

A scenic photograph of a paved path lined with trees in autumn foliage. The path is paved with asphalt and has a dashed yellow line down the center. The trees on both sides are in various stages of autumn, with some showing bright yellow and orange leaves, while others are still green. A person is walking away from the camera in the distance on the path. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. A blue banner with orange text is overlaid across the middle of the image.

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Leaps & Bounds 2022 Summer Issue Contents

Page	Title and Author
	Book Review
3	<u>Book Review of Chains by Phillip</u>
4	<u>Book Review of Land of Stories by Sophia</u>
5	<u>Book review of Mr. Lemoncello's Library by Serena</u>
	Prose
7	<u>Robbers! by Chloe</u>
9	<u>The Cobra Challenge by Arianna</u>
10	<u>The Ghost by Charmaine</u>
	Poem
11	<u>Homework by April</u>
12	<u>The Sun by Charmaine</u>
13	<u>Why Do I Exist by April</u>

Book Review of Chains

By Phillip Kou

The book *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson is an ambitious, emotional, and impactful book. It is a perfect book for anyone who is really obsessed about history and the ideals of our country. This story is about an enslaved African-American girl, Isabel, who is sold from her family in Rhode Island, to a sadistic, loyalist, and aristocratic family during the Revolutionary War in New York. During that time period, Isabel is caught between the views of the two opposing sides: Revolutionary and Loyalist. While struggling to find the right view to side with, Isabel befriends an African American lad, Curzon, who has revolutionary ties. Isabel eventually escapes from her owners with Curzon when she finds out a shocking familial truth. There are several important messages in this book, but a main theme, in my opinion, is that no matter how many difficulties the world throws at you, you should never, ever, give up, even if you have the strongest urge to do so. Isabel is a strong character who eventually gets branded for committing an act of familial honor. Although some people view her action as an act of insolence, Isabel views it as who she really is, and eventually finds the courage through that painful experience to escape from her owners. This book is told from Isabella's first-person point of view, which makes the book interesting as it helps readers understand what Isabella is thinking when she is facing hard impediments to escape British-occupied New York in the midst of the Revolutionary war.

Book Review of Land of Stories

By Sophia

6-year-old me LOVED princess movies and tales. I loved every moment, from watching Cinderella sprinting in those glass slippers to Red Riding Hood escaping the wolf. Although I lost more and more interest in tales and princesses as I grew older, I still liked Land of Stories Book 1 by Chris Colfer because of its storyline creativity

The story is about twins Alex and Conner who are given a book by their grandma, titled: "The Land of Stories". Their grandma and dad have told Alex and Conner many stories from this book, and now they have passed it down to the twins. The twins seemed excited at first, but were not ready for what was going to happen next. Reading the book opened a "Magic Portal" to the "Stories" dimension! One after another, they got pulled into the dimension.

They struggle to overcome obstacles as they try to collect all the items for the "Wishing Spell". Some items they needed to collect consisted of: Cinderella's glass slipper, a piece of Red Riding Hood's first basket, The Troll and Goblin's stone crown, and so on. Using this "Wishing Spell", they would unlock a way to go back home, where they were originally from.

As they shriek in fear, they come across unreal characters that originate from the book. At first, they seem somewhat excited about living in a world of fantasy and magic, but after spending some time, they discover that numerous people and weird looking creatures try to eat them or hunt them down.

Later, they were invited to Cinderella's birth celebration for her newborn baby. There, they find many people: princes, princesses, and even Fairy Godmother. Alex and Conner still had no way of getting home, however. Could the Fairy Godmother have anything to do with them getting home? Or was it Cinderella? No- it had to be the Fairy Godmother... right?

All in all, for the most part, I enjoyed the story. My favorite character in The Land of Stories is Alex. She has the ability to think logically and carefully. Plus, she's very sweet and kind, yet brave, all the things adding up to being a smart person. I genuinely like how the story is similar to Disney and the movies, like there's a special connection between them. Without doubt, I would rate this an 7.5/10 (1 being the worst, 10 being the best).

