



Operation Redwood

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"Sibley Carter is a moron and a worldclass jerk." When Julian Carter-Li intercepts an angry e-mail message meant for his greedy, high-powered uncle, it sets him on the course to stop an environmental crime!

His uncle's company plans to cut down some of the oldest remaining California redwood trees, and it's up to Julian and a ragtag group of friends to figure out a way to stop them. This fantastic debut novel, full of clever stunts and pranks, shows the power of determined individuals, no matter what their age, to stand up to wrongdoing. And it introduces readers to a memorable cast of characters—smart kids who care about the world around them.

Operation Redwood Details

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Author : S. Terrell French

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From Reader Review Operation Redwood for online ebook

Steph Su says

This is, simply put, the best middle-grade novel I have read in a long time. A winsome cast of varied characters, excellent writing, and an urgent but not proselytistic theme make this a book I would be an evangelist for.

S. Terrell French writes like J. K. Rowling—and no, I am not exaggerating when I make that comparison. The third-person narration from Julian's point of view is wonderfully engaging and moving. Compared to his friends, Julian is really quiet, but it's his dedication to the environmental cause in the face of his introversion that make him endearing. He is an unusual yet much-desired protagonist: quietly observant but not in an annoyingly self-pitying way, old enough to act on his own, young enough to have recognizable naivetes and limitations, and half-Asian. MG and YA literature needs more characters like him.

The other characters in the book are, of course, fantastic also. Julian's best friend, Danny Lopez, is a laugh-out-loud force of his own, and certainly reminds me of my crazily outgoing and selfless middle school classmates. Robin's a bit more difficult to define, but in the end both she and her friend Ariel are realistic, poised at the edges of the pages, ready to jump out and start chattering away right next to you. And it says a lot that the adults in OPERATION REDWOOD can be believable also, no matter how horrible some of them might be.

I also would like to point out how much I appreciated the diverse characters. Julian's mixed race is a solid part of his identity without overwhelming the story. Indeed, if you fixate on his race in the story, then you have company in his nasty aunt Daphne, who is one of those characters that makes you really really hate them but be amazed that the author could write such a hateful character so well at the same time.

There's nothing bad I have to say about this novel. It's an easy must-read for all ages, both for its rarity of being an excellent middle-grade novel and its inspirational environmentalist themes. Find it and give it a try!

Lezlee says

Both Coel and I thoroughly enjoyed this book. In fact on more than one occasion there were tears and lots of resistance when it was time for me to stop reading!

It was a tangled drama set in San Francisco and the Wilits area. The characters were both young and old, rich and poor, traditional and not so much.

Just read it, even if you don't have kids to share it with!

Sandra Stiles says

Julian Carter Li is miserable. While his mother is in China taking pictures of Buddhist Temples for a grant she was awarded, he is stuck with his rich aunt and uncle. All the money in the world doesn't matter if the people who have it are terrible. Julian can't seem to do anything right. To try and improve his behavior his aunt decides to set up a point system that rewards good behavior. Unfortunately for Julian, no matter how hard he

tries his points keep going backwards and now they are in the negatives. While sick he is stuck at his uncles office and begins snooping around. He finds an email that was unopened and reads it. It is from someone named Robin who is upset because his uncle is going to clear-cut the redwoods in Big Tree Grove. Julian and his best friends write back in answer and find out the sender is a girl about their age. Together they hatch a plan to help save the redwoods. This book is great for getting kids to look at the larger issues in the world today. It shows them that no matter how young they are they can still take steps to help protect the world they will one day inherit. I am excited to share this book with my students.

