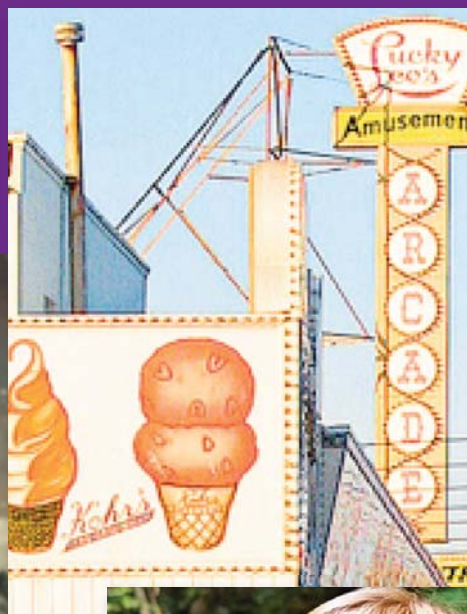


Fresh Fiction from New Voices



Fall 2009



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Fresh Fiction from New Voices



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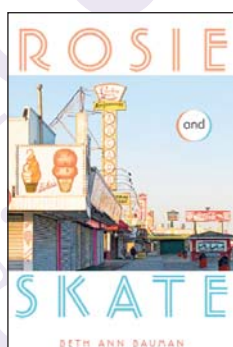
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Fresh Fiction from New Voices



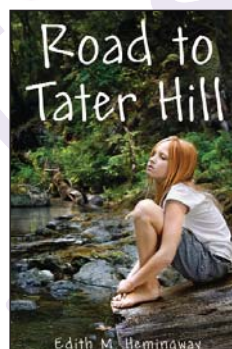
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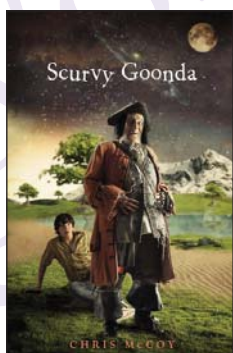
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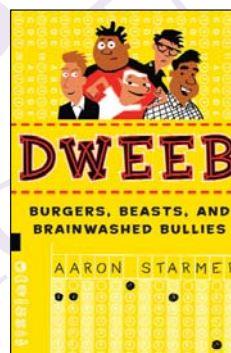
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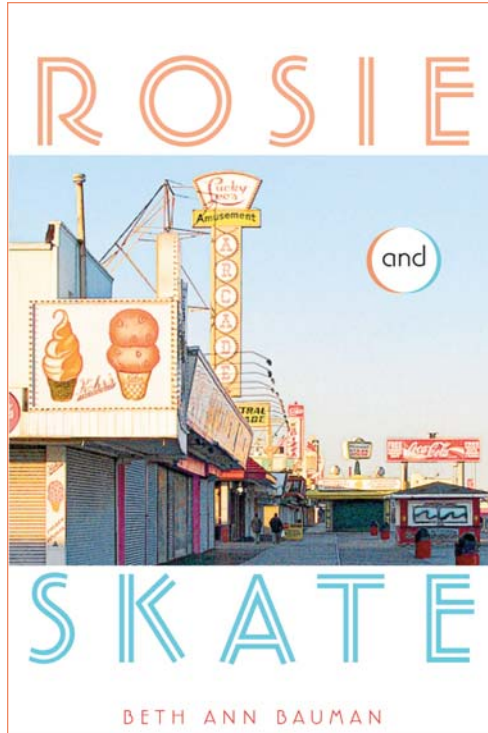


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IT'S A SECOND! Second novels from former It's a First! novelists—see p. 21

New for Spring 2009 and Summer 2009—see p. 27

Cover illustrations, first row: photo from *Rosie and Skate* © 2009 by Phil Denton (A-Wop-Bop-A-Lo-Bop!); illustration from *Powerless* © 2009 by Geoffrey Lorenzen for Veer Inc; photo from *Road to Tater Hill* © 2009 by Eva Kolenko.
Second row: illustration from *Scurvy Goonda* © 2009 by Mark Holthusen; illustration from *Gone from These Woods* © 2009 by Blake Morrow; illustration from *Dweeb* © 2009 by Andy Rash.



Rosie and Skate

by Beth Ann Bauman

Edited by Wendy Lamb

ISBN: 978-0-385-73735-7

\$15.99/\$19.99 Can.

GLB ISBN: 978-0-385-90660-9

\$18.99/\$23.00 Can.

Young Adult Fiction

On Sale: 8/11/2009

WENDY
LAMB
BOOKS

from the editor



Beth Ann Bauman has previously written acclaimed short stories for adults. The vivid young characters in that collection made me hope she could write a great novel for young adults, and Beth delivered this quiet knockout of a story about two Jersey girls.

Set in the off-season at the shore, the story is told in the alternating voices of sisters Rosie, 15, and Skate, 16, whose dad is a hopeless, amiable drunk. The girls' huge, decrepit old house and the arcade are also vivid characters. Despite Dad's problems, there's humor, warmth, and a coziness to this novel, because Rosie and Skate are supported by a whole community. *Rosie and Skate* is about people who look out for each other; it's about taking responsibility, and how it can lead to hope, and love.

I hope you'll enjoy Beth Ann Bauman's wonderful debut. And have a good time down at the shore!

—Wendy Lamb

ROSIE AND SKATE

I rest my head on my arms and smile at Skate. With her I never feel as afraid as I do alone in my room in the house. I wish she'd move back home. I wish I could be with her on nights when the ocean wind whistles and howls through the third floor and the floorboards creak and the house feels absolutely alive. Some nights, when there's enough moonlight, I can see the ocean from my window. Wave after wave crashes foamy to the shore. That's when my heart pounds and I feel afraid. When I'm afraid, I wish for so many things. I want my dad back. I want him well. I want Skate to forgive him. I want to love my friends (once I have some) and to kiss a boy (when I meet a good one). I want to have hope.

