



A Path Begins

J.A. White , Andrea Offermann (Illustrator)

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A dark, forbidden forest. Vicious beasts. Deadly plants. An evil spellbook. Secrets. Mysteries. Witches, both good and bad . . . Welcome to the world of the Thickety. Full of action, set in an intriguing and dangerous world, and illustrated with gorgeous and haunting line art, *The Thickety: A Path Begins* is a truly stunning book.

A Path Begins is the thrilling start of a new middle-grade fantasy series about a girl, a mysterious forest, and a book of untold magical powers. Kara and her brother, Taff, are shunned by their village because their mother was a witch. The villagers believe nothing is more evil than magic, except for what lurks in the nearby Thickety. But when Kara enters the forbidden forest, she discovers a strange book, a grimoire that might have belonged to her mother. The events she then sets in motion are both awe-inspiring and terrifying...

A Path Begins Details

Date : Published May 6th 2014 by Katherine Tegen Books

ISBN : 9780062257246

Author : J.A. White , Andrea Offermann (Illustrator)

Format : Hardcover 496 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Childrens, Fantasy, Adventure, Young Adult Fantasy

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From Reader Review A Path Begins for online ebook

Shannon says

A fantastically dark tale of witches and magic that might be a bit too disturbing for younger readers. On the other hand, if I was still 10 I'd *devour* this book much like the Jabehook gobbles up Death.

After finishing this I was trying to figure out what I could compare this to and both Labyrinth and The Neverending Story came to mind. Not because the stories are similar, but because of the **tone**. Checking them out as an adult you might wonder why you weren't incredibly creeped out and scared while watching them. Take Artax and the Swamp of Sadness for example; I honestly didn't even *remember* that scene but when I watched it recently I was a sobbing mess. (I honestly can't even look at screencaps of that scene - google at your own risk!) **I think we sometimes forget that a lot of themes go over children's heads and what might bother us as an adult didn't even faze us when we were younger.**

I raced through this in pretty much one sitting and was pleasantly surprised at the twists and turns it took. **This is a very smartly written book without overly flowery prose that still manages to be quite magical.** There is a surprising amount of death and darkness in this story but there's also some great lessons taught. Grief casts a veil over Kara, the main character, throughout the story and it often made my heart ache. Her father was a surprising source of empathy, and her brother, Taff, was a much needed light in all of the darkness. I want to complain about Kara's tormentor, Grace, being the quintessential mean popular pretty girl, but she was fascinating and multi-dimensional: not the one-note bully most villains end up being.

It's quite possible that many might pass this up because it looks like it's written for kids, but believe me when I say this is an excellent story that readers of any age would love. **If you're a parent you might want to read it first, but for everyone else, pick up this book the next time you're in the mood for some wild dark fantasy.**

Matt says

5/5

Do you like buried books of dangerous magic? Grimoires? Forbidden woods? Strange, hideous animals? Venoms? Potions and poisons? Classic dark fantasy? Villages in the woods? Cults? Vicious, vile neighbors? Sinister little antagonists pre-teens? Mystery? Witches? Good writing, plotting, characterizations? Steady, medium pacing? Good arcs for the Main Character? A truly, twisty, satisfying climax with loads of promise for a sequel?

Read this novel.

Now.

Put it on hold at your library.

Now.

Parts are truly weird and creepy. It's frightening and violent, perhaps too much so for anyone under 5th grade. I'm a 28 year old man, and I will definitely be reading book two. The Thickety is one of the best, fat, little chunky Middle-grade books with unsettling imagery I've ever read. 1 star and 2 star reviewers either didn't read the book or have personal issues they need sorted out. I was engaged and interested the entire time. It's huge margins and small page dimensions make this a welcome and enjoyable two day read which FLIES BY contrary to it's 480 page-count! It's probably more like 200 in "real" pages.

Minor, minor flaw: I would have liked some more history of the island and the cult. Just a bit. But there's more to come!

This could be a Tim Burton film produced by Neil Gaiman -- but better.

5/5

MH

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

Everyone just take a moment and pronounce "Thickety". Thickety I love saying that! Seriously though, this is actually a fairly light, entertaining read. I will read anything witch-related, though. This witch happens to be twelve years old up against another young witch in the village. And of course there is a grimoire. Satisfying ending. I was pleasantly entertained a light read although the audio narrator's voice was a bit creepy at times

Sonja P. says

I mean, here's the thing: this is going to have a lot of spoilers. So I warned you, but a lot of what bothered me I can't talk about without discussing the whole book.

