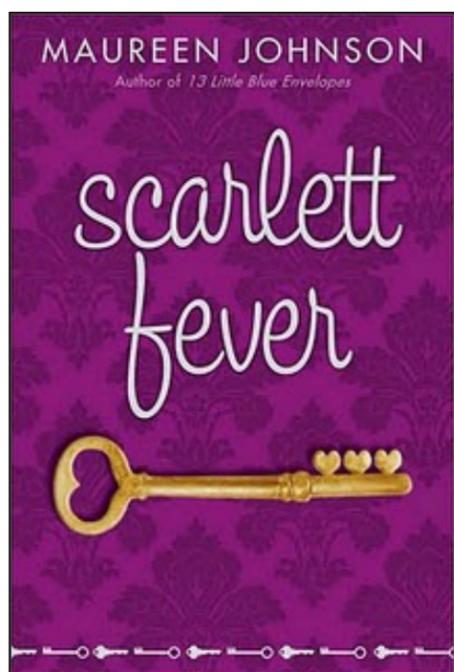


AROUNDTOWN

New novel induces literary fever

w/ Sofiya Pershteyn
Staff Writer

Taking place in a run-down, family-owned New York hotel, *Scarlett Fever* by Maureen Johnson (Point, 332 pages) follows the life of a



15-year-old Scarlett Martin and her family. After an eventful summer, the novel opens with Scarlett getting ready to begin a new

year in school. She learns to balance her time between her demanding job as a talent agent's assistant and her friends. However, it is her family that provides the humor and the drama throughout the book.

Spencer, Scarlett's older brother, starts out as an aspiring actor auditioning for a multitude of small parts until one day he gets a role on a popular TV show and becomes the most hated TV-villain—overnight.

Lola, the oldest daughter, takes time off from school after her high school graduation to figure what to do with her life, but as life gets more confusing and out of control, she quickly reverts to a relationship with her college-bound high school sweetheart, Chip. In Scarlett's family's opinion, what Chip lacks in personality, he makes up only in his family's wealth and high social status. This causes Scarlett to doubt her sister's intentions behind the relationship that grows from casual to serious in a matter of days.

Finally, Scarlett's younger sister, Marlene—although only 11 years old and a recovering cancer patient—has secret plots of her own. When Marlene stops her manipulative ploys to get Scarlett in trouble, the latter grows even more suspicious of her sister's sudden change in behavior.

As the characters' story lines grow, separate and converge, the reader is constantly entertained by the quick-paced turn of events. Though some themes such as the difference between social classes and the burden of fame are present throughout the whole book, the story does not dwell on one thing to the point of tedium. Unlike most common young adult fiction, the romance is not an obsession, and the characters do not spend countless passages

dwelling on their angst.

The tone of most of the book is light and humorous, and there are quite a few laugh-out-loud passages. Scarlett's boss's tiny, pitiful dog provides the most comic relief. Scarlett ironically nicknames the Chihuahua after the hotel's uptight doorman, Murray, because of his lack of bladder and self control. Quirky metaphors such as those comparing personality traits with woodland creatures also make reading an enjoyable experience.

One of the best components of the book is the authenticity of both the dialogue and the characters' actions. The comments made by Scarlett are sometimes witty and at other times clueless, but they all sound like something a person her age would say or think. The details about school, homework and procrastination also ring true to life, proving Johnson's connection to her inner teen.

For this reviewer, the only disagreeable aspect of the book is the occasional predictability of the

plot. Still, this is remedied with other surprises and wacky, unexpected plans. The end of the book does not present a "happily ever after" conclusion and although most of the problems are resolved by this point, some still remain, leaving readers craving another book.

Although *Scarlett Fever* is a sequel to Johnson's previous book, *Suite Scarlett*, it can be read and enjoyed by itself. As an added benefit, since this story is a continuation of the first novel, the characters and their story lines are fully developed and are three-dimensional.

Overall, the book is an easy read and is full of interesting and insightful details that provide a window not only into Scarlett's life, but also the lives of teenagers in New York in general.



Spoon's album favors simplicity

w/ Naomi Prale
Sports Editor

Spoon's seventh album, *Transference*, does not expand on the easy-to-love feeling of its previous album, *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga*, but still shines in its own way. *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* used expansive melodies on hits such as "The Underdog" and "Don't You Evah." On the other hand, *Transference* almost completely rejects melody, in favor of more trance-like rhythms and simple beats.