And I do. Isn't it funny to have hope when everything feels broken? Here's another funny, secret thing: I'm glad my father is in jail. Because in jail he can't drink. He can't get into any more trouble. He'd been soggy with Old Crow whiskey for so long—so soggy his insides must have squished like a wet sponge—but now he's drying out. Everything has to change. I can feel it. This is what I want to tell Skate, but she won't believe me.

I want to have hope.

"He didn't steal," I say. "He'll pay me back when—"

"Rosie!" Skate says, reaching across the table and grabbing my wrist.

"What?"

"Snap out it! Don't be some dumb-ass girl with her head up her butt! Dad is a drunk and a shoplifter and a low-down thief who took three hundred bucks out of your sock drawer. That's who he is, the Old Crow. I told you, you should have opened a bank account. Julia would have cosigned for you. I told you."

"But he's sick, Skate. I mean, isn't he?"

"Well," Skate says, wadding up her napkin and dropping it onto the table. "Isn't it about time he got well?"

"He will. He is."

She stares at me.

"Can't you come visit him on Saturday? Just for a little while."

"You know that Perry's coming down for the weekend." She swipes her finger through the whipped cream and takes a lick.

"You miss Perry?" I ask.

"You have no idea."

"What's it like, Skate?"

"What's what like?"

"Nothing," I say, feeling my face get hot.

"Hey, you're wearing mascara," she says, narrowing her eyes. "I knew something was different."

"Maybelline Great Lash."

"You like someone, don't you?"

"Not really," I say, and it's mostly true.

Skate waits for me to say more, and when I don't she says, "The girl with a million secrets. It's not Gus, I hope."

"Why?"

"Number one, he's too old for you. He's, like, twenty-two. Number two, he's too intense, too sad, too into the whole Drama Queen thing. I mean, can you imagine the guy having fun? Please. Number three . . . Well, I can't think of a number three."

"I know he's too old for me."

"He probably dates pimply college girls."

"You're terrible, Skate."

She puts her elbows on the table and cups her chin in her hands. "I speak the truth."

Beth Ann Bauman is the author of a short story collection for adults, *Beautiful Girls*. She received her MFA in creative writing from the University of Arizona, and her short stories have appeared in several literary journals.



Photo © Matt Guarno



Powerless

by Matthew Cody

Edited by Joan Slattery

ISBN: 978-0-375-85595-5

\$15.99/\$19.99 Can.

GLB ISBN: 978-0-375-95595-2

\$18.99/\$23.00 Can.

Middle-Grade Fiction

On Sale: 10/27/2009



Alfred A. Knopf

from the editor



The office “buzz” for a book is often very telling, and if so, things are looking good for *Powerless*. We editors naturally try to impress the kids in our lives with free books and galleys (hey, it’s our one perk), and *Powerless* is just the sort of read-it-in-a-weekend novel you grab to hand to your nephew or neighbor or son. Thus, my disappearing galley pile.

Matthew Cody starts with an inviting and kid-friendly premise: what if you moved to a new town and came to realize that your (slightly strange) new friends all had powers? As in, *superpowers*? And that is was up to you, a regular (powerless) twelve-year-old, to stop a power-stealing villain from attacking these superkids on their thirteenth birthdays? Matt taps straight into the minds and tastes of boys in this suspenseful and artfully plotted debut, a kid-superhero novel—with a comic book twist. What middle grader could resist?

—Joan Slattery

powerless

This was a bad situation. Here Daniel was, in a place that was off-limits, with no teachers around, trapped with the two most dangerous kids in school.

“Where’s your girlfriend?” asked Clay.

“She’s around,” Daniel croaked. He hadn’t realized it until now, but his mouth had gone dry. He wondered if they could see his legs shaking. Would they be satisfied that they had simply terrified him and leave it at that? Somehow Daniel doubted it.

“In fact, Mollie and Eric are on their way up here right now, so you’d better get out of my way.”

Then he did something either very brave or very crazy—he started walking straight towards them, as if they weren’t even there. The way he figured it he had

**He could feel someone’s
hot breath on his neck
and tripped just as fingers
grabbed at his shirt collar.**

one chance—Clay and Bud were both bigger than him, and Clay was certainly way stronger, but they weren’t the brightest couple of kids. He needed to bluff them, and quick, before they recognized the lie on his face.

Amazingly, it worked. Or at least it started to. Bud knitted his brow, clearly

thrown by Daniel’s brazen approach, and backed up a step to the right, giving Daniel just enough room to squeeze by. Clay, however, stood perfectly still, watching Daniel pass. He looked like he was thinking so hard it hurt.

Daniel was maybe three steps past them when he heard Clay sneer, “Aw, this is bull! He’s up here all alone!”

That’s when Daniel ran. He sprinted as fast as he could on wobbly legs towards the stairs, not even daring to look back. He could feel someone’s hot breath on his neck and tripped just as fingers grabbed at his shirt collar.

Daniel skidded on his hands and knees and ended up in a pile on the floor, dangerously close to the exposed wall and the sheer drop down the mountainside. The bright sunlight was streaming in from outside, and Daniel shielded his eyes

from the glare. He was dazed from his fall and blinded by the sun, but he could still hear Clay's mocking laughter somewhere in front of him. He was trapped between Clay and the deadly fall. The air around him smelled strongly of rotting stink, of dead things.