Its an interesting (kind of Village-esque) premise: Kara lives in a small insular town that is surrounded by a deep forest, and when she was five her mother was killed for being a witch and a murderess. Kara survives, and takes care of her family, only to find that she too might have the gift of magic. She has been tormented all her life, both by the townsfolk and by the thought of her mother. But mostly she was tormented by Grace, and here is where my main complaint lies. Its a young woman Kara's age. Kara is placed in direct opposition to Grace. Grace is so pretty and everyone loves her, but she is disabled. This is the reason she torments Kara-because her father (think village Elder) told her that Kara's mother cursed her and caused her to be like this. So she torments Kara and is truly evil. She bosses around the other children, and she presents a sweet face to the adults. She is presented as a direct foil to Kara-whereas Kara had trials and issues, and also struggles with the dark magic, she is able to overcome it. Grace gives into it, because of her hate, and is pretty much damned to hell. There is no redemption for her. She is evil all the way through. This might not be a big deal, but considering that the disabled villain is such a trope in children's lit and comics, I'm just kind of over it, ESPECIALLY as Kara overcomes it and Kara escapes while Grace is damned to hell. It just rubbed me the wrong way. I mean disabled people already face shit whenever they aren't smiley and happy to be other people's inspiration porn, damning one to hell for not being to overcome their anger about their disability and how it fucked over their lives seems really shitty. More than that, I thought some of the explanations and world-building were a little weak, and I just wanted a little more depth. I was disappointed. Definitely not the

next Harry Potter, whatever that means. I mean, pick Wildwood or Valente or any other number of books over this one. Sorry, not for me.

Skip says

When Kara Westfall was six, on the night of her brother Taff's premature birth, her mother is condemned as a witch for killing a couple and publicly executed in front of all the townspeople of De'Noran. Kara is acquitted as a witch, but the surviving Westfalls are pariahs. The town ruler's pretty daughter, Grace, makes it her special mission to torment Kara while making it look like Kara is the one bullying her.

One day, when Kara is 12, a bird steals her mother's necklace, forcing Kara to follow it into the Thickety, a mysterious forest where the Forest Demon, Sordyr, lives, making it forbidden and dangerous. Deep in the forest, Kara finds her mother's grimoire, a magical book that eventually allows her to conjure animals and control their actions. Things really get going when Grace steals the book and is able to use it much more effectively. Kara and Grace engage in an escalating contest of will and magical strength.

May be too dark for some middle schoolers. And it is accept young Kara as de facto head of the household before she is 10 years old.

Kat Heckenbach says

The book opens with one of my pet peeves: the main character is in the middle of being kidnapped. I didn't know who she was, so didn't really care at first. Once things began getting explained, I could see why the author chose that opening, but it got things off on the wrong foot for me.

The first third of book did hold my interest, although the only characters I felt any connection to were Kara and Taff. Everyone in the town hates them--everyone. Even when Kara talks about this person or that being nice in a way, they still end up being hateful.

Of course, all of this is because Kara is the daughter of a witch, and is suspected of being a witch herself, and the community is one that is completely dedicated to wiping out witchcraft. It actually feels a lot like "The Village" except that the community is escaping witchcraft instead of technology.

What ultimately drove me nuts was that it was almost as if the author were using Kara as a device to show that the community and their religion were wrong about witchcraft, to get the reader to take her side and see the community as narrow-minded, but everything that happened when magic got involved turned into disaster just proving that the community was right all along in wanting witchcraft gone.

Anyway, I like dark books, but this one seemed dark for just the sake of darkness, not because there was any real purpose to it. I ended up skimming the last third. And I hated the ending.

I was also disappointed because the book is called "The Thickety" but the Thickety is actually only a minor player in the book. I expected a book filled with adventure, and, well, time actually spent in the Thickety. Instead, I got a book about a girl witch who is hated by everyone and a magic system that seems like the kind

of thing that *ought* to be abolished.

Carina Olsen says

My fourth time reading this book. Gosh. I don't think I will ever not want to read this amazing middle grade book. Once the final book showed up on Edelweiss, I knew I had to re-read book one to three. But not because I cannot remember most of what happens, but because I love these books so much. And I'm so excited about reading them all once more. This story is simply amazing. And I love these characters so much. All the love. Also, those covers are beyond amazing. I love how they are matching. Sigh. Beautiful.

