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Bleeding Earth

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among characters. The novel almost stands on its own, lurching from one formulaic problem to the next. The first half features Cheyenne dealing with an unexpected pregnancy; readers then move on to her late-term miscarriage, Vicodin addiction, and alcoholism. The narrative wraps up by explaining why the fourth band member isn't interviewed, and readers never really engage with one problem before they're pushed on to the next one. **VERDICT** Maybe you can't catch lightning in a bottle twice; the voice is there, but the story struggles to hold together. Purchase where *The Scar Boys* have been rock stars already.—*Leah Krippner, Harlem High School, Machesney Park, IL*

★ **WALLACH, Tommy. *Thanks for the Trouble*.** 288p. S. & S. Feb. 2016. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9781481418805.

Gr 9 Up—After his father tragically died before his eyes five years prior, Parker Santé was left mute. Angry and a bit lost, he spends most of his days alone. He frequently ditches school to hang out in random hotels where he writes in his journal and steals from unsuspecting hotel guests. On one of these typical days, he notices a beautiful girl with striking silver hair. She catches his eye when revealing a large amount of money in an extravagant display of gratuitous tipping. Parker decides to steal her large wad of cash and accidentally leaves his journal behind—with a story about her written inside. When he reunites with her to get his journal, he discovers Zelda Toth is more than she appears. She claims to be over 200 years old but does not age. Wallach artfully crafts a novel that raises questions about mortality, the scarring impact of loss, and what it truly means to live and love. **VERDICT** A unique and compelling tale. The narrator's hilariously crass but poignant voice is sure to intrigue even the most reluctant of readers.—*Ellen Fitzgerald, White Oak Library District, Lockport, IL*

WARD, Kaitlin. *Bleeding Earth*. 256p. Adaptive Bks. Feb. 2016. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780986448485; ebk. \$9.99. ISBN 9780996488716. LC 2015947213.

Gr 8 Up—Lea can't believe it when the blood first appears, oozing out of the ground at the cemetery. She and her friend Hillary are sure there must be an explanation. But the blood continues to rise, while animals disappear and businesses close indefinitely; soon the blood steadily seeping from the ground is a worldwide natural disaster. Before long there is hair and then bones mixed in with the blood. Lea's parents board up their home and begin rationing food and water, and although she knows it is safer to stay indoors, the solitude becomes too much for Lea. She misses Hillary and her friends from high school; she misses her semi-secret girlfriend, Aracely. But the rising blood brings out the worst in Lea's

neighbors—her social life won't matter if she doesn't survive. Well written and descriptive, this is the story of a regular girl forced to deal with an unprecedented event. Rising blood levels set the pace, while internal turmoil and external chaos set the mood. Lea is relatable, though her credibility is sometimes questionable. Realistic depictions of the town's reaction to the natural disaster, progressive changes to the blood itself, and Lea's developing relationship with her not-yet-out girlfriend ground the work's unnatural setting. A smattering of strong language and some sexual situations are included. **VERDICT** Vivid images of blood, hair, and bones, and a budding romantic relationship—this is for readers who like their apocalyptic horror grounded in reality and kind of gross.—*Maggie Mason Smith, Clemson University R. M. Cooper Library, South Carolina*

WATSON, C.G. *Ascending the Boneyard*. 272p. ebook available. S. & S./Simon Pulse. Feb. 2016. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9781481431842.

Gr 9 Up—Caleb Tosh has only one escape in his life: the Boneyard, a computer game. It is his reward for an angry father, an absent mother, and a brother whose life was forever altered because of Tosh. In the Boneyard, Tosh is in control and in charge. Everything changes the day birds start falling from the sky and die en masse. Tosh begins seeing signs that convince him he needs to Ascend and to take out the final boss. Reality becomes distorted as his obsession with the game leads to surprising revelations about Tosh and his family. This is a finely tuned and complex story focusing on the increasingly blurred lines between one's real life vs. one's cyber life. Watson quickly creates sympathy for Tosh with descriptions of his rough home life, but it is through Tosh's quest that a layered character emerges. The story is not always accessible. The clues that the protagonist follows lead readers down unstable paths that show Tosh to be an unreliable narrator. The narrative structure centers on, to a degree, the complex decisions that take place in current video games. Not every door is a success, and not every boss is beatable—including the “bosses” in his own mind. This is a slower-paced novel, particularly at the beginning, but readers who invest in Tosh's struggles and triumphs will be rewarded by how Watson pulls the strings of reality together. **VERDICT** Fans of James Dashner's “Mortality Doctrine” series and readers of Cory Doctorow will find much to digest and explore here.—*Sarah Wethem, Douglas County Library, Alexandria, MN*

WELLS, Robison. *Dark Energy*. 288p. HarperCollins/HarperTeen. Apr. 2016. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780062275059.

Gr 8 Up—This week, 17-year-old Alice is being forced to move to Minnesota with her

father, the Director of Special Projects for NASA. That's because last week a giant UFO crashed in the Midwest, killing tens of thousands of people before skidding to a stop outside of Minneapolis. The world is outraged at the loss of human life and terrified that whatever is inside the UFO has come to invade Earth. Surprisingly, the aliens from the ship look like humans, despite having pale skin and an unfamiliar language. Calling themselves the Guides, they seem to come in peace. In an effort to boost diplomatic relations, two of the teenage Guides are sent to a boarding school in Minnetonka, where they are predictably befriended by Alice and her brilliant math- and science-minded roommates. What follows is a fast-paced adventure, filled with action, mystery, and humor. A rushed ending is the only glaring flaw in an otherwise entertaining (if not always believable) plot. The novel's greatest strength lies in the perfectly timed wit of its young female narrator. The Guides' inability to understand Alice's sarcasm and idiomatic expressions makes for some hilarious conversations. But those same sarcastic discussions lead to poignant observations about humans, who, as Alice explains, don't always treat one another very well and are generally afraid of other people's differences. In the end, Wells proves that teenagers are smart and resourceful and that their unique perspective might just save the world. **VERDICT** Witty dialogue, plenty of action, and just a hint of romance make this a perfect selection for any teenage science-fiction fan.—*Liz Overberg, Zionsville Community High School, IN*

★ **WINTERS, Cat. *The Steep and Thorny Way*.** 352p. Abrams/Amulet. Mar. 2016. Tr \$17.95. ISBN 9781419719158.

Gr 8 Up—There's something rotten in 1920s Oregon in this *Hamlet*-inspired tale of a biracial girl seeking the truth about her African American father's death. When the drunk driver who killed her father is released, Hanalee starts to look more closely at her small town and the folks who live there. She uncovers prejudice, injustice, and serious crimes from some very unexpected sources. This is not humdrum historical fiction as usual. Hanalee is a fantastic lead, armed with a two-barreled pistol and led by the lost soul of her father. Her gumption is inspiring—nothing she is faced with is too scary to make her back down, but her stubbornness doesn't prevent her from evolving her point of view. Setting Hanalee in the backdrop of Prohibition-era Oregon, punched up with bootleggers, a hidden gay relationship, the public and private face of the Ku Klux Klan, and a dash of the supernatural makes for a delightfully unpredictable page-turner. **VERDICT** Unique and riveting historical fiction that feels anything but dated.—*Emily Moore, Camden County Library System, NJ*

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