A Monster Calls by Patrick Ness, illustrated by Jim Kay

Nightmares assail 13-year-old Conor each night. Frightened about losing his mother to cancer, Conor confronts a different type of monster who takes on the form of the yew tree near his bedroom window. The monster tells him three different stories, each revealing the problem with making assumptions, and then demands that Conor tell his own story. While Conor is facing down the monster, he must also deal with school bullies, a grandmother who is completely unlike his mother, and his own demons. When his teachers or classmates offer sympathy for his plight, Conor shuns them, insisting that his mother will be perfectly all right. As the disease ravages his mother, she lets him know that she has known her secret all along.

This moving story about loss and the strength that comes from owning up to unpleasant truths is accompanied by haunting artwork that provides complementary texture to the tale.

Barbara A. Ward
Pullman, WA

A Monster Calls
Loss/Grieving/Cancer

Among Others by Jo Walton
Science Fiction/Fantasy

After confronting her mother in a tragic battle that leads to her twin sister’s death, Morwenna “Mor” Phelps struggles to establish a relationship with her estranged father and adjust to her posh boarding school in England. At school, she would rather be feared than tormented for her Welsh accent and crippled leg. She struggles to recover from childhood with an insane mother who dabbles with witchcraft. Mor seeks solace in science fiction, and things take a turn for the better when she joins a SF book club. Mor, with a bit of magic and support from her books and friends, makes strides toward moving on with her life.

For science fiction fans, this is a must read; Walton references many SF books and authors. Those familiar with these references will appreciate them. The book is written in journal format and would be appropriate for ages 13 and up.

Annalise Miyashiro
Kailua, Hawaii

Anna Dressed in Blood by Kendare Blake
Loss/Revenge/Supernatural/Thriller

Not only can Cas Lowood see dead people, but it is his task to put them to rest for good. Ever since his father died while dispatching a ghost, Cas has assumed the responsibility for getting rid of the murderous dead. He and his mother head north to Ontario, following a lead that takes Cas to a murderous ghost named Anna, supposedly killed so savagely that the white party dress she was wearing dripped blood long after her death. Although Cas has always kept any possible friends at arm’s length, he is drawn to the high school Queen Bee, Carmel, and to geeky mind-reading Thomas.

After a high school prank involving Carmel’s ex-boyfriend Mike goes awry, the unlikely trio band together to put Anna’s spirit to rest. The consequences of their actions are unexpected, and even more horrors await them in the next room or on the next page.

Barbara A. Ward
Pullman, WA

Anna Dressed in Blood
Loss/Grieving/Cancer

Between Shades of Gray by Ruta Sepetys

In 1941, 15-year-old Lina’s world is forever shattered overnight. She finds herself arrested with her family by Soviet soldiers, separated from her father, and forced into a cramped cattle car with other “undesirables.” In a harrowing journey across Russia and ultimately Siberia, she witnesses and endures horrors that verge on the unimaginable. Forced into slave labor, deprived of human amenities ranging from healthcare to solid food other than stale bread, Lina and her family seem to be in an utterly hopeless situation. Yet, through strength of faith and love, they find hope in the smallest of occasions and mercies.

Between Shades of Gray is valuable for its historical accuracy and its detail regarding the relatively little-known campaign of deportation and terror that befell many states annexed into the Soviet Union. This multilayered story is accessible, suspenseful, and powerful, delivering startling terrors and redemptive love in equal turns.

Simon Gooch
Fort Worth, TX
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<th>Author</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Publisher, Year</th>
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<td>Dead Is Just a Rumor</td>
<td>Marlene Perez</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Graphia, 2010</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>$7.99</td>
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<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Walter Dean Myers</td>
<td>Appropriation of a Classic</td>
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<td>Everything I Was</td>
<td>Corinne Demas</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>Carolrhoda Lab, 2011</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>$17.95</td>
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**The Glass House foursome is back in the 10th installment of Rachel Caine’s Morganville Vampires. Claire, Shane, Michael, and Eve are plunged into the middle of another battle for the town of Morganville, Texas, where the peace between humans and vampires is fragile.**

On her first day of class at Texas Prairie University, Claire finds herself on the front lines of yet another battle. She knows that he, Glory, and Bishop are up to no good, but trying to solve the mystery will put her in terrible danger.