Book Review of Mr. Lemoncello's Library

By Serena

Love riddles? Libraries? Mysteries? Let me introduce you to *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library* by Chris Grabenstein! This book is about a new library's grand opening, designed by the one-and-only Luigi Lemoncello, where twelve lucky students are selected to be the first ones to have access to the brand-new library. It doesn't end here though—the objective is to escape. Getting out won't be as simple as getting in; only the smartest will be able to escape the library and earn the prize of millions of dollars as a star in Mr. Lemoncello's board game advertisements.

The whole book consists of two chapters; Kyle's and Charles'. Since they are basically enemies, they recruit contestants and try to beat each other to the exit. Kyle's chapter, the main chapter, was pretty cool, since the way Kyle and his team found the escape route was unique. Mr. Lemoncello tells them that their library cards will help them. The author uses that idea as one of solutions; by deciphering the code on everyone's library card, a solution can be obtained. To get the library cards, Kyle and his team have to do impossibly hard 'Extreme Challenges'. 'Extreme Challenges' can either eliminate the challenger or, if they complete the task, gain them a handsome reward. But personally, I enjoyed solving the puzzles in Charles' chapter best, especially the cards with a picture and some words.

My favorite thing about this book is that the 'game' is modeled just like a regular board game. From minigames to puzzles to challenges, *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library* has it all! Players form alliances and race to the exit, solving riddles and finding clues hidden throughout the library. As for the characters, I didn't particularly like Haley in the beginning, but I began to appreciate her more and more throughout the book. I have neutral feelings about Kyle and Miguel. Akimi seems like a great friend to have. Charles is Charles. And Andrew is like a two-year-old. Sierra is pretty cool and smart—I honestly wish I knew as much about books and authors as her, though I do relate to Sierra the most. Instead of rushing to find the exit, why not enjoy yourself for a bit? You're one of the first people to have access to a library with brand-new books and technology. Why would you be rushing to find the exit? It wouldn't hurt to read for a bit and enjoy the technology in the new library. Sierra does join Kyle's team and helps decipher a code about a group of books with something in common. Along with the rest of Kyle's team, which also includes Haley, Akimi, and Miguel, she escapes the library and wins a place in Mr. Lemoncello's television commercials. **(Cont.)**

Book Review of Mr. Lemoncello's Library

by Serena

(Cont.) I just want to say, Miguel's library joke in the end was amazing. He shouts, "This library is like a good book. You just gotta check it out!" I think that pun was awesome. Who doesn't like a good book?

This book is something that I recommend for any riddle-lover out there. These simple yet mind-bending riddles will surely keep you on your toes. Some people may not enjoy this because the whole theme of this book revolves around board games. This book doesn't have the children in any potential danger or have them go on some kind of quest to save the world. Personally, I'm very excited to read the next few books in the series because I enjoyed watching the characters solve puzzles and challenges.

I agree that the story has a few issues, like how Kyle got Mr. Lemoncello's email. Or why the library is full of technology/game rooms. Personally, I think that Mr. Lemoncello's just an eager library-lover who wants videogame-loving kids to go to libraries more often! Having a portion of the library dedicated to technology and games is a great idea! Besides, the games in those rooms are educational. Another possible complaint that people might have is that since Kyle emailed another essay, he technically cheated. I think he deserves it since he put in the effort to write that essay and no one said he couldn't email it. The teacher just said that she wouldn't be collecting any more essays. So, did he beat the system? Or cheat the system?

Robbers!

By Chloe

Robbers

About me!

Hi! My name is Robert Banks, but everyone in my family calls me Rob, probably because I rob banks everyday! I have a sister who works with me called Robin Banks and our whole family are thieves. In total, my family has robbed 50 banks!

No offense to my parents, but I think they are super bad at robbing banks because every time they rob a bank, they always get caught and get put in jail.

Crime time!