I just cannot describe how much I love this book. I mean, I have read it four times now. And each time I love it just a bit more. Because it is so beautiful. And heartbreaking. And all kinds of fun too, though there aren't many fun moments in it, lol. I love how dark this middle grade book is. I love how many awful things happen all the time. Yet there are some good people in it too. I love those the most. Everything about this book is perfection. I'm not going to say too much about it, since I have reviewed it so many times now, lol.

This book is about Kara, whom is twelve years old. And gosh, this girl is simply the most amazing. I love her so much. She's so strong and brave and kind and just too good of a person. Everyone have been treating her so badly for the past seven years, ever since her mom got killed for being a witch. And it made me hate those other people so much. Hmph. They were the worst. Ahh. But there were some who were good. Like Kara's brother, Taff, whom is seven years old. He is so cute. And kind. But also so sick.

There is just so much about this book that I love. And I'm not going to mention all of it, again, lol. Just going to say some amazing things about this book. Like the friendship between Kara and Lucas. It is the cutest thing. He is her only friend. And they are so good together. And I ship them so much. They are just the best of friends. And I love that so much. Lucas is so kind and awesome. I disliked a little bit how Kara was with him at times in this book, but she had reason for it, so I didn't mind too much. They are so cute.

This is a book about magic. About a book that you can use to make spells. But only if you are a witch, though. And ahh, this story is just so exciting. I simply love reading about Kara and her life. I so hated reading about how everyone treated her. Especially Grace. Shudders. She was the worst. And I dislike her more for each time I read this book, lol. But oh, this book was exciting even so. I'm always nervous about what will happen next, despite having read it four times now. It is so exciting. And evil. So good.

If you still haven't read this amazing book, then you really must read it now. I have read it four times. Least you can do is read it once, haha. I promise you that it is amazing. The writing is gorgeous. The characters are so interesting. The plot is exciting. And that ending is full of surprises. I cannot wait to re-read the next two books as well, and then get to read the fourth and final one. Eee. I don't have more to say about this book. Just that I love it the most. And I'm so glad I re-read it right now. It is so amazing.

I first read this book on May 1st 2014. My review here: <http://carinabooks.blogspot.no/2014/0...>

Then I read it again from October 20th to 21st 2014. My new book recommendation here: <http://carinabooks.blogspot.no/2014/1...>

I read this book for the third time on August 3rd 2015. New blog post can be found here:
<http://carinabooks.blogspot.no/2015/0...>

I read this book for the fourth time on October 2nd 2016. New blog post here:
<http://carinabooks.blogspot.no/2016/1...>

Kagama-the Literaturevixen says

On the same night Karas little brother was born her mother was executed for witchcraft. Now 8 years later the villagers scorns her and calls her "witch girl" and her father has become a wreck.

Kara tries to take care of her sickly brother Taff who she loves she also has a friend, Lucas who is a Cleaner. Cleaners are the lowest in the village and their job is to try and keep back The Thickety. A wood full of weird trees and deadly monsters and all of ruled over by the forest demon Sordyr.

The community where Kara lives ,the Fold is a strict community that closed itself off from the outside world centuries ago.

After a crowlike thing lures her into the Thickety Kara finds a buried book, a grimoire belonging to her mother. She also encounter Sordyr but manages to escape the Thickety just in time.

Kara after a while learns how she can use the grimoire to summon and command any animal she wants and she finds herself using the magic more and more, but when a former friend of her mother warns her that the grimoire is more dangerous than she can understand she tries to stop using it.

At the same time Fende Stone -the man who convicted her mother of witchcraft watches Kara for signs of witchcraft while his daughter Grace who on the surface seems to be very nice and devout girl but hides a manipulative and cruel personality and when she learns of the grimoires existence she decides she wants it and its power for herself.

And what Grace wants she will get...one way or another.

The Thickety is a book wich I did like in its way but that I cant claim to love despite it having many things I do love in a book. First of all its dark, maybe too dark for the demographic its originally aimed at.

Fende Stone was an unpleasant man, but he was nothing when in comparision with Grace. I felt vaguely unclean from reading about her evilness. In her way Grace is used as a foil for Kara, showing her what the grimoire could turn her into.

There is mention of torture of the maincharacter, it does happen offpage but I just felt uncomfortable at the mere thought of a 12 year old girl being physically abused.

It was all very metaphorical not unlike a situation a teenager might find herself or himself in

There is the dead mother, the depressed father, the sick brother, bullies, religious oppression, poverty etc misery, gloom, bleakness.....

When I started to really think about I felt it was trying to deal with too many issues all at once. Obviously trying to cram so many things into the story makes the book take its time to build up to the more meaningful scenes. I was halfway through the book when I realized it felt like the book was stalling.