The album begins with two similar sounding songs, "Before Destruction," and "Is Love Forever." They are similar in the sense that each uses a guitar to keep a steady beat, without really accenting any other instruments. The percussion and vocals seem faded behind the guitars. Both songs lack a melody, but this does not diminish the quality of the songs. "Is Love Forever" is one of the better songs on the album and does a good job of proving to be memorable because of its intriguing lyrics.

The album is not completely comprised of songs that lack melody, however. More conventional tracks such as "The Mystery Zone" and "Written in Reverse" have more of a melodious touch to them. These songs focus more on the vocals of lead singer/guitarist Britt Daniels. Both tracks have a jaunty feel which evokes a feel-good sensibility in the listener, particularly on "Written in Reverse," which gives this reviewer goosebumps.

Those two songs aside, however, frustration seems to be an overarching theme on the album, especially on "Out Go the Lights," on which Daniels sounds lovesick and exhausted. Daniels' voice is passionate, and almost vulnerable as he sings, "You became like that/ One which your heart was fixed/ Before I knew what was which/ Out with the lights." The song intersperses atonality with sporadic melodies, an enjoyable

and refreshing contrast.

Conversely, "Got Nuffin'," a track full of sharp chord changes, downplays Daniels' vocal talent, as he sounds purposefully disinterested, raw and resigned. Once again, lovesickness reigns supreme as Daniels moans, "And I got nothing to lose but/ Darkness and shadows/ Got nothing to lose but/ Bitterness and patterns," over a more aggressive backbeat.

Most striking is "Goodnight Laura," a track with spare instrumentation and vocals that are soothing and almost soporific. It is the closest



thing to a standard love song on *Transference*.

Overall, the album is most distinctive because it succeeds in presenting a variety of genres in one album. While some listeners may be turned off by the album's decided uncatchiness, *Transference* still works.



Dear John delivers drama

w/ Hira Malik
Around Town Editor

At first glance, *Dear John*, directed by Lasse Hallstrom, seems like a typical romantic drama. The movie is based on a novel by Nicholas Sparks. Walking into this film at the Old Orchard Loews Garden Cinemas, this reviewer had no expectations for this movie because this reviewer is a fan of the acting "talent" of neither Channing Tatum nor co-lead Amanda Seyfried. Although the acting of both could have been much better, this reviewer was surprised to find that the movie in general is a satisfyingly heartwarming tearjerker.

The pre-Sept. 11 film begins with John Tyree (Tatum) being shot in the Middle East as a member of the U.S. Army. As his life flashes before his eyes, the first thing he remembers is his father's coin collection, a memory he shared with his autistic father Mr. Tyree (Richard Jenkins). After remembering his father, he recalls the love of his life, Savannah Curtis (Seyfield). The story then flashes back for the next 90 minutes.



The retrospective begins with Tyree on leave from Germany in his small hometown, where he meets Curtis, who is there to build a home for Habitat for Humanity during her spring break. When together, the two have a blast. Tyree falls in love instantly, and Curtis is attracted to him as well. The two get to know one another and eventually fall deeply in love.

After a few weeks, Tyree is stationed in the Middle East due to the Sept. 11 attack, and Curtis goes back to school. The couple promises to send letters back and forth (hence the title of the film) to one another so they can keep in touch and keep their relationship going. The letters continue for a few months. However, these soon come to an end. When Curtis sends her last letter stating her intentions to end the relationship (for reasons that would spoil the movie to reveal), the sorrow in Tyree's eyes is clearly visible, and this reviewer found herself in tears at this point in the film.

The film's emotional appeal aside, *Dear*

John succeeds in spite of its director and actors. Hallstrom's direction did not meet the expectations of this reviewer. His handling of the flashbacks is very confusing, and overall, his approach to film-making is typical of teen tearjerkers and very pedestrian.

The acting performances of the two leads are not much better. For the next film that Hallstrom directs, he should think twice before choosing Tatum and Seyfried again. It was very difficult for anyone to understand the two actors' emotions during the silent moments of this film.

On the other hand, Jenkins' portrayal of an autistic man is phenomenal and nuanced, including never making eye contact with any of the characters, common characteristic of autism.

Composer Deborah Lurie's score is equally memorable. After walking out of the theater, this reviewer found herself thinking about the score continuously and its impact on the film. For the most part, this film only played music during times of sorrow and much grief. Although the music was soft and mellow, it provided a lot of emotion throughout the film. Each time a song was played, this reviewer found herself tearing up.

