

A Weekend With Oscar

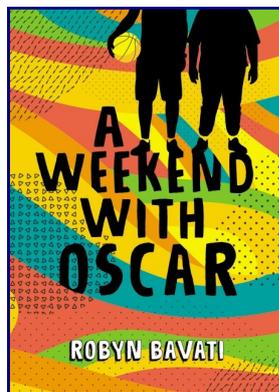
By Robyn Bavati
Publisher: Walker Books
ISBN 9781760653002 SCIS: 5359800
\$19.99

**SECONDARY BOOK
OF THE MONTH**

Blurb:

A moving #LoveOzYA novel about loss, first love and being there for your family, no matter what.

Sixteen-year-old Jamie lives with his mum and his younger brother Oscar, who has Down syndrome. Though Jamie is still grieving the loss of his dad, life starts to look up when he meets Zara, the new girl at school. When their mum goes away for the weekend, Jamie volunteers to look after Oscar. But when the weekend is over and their mother doesn't return, Jamie faces the toughest challenge of his life.



Lamont Review:

This is a tremendously heart-warming coming of age novel.

The story follows sixteen-year-old Jamie's journey, months after the death of his Dad. His younger brother Oscar has Down syndrome, and when his Mum needs to fly to Perth to help her sister through a separation, Jamie offers to stay home and look after Oscar for the weekend.

But then Mum doesn't come home!

Jamie seriously doesn't know what to do or who to turn to. He thinks it's probably only because of the huge storm in Perth that she hasn't returned, but days later, still NOTHING.

He's already lost his Dad, and had promised his parents that he would always look after Oscar, but now what?

This is a great story for teen readers that would also be an ideal text to use with lower to middle secondary students to explore issues of empathy, compassion, disability and grief. It also looks at first love and friendship, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Reviewed by Rob

Are You There, Buddha?

By Pip Harry

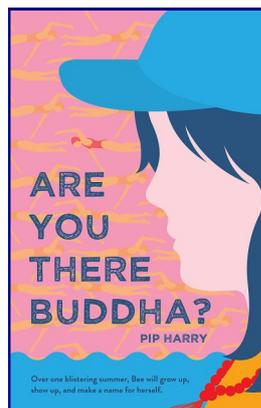
Publisher: Lothian Children's Books / Hachette

ISBN 9780734420305 SCIS: 5364626

\$16.99

Blurb:

Bridget 'Bee' Ballentine is 12 and starting her first year of high school in the beach suburb Crescent Bay. Still reeling from the departure of her mother for an ashram in India, Bee talks to Buddha and begs for her first period not to arrive. She's not ready to become a woman yet, whatever that means. Although Bee's yet to find her tribe at school, her best friend forever is surfer Leon McKay, also known as the hottest boy in Year Eight. As long as Leon has her back, Bee can survive the mean girls, her meddling step-mum, Kath, and her swimming nemesis, The Piranha. Over one blistering summer, set against the backdrop of bushfires, smoke haze and water restrictions, Bee will grow up, show up, and make a name for herself.



Lamont Review:

Bee is in her first year of high school and is adjusting to this strange new world. She still misses her Mum, who took off to live in an ashram in India. She likes Kath, her Dad's new partner, and loves her little half-brother Max.

Bee prays to Buddha each day in the hope that she won't get her period yet, because she is just not ready. She is a great swimmer and in training for the upcoming state championships. So is her best friend since forever, Leon, although he loves surfing more than swimming.

She knows Leon will always be on her side and will always believe in her, no matter how mean some of the other girls get, but does she believe in herself?

I loved this book and I loved Bee. She is uncertain of herself at times, but ultimately realises that she is strong, brave and determined. It is about friendship, growing up and finding out who you are along the way. I also loved Leon, and his wonderful attitude towards Bee and their friendship.

A great book, and many readers will relate to Bee's journey. This story will most appeal to girls in lower secondary and above.

Reviewed by Michelle

Rainfish

By Andrew Paterson

Publisher: Text Publishing

ISBN 9781922330963 SCIS: 5359821

\$16.99

Blurb:

Winner of the 2020 Text Prize. A humorous and poignant middle-grade story about a young boy grappling with guilt after stealing from the local church.

'You don't kill them rainfish cause they'll bring trouble. Rainstorms and floods and bad things.'