"Nowhere to go, New Kid. Might as well take what's coming to you."

In a panic, Daniel got to his feet too fast and realized the room was spinning. He'd fallen harder than he'd thought, and now his vision began to go dark with spots. Stumbling and blind, he tried to back away from Clay's taunting laughter.

Daniel's eyes started to clear just in time to see Clay make a desperate grab for him. Daniel lunged backward. But the look on Clay's face suddenly changed. The cruel smile disappeared and his eyes went wide with fear. He shouted, "Wait! Look out!" but it was too late.

Daniel was already taking another step back, but this time he found only empty air. Daniel's stomach dropped out from under him as he tottered over and through the exposed wall, plummeting off the side of Mount Noble.

All Daniel saw was the blurry shape of the scaffolding passing by him, and all he heard was the sound of blood pounding in his ears. Despite his panic, he found himself wondering whether he would feel it when he hit, or if he would just die instantly.

Then he was no longer falling. Somebody had a hold of him, and that someone was floating in midair.

He turned his head and saw Eric smiling back at him.

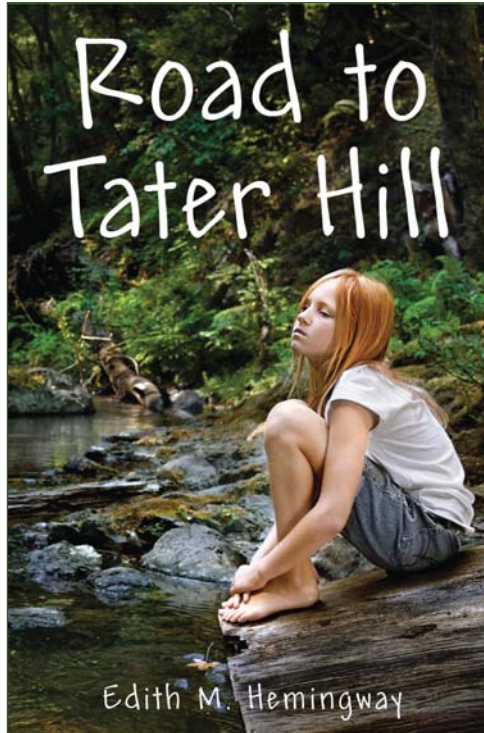
"Hi, Daniel. I guess it's time we talked, huh?"

Then he was no longer falling. Somebody had a hold of him, and that someone was floating in midair.

Matthew Cody divides his time between writing and teaching college English in New York City. *Powerless* comes from a lifelong love of superhero comics and 1940s pulp fiction.



Photo courtesy of the author.



Road to Tater Hill

by Edith M. Hemingway
 Edited by Michelle Poploff

ISBN: 978-0-385-73677-0

\$16.99/\$21.00 Can.

GLB ISBN: 978-0-385-90627-2

\$19.99/\$24.99 Can.

Middle-Grade Fiction

On Sale: 9/8/2009



Delacorte
 Press

from **the editor**



The sights, sounds, and scents of the country called to me in Edie Hemingway's story set in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina in 1963. I was pulled in by young Annie Winters and her struggle with grief following the death of her newborn sister and the isolation she felt by her mother's deepening depression. But this is much more than a tale of grief, it's a story of strong unexpected friendships and finding solace in surprising places. Unable to confide in her family, Annie finds comfort only when she's holding an oblong stone she calls her rock baby. Then she secretly befriends Miss Eliza, a mysterious mountain woman who helps her come to terms with her loss. Soon this unlikely alliance leads to an unexpected turn of events. I'm sure you'll quickly connect to the wise and resourceful Annie in this lyrical novel. If you listen closely, you can just about hear Miss Eliza singing and playing the hog fiddle.

—Michelle Poploff

Road to Tater Hill

For months I had wished and wished the baby would be a girl, a little sister. Maybe I shouldn't have wished so hard. *A boy might have lived.*

Weren't wishes kind of like prayers? Maybe my wishing really did make things worse. I knew that didn't make sense, but nothing in this whole terrible day made sense.

Grandma closed the front door with a bang, as if announcing the end of a chapter in a book about our lives. "What a day," she said, dropping her purse to the floor. "I'm going to lie down. You should take a nap, too, Annie. None of us got much sleep last night." Grandma headed to her room, not waiting for an answer.

A nap? I was almost eleven. I hadn't taken a nap for as long as I could remember. Besides, how could a nap change the way we all felt? We'd still wake up. It would all still be the same.

"She means well, Annie," Grandpa said. "We're all worn out." He looked like he wanted to say something more. I waited. Grandpa had grown older, just in this one day. His glasses were smudged, and his mouth and shoulders sagged. Gray stubble covered his chin.

**Besides, how could a nap
change the way we all felt?
We'd still wake up. It would
all still be the same.**

"I thought . . ." Grandpa reached out to smooth my hair. "We all thought it would be okay this time." Another pause as he started down the basement stairs to his workshop. "She had red hair, you know. Very much like yours. A downy, reddish cap."

My baby sister had red hair like mine. If only I could have seen her, just once.

The house was silent. I walked from room to room with that heavy, tired feeling you have after you've cried for a long time. I looked out the windows. How could the sun still shine like it was just any normal day? The kitchen clock showed that it was only 2:45. Maybe I'd go down to the Millers'. If the Miller kids didn't know about the baby, I could pretend things were normal.

The walk down the winding dirt road to the Millers' farm seemed longer than ever before. Maybe it was because I usually ran down and didn't even notice passing Loggers Hollow Church with its small fenced-in graveyard. But this time that little graveyard was all I could think about. *I won't look, I won't look*, I repeated over and over to myself, but it didn't keep the vision of gravestones out of my mind. Soon my little sister would have a gravestone of her own with her short, one-day life carved into it. Born July 13, 1963. Died July 14, 1963. Grandpa had buried her there earlier this morning—all by himself while Grandma and I stayed with Mama at the hospital.