Screenwriter Jamie Linden can be

applauded for her work as well. This film is a sweet, romantic film that can be watched over and over again, much like *The Notebook*. The script is especially beautiful in the letters that Tyree and Curtis send back and forth to one another. The letters paint a picture of the love the two share. Furthermore, the dialogue is authentic, and the characters sound like people one may know.

It is a testament to Jenkins, Linden and Lurie that this reviewer was able to sit through 100 minutes of bad acting and mediocre directing and still be able to state that *Dear John* is a film that can be watched a number of times.



WestWord

Paid in Full pays to please

Ninth in a series

W Suhail Ansari
Viewpoints Editor

When you turn on the radio, does every hip-hop song sound like the one that played just before it? Does it seem that every song samples the same oldies and that the lyrics revolve around the same tired, narcissistic themes?

If so, it may be time to jump in a time machine, back to the Golden Age of hip-hop, back to the late 1980s—"back in the day" when Eric B. & Rakim ruled the stage.

Relatively unknown to modern audiences, the innovative D.J. (Eric B.) and M.C. (Rakim) duo defined the dynamics of mixing rap and hip-hop music and lyrics into a cohesive whole, particularly on their landmark album *Paid in Full* (B'way Records, 1987).

Unlike many modern artists of the genre, the duo cared more about the intrinsic value of hip hop music than about self-promotion and a paint-by-numbers approach to production. As the M.C. describes in "My Melody," there is more to art than fame and street credibility: "I take this more serious than just a poem," he says. "I'm just an addict addicted to music / Maybe it's a habit, I got to use it."

For today's hip-hop fans accustomed to mangled syllables, awkward rhymes and "gangsta" posing, Rakim's lyrics are a refreshing

departure.

In "My Melody," a prescient Rakim foreshadows the genre's decline when he chants, "Putting blurbs and slurs and words that don't fit in a rhyme—why waste time on the microphone?"

Nor are Rakim's lyrics prone to cliché-ridden underworld themes. In "Paid in Full," he tells the listener, "I used to roll up, this is a hold up, ain't nothing funny / Stop smiling, be still, don't nothing move but the money / But now I learned to earn



Complementing Rakim's fresh lyrical approach is Eric B.'s choice of diverse, interwoven samples, best displayed in "Don't Sweat The Technique."

In this song, a drum set and classical bass are featured under the crisp sound of a jazzy alto saxophone. Although the mix may seem too busy for the lyrics, the constant and predictable bass line helps the words flow in an understandable manner. Many times, the lyrics are mumbled in today's rap songs, and the audience cannot appreciate the unintelligible rhymes. Rakim's clean articulation is achieved because of his adherence to the masterful combination of beats produced and arranged by his partner. Eric B. adds tone to the song by incorporating a variety of D.J. techniques such as disc scratches, which are an integral part of the mix and help to form a simple chorus repeating "check out my melody." This simplistic beat places the listener's focus on the lyrics.

It is easy to dismiss the hip-hop music of today because of the lack of focus on meaningful lyrics and the increased focus on plodding beats, simple rhymes, lazy sampling and materialistic topics. However, in "Paid in Full," Eric B. and Rakim provide a model of the true values that founded hip-hop and which could be salvaged if today's artists were to emulate the features of this true cult classic.

Erik B. & Rakim
★★★★☆
Paid in Full

cause I'm righteous." In Rakim's world, it is not *all* about the Benjamins. While he wants to be "paid in full," he does so by working in the studio to achieve an honest living.

Ameer Kabob presents savory dishes

W Kathryn Booker
Staff Writer

For diners who enjoy great Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisine, as well as superb service from helpful employees, Wicker Park's new Ameer Kabob is the perfect choice for a pleasant night in the big city.

The restaurant offers dine-in seating as well as carryout and delivery options. It is arranged much like a comfortable hamburger joint, with multiple four-chair tables and a long counter for ordering. The walls are simply decorated with a few colorful pictures, creating a comfortable urban setting.

The restaurant menu consists of flavorful appetizers, meat or hummus-filled entrées or sandwiches, beverages, extras and a mix of cultural and American desserts. Both carnivores and vegetarians will find the menu items delicious and satisfying.

Upon entering the restaurant, patrons are greeted by friendly employees who are willing to help those unfamiliar with Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. This reviewer's waiter offered suggestions of his personal favorites and pointed out the dinner special of the day.