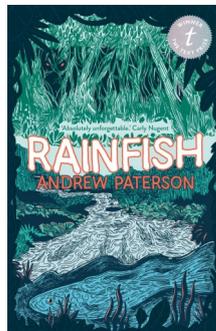
Aaron lives with his mum and older brother in a small town on the edge of a rainforest in tropical Far North Queensland. He's sick of being the little bother, left out of all the interesting stuff the older kids get up to.

So when he meets Damon he's keen to impress him. It's all going well, until Damon suggests they break into the church. Aaron's nervous and uncomfortable. But he can't back out now - he's only just beginning to be accepted.

When the theft is reported in the local newspaper and the police knock on the door, Aaron finds himself hiding the truth in a tangle of lies. And before long his deep sense of guilt and fear of being found out overwhelm him.

And then, when he discovers that the mudcod in the old bath in the backyard - the fish he'd caught in the river in the rainforest - are the rainfish of local legend, he becomes convinced that he is responsible for the terrible rainstorms and floods that devastate the town.

Rainfish is a delightful middle-grade novel exploring childhood innocence - a warm and humorous portrayal of a young boy trying to undo an impulsive mistake.



Lamont Review:

This is a terrific Australian adventure, set in a small far North Queensland town. Our main character, Aaron, wants to live life to the fullest but when he teams up with Damon, a rebellious new kid in town, things quickly go wrong.

They break into the church and steal the Priest's prized rosary beads, and Aaron is instantly remorseful. His fear of being caught is exacerbated by his older brother Connor deciding to make it his mission to uncover the perpetrators.

When Peter, his Mum's new boyfriend, takes the boys fishing they catch lots of mudfish. These are known as rainfish in the local legends - as they believe catching the fish brings rain. But when a torrential flood follows their fishing outing, the likes of which the town has never seen before, Aaron is convinced it was his fault.

With Aaron's guilt increasing, can he find a way to try and make things right?

This was such a great story and an easy read, with themes of guilt, remorse, family dynamics and rural communities, that will appeal to all lower to middle secondary readers.

Reviewed by Rob

Skin Deep

By Hayley Lawrence

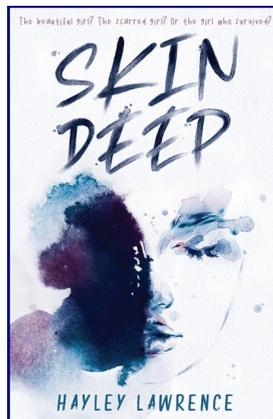
Publisher: Scholastic

ISBN 9781760976446 SCIS: 5359814

\$15.99

Blurb:

Scarlett was gifted with beauty. But beauty can be taken in a day, in a single moment, by one car fire. Now permanently scarred, Scarlett has become a smudge in her perfect world. She can see only one acceptable solution: to escape the modern world for Matilda Mountain, which is desolate, isolated, forlorn. Perfect. But mountains are not always as lonely as they appear. And unexpected friendships can be found in the wilderness. Friendships that challenge her ideas about perfection and her place in the world. Can Scarlett break free from the confines of her beauty-obsessed culture to discover who she is beyond the layers of her skin?



Lamont Review:

This is an incredible journey of self-discovery and recovery after a horrific car accident.

Fourteen-year-old Scarlett was a perfect ballerina. As her Gran would say she was so pretty - in a world where pretty is so important for girls.

Now fifteen months on and having just turned sixteen, Scarlett knows that with terrible scarring from burns to her face and upper torso, she can never be pretty again.

But then she convinces her Dad to take her away to remote Matilda Mountain for a couple of weeks to get away from people. There she meets home schooled Eamon and his extended family, who live in a community of caravans. Slowly he convinces Scarlett that beauty can be found in so many things, and that being beautiful is so much more than skin deep.

This is a wonderful story about the things we truly value in ourselves, and in society. Things like honesty, accepting people as they are and trying always to do well for yourself and others, beauty standards, and societal expectations.

I really loved this story, and it is a great read for all teens.

Reviewed by Rob

Time Catchers: When Days Tilt

By Karen Ginnane

Publisher: Penguin

ISBN 9781760895037 SCIS: 5366531

\$16.99

Blurb:

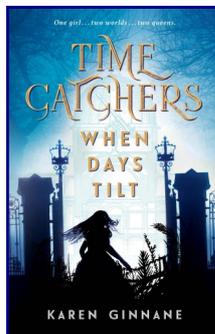
Magic, mystery and darkness - a gripping fantasy adventure for lovers of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*. In this page-turning debut, one girl must figure out why she is the key to two worlds, before time itself falls under the control of the powerful and the greedy.