Meredith Milligan
Jefferson City, TN

**In this modern retelling of the classic opera, Carmen, a sassy and bewitching teenage factory worker in Spanish Harlem, finds herself torn between two men. Her first love is a handsome Puerto Rican police officer. When Carmen realizes that Jose is not who she thought he was, she leaves him for Escamillo, a wealthy hip-hop mogul who she thinks will get her out of the barrio. But Jose is not willing to let her go easily, and his passion ends in bloodshed.**

Walter Dean Myers presents his modern retelling in script form, complete with hip-hop remixes of the famous operatic score. This book provides great opportunities for teaching about cross-curricular work or a study of modern appropriations of classics.

Laura Hermann
St. Louis, MO

**Thirteen-year-old Irene is shocked when financial troubles force her parents to sell their Manhattan penthouse and move to a small town. She is taken for granted. Eventually, she must choose between everything she was, and everything she is realizing she needs. In Everything I Was, Demas presents a likeable narrator trying to negotiate friendships, family, and first love. Although Irene’s social class sets her apart from many readers, her concerns are universal, and the book comes as reliable and accessible. Readers will likely find themselves on her side as she comes of age in this earnest novel.**

Laura Hermann
St. Louis, MO
**Girl Wonder** by Alexa Martin  
Realistic Fiction/High School  
ISBN: 978-1-4231-2135-0  
Charlotte Locke is new to Shady Grove High School, and things aren’t necessarily going her way. Her luck starts to change when she befriends Amanda Munger, a spunky, pink-haired girl who has it all. Charlotte joins the debate team to get closer to Neal, the cool and intelligent editor of the literary magazine. Charlotte is getting an “A” in life, but when she and Neal begin a secret relationship, things start to fall apart.  
Through Charlotte’s trials, Martin keeps readers engaged, evoking strong emotional ties to the characters. Charlotte, in particular, is relatable to readers who have faced parental and peer pressure. The book is recommended for readers ages 13 and up, as there are incidents of drug usage and sexual situations that require a mature audience. Martin has written a compelling story that lets readers into the world of a girl you’ll want to root for.  
Annalise Miyashiro  
Kailua, Hawaii

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**Hothead** by Cal Ripken Jr.  
Realistic Fiction/Sports  
ISBN: 978-1-4231-4000-9  
Connor Sullivan is the best 12-year-old baseball player around Eddie Murphy Field; the problem is, he also has his hottest temper. Connor’s team, the Orioles, is on a winning streak and en route to win the championship with an undefeated season. But when Connor makes a mistake, his anger erupts like a volcano, and his position on the team is compromised. Connor needs to stay on the team, help them win a championship, and keep his temper under control, even with a pesky girl reporter, Melissa Morrow, on his case, and more issues flaring at home.  
Ripken’s depiction of a 12-year-old little leaguer who loves nothing more than baseball is spot on. The baseball lingo throughout the novel makes it a compelling read for young baseball fans. Through the story, Connor learns about himself, his friends, and family.  
Max Gertz  
Atlanta, GA

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**I Am J** by Cris Beam  
Fiction/Transgender/Identity/Self-Discovery/Families  
Little, Brown, 2011, 326 pp., $16.99  
ISBN: 978-0-316-05361-7  
Convinced that he is a boy born in a girl’s body, J has always felt different from everyone around him. As his body began to change, he hid the undeniable physical changes beneath his clothing. Now, on the eve of his eighteenth birthday, a betrayal by long-time friend Melissa prompts him to embark on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. No longer will J hide—from his friends, his parents, and even himself. There’s a whole new world of possibilities outside his front door, even a school where he might find acceptance.  
J’s unhappiness, expressed through his photography, is palpable, and his journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance is inspiring. Navigating the often unfriendly New York neighborhoods, J embraces a hopeful but not easy future with difficult choices. This breathtakingly honest book features complex characters, including parents whose acceptance is not certain. Back matter includes an Author’s Note and Resources.  
Barbara A. Ward  
Pullman, WA

