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My Haunted House (review)

April Spisak

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 60, Number 2, October 2006

pp. 92-93

10.1353/bcc.2006.0686

REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

April Spisak

Sage, Angie *My Haunted House*; illus. by Jimmy Pickering.

Tegen/HarperCollins, 2006 133p Library ed. ISBN 0-06-077482-7 \$14.89 Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-077481-9 \$8.99 R Gr. 2-5

Araminta loves her giant spooky house with its endless rooms and bat occupants, and she and her vampire-philic uncle won't stand for her aunt's decision to sell the place and move to a more normal abode. Therefore, Araminta feels justified in her decision to sabotage her aunt's attempts to sell the home; with the help of two affable ghosts who also want the family to stay, she discovers that there are many ways to foil a sale, from all-out slime attacks to the more subtle changing of the "For Sale" sign. Fortunately, the family that comes to look at the house is just as quirky as the current occupants, so instead of Araminta's family selling the house, both families decide to move in together, setting the stage and widening the cast of characters for future books in the Araminta Spookie series. Araminta is an appealing **[End Page 92]** heroine who exudes stubbornness, daring, and an imaginative flair for creating drama, and her warm relationships with the other members of the household, both alive and incorporeal, balance her occasional egocentrism. Pickering's black-and-white illustrations are liberally arranged in and around the text, complementing both the atmospheric descriptions of the rambling haunted house and the humorous elements of the story. Simple vocabulary, large text, and healthy proportions of scary details leavened with light and funny plot twists make this novel an easy recommendation for the middle-grades set.

has profoundly stunted his ability to judge character and damaged his relationships with potential allies, particularly his mother. While the theme of human flight has been treated compellingly in other novels, notably Almond's *Skellig* (BCCB 3/99) and Murphy's *Night Flying* (BCCB 1/01), Graham's travails give this story a darker cast and also a more realistic one—a boy who could fly would indeed need to worry about the tabloids and the police. The fact that he must also worry about his so-called friends and his own parents puts this novel, despite its fantastical subject matter, comfortably at home alongside other dark, realistic YA fare. LG

ROSOFF, MEG *Just in Case*. Lamb, 2006. 246p
Library ed. ISBN 0-385-90909-8 \$18.99
Trade ed. ISBN 0-385-74678-4 \$16.95

Ad Gr. 9-12

When David Case's little toddler brother, Charlie, almost takes a header out of an upper-story window, fifteen-year-old David is suddenly overwhelmed by the constant possibility of catastrophe. Determined to avoid what he considers his inevitable doom, he transforms himself, changing his name to Justin, finding a new clothing style, and taking up cross-country running, along the way garnering the attention of a stylish young photographer, Agnes, with whom Justin falls in love. He's finally convinced he's outrun Fate, whose threatening voice he hears in his head, by making his home at the airport; when a freak plane crash almost kills him and Agnes, however, he's devastated to realize that he can't be safe from disaster anywhere. Rosoff, author of *How I Live Now* (BCCB 9/04), here explores a contemporary world of slightly manipulated realism—Fate occasionally interjects his/her own commentary. Justin has an imaginary greyhound visible to several of his friends, Charlie has a deep wisdom that his limited vocabulary unfortunately prevents him from sharing. The fluid, probing narrative is highly readable, and the issues of Fate and the fear of catastrophe are intriguing ones. Unfortunately, the disparate elements don't knit together effectively, and the pacing lags after the plane crash; the characters are often interesting but not emotionally engaging, especially the preternaturally perceptive young children (Charlie and the young sister of a friend of Justin's), who end up an obtrusive device. Norma Howe's *Adventures of Blue Avenger* (BCCB 3/99) is a more successful novel about the whims of Fate, but readers may appreciate this quirky chronicle of a young man's struggle with doom. DS

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



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