"Aren't we having a funeral?" I had asked.

Grandma was quick to shush me. "We're trying to make it easier for your mama. Less for her to go through," she whispered, while Mama lay in bed with her eyes

**I could see tears slipping
through the cracks and sliding
over Mama's face, soaking the
pillow beneath her head.**

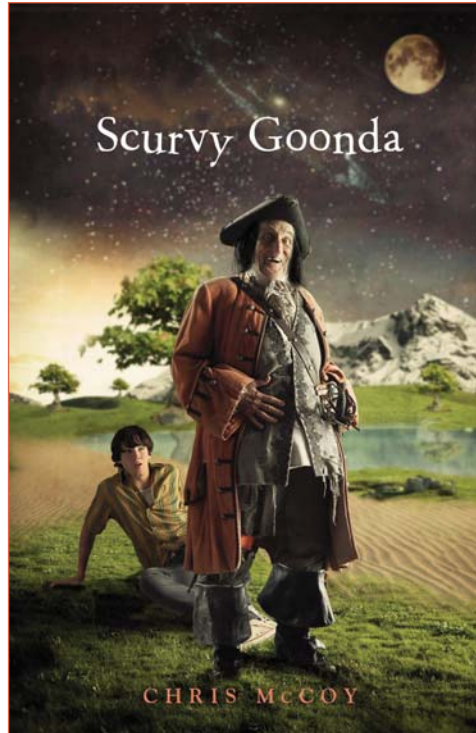
closed, looking like she was asleep. But I could see tears slipping through the cracks and sliding over Mama's face, soaking the pillow beneath her head. Grandma patted her hand, and I tried squeezing Mama's other hand, but she didn't squeeze back.

Easier? Nothing could make things easier right now—except if I were miles and miles across the ocean in Germany with Daddy, who didn't even know anything was wrong. This was probably something I should write down in the journal Daddy had given me before he left. Something I should tell him about my summer, but I didn't know if I could ever write this feeling down on paper.

Edith M. Hemingway lives in a log cabin in Maryland, teaches creative writing workshops, and is learning to play the mountain dulcimer. She spent many summers at her grandparents' home in the North Carolina mountains.



Photo © Doug Hemingway



Scurvy Goonda

by Chris McCoy

Edited by Cecile A. Goyette

ISBN: 978-0-375-85598-6

\$16.99/\$21.00 Can.

GLB ISBN: 978-0-375-95598-3

\$19.99/\$24.99 Can.

Middle-Grade Fiction

On Sale: 11/10/2009



Alfred A. Knopf

from the editor



Chris McCoy makes his children's book debut with a fabulously imaginative and entertaining adventure featuring a guy who never outgrew his childhood imaginary friend—or “Abstract Companion” as his sort apparently prefers to be called. Said friend is one Scurvy Goonda, an outlandish invisible pirate with an insatiable love for bacon.

For kids who love stories in which almost-ordinary kids travel to fantastical lands and become heroes, Chris has populated *Scurvy Goonda* with characters who are weird, endearing, and a few who are bent on revenge against all humankind. His lovesick cockatoo skeleton, Persephone, who rules over a realm called Middlemost, was a particular delight—a baddie to be sure, but hilariously demented to boot!

While thrill-seeking vegetarians will find plenty to savor, this is a must-read for all who love bacon—which plays a key role in the story's sizzling climax!

—Cecile A. Goyette

Scurvy Goonda

In Ted's workstation of processed meats, Scurvy Goonda was stabbing packages of bacon with his dagger and sliding the raw slabs off of the blade into his mouth. Scurvy loved the cured, smoked strips of pork with an insane enthusiasm.

Every night, Ted was forced to conceal the pirate's meat-aisle carnage from Jed, the supermarket night manager

"Please. Tell me again: why bacon?" asked Ted.

"Ah, a story, ya want! Y'see, I once survived on a lifeboat for three weeks with a lovely pig named Alfie, " said Scurvy, small globs of pink meat decorating his beard. "Alfie was a dear old friend, but there came a point where it was *him* or *me*. So I ate me dear piggy. I did. Roasted his lovely strips right on tha blade of me sword. Alfie kept me company, and then kept me alive. Since that day, tah me bacon has tasted like friendship."

**"Alfie kept me company,
and then kept me alive. Since
that day, tah me bacon has
tasted like friendship."**

Ted nodded. Over the years he had learned it was best not to question Scurvy too vigorously about odd moments from his past.

"But it isn't good for you to eat it raw like that, " said Ted, something he'd told Scurvy many times before.

"Don't ya worry about me, Teddy-boy, " said Scurvy. "Whenever me heart stops, I just give it a wee pep talk—*Ahoy! Ticky-ticky thump pumper! Yer better than that! Buck up and do yer jobbie!*—and all of a sudden it's beatin' again like I'm a teenager in love."

Whether consuming cured meats, juggling chainsaws, cliff diving, or any other manner of questionable and dangerous activities, Scurvy approached everything he did as something to be *devoured*. When Ted went skiing for the first time, Scurvy slapped on his own skis and insisted they take the lift to the top of the highest peak.

"To the ledge!" he'd roared.

Ted promised him it was certain death, but Scurvy launched himself over a sheer cliff and went tumbling down the mountain, head over leather boots all the way to the bottom. Then he got up and brushed himself off, all fine and dandy.