A historical fantasy adventure for teens set between Victorian London and a darker parallel city.

It's 1858, and there are two queens on the throne. Victoria reigns over London, the biggest city the world has ever known. But London has a secret shadow city, called Donlon, where another queen, the Green Witch, rules her own domain - time.

London is in turmoil. The Thames is at the height of the Great Stink; a blazing comet is searing the sky; technology is moving so fast it seems otherworldly; and the city is exploding with more people than it can hold. Darwin is about to publish his theory of evolution and humanity's very place in the world is in question. On top of all this, people are disappearing into thin air. If they return, it is with empty eyes and torn souls, never to be the same again. Ava, a fourteen-year-old Londoner, feels trapped by the limited life of a young Victorian woman and by her watchmaking apprenticeship with her father. Her predictable world is turned upside down when she discovers that the body in her mother's grave is not her mother, but a stranger.

When Ava goes in search of her real mother and her true identity, she is thrust into the dark world of Donlon and must fight a battle to save those she loves and the future of both worlds...



Lamont Review:

Ava lives in Victorian London with her watchmaker Dad, and feels trapped in this very predictable and closeted world.

But when Ava finds out that her mother is not dead, she is determined to find out where her real mother is. This lands Ava in two worlds - London, and it's secret twin city, Donlon. Can she solve the mystery of why people keep disappearing into thin air? What dark secret is hiding in Donlon? Will she find her mother and, if she does, can she help Ava?

This is a wonderful fantasy adventure that will enthrall readers. Ava is a wonderful character and I loved her bravery, and her strength in her quest to find out who she really is. Full of courage, compassion and honesty, it is also a story of the true meaning of family, in all the many forms.

It is a perfect read for fantasy lovers in Year 8 and up, and I can't wait for the sequel.

Reviewed by Michelle

Everything I Thought I Knew

By Shannon Takaoka

Publisher: Walker Books

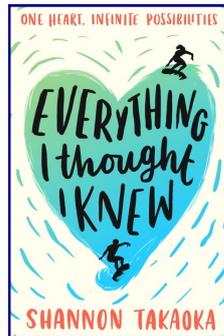
ISBN 9781406395365 SCIS: 5368809

\$18.99

Blurb:

A teenage girl wonders if she's inherited more than just a heart from her donor in this compulsively readable debut.

Seventeen-year-old Chloe had a plan: work hard, get good grades, and attend a top-tier college. But after she collapses during cross country practice and is told that she needs a new heart, all her careful preparations are laid to waste. Eight months after her transplant, everything is different. Stuck in summer school with the underachievers, all she wants to do now is grab her surfboard and hit the waves – which is strange, because she wasn't interested in surfing before her transplant. (It doesn't hurt that her instructor, Kai, is seriously good looking.) And that's not all that's strange. There's also the vivid recurring nightmare about crashing a motorcycle in a tunnel and memories of people and places she doesn't recognize. Is there something wrong with her head now, too, or is there another explanation for what she's experiencing? As she searches for answers, and as her attraction to Kai intensifies, what she learns will lead her to question everything she thought she knew – about life, death, love, identity, and the true nature of reality.



Lamont Review:

Chloe is seventeen, and super driven to succeed. But when she collapses at running practice, it is soon discovered that she has a failing heart - and will need a transplant to survive.

But when the new heart arrives, so do lots of other new feelings...

Now having to complete summer school in order to qualify for University, Chloe is no longer so committed to getting good grades. She's changed, and school is no longer the most important thing. More than that, she suddenly knows how to ride a motorbike, fast, and is learning to surf under the coaching of the mysterious Kai.

The transplant and the aftermath leads Chloe to question everything she thought she knew. Can our cells contain memories? What makes us who we are? Could the scientifically accepted laws of the universe relating to life and death, time and space, be wrong?

This is a marvellous coming of age novel, covering existential questions as well as themes of love, friendship, life changing experiences and how we view the world. *Everything I Thought I Knew* will be loved by readers, and is best suited to those in middle and upper secondary levels.

Reviewed by Rob