It was if I may be a bit fanciful like fighting your way through the Woods and then realizing you have been so busy avoiding to get snagged or stepping into a hole but you have barely moved at all.

And then the showdown at the end just comes all at once.

Now that I've mentioned that I would like to end with some good things.

Kara is a great character.

The plot twist with the book Kara's father keeps writing in was pretty neat.

When the Jabberhook, a character from a story Kara made up for her brother does turn up towards the end part of the book I was like YEAAAAAHHH.

If you liked this book you might also like:
The Witch's Boy by Kelley Barnhill

Bailey says

Happy endings, Kara often suspected, could only be earned through some sort of sacrifice.
-The Thicket: A Path Begins by J.A. White

Kara Westfall lives on a peculiar island, isolated from the World. The strange villagers of this land follow the teachings of Timothy Clen, a man who, years ago, eradicated witches and their disastrous magic. Waiting for Clen's return, they follow very specific rules such as don't wish for anything and, most importantly, never practice magic. While the rest of the World continues on into the indefinite future, they stay put in their own time and only specific people may venture out on ships to get the supplies that are needed from the outside. More importantly, the villagers stay clear of the Thicket, a secluded piece of forest that surrounds part of the island's border. It is here that the demon, Sordyr, is rumored to reside. Fearful of even the mention of

magic, trouble quickly ensues when Kara's mother is tested for deceitful witchcraft. At the fragile age of six, Kara sees her mother murdered in front of the whole island. It is at this time, that Kara is also tested for using magic. After great hesitation, she is finally declared innocent.

Years later, Kara is living with her younger brother, Taff, and her broken father, who hasn't been the same since his beloved wife died, simply scribbling in the same book day after day. Confused, Kara is conflicted between feeling love or hatred towards her late mother, a now renowned and infamous witch. The villagers haven't treated her as they once had, with love and compassion, for six years. With her being a spitting image of her mother, with dark hair and not to mention a peculiar gift with animals that isn't a common normalcy, she is shunned, with only one true friend beside her dear brother, Lucas. Kara's been told that her mother murdered two people with her father as a witness. It was an awful endeavor, they said. Her life almost seems not worth living, being poor day to day and looking after Taff who is frequently sick with fever every time you turn around, but now life, while not perfect, will soon take a turn for better or far worse.

Being lead by a mysterious bird, Kara is forced to travel into the mysterious and foreboding Thickety, a woods full of dark shadows, writhing shadows, and strange, unbelievable creatures. Once there, she finds a grimoire, a book full of strong magical powers that might be her mother's very own spell book. This is the story of her journey with magic and the holds it ties to her. Being lured by Sordyr himself, the demon with hands made of branches and a body frighteningly cloaked in orange, her life is quickly hurtling towards darkness and even her own destruction.

J. A. White wrote a simply fabulous first installment that will undoubtedly become part of an amazing series. I have always been looking for a good witchy book to devour but never got to do so until now. This wasn't because I was hesitant, but because they were never at my disposal. This was a great way to start off my adventures with this topic. I like to believe that *The Thickety: A Path Begins* is one of those books that is fun to read at night, under your covers, with only a flashlight as your friend. Even though so many people call it a middle grade novel, the writing is so diverse that I feel that it can fit into more than one category. It can be read by a middle grader, a young adult, and maybe even some adults. J. A. White has such a voice that makes it blur between the lines so that countless people can enjoy it. It has magic, friendship, trials, and tribulations. At the end of the day, though, it seems that family is also very prominent in the story. I was so warmed by the development of Kara's helpless father into someone she could easily talk to and count on.

As you may have already heard, *The Thickety: A Path Begins* does have violence and "gore." However, White conveys these happenings in such a fashion in which you know what happened, but it wasn't something that was described in detail, almost "swept under the rug," if you will. For example, one character lost a few fingers at one point, but it was written so that you knew what occurred without going into the bloody details. It was simply a part of the story line. People are killed, bad things happen, and darkness is a part of everything. That's what makes this book so interesting, the darkness fighting the light, the lies pitted against the truth. It captivated me. Kara struggled with the grimoire. It blackened her heart and turned her into someone different. Her character changes were so fascinating and very well portrayed. For a middle grade novel it was amazing! I have never read one like it. I wasn't expecting so many of the twists and turns that the author presented to me. It was a brilliant piece of work! The ending about killed me, I was so not ready for it. But, as Kara said, happy endings could only be earned through some sort of sacrifice.