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**Hard Bitten** by Chloe Neill  
Fantasy/Vampires  
New American Library, 2011, 368 pp., $15.00  
Merit dropped out of graduate school to become an Initiate at Cadogan House, home to 300 or so Chicago vampires, where Master heartthrob Ethan Sullivan engages in serious flirtation with the heroine. Vampire drama takes on a double meaning: the novel is filled with exciting adventures for Merit as she seeks to end the proliferation of V, a drug being circulated to spur vampires to violence and mayhem against humans, while the daily interactions of vampires, shape shifters, trolls, and fairies create angst and tension.  
Merit is engaging, entertaining, and an exceptional Sentinel for her House as she tries to save her friends from destruction. The city of Chicago—its history, politics, wheeling and dealing—emerges as both a character and setting as the plotlines ebb and flow, the kind of kinky chaos that mature teens will enjoy. This is the fourth in the Chicagoland vampire series.  
Judith Hayn  
Little Rock, AR
**NATIONAL BOOK REVIEWS**

**Reviews:**

**Immigration: The Ultimate Teen Guide**
By Tatyana Kleyn
Nonfiction/Immigration
Scarecrow Press, 2011, 227 pp., $42.00
ISBN: 978-0-8108-6984-4

The life of the average United States immigrant is one of hardship and confusion, combined with the pressures of being a teenager in a new country. Immigrant teenagers face challenges that are entirely unique to their identity, and their struggles are often stigmatized or misunderstood. This book provides guidance and insight into the experiences of these young people, offering a valuable resource for understanding the demands they face daily.

**NERDS: National Espionage, Rescue, and Defense Society**
By Michael Buckley
Fiction/Humor
ISBN: 978-0-8109-4324-7

Jackson has a new friend who can morph into any robot. But things aren’t all robots and fun. Jackson must learn to accept the quirks of his new friend and work together to save the day. The two go on adventures, solve mysteries, and learn to work together.

**Paige by Page**
By Laura Lee Gulledge
Voice/Identity/Art
Amulet Books, 2011, 192 pp., $9.95
ISBN: 978-0-8109-9722-6

In order to make New York City her new home, young Paige starts to draw. Through an inside look at her drawings, the cartoonist provides a window into the world of New York City and the challenges faced by young immigrants. The book is unique because it inspires its readers to author their own lives, and the source of inspiration is often found in simple, everyday moments.

**Lost in the River of Grass**
By Ginny Rorby
Adventure/Fiction/Identity
Lerner Publishing Group, 2011, 252 pp., $17.95
ISBN: 978-0-7613-5685-1

It was supposed to be a simple school field trip, but for the new girl, it turned into a dangerous adventure in the Florida Everglades. The book provides a gripping narrative of a young girl’s struggle to survive in a dangerous environment, while also exploring themes of friendship and the power of nature.

**Reviews of the Reviews:**

**Clip & File**
By Tanya Clayton
Nonfiction/Immigration
Scarecrow Press, 2011, 227 pp., $42.00
ISBN: 978-0-8108-6984-4

The book provides a clear message that one need not fear honestly expressing oneself. The text encourages readers to embrace their own experiences and stories, offering a platform for young people to share their voices.

**Reviews of the Reviews:**

**Paige by Page**
By Laura Lee Gulledge
Voice/Identity/Art
Amulet Books, 2011, 192 pp., $9.95
ISBN: 978-0-8109-9722-6

The book is unique because it inspires its readers to author their own lives. The mix of images and text sweeps the reader along, conveying a clear message of the power of self-expression.
**Personal Demons** by Lisa Desrochers  
Fiction/Romance/Religion  
Tor Books, 2010, 368 pp., $9.99  

Frannie has become excellent at keeping everyone at arm’s length. That is, until Luc and Gabe come to town. What Frannie doesn’t know is that Luc and Gabe are a demon and an angel sent to fight over her soul. Frannie is very valuable to the powers that be, and they are willing to do anything to win her soul to their side. To add to the problems, Luc is beginning to fall for Frannie. Not only does this mean destruction for him, but more danger for Frannie. Suddenly, they are joined by unlikely allies in order to save Frannie and the human race.