Right now, I'm by myself on my way to rob a bank called Billionaire Bank. Robin is robbing another bank in Boston. Billionaire Bank is the richest bank in the world, which means I'm about to be the richest man in the WORLD!! I've never been there before, so I'm really nervous. They will have security guards and cameras. What if I get caught? I've arrived at Billionaire Bank, and I'm about to walk in. My hands are shaking, and my legs are squiggling around like an octopus. Alright, here I go! Now all I have to do is find the most expensive thing in here.

Aha! Here it is, it is the most expensive diamond ring in the world! I know it's the most expensive diamond ring because it says so right here: *Most expensive diamond ring*. First, I have to carefully open the box that protects the ring. Carefull, carefull, yes! I opened the box safely without getting caught. Now, I just have to carefully take it out. Careful, careful, there we go! It's out!

RING RING RING RING!!!!

Oh no! That's the alarm! *Run, Rob, Run!* Oh no! That's a security guard right behind me! *Run faster Rob, just run!*

Yes! I'm out of there. Now I just need to get in the car and drive until I outrun the cops! I'm going in every direction right now, turning corners and running over street lamps. Hopefully I didn't run over a person. Even though I'm a robber I still kind of care about people's lives. See, I'm not **that** bad of a person. Now, I think I've crashed into six street lamps in three minutes. That's a lot. But still, I don't want to go to jail because if I do, then I'll have to pay the monthly rent for my family's house with **my** money. I've **never, ever** done that before. Me and Robin are competing to see who can steal the most expensive thing from a bank the quickest. Whoever comes home last has to pay the monthly rent for the house. But right now, it doesn't look very good because the cops are chasing me. **(Cont.)**

Robbers!

By Chloe

(Cont.) *Drive quicker, Rob. Drive quicker!* The cops are right behind me, and I don't know where I am going! What will I do!? There are three ways to end this: One—race to the parking lot and run; two—I go home and just lock myself in the house; and three— just get arrested and deal with the punishment. I choose three, because that's the only smart choice, but then again I have to pay the bills for my family and Robin will just be sitting there eating chips and watching me suffer. Wait! I just now realized, I can't pay the bills for my family if I go to jail and Robin will have to pay them! I'm so smart! There they are, the cops. I'll just stop the car and pretend to be a nice person and get what I deserve.

"Hands up and get out of the car!"

"Okay, okay, I'm coming out! Here. Handcuff me already!"

"Alright, you are going to jail for a long, long time."

"Okay, fine."

"Hold still for us please while we put on these handcuffs."

"Sure, no problem. Oh and sorry for stealing the ring. Here, I'll give it back."

"Thank you. You are actually very nice."

"Thank you! Now, can I go to jail now? Please?"

"Wow! Well okay, since you are so nice, I'm going to try to convince the judge to give you a short sentence of only a month."

"Thank you for shortening the time just long enough so I don't have to pay the rent."

"Sure, no problem." "Now, just because you are a nice person doesn't mean you don't go to jail. Into the car, now!"

"Okay, Okay! Sheesh, no need to be so mean, I'm going!"

Back at home...

"Where is he!?" "Mom! Dad! Have you seen Rob anywhere?"

"Nope, we don't know where he is."

"Did he go to jail for the first time?" "Let me go onto Latest Crimes on the computer. It updates pretty quickly." "Let's see..."

HUH!! He's in jail! Mom! Dad! He's in jail!"

"Really!?"

"Yeah! The website doesn't lie!"

"Oh, wow!" "Didn't think he'd end up there today."

"Yeah. Wait... now that Rob's in jail does that mean I can use his stuff?!"

"No, but that does mean you can pay the rent for us!"

Ugh, fine. If I have to."

"Stupid Rob. **Ugh.**"

The Cobra Challenge

By Arianna

The clock points to 5:00 am. Outside, a foggy haze is swirling around the house. My mom turns the light on and gently brushes my face. “Time to get up,” she says softly. It suddenly strikes me—today, I am going to compete in my first fencing competition. ...

