

MIDDLE READERS



MegaMan NT Warrior, Volume 13
Ryo Takamisaki
VIZ Media
216 pages
Softcover \$7.99
978-1421517-85-8

When the world's in trouble in the future year of 200X, who do the people turn to? An eleven-year-old boy named Lan and his *netnavi* MegaMan. (A *netnavi* is a digital character limited only by the imagination of its creator.)

The thirteen-volume series, *MegaMan NT Warrior*, is all about Lan, MegaMan, and their friends' adventures on the cyber net, an evolved, super advanced Internet of the future. Lan aims to be the best net battler in the world but realizes that he's going to have to work hard when he meets friends and foes like Protoman and Bass.

In the previous volume a mysterious girl named Iris brought MegaMan to the underground where she forced him and other *netnavis* from around the world to fight for the "legendary program," the only thing that can destroy cyberbeasts—very powerful viruses that turn *netnavi* into rampaging monsters.

Now, in *Volume 13*, two cyberbeasts merge into one and escape into the world. Since the cyberbeast absorbs anything that uses energy, and in 200X that is pretty much everything, this could spell disaster. Iris gives MegaMan the "legendary program" and he then says goodbye to Lan, believing that destroying the beast will also mean his destruction. But, about a week later a mysterious light appears in the net...

MegaMan is an intriguing, action-packed series, and will encourage young readers to want to do their best and be heroes like MegaMan and Lan. (January)

Joey A. Kane



The Secret Prince of Tir-na-nOg: Tales from the Higher Realm—Book 1
M.J. Bell
Alexis Cala, illustrator
Opus II Books
34 b/w illustrations
400 pages
Softcover \$9.99
978-0-9796210-2-4

Deston Lesperance's world is in turmoil. His mother is missing, presumed dead, and he is being shipped to France to live with a cousin of his mother's, whom he's never heard of before. This premise alone would be enough to create a book worth reading. However, M.J. Bell's, *The Secret Prince of Tir-na-nOg: Tales from the Higher Realm* takes this relatable childhood fear and

creates a fantastical, mysterious adventure with many unexpected twists and turns.

"My mom's not dead like everyone else says!" he blurted out. A soft light came to NiNi's eyes. "Oui, I know." Deston's mother's cousin, NiNi knows his mother is still alive but also wants to protect him from the evil that took her away from him. His determination and curiosity win out as he and his new friend Margaux set off into the forest and enter a whole new realm. They encounter both friend and foe in the cast of characters Bell has assembled. Zumwald, the gatekeeper, starts them on their adventure: "...think carefully before you answer, Deston. Are you willing to accept the risks and do whatever it takes to find your mother?" "Yes! Of course, I will do whatever it takes..." And that he does. With the help of other mystical creatures, Deston battles Rellik the wolf, Verosse, the king of the bats, and the vile Grossard.

The mystical setting adds as much excitement as the eerie cast. Bell's descriptions bring them alive: "...but those lush, green slopes were a far cry from this stark, foreboding rock face. There was no vegetation of any kind—only jagged, protruding boulders and crevices that cast unearthly shadows across its surface, adding to its sinister appearance." Alexis Cala's detailed black and white illustrations at the beginning of each chapter foreshadow what lies ahead, but readers will often be surprised by what they represent. Cala's interest in fantasy and mythology is evident—as well as her BFA in Traditional Illustration from Academy of Art University in San Francisco.

Bell's first published work will surprise and intrigue middle and young adult readers. The frequent violence and occasional gore make it inappropriate for a younger reader. The ending will be satisfying until the page is turned to the epilogue. There it will be discovered that "happily ever after" is only temporary—leaving a clear path to Book Two. (July)

Troy-Michelle Reinhardt



The Smell of Old Lady Perfume
Claudia Guadalupe Martinez
Cinco Puntos Press
256 pages
Hardcover \$15.95
978-1-933693-18-7

"Apá was a strong still oak. We hid under his branches like shadows. Even when he laughed a thunderous laugh, those branches shook only ever so slightly," Martinez writes.

Chela Gonzales is about to start sixth grade, the last year of elementary school, when her beloved father suffers a stroke. Her grandmother comes to stay, and Chela realizes that old lady perfume smells like bad news. She and her brothers and sister miss a week of school while her father is in the hospital. When he comes home

and Chela returns to school, her best friend Nora has "mutated into a popular girl" and isn't speaking to her.

Because she has no friends at school, Chela spends her free time with Apá, helping him build their new house and practicing for the school soccer tournament. Eventually, after proving that she is smart and good at soccer, Chela is recruited to join Nora, Camila, and the other popular girls.

During Easter break, her dad has another stroke, and doesn't recover. Back at school, the popular girls show off their new outfits and brag about their vacations, while Chela hides the fact that she spent her break in mourning and attending her father's funeral. Only Nora and their friend Roy know the truth.

The Smell of Old Lady Perfume is a touching story that will teach lessons on loss, family, loneliness, and the importance of being oneself. Not only does Chela deal with the pains of growing up—wearing a bra for the first time and discovering what the "napkins" under the sink are for—but she has to do it without friends to confide in.

Chela's school year ends on a happy note; she is rewarded for her academic achievements and she and Nora break away from the popular crowd, who weren't very good friends anyway. But young readers will see that nobody's life is perfect and that with happiness often comes pain.

The author's own father died when she was eleven. This is her first book. The novel's easy language reads like genuine narration from a sixth grader and complements the story's complex themes. Young readers will also learn Spanish words and phrases including *abuelita* (grandma), *Si se puede* (yes, you can), and even *sapo verde* (green toad). They may be tempted to try dishes like stuffed peppers with tortillas and the chocolate drink *champurrado*.

After the All-School Awards ceremony, Chela accepts that her father isn't coming back, but she is comforted by the memories of their time together and the love he always showed her. "Seventh grade, eighth grade, the first day of high school, college, and many more days would come. It was okay," she says. (July)

Whitney Hallberg



What The World Eats
Faith D'Aluisio
Peter Menzel,
photographer
Tricycle Press
160 pages
Softcover \$22.99
978-1-58246-246-2

Every week, families around planet Earth gather for meals at tables, in tents, or on dirt-packed floors, but what they eat depends on where in the world they live. The authors of this book set out to document those weekly meals by visiting twenty-four families in twenty-one countries, from Australia to Mongolia.