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Young Adult Fiction

Cursebusters!
Julie Smith
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"Deb, listen to me—this place can help us. And so can you. You're our only hope." These cryptic words are all that Deb "Reeno" Dimond's father left her with when he deposited her at the gates of a mysterious boarding school. Sent away for being caught burglarizing yet another home, Reeno desperately wants to leave this crazy school, so she can be with her older sister, who is dying of an undiagnosed illness that has plagued her for years.

While at school, Reeno meets the Ozone Rangers, a group of friends that have in common an extraordinary psychic gift. Reeno soon learns to use her own ability to see auras to help others. To her surprise, she also realizes that she can communicate telepathically with the school cat, A.B. And, as she soon discovers, he is not just an ordinary house cat, but a shape-shifting Planet Guardian who needs her help to save the world from destruction. She also learns how an ancient Mayan curse may be linked to her sister's illness. As the relationship between Reeno and A.B. and the Ozone Rangers grows, she learns to look beyond first impressions and discovers what real friendship is.

Julie Smith—author of twenty adult mysteries, including New Orleans Mourning, which won the Edgar Allen Poe Award for Best Novel—delves into both the young adult and paranormal fiction worlds for the first time with Cursebusters! Some aspects of her new novel could have been fleshed out better. For example, Reeno's claim that she is "among the most accomplished teenage burglars who ever lived" is often repeated, but the only burglary the reader experiences is the failed attempt that sent her to boarding school. In contrast, the well-painted character of A.B. allows the reader to quickly lay aside disbelief and get behind this talking cat who has the most paramount of missions: saving the planet.

One of the strengths of *Cursebusters!* is its focus on a young female lead who is more interested in solving her own problems than getting a boy to kiss her. While any young adult with an interest in paranormal fiction will enjoy this book, it also is an excellent vehicle through

which to reinforce in girls the knowledge that they can be independent-minded leaders.

Christine Canfield