Desrochers deals with some heavy themes, such as religion and the existence of God, but it is all done in a very effortless way. Teens can identify with the various struggles that the characters go through, and girls will admire Frannie’s independent spirit.

*Katie Castro*
*Miami, FL*

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**Sidekicks** by Jack D. Ferraiolo  
Superheroes/Villains  
Amulet Books, 2011, 320 pp., $16.95  

Scott Hamilton is not the average teenager. When he’s not completing his homework or finishing a term paper, Scott is flying across rooftops and halting crime by night as Bright Boy, loyal sidekick to the dynamic crime fighter Phantom Justice. After his latest heroics saving a hostage from the hands of masked villain Rogue Warrior, Bright Boy has a slight wardrobe malfunction and becomes the laughingstock of criminals, fans, and the entire school!

What makes matters worse is the discovery that his evil archenemy Monkeywrench is actually the pretty girl who sits in front of him in science class, Allison Mendez. What begins as good old-fashioned hate turns into romance between the two. Scott must make a decision: will he remain loyal to the cause of defending justice, or will he fall for his sworn enemy, whom he must ultimately deliver to the law?

*Raef Williams*
*Savannah, GA*

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**Skin** by Rick Jasper  
Horror  
Darby Creek, 2010, 112 pp., $7.95  

At first, Nick Barry’s troubles, although still traumatic to a teenage boy, seem like nothing out of the ordinary: acne, a rise in anger, feelings of isolation and abandonment. However, Nick’s case is too severe for anyone to ignore; something “other” is clearly involved. When Nick is suspected of committing acts of violence and murder, he decides to investigate the outside forces that have set their sights on him.

This novel, reminiscent of (and referential to) Steven King, couples a thrilling horror story with a message important to early adolescents: No one is alone. Unlike King’s work, however, the protagonist is not a tragic hero, but a victorious hero who resists evil. Accessible to adolescent readers, the story moves quickly (although at times a little too quickly), and the shortness of each chapter paired with the size and arrangement of print helps the novel’s exciting pace.

*Molly Landholt*
*St. Louis, MO*

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**Starfish** by James Crowley  
Fiction/Adventure  
ISBN: 978-1-4231-2588-4

James Crowley’s first novel, Starfish, is an exploration of self, culture, and the natural world in Montana in the early twentieth century. The plot unfolds upon discovery of a frozen corpse on the Chalk Bluff Indian reservation. This leads to violence and the desperate escape of siblings Beatrice and Lionel from the Chalk Bluff Boarding School. The siblings’ only hope to survive a brutally cold winter (and their sworn enemy, Sergeant Jenkins) is to find their grandfather, a Blackfoot elder who lives on the edge of the reservation.

This story is rich with characters and conflict, uncertainty and adventure, and growth and loss. Its nuanced imagery and dialogue draw a realistic depiction of the time and place, and its third-person narration provides detailed, developed characters. Ultimately, we witness Beatrice’s story as seen through her younger brother’s eyes. She is his leader, mentor, and protector, and she does nothing less than risk her life for their freedom.

*Kevin McCarthy*
*Charleston, SC*
**The Kissing Game** by Aidan Chambers
Short Stories
Amulet Books, 2011, 216 pp., $16.95

This collection of 16 short stories, written by Michael L. Printz Award winner Aidan Chambers, uses seemingly banal circumstances to spark conversations between characters that touch on deep and meaningful topics. In St. Cecilia, a pint-sized boy finds himself in the middle of a wild ride of right and wrong in a suspended thriller of abuse and faith. In Findhorn, a summer job becomes the site of a teenage girl's struggle with decency and sense of self. The Kissing Game gives students the opportunity to engage with new ideas and to consider the implications of their own lives. The collection includes material for study of major issues relevant to students and society.

