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REVIEW: Quest for the Dragon Stone

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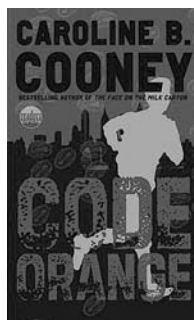
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completed homework at school the next day. When he gets called to the board and can't do the work, his teacher and classmates know something is amiss. The boy then realizes the error of his cheating ways and tells the monster to get lost. As he successfully scrambles to find (and count) enough money to pay the monster's \$64 homework bill, he overcomes his anxiety and realizes math isn't so bad after all. Schnitzlein's polished meter and rhyme give the story momentum that will keep students engaged. Mayer's illustrations grab our sympathy from the first page: a wide-eyed boy cowers in bed as a menacing shadow five looms on the bedroom wall. A dizzying array of numbers and mathematical signs swirls in the background of several pages. The monster sports a ruler tail and sharpened pencil fingers. The "making a deal with the devil" theme invites comparison with similar texts, including Schnitzlein's previous book *The Monster Who Ate My Peas*. Students and mathaphobes will enjoy the boy's final triumph over the monster. School media centers will find this book useful to pair with math lessons. Vocabulary and subject matter most appropriate for second-fifth grades. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Sharon Mitchell**
Jackson County Schools

Code Orange by Caroline B. Cooney
(Delacorte Press, 2005; ISBN 0-385-732597-7, \$15.95).

Included in this year's list of nominations for the Georgia Peach Book Award for Teen Readers is best-selling author Caroline B. Cooney's book *Code Orange*. Living in post 9/11 New York City, Mitty Blake loves having all of the sights, sounds and conveniences of Manhattan at his disposal. Attending school, much less participating, is something he does simply because it is expected. When his biology teacher assigns him the topic of "variola major," known commonly as smallpox, as his research topic for a term paper, Mitty assumes that he will be able to breeze through the research, especially since everyone knows that smallpox no longer exists. However, with a deadline for notes looming and a requirement of having four book sources, Mitty resorts to borrowing some old medical texts from his mother's book supply used for her interior decorating business. Within the pages of the old books, Mitty finds an envelope labeled "*Scabs-VM epidemic, 1902, Boston,*" and suddenly smallpox is no longer a contagious disease taken from the history books. It is something that can be seen, touched and smelled. But will it still be infectious after more than a century in an envelope? That is the question that haunts Mitty as he



further delves into the significance of the smallpox virus and how it impacted the lives of people it touched in the past. Consequently, Mitty is surprised to learn that smallpox is not quite the dead disease of the past he thought. In reality, smallpox remains a very real threat in the world of bioterrorism. And, as the days slip by, Mitty wonders if he has been infected, making him a tool of destruction for millions of people should smallpox be revived. Learning the outcome of Mitty's exposure to the smallpox scabs in the envelope and realizing the realities of the world we live in now combine into a fast-paced story suitable for both teen and adult readers. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Ginger Nelms**
Vidalia-Toombs County Public Library

Quest for the Dragon Stone by Ami Blackford (Red Cygnet Press, 2007; ISBN 978-1-6010-8008-0, \$16.95).



Atlanta College of Arts student Ami Blackford was one of the winners of a publisher's competition call to submit a picture book with manuscript and illustrations. *Quest for the Dragon Stone* is her debut story, aimed at an audience of children 9-12 years old. *Quest for the Dragon Stone* is 48 pages with 16 full-page color illustrations. The story is about siblings Ruth and David, who are members of a scientific association known as "magbeologist" (a group dedicated to preserve and protect the "magic-kind" species), along with a resident faerie named Simone. The trio accidentally stumble upon an ill Phoenix dragon. This dragon is not as important in the story as is the dragon stone inside his head. This is disturbing — until you realize that the dragon, just like the mythological phoenix, is supposed to combust and come back as an egg to be re-hatched. There is no re-hatching in this story. In the ashes, the dragon stone is found. It is the stone that the children's father has been searching for all his life, plus 12 other highly sought-after relics. There is a connection between these relics and saving the magic-kind from extinction. With egg and stone in hand, Ruth and David embark on an endeavor to keep their father's work alive. It's a perfect setup for a series of adventures. Certain characters and concepts could be sketched out a little more, but this debut story shows promise. An optional purchase for libraries with lots of juvenile fantasy readers. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Erika Gschwind**
Conyers-Rockdale Library