

Zen and the Art of Faking it

Written by: Jordan Sonnenblick

San Lee's life has been full of new towns and new schools, but this one upsets him more than all of the others combined. This time, instead of having his dad uproot the family in search of his latest scheme, it is just San and his mother.

Not particularly successful at anything in the past, San has frequently used negative behavior to get attention. Faced with not only a new school and trying to fit in, San is ready to try just about anything. With his mother working long hours to make ends meet, he decides he needs a gimmick to win some friends and positively influence some people. Thanks to his new social studies teacher, the door to Zen Buddhism opens wide.

San's well-worn clothes and tattered sandals become a great disguise as he steps into his role as the Zen expert of the eighth grade. With help from the local library, the perfect "meditation" rock right outside school, and his new friend, Woody, San fools everyone into believing his Buddhist philosophy. Although he seems to be fitting in and gaining popularity, he worries that faking it may make him like the father he has learned to detest.

Sonnenblick uses his humorous, straight-forward style to grab readers on page one, and whisk them into San's world. There are crazy antics, a touch of romance, family frustrations, and quite a bit of Buddhist information packed into this fast-paced read.

A Corner of the Universe

Written by: Ann M. Martin

Winner: Newberry Honor

Hattie Owen has never really thought about the world outside her small town. Her family's boarding house is where she feels most at home, with its eccentric tenants and predictable routines.

But, there are secrets in Hattie's family, and the biggest one is her young uncle Adam. Hattie doesn't even know he exists until he shows up in her town, right when she's about to turn twelve. Suddenly, the place she thought she knew so well begins to feel different. Her family and neighbors aren't ready to deal with Adam's mental problems...so Hattie gets caught in the middle.

Hattie lives in a typical small town in the 1950s and 60s United States--everyone knows all the gossip by sundown. And when Hattie's unknown Uncle Adam comes to stay for a while, the news spreads quickly, as usual. Adam is different--they aren't sure what is wrong with him, other than he has a mental disability. Hattie finds she really likes her young uncle (he's 21, she's 12), and wishes she could help him more.

Ann M. Martin has created a realistic world in this book. Throughout, Hattie goes through a range of emotions when dealing with her family. The reader is able to understand where Hattie is coming from, and why she acts and reacts the way she does. Martin also captures history in this book--from the carnival, to the grandparents' idea of what is proper, to the everyday activities of Hattie's life--without making the reader feeling disconnected.

The Softwire: VIRUS on ORBIS 1:

Written by: PJ Haarsma

When the children on the seed ship, Renaissance, are orphaned in outer space, thirteen-year-old JT and his sister Ketheria are forced to work as knudniks on the Rings of Orbis. Instead of beginning the new and better life he had hoped for, JT and his sister spend their days sifting through trash for their new Guarantor.

But JT soon discovers that he is the first human Softwire - he has a special gift that allows him to enter any computer with his mind. And when the central computer on Orbis mysteriously malfunctions, the Citizens point their fingers at the newcomers, especially the Softwire.

Before long, JT is embroiled in a struggle between the Keepers who rule Orbis and the Trading Council, which wants him dead. As he learns to harness his newfound ability, JT uncovers a virus wreaking havoc inside the computer. Now he must convince the powers that be on Orbis that the virus is real before they make war on each other and destroy his new home - along with JT's dream of a better life.

In the first episode of The Softwire, newcomer PJ Haarsma launches readers into an extraordinary new universe of power, intrigue, and cyber-fueled adventure.