In the car, I try to sleep, but I can't bring myself to close my eyes. The haze outside the car is starting to part. My heart beats faster as we get closer to New Jersey. By now, my hands are sweating. We have arrived at the competition.

I go into the building, unpack my bag, eat lunch, change, and go to wait in line for weapons check. There are so many things to do before a competition. My mom tells me to go warm up. I remember how I used to warm up at Gold. Stretch, do footwork, do a practice bout. Then, the announcer says the words that have been haunting me all morning ... “The pools have started.”

I head over to the strip where I'm supposed to fence, the pressure building up inside me.

I go in first. My coach Ralf appears next to my mom, telling me to move. To not stand there. The pools slowly pass. It's almost time for the elimination rounds.

The other pools end. The elimination rounds have started.

“Angelina Sheng with Allison Chen.” The referee said, “you will be fencing on strip E5”

We go to the strip, and as I face my opponent, I feel anxiety rising in my chest, like an empty pit in the middle of my stomach. The timer is set to 3:00. It's the elimination rounds. I watch the referee, disliking her more and more by the minute. She yells: “Enguard, Ready, FENCE!” I attack, pushing my opponent back, keeping the right of way, I find the perfect time, I hit, but I miss. “Off target!” We re-distance, and once again, the referee yells, “Engard, Ready, Fence!” I fence, the opponent pushes, the timer ticks, I feel under pressure when the referee calls “Break!” I jog over to Ralf, and he gets me water.

5 minutes pass.

Break is over. We start fencing once again. I notice the timer, hovering at 0:06. I need to get a point. I make a desperate attempt to hit and... I miss. The other person gets the point. I lost.

My vision blurs as I feel the tears burn in my eyes. Big fat droplets roll down my face.. My mom takes off my fencing mask and tells me that it's okay. But it isn't. I lost to someone worse than me. My legs tremble from fencing. Ralf comes over, comforting me. As he speaks, I feel hope rising in me, replacing the feeling of humiliation that has been drowning my other feelings. I get changed and climb into the car, feeling much better. Perhaps the competition wasn't so bad after all.

I look out the back window, watching cars go by. I was excited to get back home. I suddenly remembered Ralf's words. Looking out the back window of the car, I smiled a secret smile to Ralf, hoping that he would feel it too...

The Ghost

By Charmaine

It was flying around. She saw it. Walking by a laundromat with big windows, how could she not? At first she thought it was her imagination, but then she knew it wasn't. She froze in place, heart pounding out of her chest, a scream caught in her throat. A white form flying around the dark room, in the dead of night.

This is it, she thought, this is how I die. A strong gust of wind hit her, making her shiver as she pulled her coat around her body tighter. Her breathing slowed, eyes quickly glancing around the room as she gripped her coat. She knocked on the door, peering into the darkness, trying to see everything that was happening. "H-hello? Anyone there?" What came out was just barely above a whisper, not the strong clear voice she had intended. The wind pushed past her and into the room, and the white form whipped around, diving right at her. Her breath caught in her throat and then she thought, *Wait a minute..* She quickly closed the door behind her, and the form flopped to the ground, unmoving. She opened the door again and the shape started flying all over the place once more. It was a sheet—just a sheet.

Homework

By April

Homework is stupid

"But it helps you learn!" you say

Well, it's still stupid



The Sun

By Charmaine Cao

He was smiling
The waves crashed below him
But the sun was there
It was right there and
How could he focus on something that wasn't the Sun?

Oblivious to the wax burning his skin
He

Ignoring the feathers
Rip
Rip
ripping from the leather harness bound to his back
He...

He was smiling
But oh
The Sun was beautiful
It shone in his eyes
Blinding him
Grabbing his attention and never letting him look away



He smiled
He smiled because the Sun was smiling right back at him

He smiled because he felt its warm rays embracing him

And as the waves came closer, as he felt them dragging him

Down

Down

Down

To the depths of Tartarus

He smiled because he loved the Sun

Why Do I Exist

By April

Why do I exist?

And why does the world exist?

I want an answer