If you have the opportunity to read this captivating tale, you should definitely do so! If you are worried about whether or not your child should read it, then maybe wait for it. Some nine or ten year olds may enjoy this spooky book while others may be frightened. In the end, you may want to wait until they are twelve. If you're an adult or young adult, take the chance on *The Thickety: A Path Begins*. I hope you enjoy it just as much as I did. I'm simply dying for the next one and am so excited to read more and more by Mr. White!!!!

He's definitely an exceptional author who can twist a tale like no other.

You can see reviews like this one and more at <http://knightingalereviews.blogspot.com/>.
(<http://knightingalereviews.blogspot.c...>)

Jessica says

What . . . Whaaaaat . . . what did I just read? I mean . . . whaaaaat. A friend gave me this ARC last year (Thank you, Joella!) and said, "This was so different, I think you'll really like it!" So of course I put it aside for a year, because honestly, when people tell me I'll like something, whether out of stubbornness or because my tastes just are that weird, I usually don't! And I have a hard time with middle grade fantasy as well. I'm very, very picky.

But Joella was so right! Because this book! THIS BOOK! I mean WHAT WAS THIS BOOK?! It was so different! It was like Grimm's Fairy Tales mixed with the Crucible with an added dash of The Giver. So different! So good!

You must read this! Yes, you!

Kaitlin says

This is a young adult story following the childhood years of Kara and her young brother Taff. When Kara is just five years old her mother is branded a witch and destroyed by the other members of the town where Kara lives. She's horrified and very nearly branded a witch too, but she survives scrutiny and ends up growing up in a very hostile town and taking care of her baby brother because her father has gone rather senile from the loss of his wife.

This story fell off of the page easily for me. It's a great start to the book, which draws the reader in, and it feels like it's a fast-paced and fun story too. I really enjoyed the fact that it retained a creepy vibe, despite being aimed at younger readers, as this really made me want to keep on reading.

Kara and her brother have a lovely relationship, and although I do think some elements of this story are predictable, I really liked the storyline and I enjoyed getting to discover their world and follow them through the day-to-day trials...Until the Thickety (a large, deadly forest which is gradually encroaching on their island) calls to Kara and changes everything.

This is definitely a book I would recommend to many young or older readers. I fully plan to continue the story, and I am looking forward to doing so as it's a rather dramatic ending. 4*s overall from me :)

Faye, la Patata says

You can also find this awesome review on my blog! POTATOES UNITE!

This book surprised me. A LOT.

You see, a few weeks ago, I thought to myself that perhaps I should give an equal focus to Middle Grade books coming out this year for a variety of reasons: one, they're usually shorter; two, the plot is more focused (therefore not all over the place), and; three, it's more light-hearted than many of the Young Adult ones that I'm surrounded with. So when I found myself staring at an ARC of *The Thickety: A Path Begins*, I thought I'd finally read something that would give me all three.

Man, was I wrong.

My friends, **do not read** this book if you're looking for something that could make you laugh and cry and be in cloud nine. This book is **not** it. This book will squeeze your pumping heart, pull your heartstrings, make you see red, and wonder why is there a thing such as 'evil' in this pitiful, pathetic world. It will make you hate humans and bratty, spoiled girls who are fond of power trips at the expense of others. This will make you scared of anything that resembles a forest. You will want to cover yourselves with blankets, and wish for bizarre shadows to go away. You will never see remote islands the same way again. The cold of the night will give you cold sweat, and the sight of rats and insects will make you run for your life. You will wonder if there is such a thing as happiness in this world.

I may be stretching it out a bit, but I shit you not when I say that this is a **dark book**. It may label itself as Middle Grade, but **I don't recommend giving it to children who are sensitive to dark themes such as death, dark magic, murder, psychopaths, and severe cases of ostracisation**. It's highly disturbing and atmospheric in a sense, and seeing children involved in these things makes it a notch more damaging to one's mental self. This book honestly felt like going to hell, meeting the devil and its children, and then going back barely surviving the horrors you faced.

shudder

Kara's mother was executed for allegedly killing two people through her witchcraft ways when she was 5 years old, nearly 7 years ago. Since then, Kara has been taking care of herself and her baby brother, Taff, making herself strong enough for both of them as they are constantly scrutinized, discriminated upon, and ostracised by the villagers for the mere fact her mother was a witch. One day, a bird beckons her to follow it into the Thickety, a mysterious forest with a dark life of its own, the very same forest where the Forest Demon, Sordyr, lives, making it forbidden and utterly dangerous. Deep into the forest, she sees the Grimoire, a magical book that eventually allows her to practice Witchcraft. From then on, she finds herself slowly discovering the cruel, awful truth... that magic is power, and power kills.

