



## Silver Birch Fiction 2024 Nominee List – Annotations and Content



### ***Apartment 713***

Written by Kevin Sylvester

Published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

Jake Simmons hates his new home.

The Regency is nothing more than floor after floor of peeling wallpaper and faded glory. Jake misses his old life. He misses the time when his mother was employed. He misses living in a house where the wind doesn't make the windows whistle. Loneliness (and a trail of kittens) leads Jake to the apartment of an elderly lady, then to the bowels of the building and then to a part-time job assisting Larry the custodian. With each passing day, the building reveals more of its mysteries to Jake. The occupants grow on him too.

Unfortunately, Jake's feeling of belonging is short-lived: the city plans to demolish the Regency. Jake feels powerless. And then fate throws him a curveball. He's summoned to apartment 713. An apartment he's been told is off-limits. But when he opens the door . . . he travels to the past!

Alongside Beth, his new friend and guide, Jake begins searching for any clue that might help him save the Regency. As their friendship blooms, the mystery around the building's makers deepens. The Regency's own storied past will give Jake the key to saving his own future—if only he knows where to look.

#### **Content/Discussion Themes**

gentrification, historical mystery, aging

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### ***Berani***

Written by Michelle Kadarusman

Published by Pajama Press

Malia has had a privileged upbringing in Indonesia, but since her Indonesian father died, her Canadian mother wants to return to her own family on the other side of the world. Malia is determined to stay. Indonesia is her home, and she loves it. Besides, if she leaves, how can she continue to fight for her country's precious rainforests?

Ari knows he is lucky to be going to school and competing on the chess team, even if it means an endless round of chores at his uncle's restaurant. Back in his home village, he and his cousin Suni dreamed about getting a chance like this. But now he is here without her, and the guilt is crushing him. As if that weren't enough, he's horribly worried about Ginger Juice, his uncle's orangutan. The too-small cage where she lives is clearly hurting her body and her mind, but where else can she go? The rainforest where she was born is a palm oil plantation now.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

understanding of home, climate issues, animal rights issues, friendship, city vs. country life in Indonesia

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***The Big Sting***

Written by Rachelle Delaney

Published by Tundra Books

Eleven-year-old Leo is an "armchair adventurer." This, according to Dad, means he'd choose adventures in books or video games over real-life experiences. And while Leo hates the label, he can't argue with it. Unlike his little sister Lizzie, Leo is not a risk-taker.

So when he, Lizzie, Mom and Dad leave the city to visit Grandpa on Heron Island, Leo finds all kinds of dangers to avoid — from the deep, dark ocean to an old barn on the verge of collapse. But nothing on the island is more fearsome than Grandpa himself — Leo has never met anyone so grumpy! According to Mom, Grandpa is still grieving the recent death of his wife, a beekeeper beloved by everyone on the island.

Despite Leo's best efforts to avoid it, adventure finds him anyway when Grandma's beehives go missing in the dead of night. Infuriated, Grandpa vows to track down the sticky-fingered thieves himself . . . with risk-averse Leo and danger-loving Lizzie (plus a kitten named Mayhem) in tow.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

theft, seemingly irresponsible parents, self-discovery, coming out of your shell

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***The Boy Who Woke The Sun***

Written by A.T. Woodley and Illustrated by Mike Deas

Published by Red Deer Press

Eleven-year-old Elliot is having a dismal pandemic summer when suddenly he's caught in the bubble of one of his own dreams and transported to another world, controlled by evil butterflies, where the sun doesn't shine. Along with his octopus sidekick, Elliot discovers the reason for these butterflies-gone-wrong and realizes that things must be set right if he is ever to find the way home. An epic middle-grade fantasy about discovering your true path.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

fantasy violence, adult drinking alcohol, pandemic, self-discovery

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***The Case of the Rigged Race (A Mighty Muskrats Mystery)***

Written by Michael Hutchinson

Published by Second Story Press

Windy Lake First Nation is hosting the annual Trappers Festival, and the four Mighty Muskrats are excited about the sled-dog races and the chance to visit with family and friends from far and wide. But during the Teen Sled Race, the lead dog is the victim of a frightening accident that may be more than it seems.

Between mysterious strangers seen lurking by the trail and a loud group of animal rights protestors, the Muskrats have a lot of suspects. Despite the chill of winter, the case is heating up for Sam, Otter, Atim, and Chickadee!

**Content/Discussion Themes**

sabotage, animal rights, protesting, not seeing another point of view, mystery

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***Gnome is Where Your Heart Is***

Written by Casey Lyall

Published by Greenwillow (HarperCollins)

Lemon Peabody loves spending time with Grandpa Walt. Even though he has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and moved to an assisted living facility, he's still the same funny, loving grandpa he's always been. One of Grandpa's claims to fame is his story about meeting an alien years ago—and that it looked like a garden gnome. Ever since, it's been something of a town-wide joke, and the cause of a rift between Grandpa and Lemon's dad. Lemon is determined to find those extraterrestrial gnomes and vindicate Grandpa Walt—while Grandpa can still remember it.