The appetizers range \$3-9 and consist of a variety of vegetable delicacies, including hummus, baba ghanouj, tabouleh, fatoush, yogurt and Jerusalem salad, stuffed grape leaves, lentil soup and falafel. This reviewer chose the large hummus (\$3.45), the large Jerusalem salad (\$3.99) and the yogurt salad (\$2.99). The hummus is topped with olive oil and spices and serves as a tasty spread or dip for the pita bread. The Jerusalem salad contains chopped lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and parsley with tahini

sauce. The yogurt salad is a blend of homemade yogurt and fresh cucumbers in mint dressing. The mix of oily hummus, fresh vegetable salad, and slightly sour cucumber yogurt salad adds a refreshing touch to the filling entrées.

The entrée selection is impressive and reasonable. The shish kabob entrée (\$7.99) and the combination feast (\$8.99) were particularly



This is just one of the delicious dishes at Ameer Kabob. Photo courtesy www.ameerkabob.com

satisfying. All meals are served with rice and pita bread. The shish kabob entrée consists of grilled, tender marinated beef, which functions as a tasty pita-filler. The combination feast includes both shish kabob and chicken kabob. The grilled, marinated chicken is cooked with spices and is a pleasant mix with the juicier shish kabob beef. The rice and hummus side dishes add extra flavor to the generous portions of meat.

Whether customers are in the mood for beef, chicken or vegetarian, Ameer Kabob offers

a wide variety of delicious entrées. Unless customers are extremely hungry or cannot leave a crumb on their plates, they should be prepared to take a portion home in a doggie bag, especially if they want to sample Ameer Kabob's excellent desserts.

The homemade baklava (\$1.99) is perfect for those with a sweet tooth; this dish will certainly fill one's cravings, with its sweetened, flaky and caramelized goodness. The pastry is surprisingly filling for a small portion, and the price is just right.

While Ameer Kabob's menu is reminiscent of that of the local Pita Inn chain, the food of Ameer Kabob tastes more organic, with a wider variety of spices, and features an atmosphere that is quieter and more comfortable.

Anyone who seeks a pleasant night out in Chicago with great food and a friendly environment should visit Ameer Kabob, located at 1501 Milwaukee Ave. in Chicago. The restaurant is open Sunday-Thursday 11 a.m.-midnight and Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-2 a.m.

For information, reservations, carryout or delivery, call (773) 489-8888.

Ameer Kabob
★★★★☆
1501 Milwaukee Ave.



Online file sharing leads to financial crisis

W Hira Malik
Around Town Editor

In 1999, while Shawn Fanning was developing the file-sharing software that became known as Napster™ in his Northeastern University (MA) dormitory room, one wonders if he knew what havoc his invention would wreak on the entertainment industry.

Eleven years later, the industry—especially the music component—is suffering. According to www.cnnmoney.com, music sales have been dropping about 8 percent each year. Revenues from music sales and licensing in 1999, just prior to the introduction of Napster™, totaled \$14.6 billion, almost all of which came from the sale of CDs. Last year, www.cnn.money.com reported that sales and licensing totaled \$6.3 billion, a total not adjusted for inflation.

While the music industry is attempting to recover through selling individual songs on iTunes™ and other pay-to-play sites, it is nearly impossible for the industry to make the same amount of money as it did prior to the invention of Napster™ and imitators such as Limewire™. Each time an individual downloads a song for free or shares files with others, the music industry falls farther into financial ruin.

Do we care? It seems not. According to the Recording Industry Association of America, one in five American Internet users is an active file sharer. This does not count the number of people who legally purchase files but then burn CDs or share their legally purchased files with friends. Put these two groups together, and the result is a more than 50 percent reduction in revenues.

A common response from file sharers is that much of the proceeds from the sale of music go to large corporations such as Time Warner AOL, CBS and other conglomerates with a music division, thus they feel no embarrassment about cheating such corporate giants out of revenues.

However, such logic does not take into account the artists themselves, whose livelihoods historically have depended heavily on performance and songwriting royalties. File-sharing denies artists, engineers and producers an opportunity to make a comfortable living, thereby discouraging musicians from pursuing music as a career.

If concern for artists is not enough of a motivation to purchase music legally, file sharers should be aware that artists and record labels must find alternative revenue streams that prohibit sharing and which eventually find their way back to the consumer.

The main source of recouping losses is the sale of concert tickets. Concerts are much more expensive now than they were prior to 1999. In 1999, the average arena concert ticket cost about \$37 for a decent seat according to www.rollingstone.com. Compare that to the recent Taylor Swift concert tour. The *least* expensive ticket available for Swift's concert, according to www.gottickets.com, was \$77 for a spot in the nosebleed section.