Like I said before, this is a very dark book. The treatment the villagers give to 12 year old Kara alone is enough to make you see red. It's absolutely dreadful, and it even made me feel a wee bit depressed and sad for her. Nobody deserves to be constantly mocked behind your back for something you had no control over. Nobody deserves to have their house vandalized night after night by mud and dung. Nobody deserves to be bullied by seemingly charitable people like Grace who presents herself as sweet and innocent, but treats Kara inferior to dirt. From the get-go, you instantly feel for the main character and her little brother, Taff. The fact that their father has become a negligent parent because of what happened to his wife makes their situation all the more heartbreaking.

With that said, you'll understand Kara's frustrations, and even some of her dark thoughts. And when she gets her hands on the Grimoire, a magical book that stores spells for witches, you even feel like cheering on for her. You start to look forward to her using it to smite those who laughed and spat at her face. (I feel so

evil now)

Surprisingly, this book got even darker at that point. For once, finally having power over others makes Kara's ego balloon. The more she uses the book, the more she becomes obsessed with it, to the point of sleeping with it, and having nightmares when she doesn't use it. At this point, you become concerned for her, and you'll start to wonder if you even know this girl at all. That's what happened to me at least. **Chapter after chapter, Kara gradually became a trainwreck that it was painful to watch her slowly get overcome with power that was so easily abused. It felt like seeing another Sophie (*School of Good and Evil*) come to life.** The character development from bad to good to bad to good was so strong and evident that her actions left me uneasy and full of trepidation.

Doki, doki, doki, doki...

Do you hear that?

That's my heart beating fast and my sanity ebbing away. That's how intense this book was.

And then, there is Grace: the girl with the white hair and beautiful smile who look at others with a twinkle in her eye. **She is devil incarnate. She is CHUCKY in woman's clothing.** And you guys surely remember Chucky? That evil doll? If not, let me refresh your repressed memories:

I AM NOT FUCKING KIDDING.

I've never been scared and angry of a kid this much. This girl is absolutely heartless. She makes me scared of kids (okay maybe not, but she's making me second guess them now). Characters like her lead me to believe it is hell on earth, because only demons can be that evil. Let's just say if you're not of the faint of heart, you'd really rather not meet this girl at all.

...

OKAY SCRATCH THAT PLEASE READ THIS BOOK SO I CAN SHARE THIS FEAR WITH SOMEONE!!!

Overall, here's a checklist:

- 1.) If you want a dark book with witches, hateful villagers, scary forests, and Chucky-like characters, this is the book for you.
- 2.) If you like atmospheric stuff with a hint of horror, mystery, and thriller, this book is for you.
- 3.) If you like good character development, this book is for you.
- 4.) If you like a well-written Middle Grade book, and be damned scary stuff, this book is for you.

I think I shall rest my case here. My blanket is looking really cozy right now, and I want to sleep under the covers tonight.

P.S: THAT ENDING WAS SUPER, SUPER, SUPER, SUPER CRUEL. I DID NOT SEE THAT COMING AND WHILE IT WAS BRILLIANT, IT WAS SUPER HEART-RENDING AT THE SAME TIME. WAAAAAH!!

Emily says

Wow that was dark, but so well crafted. I was totally drawn in from the start and must see what happens next.

Erica says

There are some kids books that retain their charm well into adulthood. For me, *Bunnicula*, as well as most books by Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume rank highly in that category. Then there are other books that were amazing when I was a kid but when I read them now, I wonder how I was so easily hornswaggled. *Grandmother's Heart* is a perfect example of such a tale. I was probably in fourth grade when I got that book and I fan fictioned the hell out of it. I still have some of my drawings of what I thought everyone should look like, how and where I would interact with the characters, and other amazing scenes I'd made up out of love for that story. I've tried to re-read it many times and I always fail. It's a short book. It's also an awful book. But it wasn't always awful and I still love it because I had loved it so well when I was 8. 7. Whatever age I was when I first read that marvelous (horrendous) story.

This book probably falls more closely to the latter category. It's a story about a girl, Kara, whose mother was killed for witchery seven years ago and the consequences that event has had on Kara, her brother, who was a baby when it happened, and her father, as well as upon the rest of the island town's inhabitants who adhere to the Path of Timoth Clen and shun witchcraft and all its evils.

