the two girls recognize and act upon their attraction to each other, knowing that they have no future together because of Taisin’s vocation. Lo’s alternately languid and heated descriptions of the politics and obstacles in Kaede’s life—from her father’s presumption to marry her off to her flight with Elowen—build a compelling world to pull in readers and hold them fast to the final page. A gripping fantasy with high appeal for fans of Ursula K. Le Guin as well as for readers in search of a smart, female-dominated adventure tale. —Francisca Goldsmith

Jasper Jones.
By Craig Silvey.

To 13-year-old Charlie Bucktin, Jasper Jones is nothing but an outcast, a stranger. Then, in the middle of the night, Jasper turns up at Charlie’s bedroom window and leads him to the hanging body of a dead girl, the daughter of the shire president in their small Australian town. Unless Charlie helps him, Jasper will be blamed for the murder. What follows is equal parts mystery, coming-of-age story, and sophisticated literary novel. Right up to the hard, satisfying ending, the first-person, immediate, present-tense account offers an authentically adolescent perspective of the racist, patriotic turmoil of the 1970s as it affected small-town life. Silvey balances the predominant gravity with moments of lightness in the awkward fumbling of first love and the profane, hilarious banter that defines Charlie’s relationship with his new best friend, Charlie is an avid reader, and in his worldview, shaped by Atticus Finch and Pudd’Nhead Wilson, and his account of events, young readers will experience how powerful stories help to clarify life. —Thom Barthelmess

Leap.
By Jodi Lundgren.

A lot can go wrong in four months when you’re a 15-year-old girl with a moody best friend, a distracted single mother, and you are shy about showing off your talents. In less capable hands than Lundgren’s, all that goes awry for Natalie between June and September might read like a litany of every problem-novel problem stuffed into a single book, but instead Natalie comes across as an authentically developed and engaging character. She copes with her best friend’s apparent jealousy, which actually masks how the other girl is upset with an alcoholic mother; she learns all the ramifications of being seduced and abandoned; she discovers that each of her parents is human; and, best of all, she realizes her own abilities as a dancer and as a model for a girl even shyer than herself. Set in Victoria, British Columbia, Lundgren’s story also provides a glimpse at differences between Americans and Canadians, including access to morning-after pills and intolerance for driving under the influence. A diverting story that offers some solid insights to consider. —Francisca Goldsmith

The Liar Society.
By Lisa Roeger and Laura Roeger.

One year after her best friend, Grace, tragically dies in a fire, 15-year-old Kate, still lost in grief, receives a cryptic e-mail from Grace, hinting that her death was not just an accident. Kate follows Grace’s instructions, setting off a chain of events that pulls her deep into the secret societies and dangerous rituals of their private school. The only person she can trust is guileless conspiracy-theorist Seth, who has pursued Kate for years. The one she wants to trust, handsome Liam, tries to get close, but he comes with a past that Kate worries will conflict with exposing the truth. The trio forms a sort of detective love triangle, and Kate’s sightings of Grace’s ghost add an element of unreliability to the narration. Add this smartly paced and plotted first novel to your go-to list of mysteries, and expect readers to clamor for a follow-up to this sister duo’s first novel. —Heather Booth

Love, Inc.
By Yvonne Collins and Sandy Rideout.

Zahara Ahmed-MacDuff, 15, is not sure why she has been placed in group therapy when it’s her recently separated Scottish American dad and Pakistani mom who will not even speak to one another. The aspiring pastry chef finds an unexpected sisterhood, though, when she and fellow group members Kali and Syd discover that they have been three-timed by the same guy and plot revenge. When news spreads of their retribution and other group members and classmates seek their help with matters of the heart, the trio forms Love, Inc. Although keeping track of their lengthy client list can be difficult, the girls’ failure to heed their own matchmaking advice drives this predictable yet entertaining first-person narration. Reminiscent of Randa Abdel-Fattah’s Ten Things I Hate about Me (2009), Zahara’s struggle to reconcile her Scottish American heritage with her mother’s Muslim traditions and her sarcastic quips with her Pakistani grandparents, who are ready to marry her off to the first eligible “Member of the Tribe,” add depth to this breezy, happy-ending romance. —Angela Leeper

Notes from the Blender.
By Trish Cook and Brendan Halpin.

Neilly, a hot, self-assured junior nicknamed “Steeo Neilly” after facing down ridicule when her father came out, and Declan, a quirky, brooding sophomore infatuated with Neilly and still angry about his mother’s accidental death years ago, find themselves suddenly becoming siblings. Her mom and his dad get pregnant and engaged, forcing the two teens (including Neilly’s body and Dec’s hormones) to consider. —Francisca Goldsmith

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ALA/YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults

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