**The Outside Boy** by Jeanine Cummins
Identity/Coming of Age
New American Library, 2010, 360 pp., $15.00

Christy Hurley has grown up on the road. He is a Pavee Gypsy whose family travels Northern Ireland with their horse-drawn trailer. However, he is an outsider among his friends, who are all but stand-offish because of his identity. He finds solace in the company of his grandfather, from whom he learns to read and write. His grandfather tells him stories of Irish history and culture, and Chrisy takes a lesson to him, helping him to understand his own identity as a Pavee. They have a strong bond, and this bond is tested when Christy must choose between his identity and the community that he grew up in. The story explores the themes of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage.

**The False Princess** by Eilis O’Neal
Fantasy/Falling in Love

Nalia, the Princess of Thorvald, has just been told that she is not actually a princess at all, but a stand-in for the real princess, who has been captured by an evil sorcerer. Nalia must now relearn everything she knows about her life, including her identity as a princess. She must also deal with the consequences of being a stand-in, such as being neglected by her family and friends. Nalia must also learn to navigate the politics of the court, which are complicated by the fact that she is not actually a princess. The story explores themes of identity, family, and power.

**Thaw** by Rick Jasper
Thriller
Darby Creek, 2010, 106 pp., $7.95

Dani Kraft's hometown of Bridgewater suffers a major power outage. When the backup generators at the Institute for Cognitive Engineering fail, the townfolk learn that the institute was destroyed in a fire. The institute's employee, Darby Creek, is ungrateful for the help she received during the fire. The town is split between those who believe that the institute was destroyed by accident and those who believe that it was the work of a shadowy figure. The story explores themes of revenge and justice.

**The False Prince** by Jennifer A. Nielsen
Fantasy/Climbing the Rungs of Power
Scholastic, 2010, 318 pp., $16.99

Nalia, the Princess of Thorvald, has just been told that she is not actually a princess at all, but a stand-in for the real princess, who has been captured by an evil sorcerer. Nalia must now relearn everything she knows about her life, including her identity as a princess. She must also deal with the consequences of being a stand-in, such as being neglected by her family and friends. Nalia must also learn to navigate the politics of the court, which are complicated by the fact that she is not actually a princess. The story explores themes of identity, family, and power.
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<tr>
<td>The Popularity Papers, Book Two</td>
<td>Amy Ignatow</td>
<td>Abrams Books for Young Readers</td>
<td>2011, 208 pp., $15.95</td>
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<td>The Quicksilver Faire</td>
<td>Gillian Summers</td>
<td>Flux Books</td>
<td>2011, 336 pp., $9.95</td>
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<td>The Protectors</td>
<td>Val Karlsson</td>
<td>Lerner Publishing Group</td>
<td>2010, 106 pp., $7.95</td>
<td>978-0-7613-6159-6</td>
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<td>The Sentinels</td>
<td>R. A. &amp; Geno Salvatore</td>
<td>Wizards of the Coast LLC</td>
<td>2010, 297 pp., $17.95</td>
<td>978-0-7869-5505-3</td>
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After spending a summer at camp together discussing the coming adventures of junior high, Lydia Goldblatt and Julie Graham-Chang are split apart; Lydia’s family is moving to Great Britain. Each of the girls begins to form her own 6th-grade reputation at a new school. Lydia becomes known as the “Violent American,” and Julie’s acceptance into a popular 8th-grade clique pushes them to analyze their own choices involving friendship.

Amy Ignatow puts her own signature style of graphic novels into this book through a series of cartoon correspondence between the girls, highlighting Julie’s adjustments to junior high and Lydia’s exploration of British culture. Their revelations to each other and themselves will keep the audience laughing about their funny intrigues and relatable tales. More important, the girls learn valuable lessons involving true friendship when exploring the meaning of popularity on two continents.