The writing is probably better than what you'll find in *Grandmother's Heart*, but the story, itself, leaves a bit to be desired for the adult mind. I had some serious problems buying Kara's twelve-year-old self. She seemed closer to fifteen or sixteen. I had a hard time believing in Grace, the Nellie Oleson of this tale, before and after her discovery. I couldn't quite follow the story and had to bridge all the gaps myself. I rolled my eyes vehemently at the last few chapters.

These are things a young reader will overlook. A young reader with imagination will fill those gaps automatically, will insert themselves into Kara and her brother, will insert their enemies into Grace. It will all fit together perfectly.

And the illustrations, simple and stark, are delightful, so that's a plus.

This will be a wonderful book for the 7-12 year-old set. As a read-together with an adult, though...well, the adult is probably going to need a bit of patience and understanding. This was not written for us. It was written for them, the childrens, and I hope they love it. I would have.

Stephanie Swint says

A young girl loses her mother at the age of six. Her mother is accused of witchcraft and killed in front of her in the small colonial village of Denoran. The village is on an Island surrounded by dark forest known as the

Thickety. It's black life continues to encroach on the town despite clearers cutting it back every day. It reminded me of 'The Heart of Darkness.' No one can enter and not be changed if they survive at all.

This was another book I found in search of Halloween books, and is Halloween Approved! Halloween is referred to as The Shadow Festival. Activities include costumes and traveling from house to house for treats. There is even a corn maze. Sordyr is the dark creature that controls the Thickety and the Shadow Festival is dedicated to cautionary tales of Sordyr and is the night he is at his strongest.

This is an intelligent middle school/young adult book that adults can enjoy too. It centers around Kara, who is twelve years old. She has taken on the role of caring for her family in the absence of her mother. Her brother is sickly and her father has never gotten over the loss of his wife. He is barely functional. Her family is looked down upon if not openly despised by the villagers because the mother was a convicted witch. The village is a tightly knit religious community and what the "Fender," similar to a governor, says is law. The Fender believes Kara is a witch and has believed it since she was six. He has no proof, however. If this was not enough adversity for a young girl Kara has a nemesis in the body of a beautiful disabled girl named Grace. The community sees Grace as a fair-haired angel. She only shows her dark, cruel, and manipulative side to Kara and her brother Taff.

'The Thickety' is filled with magic. It explores themes of what is not understood is seen as dangerous and the price of power. Kara is tempted by Sordyr's creatures into the woods and finds a grimoire. As she explores its power it brings out darkness, jealousy, vengeance and anger in Kara. Sordyr is very similar to the concept of the devil in colonial stories of witches. He provides temptation and power to young women in exchange for their mortal soul. The focus of his attentions are on the disenfranchised and outcasts. I believe that J.A. White did proper research into witch hunts like the Salem witch trials and utilized it intelligently to create this fictional tale. It is age appropriate for middle grade children but doesn't shy away from the unfortunate truths of historical witch hunts. I am impressed with this new series. It is a good Halloween read. It would be frightening for young children but is appropriately suspenseful for older children and young adults. It is a great introduction to early Halloween traditions in America and colonial belief in witches for young adults. I recently read *The Penguin Book of Witches* which is a book of collected true accounts of witch trials. I was pleasantly surprised that J.A. White's story kept so close to historically accurate portrayals of early American beliefs in witches.

There is a wonderful audible version of this book narrated by Susan Duerden. She has narrated several other books I enjoyed like 'The Rook.' She is one of my favorite narrators. I recommend this in both book and audible format.

Brandy Painter says

The Thickety is an interesting fantasy world with a fast-paced and engaging plot. Kara is a strong sympathetic main character and the life she lives is not easy. I can't really love this book for reasons that are such a personal bias that I don't even feel it is important to share them, but I can see how it would appeal to a lot of young readers.

*REVISED REVIEW: After a recent conversation with a friend, I have decided to drop this book's star rating. While there was much I found problematic with it originally, I realize now that I glossed over something I should not have. This is why I love the book and blogging community. Because discussions with friends help me find strengths in books I had not previously seen, and they also open my eyes to my own

privilege and how I could allow a serious issue to slide by without commenting. The villain in this story is a girl born with a disability, a disability that she uses to manipulate other and be generally mean, spiteful, and specifically plot awful things toward the protagonist. While her environment can be blamed for how she turned out, the way she is portrayed ties her disability too closely to the evil machinations of her mind. Also, the word "cripple" is used to describe her, which is not acceptable in anyway.