“Yer turn!” he’d bellowed. Ted took the ski lift back down the mountain, and spent the rest of the day on the beginner’s slope.

Ted often wished that he was as brave as Scurvy.

Then there was the time Ted visited the Grand Canyon, and Scurvy showed up wearing a parachute and jumped over the edge of the chasm, yelling about how he would drink the entire Colorado River because he

was thirsty. Ted dropped a quarter into one of the tourist telescopes at the top of the canyon and watched Scurvy howl through the empty air, plummet into the water and be swept away by the current, whereupon he navigated deadly rapids by dog paddling and using his face to absorb the impact of the boulders.

“Weren’t no worse than goin’ fifteen boxin’ rounds with a outback kangaroo!” Scurvy had explained later, when Ted was trying to jam the pirate’s nose back into its correct position.

A great white shark once swam to the shore near Ted’s house, and Scurvy hopped in the bay, grabbed onto the shark’s fin, and disappeared for the next three days as he and the shark zoomed from Martha’s Vineyard to Nantucket to the Maine shore and back to Cape Cod again. By the time he returned, Scurvy demanded that Ted start cooking him seal bacon, saying he’d developed a taste for the aquatic mammals. Ted told him that Stop to Shop didn’t carry it.

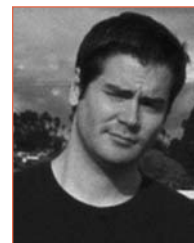
“Then ya gotta look at it as a *fantastic* business opportunity, me Teddy!” said Scurvy. “Melts on tha tongue, seal bacon!”

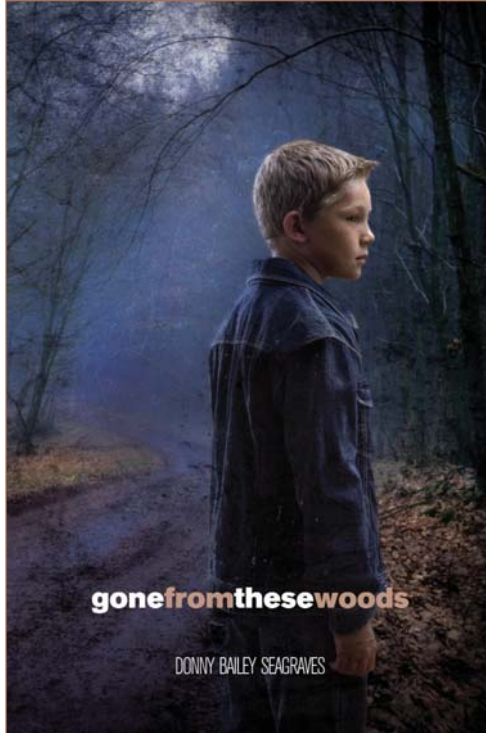
Ted often wished that he was as brave as Scurvy—even though he knew that much of what Scurvy did was more stupid than brave.

Ted wasn’t brave.

Editor’s note: Yet.

Chris McCoy grew up on Cape Cod and graduated from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. He has contributed to *McSweeney’s* literary quarterly, sold a screenplay, and currently lives in Santa Monica, California.





Gone from These Woods

by Donny Bailey Seagraves

Edited by Michelle Poploff

ISBN: 978-0-385-73629-9

\$15.99/\$19.99 Can.

GLB ISBN: 978-0-385-90599-2

\$18.99/\$23.00 Can.

Middle-Grade Fiction

On Sale: 8/25/2009



Delacorte
Press

from the editor



While at a children's book writers conference, I read aloud the first page of a manuscript, in a session where editors give an instant response to what they've read. I felt a touch of chill as I read about a boy who didn't want to go hunting one cold November morning. I didn't know the author, but expressed interest in reading more. Though we didn't meet, Donny Bailey Seagraves was sitting there and honored my request. Soon after I happily acquired *D-Man*, which became *Gone from These Woods*. Donny paints a riveting portrait of a once brave and confident boy struggling with the pain and guilt of having taken a loved one's life. As the spirit and love of Daniel's Uncle Clay resonates through the story, readers are reassured that Daniel will finally move beyond his grief and make peace with the past. You will soon see why I asked for more after reading just one page.

—Michelle Poploff

gone from these woods

Have you ever felt like everything just stopped? Like the whole world froze and you were part of that ice? Unable to move. Barely breathing. Unsure of what to do next because you'd never been to a place like that before?

That's how I felt, kneeling out there in the woods by my uncle. The boom of the shotgun blast still rang in my ears. I felt myself go all white and ghostly like the comic book character Deadman as I looked at Clay. Facedown on the pine straw. Blond hair curling on the back of his neck. Wrinkled camouflage jacket. The muddy heels of his boots. And in front of him, his hat, upside down where it had landed when he fell.

**Was he breathing?
I couldn't tell. I'd have
to turn him over.
I pushed at his back,
then stopped.**

This wasn't real.

I waited for Clay to move, to say something. When he didn't, I swallowed and forced my voice, hoarse and shaky, up my throat.

"Clay?"

No answer.

I leaned over and grabbed his arm and shook it gently, not wanting to believe how limp it felt.

"Clay?" My voice squeaked into the woods air, thin as a scared bird's cry.

Nothing.

I hugged myself, trembling, wondering what to do. This was an emergency and I had to act fast. But I'd never had a lifesaving course, so I didn't know how to do CPR. Any other time, I would have asked Clay what to do. But today, in the woods, I'd have to figure everything out myself.

Just thinking about how far we were from my house made me shake harder. We were at least two miles from Mouse Creek Road. "Stop thinking about that," I told myself, forcing my eyes to look back down at Clay.

