M J S**

How can one not love a work that begins "I accidentally vaporized my pre-Algebra teacher"? That explosive event just marks the beginning of Percy Jackson's adventures. Bernstein brings mythology to life as he depicts Percy, son of Poseidon, enthusiastically confronting mythological monsters.



INTRIGUING INDIVIDUALS

Jacobs, A. J. **The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World.** HighBridge, 2004. Narrated by Geoffrey Cantor. Unabridged, 15 hours. 12 CDs, \$39.95. 1-56511-905-3. Abridged; 7 hours, 30 minutes. 6 CDs, \$29.95. 1-56511-908-8. **VOYA** August 2005. **5Q 5P S A/YA**

*To keep his brain from turning to mush, A. J. Jacobs decides to read all 33,000 pages of the **Encyclopedia Britannica**, following which he proves the validity of the maxim that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Cantor interjects the right touch of humbleness and self-deprecation when A. J. realizes that trivia retention doesn't equal wisdom, extracting the humor from A. J.'s misguided attempts to appear smart.*

Kurson, Robert. **Shadow Divers: The True Adventure of Two Americans Who Risked Everything to Solve One of the Last Mysteries of World War II.** Books on Tape/Random House, 2004. Narrated by Michael Prichard. Unabridged; 13 hours. 11 cassettes, \$90. 1-4159-0087-7. 13 CDs, \$96. 1-4159-0283-6. **VOYA** August 2005. **4Q 5P S A/YA**

A chance find of a U-boat off the New Jersey coast leads wreck divers Chatterton and Kohler on an obsessive quest to identify the wreck that they feel should be accorded the respect of any hallowed grave site. Prichard's resounding voice details the years of research that their seven-year mission required to finally name the U-869 and its occupants.



Kushner, David. **Jonny Magic and the Card Shark Kids.** Listen and Live Audio, 2005. Narrated by David Kushner. Unabridged; 8 hours. 7 CDs, library edition, \$35.95. 1-59316-069-0. **VOYA** December 2005. **4Q 5P S A/YA**

Narrating his own work in an even tempo, Kushner approaches game playing with the zeal of a sports reporter as he tells of Jon Finkel's rise from nerdy, bullied student to six-figure-earning game player in the world of young professional gamblers. The concluding disc includes an interview with Jonny Finkel.

Levithan, David. **Boy Meets Boy.** Full Cast Audio, 2005. Read by Nick Robideau and the Full Cast Family. Unabridged; 6 hours. 6 CDs, \$45. 1-933322-33-0. **VOYA** December 2005. **5Q 4P S**

Having realized in third grade that he's gay, fifteen-year-old Paul falls in love with Noah at their amazingly diverse and tolerant high school, where the homecoming queen is also the star quarterback. The varied voices of children, teens, parents, and teachers lend authenticity to the unreal high school atmosphere. Jazzy or subdued piano music signals

changes in story line. Interviews with the young narrators about their high school experiences are a plus.

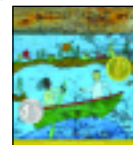
FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Abrahams, Peter. **Down the Rabbit Hole: An Echo Falls Mystery.** HarperChildren'sAudio, 2005. Narrated by Mandy Siegfried. Unabridged; 8 hours. 7 CDs, \$27.95. 0-06-078664-7. **VOYA** August 2005. **5Q 5P M J**

A chance meeting with local eccentric, "Cracked-Up Katie," on the afternoon of her death propels Ingrid into an adventure reminiscent of her role as Alice in the local production of Alice in Wonderland and fuels her determination to find Katie's murderer. Siegfried's clear voice realistically portrays Ingrid as an unworldly yet decisive teen.

Schmidt, Gary D. **Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy.** Listening Library/Random House, 2005. Narrated by Sam Freed. Unabridged; 6 hours, 46 minutes. 5 cassettes, \$40. 0-307-20725-0. 6 CDs, \$50. 0-307-28185-X. **VOYA** December 2005. **5Q 4P M J S**

When young Turner Buckminster moves to Phippsburg, Maine, he doesn't fit in with the hypocritical townsfolk. He befriends Lizzie Bright, granddaughter of a former slave, who lives on Malaga Island, and they explore the shoreline until a decision to develop the island for tourists upsets their friendship. Freed easily duplicates the Maine accents, the thundering bluster of the local businessmen, Lizzie's upbeat nature, and Turner's inner burning in a moving work based on a true incident from the early 1900s.



Swindells, Robert. **Abomination.** Bolinda Audio Books, 2004. Narrated by Amanda Hulme. Unabridged; 3 hours, 30 minutes. 3 cassettes, \$28. 1-74030-493-4. 3 CDs, \$28. 1-74030-909-X. **VOYA** August 2005. **5Q 5P J S**

Living a life of secrets becomes intolerable for Martha, daughter of fanatically religious parents, after being befriended by new student Scott, whom she fears will discover "Abomination," or worse, her parents will find out about Scott. Australian Hulme's outstanding narration of this dysfunctional family's life is expressive, upbeat, and fluid.

Tingle, Tim. **Walking the Choctaw Road: Stories from Red People Memory.** Cinco Puntos Press, 2004. Narrated by Tim Tingle. Unabridged; 4 hours, 13 minutes. 4 CDs, \$24.95. 0-938317-82-2. **VOYA** December 2005. **5Q 4P M J S**

Choctaw storyteller Tingle's resonant, strong delivery and expressiveness lend a haunting quality to twelve chronologically arranged tales that reveal early Native American folklore, the life for the Choctaw on the Trail of Tears, and more recent family events. The occasional thump of a drum, trill of a cedar flute, or lilting words of a song add a touch of mystique to these Choctaw tales. ■

SOURCES

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Recorded Books, LLC. <http://www.recordedbooks.com>.

Pam Spencer Holley is a retired school librarian and long-time VOYA contributor who writes the Gale series, What Do Children and Young Adults Read Next? and currently serves as President of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association (ALA).