Do I understand that evil and cruel intentions are something that people with disabilities can have? Of course! I'm not naive. However, kids with disabilities see themselves so little in books as it is. When they do have the opportunity to see themselves in a book, do we want them to see themselves as the villain? That is worse than them being the sympathetic sidekick (looking at another popular MG book from this year). We need more books like Handbook for Dragon Slayers where these kids get to see themselves as the heroes.

This combined with the issues I already had means I can't endorse this book in any way. Upon further thinking of the book, I've also decided that the writing isn't of the quality enough to save it from it's weaknesses.

msleighm says

Read in one evening. This is a clever book that brought me back to when I read The Witch of Blackbird Pond (multiple times) as a kid. There was also an echo of The Crucible and another famous short story I won't mention by name (it could create a spoiler). Nods to some of the great witch and small town literature were fun (intentional or not). Truly frightening at times: crowd hysteria and religious zealotry. There were a few times I thought the world could have been better explained - things that are brought up later in the book could have/should have been explained earlier. I also would have preferred the heroine to be a little older, but realized Harry Potter was twelve when his adventures began (another nod?) and this gives the character more years to have a series for kids. However, those critiques aside, I thoroughly enjoyed it and don't want to have to wait for the next one!

Kendra says

This is a debut novel for this author, geared toward middle readers and tweens --- but I have to say that as an adult, I found this book to be very entertaining & engrossing. The story is primarily about Kara and her family after Kara's mother was killed for being a witch in a society that purports to tolerate no magic of any sort. Kara doesn't believe her mother was really a witch, but the rest of the village does, and treats Kara very poorly. Even so, Kara is determined to treat everyone with kindness - even the animals. She thinks nothing of her seemingly special ability to heal and soothe animals. Then, one day, Kara is lured into the thicket by a bird-like creature that steals her necklace. While there, the bird creature leads her discover a grimoire (a spell book) that Kara thinks must have belonged to her mother. From there, we follow Kara's endeavors to remain good and kind while wrestling with the power of magic that has been awakened in her. A great story, with good and evil, magical creatures, real human emotions, mystery, and a cliff-hanger at the end. I highly recommend this book to anyone with middle-grade readers, tweens, or adults who also happen to like a great fantasy story. Thank you to the author and the publisher for allowing me to read this advance copy. The book will be released in May 2014.

C.G. Drews says

This is probably the **creepiest most dark and scary MG book I've ever read**. That surprised me! I thought it'd be creepy but it's actually fairly violent. Not graphically so, though. Just, like, a few people die and get hung and all that fun stuff.

WITCH TRIALS, PEOPLES, WITCHES.

It was like a fantasy verison of the Puritan times when they killed people they thought were witchy.

I loved how magical it was! It was a totally reimagined world and that's aaaawesome. There are magical creatures and grimoire books and scary demons in the forest. There's also villains and antagonists on multiple levels. Like the most real and frustrating villain was the "sweet" little girl, Grace, who was crippled and everyone's favourite...but was really a complete bully and sociopath.

Like all Puritan-esque books...the main character, Kara, is grossly mistreated. I WAS SO FRUSTRATED. They burned her mother as a witch, so Kara had her little brother Taff and her mostly insane Father are branded as outcasts. Everyone is so cruel to them. I *hate* mindless cruelty and I really empathised with Kara. Also the sibling relationship was so nice and refreshing to read. Taff and Kara have some quirky banter.

So why didn't I fall head of heels into the thickety of lovingness? It's hard to explain. But, firstly: I was a bit bored. I felt the story dragged (it's nearly 500 pages). I wanted to give the plot a bit of a shove-along to get to the action parts. Then secondly, it was violent and dark and scary which I am **TOTALLY FINE WITH FOR AN MG BOOK!** I think MG books can totally be dark. Kids like scary things. But then it seemed to dive headfirst into scary witch hangings....and then bounce back barely brushing them. No detail. I get why this is done, but it almost felt like the detail was chopped out. I felt like the book was just grabbing and snabbling at darkness and then was too scared to go right for it.

The plot also didn't keep me on my toes at all, but I AM like 10 years older than the intended audience, so I'm not complaining over that.

It's dark and scary and quite a bit loveable. I just didn't love this like I thought I would. MG and I usually marry at dawn, but this time? Eh.

Lora says

This book is too dark and too long for its target readers. Worse, the darkness of this book seems to be for its own sake rather than to serve any purpose. Its ending appears to be a teasing hook to draw the reader into a future book, but after all the misery of this one, why read another? Stop. Please, stop. Kara is a great protagonist, but I don't think I could stand to read another book in this author's world.