Was he breathing? I couldn't tell. I'd have to turn him over. I pushed at his back, then stopped. My teeth chattered as I tried to calm myself. I wanted to help my

uncle, but I was afraid to turn him over. He might be bleeding.

But he wasn't dead. He couldn't be dead. No way.

I got up, shivering, wondering what to do. I couldn't turn Clay over and I couldn't keep looking at his back, so still and scary. The loud, rasping scream of a red-tailed hawk made me turn my eyes toward the trees. The bird circled in the sky between two pines.

I gasped when I saw Clay's eyes.

Open with the same faraway look

I wanted the hawk to dive down into Sartain Woods and snatch me out of this frozen place. Jab my arm with its sharp beak. Lift me up by the shoulder of my parka and fly me away from what had just happened to Clay.

I'd seen on that first rabbit earlier this morning.

I was thinking that, imagining it, when my heart came back to life, pounding hard inside my chest like it wanted to escape. The front of my jeans felt suddenly wet and cold as I turned back to Clay and dropped to my knees, leaning over him, trembling, feeling like I might pass out.

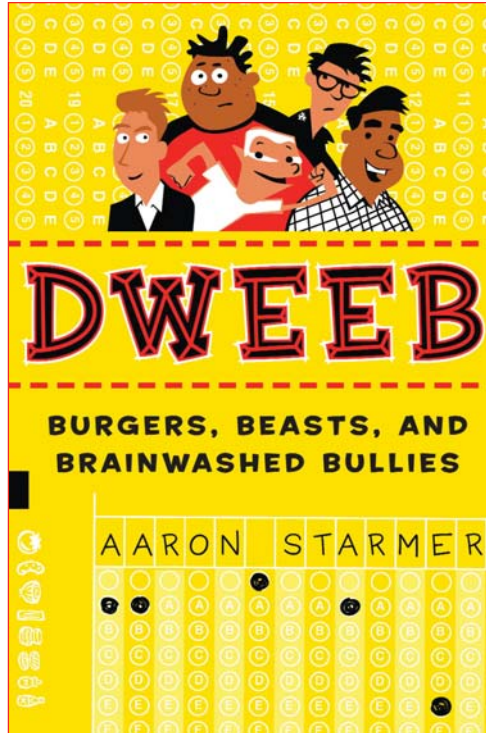
Grabbing his shoulder, I nudged him over on his back.

I gasped when I saw Clay's eyes. Open with the same faraway look I'd seen on that first rabbit earlier this morning. Only blue instead of brown. Deep Sartain blue . . . glinting from streaks of sunlight shining through the treetops overhead, but not seeing.

Donny Bailey Seagraves was a newspaper columnist and has published in regional and national publications. Donny enjoys reading, writing, and walking in the rural areas around her home in Georgia.



Photo © Barry Mobley



Dweeb

by Aaron Starmer

Edited by Michelle Poploff

ISBN: 978-0-385-73705-0

\$15.99/\$19.99 Can.

GLB ISBN: 978-0-385-90643-2

\$18.99/\$23.00 Can.

Middle-Grade Fiction

On Sale: 10/13/2009



from the author



Sometimes authors write great pitch letters, but the manuscript doesn't deliver. Aaron Starmer's pitch delivered and so does DWEEB. Here's an excerpt:

It's April at Ho-Ho-Kus Junior High. Students are studying for the yearly Idaho Tests. Thanks to a generous grant, fast-food giant Mackers is planning a grand opening in the school cafeteria. And someone has stolen nearly \$3,000 from last week's bake sale. Now that's a lot of Rice Krispie Treats. Vice Principal Snodgrass, the sneering thorn in every mischief-maker's side, has gathered five suspects in his office. They are diverse, multitalented, and the last kids you'd expect to be involved in grand theft. In fact, they're among the smartest boys in eighth grade. There's Denton, Wendell, Eric, Eddie, and Bijay. If they were a crime syndicate with an affinity for acronyms, these five boys might call themselves: DWEEB. These innocent boys must use all their nerdish powers to expose a conspiracy involving fast food, standardized testing, and a school full of overachieving zombies . . .

—Aaron Starmer (in a pitch letter to his agent)

DWEEB

Quietly, Wendell emerged from the closet and headed straight to the computer. He set his watch down next to the keyboard and turned on its light. The flour he had sprinkled on the keys glowed. He could easily see Snodgrass's fingerprints.

He grabbed a pen off the desk and wrote the letters on his hand: E R O A S D G L X N.

Then Wendell blew lightly across the keyboard, sending the flour into the air like pollen. He snatched up his watch and backed into the closet. He knew Snodgrass would return at any moment.

His prediction was right. Snodgrass stepped into the office, a look of annoyance on his face. "Lousy old pipes," he grumbled.

**Through a crack in the closet door,
Wendell tried to see what was on
Snodgrass's computer screen.**

He hurried to his desk, where he sat down, lifted up the phone, and dialed a number.

"Hello, sir. . . . Yes, it's me again. . . . Tomorrow, day of reckoning. . . . Yes, sir. . . . You

have my guarantee. . . . We shall see, oh, we shall see. . . . What can I say, other bidders, others with uses for it. . . . Understood, and it's one of many generous offers. . . . And to you as well."

He placed the phone down, smiling to himself. Then he hunched over his computer.

Through a crack in the closet door, Wendell tried to see what was on Snodgrass's computer screen. He had no idea what kind of wickedness the vice principal could be up to. Was he e-mailing his coconspirators at Mackers? Or plotting more evil to unleash on Ho-Ho-Kus Junior High? Or covering his tracks, framing more people, disguising what actually happened to Nurse Bloom?