Erica Cain
Decatur, AL

Although a bit disjointed at times, The Quicksilver Faire is an engrossing tale of elves, fae, goblins, dragons, talking cats, and other creatures of fantasy. Sixteen-year-old Keelie Heartwood (part elf, part human, and part fae) is on a mission to repair a rift from which magic is pouring, threatening the entire world.

Keelie’s adventure forces her to reach deep within herself in order to fully understand who she is and what she is capable of. Only by understanding herself will she be able to understand others. She must also maneuver her way through the lies and deceptions of those around her in order to determine who shares her wish to save the world.

Readers young and old will enjoy this tale of magic and coming of age.

Neil Klein
Nashville, TN

Luke leads a life beset by death. His deranged stepfather, Sal, has apprenticed Luke in the mortuary arts at the Signorelli Funeral Home since Luke was nine. His mom serves their town, Bridgewater, as a medium for communicating with the dead. Little seems out of the ordinary until Luke’s mom confides in him that her protectors are trying to warn her of impending danger. But when she fails to return home from a séance one evening and is declared dead, Luke, too, begins to receive messages—clues—from beyond the grave.

The excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” that opens The Protectors is astutely chosen. Beyond the dark, macabre content that fills the tale, Karlsson weaves a story that is highly readable in one sitting—a quality Poe would appreciate—and a narrative fabric that finds its heritage in Poe’s accounts of ratiocination, horror, and the grotesque.

Kevin McCarthy
Charleston, SC

Maimun is a teenage orphan who has already seen more than his fair share of adventures. He is bound to a magical artifact of the goddess of good fortune, Tymora; yet somehow, this good luck charm seems to attract nothing but trouble. In this book, the third of a trilogy, Maimun sets out to destroy the Stone of Tymora with the help of his friend, the young pirate Joen. Maimun soon discovers that things—and people—are rarely as they first appear.

The story is set in the world of the Forgotten Realms, a fully developed and richly layered fantasy universe. In this book, Maimun travels through locations such as Waterdeep, Longsaddle, and Silverymoon in search of answers to the many riddles he faces in his quest. He also encounters his occasional rescuer and mentor, the famous elf Drizzt, who is a beloved character in the Forgotten Realms universe.

Simon Gooch
Fort Worth, TX
ALAN REVIEW

The Serpent's Coil
by Christy Raedeke
Adventure/Conspiracy/Fiction
Flux, 2011, 312 pp., $9.95

Caity Mac Fireland is back in the second book of Raedeke's Prophecy of Days series. In her continuing attempt to unite the Earth's youth against the Fraternitas—the oppressive Shadow Government operated by the world's elite—Caity travels across the world decoding mysterious symbols of... loving and trusting her parents and the adults who support her while maintaining a distrust of new or unseen authority.

The Serpent's Coil unfolds in a fascinating array of cultural, historical, and astronomic information, and readers will be easily engrossed by Caity's adventures and discoveries. Raedeke's writing reflects her goals of sharing her alternative to the information Raedeke presents, as much of the novel challenges the line between fact and faith.

Jonathan Tomick
Nashville, TN

What Can't Wait
by Ashley Hope Pérez
Realistic Fiction/Cultural Identity
Lerner Publishing Group, 2011, 234 pp., $17.95

Marisa Moreno has been told her whole life what she's expected to accomplish in this world—help her family. But when she realizes her family's expectations are unrealistic and driven by a desire to own her, she sets out to break free of their control and prove herself. Eventually, she discovers that there's no magic here. Just her own life.

Hilary Diaz
Nashville, TN

The Water Wars
by Cameron Stracher
Dystopia/Environment/Friendship
ISBN: 978-1-4022-4369-1

Vera lives in Illinowa, a republic located in America's former Midwest region. After years of wastefulness, countries begin to experience serious factions that force them to turn to water. Vera's group, the Water Farmers, is tasked with keeping the water clean and safe for all. Her actions, along with those of other Water Farmers, have a ripple effect across the world. This novel is an adventure story, though, this novel provides a compelling够 to hold readers' attention all the way to the end.

Kelly Colton
Nashville, TN

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