Late one night, after seeing the flash of a spaceship during a storm, Lemon enlists the help of two friends to find out what might have crashed in the woods. But then the aliens find her, and nothing goes the way she expected. Lemon is sure she can convince the aliens to fix Grandpa Walt's memory and bring back the grandpa she misses so much for good. But the aliens are dealing with problems of their own. With a little creativity and compassion, maybe they can all help one another.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

grandparent with Alzheimer's, minor sci-fi violence

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***Jude Saves the World***

Written by Ronnie Riley

Published by Scholastic Canada Ltd.

Twelve-year-old Jude struggles with some things: focusing at school, feeling like everything rests on their shoulders, and not being able to come out as nonbinary to their old-fashioned grandparents. But Jude doesn't struggle with Dallas, their best friend in the whole world. Their

person. Jude and Dallas's world changes when they learn Stevie, a girl in their class, has been ousted from the popular clique at school. Worried it had something to do with Stevie's rumoured crush on another girl, Jude reaches out to see if Stevie is okay. Stevie quickly becomes an important friend to Jude and Dallas, whose unwavering acceptance of her is a stark contrast to the tests and dysfunction she experienced with her former friend group.

As their friendship deepens and the three open up to each other, Stevie's unconditional and open acceptance when Jude comes out to her motivates them to create a queer safe space in their community. Jude has the courage and determination it takes to create the first Diversity Club in their community, but will they be able to find the support they need to make it happen?

#### **Content/Discussion Themes**

bullying, parental discord causing anxiety in children, misgendering, self-discovery, safe spaces

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#### ***PAWS: Mindy Makes Some Space***

Written by Nathan Fairbairn and Illustrated by Michele Assarasakorn

Published by Razorbill

Best friends Mindy Park, Gabby Jordan, and Priya Gupta are back in business! After a few ups and downs, their dog-walking business is booming and the girls are closer than ever. It's a dream come true!

But for Mindy, things at home are beginning to feel like a bit of a nightmare. Her mom just started dating someone, which has Mindy feeling like the odd one out. For as long as she can remember, it's been just the two of them and she doesn't want that to change. (So what if her mom's boyfriend has a cute pet cat, and all of Mindy's friends seem to think he's pretty cool?) Things only get worse when a new student named Hazel arrives in class and seems totally into joining PAWS. Sharing her mom feels bad enough, so there's no way Mindy is going to share her best friends and her business, too! But when Mindy's stubbornness starts to hurt everyone around her, will she be able to overcome her fears and learn that change doesn't have to be a cat-tastrophe?

#### **Content/Discussion Themes**

single mother dating, new friends, jealousy, interpersonal conflict, passive bullying

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#### ***Swept Away: Ruth Morney and the Unwanted Clues***

Written by Natalie Hyde

Published by DCB Young Readers/Cormorant Books

A frog-shaped garden sprinkler, a mismatched pair of ladies' gloves, and an ugly flower picture made of human hair do not add up to murder. Or do they?

Eleven-year-old Ruth's friend and neighbour, Bea, has just died — an accidental drowning. Or

so they say. Ruth's not so sure. Bea was sixty-four and knew the area better than anyone. She was much too careful to get swept away by the flooded Teeswater River. And now Bea's godson, Saul, says his godmother had premonitions that she would be murdered. She even left behind a box of clues to help Ruth figure out what happened.

Accident or murder? That's the case Ruth, Saul, and Ruth's wayward pet chicken, Dorcas, have to crack.

**Content/Discussion Themes**

murder mystery, minor violence, friendship

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***Umbrella House***

Written by Colleen Nelson

Published by Pajama Press

Middle-schooler and New Yorker Ruby Markowski wants to tell the truth fearlessly and powerfully, just like her idols at Veracity News. She and her best friend Scout already make YouTube videos together about East Village life, so when Veracity News announces a Young Voices video competition, Ruby knows it's the perfect opportunity to make a name for herself if only she can find a story worth telling.

When a real-estate mogul threatens to buy her historic East Village apartment building, Umbrella House, Ruby sets out to create a video about the people who live in her building, depicting their love for art, community, and family.

With time—and her options for saving Umbrella House—running out, Ruby finds herself caught up in the mystery of the Midnight Muralist, a famous East Village artist whose murals once made buildings famous and valuable. Could finding this enigmatic artist be the key to saving her historic East Village apartment building?

**Content/Discussion Themes**

gentrification, dead father, absent mother, poverty, corporate interest in politics