After what seemed like an eternity of silence, a cackle like machine-gun fire suddenly burst from Snodgrass. He doubled over in his chair.

"Priceless," Snodgrass said between his hideous giggles. "Xerxes has got to see this one!"

Over Snodgrass's curled back, Wendell could finally spy the computer screen. A short video was playing on a loop, over and over again. It started with a small cat sitting in front of a short fence. The cat eyed it for a moment, then jumped. But he didn't quite clear the fence. His stomach struck the edge of it, sending him into a flip and landing him on his back on the other side. It was an uncharacteristically clumsy move for a feline, and had made Wendell laugh the first time he saw it. But that was two years ago, and he hadn't laughed nearly as hard as Snodgrass.

“Stupid stinkin’ cat!” Snodgrass bellowed, spinning around in his chair like a child.

“Stupid stinkin’ cat!” Snodgrass bellowed, spinning around in his chair like a child. He gave a high-pitched, satisfied sigh and said, “Oh, Xerxes will love it!”

Then Snodgrass was on his feet. He hurried to the door, and before Wendell could figure out what exactly was happening, the door was closing.

“The snake is slithering. The snake is slithering,” Wendell said into his microphone. “Is it almost time?”

“Almost there,” Eddie’s voice came back.

“Someone’s here,” Elijah said, a clanging sound in the background, then a crash.

“Elijah?” Wendell said. There was no response.

The only other thing Wendell could hear was muffled talking. He figured Bijay must have placed the microphone in his pocket. Bijay was out of contact too.

Aaron Starmer has been a bookseller and an African safari specialist. His writing has appeared in guidebooks and humor publications. He lives in New Jersey.

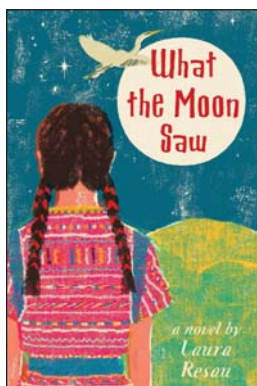


Photo courtesy of the author.

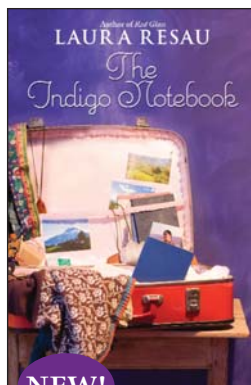
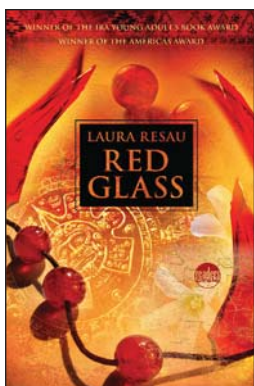
IT'S A SECOND!

Find out what former “It’s a First” novelists have been up to.

LAURA RESAU



“It’s a First”

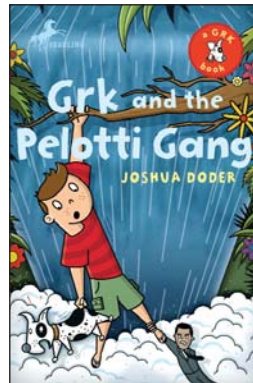
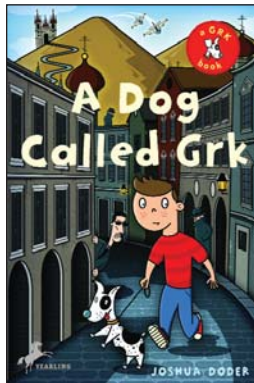


Laura Resau’s second novel, *Red Glass*, received critical acclaim. In a starred review, *School Library Journal* called it “a captivating read.” Now Resau begins an exciting new series, beginning with *The Indigo Notebook*.

IT'S A SECOND!

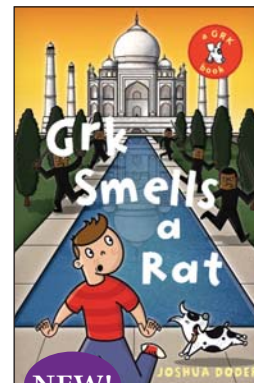
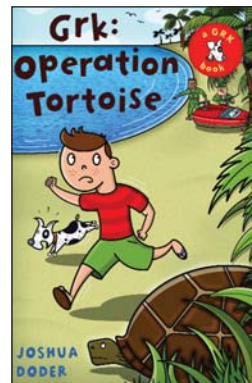
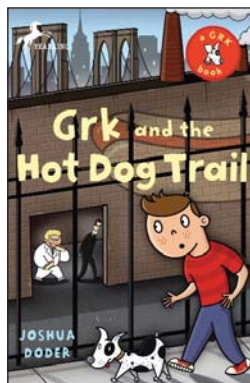
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JOSH DODER



Josh Doder's book about *A Dog Called Grk* led to his second novel, *Grk and the Pelotti Gang*. Now Grk has become a whole series of adventurous, fun books!

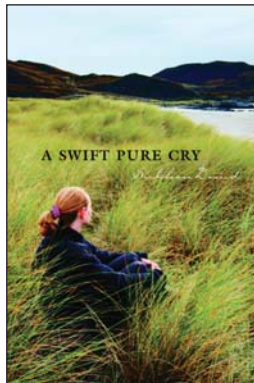
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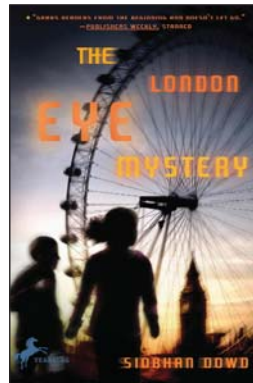
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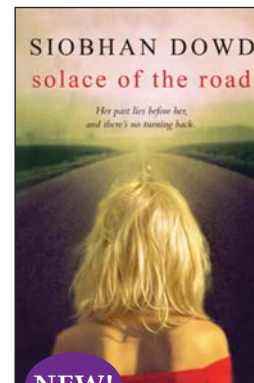
SIOBHAN DOWD



“It’s a First”



Siobhan Dowd’s second novel for middle grade readers, *London Eye Mystery*, received *five* starred reviews. In her last novel, for young adults, Dowd tells a story that will leave a lasting impression on all who travel through it.