In the past 10 years, the industry has seen a 180-degree shift. Prior to advent of Napster™, artists toured to support their records; now, artists release music virtually cost-free to support their expensive concerts. The increase of free online file-sharing users causes a decrease in revenue for artists.

The problem cannot be solved by banning file-sharing sites forever, but only if each individual takes a stand by purchasing his/her own music and refraining from sharing music with others, including burning CDs.

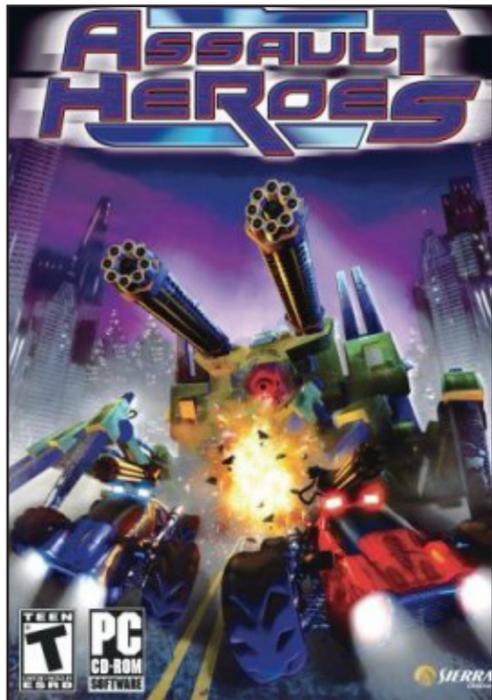
If the current trend continues, revenues from records sales will continue to diminish, musicians will leave the industry or not pursue a career in music in the first place, and soon, there will be nothing left to share.

AROUNDTOWN

Assault Heroes fires up gamers

by Rexly Penaflorida II
Editor in Chief

Even with all the new techniques in game play and story lines that are currently used by big game companies to create great titles, it sometimes is fun to return to the old-school



game play that everyone fell in love with in the 1980s and 90s. Luckily, Wanako Studios' *Assault Heroes*™ is the perfect game to recapture the

past. It combines classic game play and great graphics to create something very unique and something familiar at the same time.

Frankly, the story line of the game is pedestrian—the player is the last surviving member of a special forces unit and (s)he must find his/her way across deserts, cities and oceans to find a secret underground base and destroy the enemy's secret weapon. This reviewer must admit that after reading a description of the game, it seemed as if this game would be headed for a one or two-star rank. However, like books, games should not be judged by their covers, or in this case, this story lines. A few hours of game play made this reviewer change his mind about the overall performance of the game.

This game is different from most games because of the fact that it features top-down scrolling, similar to *Super Mario Bros*™ in which Mario is always on the screen while the level moves forward as he moves forward. *Assault Heroes*™ works the same way except that the level moves from the top of the screen to the bottom. For the majority of the game, players control a buggy-like vehicle that is equipped with a machine gun, flamethrower and a cannon. Players have an armor gauge on

the vehicle, and once the armor wears down, the vehicle breaks down and the character jumps



out of the vehicle. The player has only three lives throughout the entire game, but game play is easy enough, even on the medium difficulty setting, that three lives are more than enough.

The visual aspect of the game evokes a love/hate relationship for this reviewer. The different levels provide a pleasing view, but sometimes, there is just too much on the screen. For example, during the first level, there is a section in which helicopters, tanks and foot soldiers in all directions simultaneously bombard the player. Even on a large television, it seems as if endless adversaries flood the screen. Granted, the number of enemies is supposed to simulate the feelings of a large force against one person, but in this case, it seems a bit too much.

Luckily, the game play in *Assault Heroes*™ is neither lackluster nor complicated. The fact

that there are only three weapons from which to choose simplifies combat. Every single enemy can be beaten with any of the three weapons, so all the player has to do is point and shoot. Also, each weapon has infinite ammunition. While some might say this is unfair, one must consider the plethora of enemies that continuously flood the screen to plague the gamer; thus, the need for copious ammunition. Moreover, each weapon has upgrades that are revealed to the player as the player progresses through each level. Each upgrade increases both the range of the weapon and its power, so each level gives the player more tools for destruction.

Despite its flaws, *Assault Heroes*™ is still a very addictive game. This reviewer found himself very excited for every new level and boss battle that came around the corner. For a game that aims to feel like an arcade classic, it delivers the same type of experience that *Galaga*™ or *Super Mario Bros*™ brought to gamers, with the graphics and game play updated to entice the modern player.

Assault Heroes
★★★★☆
Multiple Systems

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