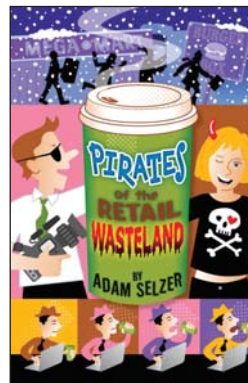
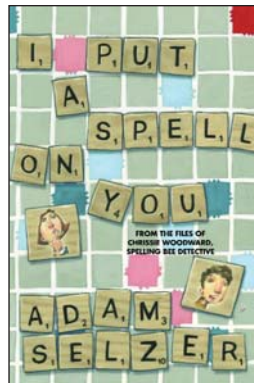
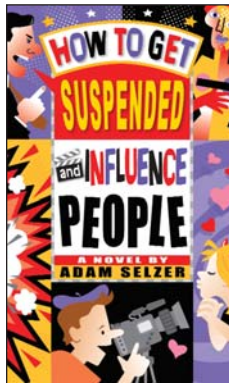


NEW!

IT'S A SECOND!

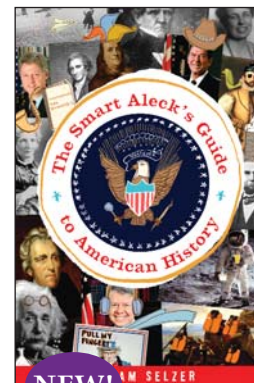
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ADAM SELZER



Adam Selzer's hilarious and deadpan style is the ultimate voice for kids who are mischievous and too smart for their own good. His books are funny, clever, and topical.

“It’s a First”

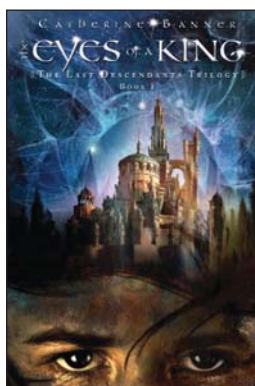


NEW!

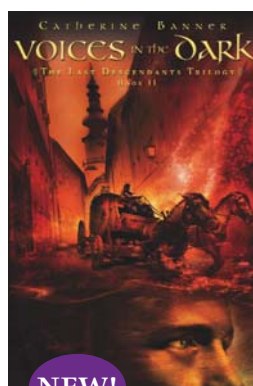
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CATHERINE BANNER



“It’s a First”



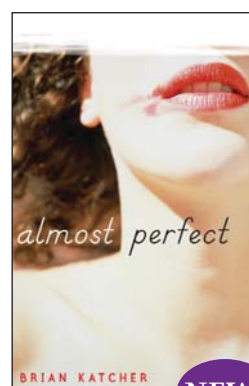
Asking for the truth can be as painful as telling it. . . . This second volume of the Last Descendants trilogy picks up fifteen years later with a new teen protagonist, but features the same blend of fantasy and romance.

BRIAN KATCHER

Almost Perfect is a gripping and unflinchingly honest second novel that follows a heartsick teenage boy as he becomes enamored with the strange new girl at school, who reveals that she is transgendered, not too long after their first kiss.



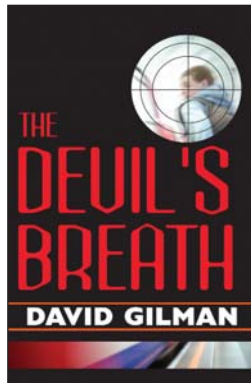
“It’s a First”



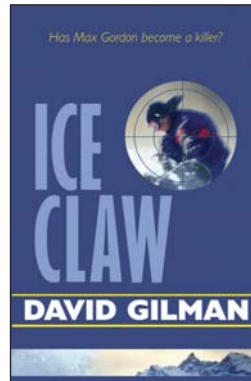
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DAVID GILMAN



“It’s a First”



Max Gordon is still on the run. In this second, action-packed novel, he’s wanted. For murder.

BARRIE SUMMY

In *I So Don't Do Spooky*, the second mystery about fast-thinking tween sleuth Sherry Holmes Baldwin, someone is out to get Sherry's stepmom. Can she save her before it's too late?



“It’s a First”

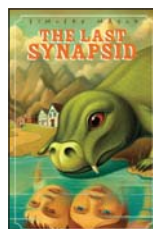
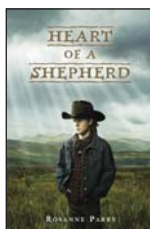
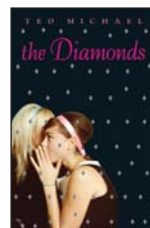


WHERE STRONG VOICES
BECOME BESTSELLERS!

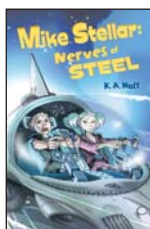
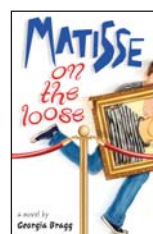
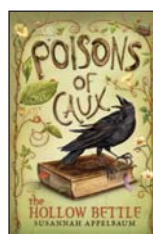
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