Ari says

There is not a single thing I didn't like about this book. Some might complain that it started off rather slow but I live for slow contemporary starts, I like getting to know every little detail about the main character and their friends. Sure some things are a little too convenient (Danny speaks Spanish but Julian doesn't speak Spanish so naturally Danny must translate often. also Julian's Chinese grandmother writes for a sizable newspaper), but who cares? This story is too fun to get wrapped up in such minor things. I'm a sucker for kids and teens engaging in social justice because I think too many books only show us as selfish brats who don't care about the future of our world. That's simply not true and this author gets that. At the core of this book (or the trunk of this book, and yes there will be more annoying tree metaphors) is a message of environmentalism. Here we have three kids who don't have an extraordinary amount of resources available to them and yet they manage to come up with a plan, a plan that has the potential to work. They aren't hackers or geniuses or super wealthy, instead they have lots of heart and pool together their respective brain power to find a solution. These qualities make the book an interesting read and one that is authentic. I could easily see myself and other kids in middle school coming up with a similar plan (instead of those outrageous plots that you know would never work out in real life. Not that those can't be fun). The core has different branches that all lead back to the plan to save the redwoods but they divert (in the best of ways) to stories dealing with racism, family abandonment, strong friendships and the actual application of what we learn in school.

In addition to the save-the-trees message that rocked, I also adored the subtle displays of racism. In today's world, rarely do we see outright prejudice and Operation Redwood perfectly reflects that fact. Julian's mother travels a lot and his father died when he was seven, so when Julian's mother leaves for China for several months, he has to go live with his uncle Sibley. Sibley is his father's brother and while Sibley's young son, Preston, adores Julian, Sibley and his wife do not. Sibley's wife, Daphne, goes out of his way to make sure Julian knows he is not welcome (she has a point system. A POINTS system, but that's actually not a totally implausible situation). Of course since she never spells it out, you can't be sure that part of that dislike is race-based, but it probably doesn't help that Julian's Chinese (his mother is Chinese, his father is white) heritage 'ruins' her image of the perfect all-American blonde family. Like when Julian says '[s]omething about the way his aunt said 'half-Chinese' always made it sound vaguely like an insult-or not an insult exactly, but something that made him less than Preston, who at least in her view, wasn't half anything." (pg. 51) I had such a YES moment when I read that, I totally get what Julian's describing and I think many people from different cultural backgrounds may have a similar moment. Julian doesn't spend the entire book talking about the hardships of being a biracial kid, he mentions it, but he also talks about the joys of being biracial and how funny it can be to think about "how strange it was that he should be descended from two such different people, how weird and improbable that their DNA would end up mixed together in his own body." (pg.341). I would be remiss not to rave about Danny. I LOVE Danny, I want him to be my best friend. He is a mess, always hamming it up and yet his silly ways often help him to come up with the most outrageous-but-they-just-might-work stunts. But he can also be very practical (he's quite handy with computer basics such as sending emails in which Julian is hopelessly defunct). One of my favorite exchanges between Danny

and Julian is below

"Am I good or what?" he [Danny] said with a broad smile.

'You have a real talent for lying. And you've ruined my reputation too. Congratulations!' [Julian]

'We all have our gifts,' Danny said humbly." (pg. 79) What a great kid.

Operation Redwood has many different branches that all lead back to the importance of speaking up when a wrong is being committed and the value of nature. Julian lives in San Francisco which can be a bit polluted, and he ends up going to see the Big Grove of redwood trees and is in awe of nature. I probably would be too. I don't live in the heart of the city, but I can relate to not spending much time relaxing and pondering nature, especially as we kids become older. I love that Julian has such a diverse group of friends, as the 21st century pushes on, we are going to see more diverse friendships, even now, people are rarely friends with only white people, and it's so nice to see a book that reflects this. In fact this is the kind of contemporary middle grade I want to see more of, pretty please publishers? The ending certainly surprised me and it's realistic. Robin is resourceful, Danny is imaginative and Julian has the quiet strength that only unveils itself when push comes to shove. I could go on and on and on, but I'll stop. Ultimately this is a prime example of a book where it's the LITTLE THINGS that make it such a phenomenal read. The plot is not complex but it is revolutionary in that it so accurately depicts our world through the eyes of middle school students. A definite favorite of 2011 already.

Lamanjalo says

"Operation Redwood" is definitely the best book I've ever read!!!! It is a wonderful book with an amazing plot and interesting and entertaining characters. It's full of adventure and suspense and different exciting twists. It is hilarious and amazing and if all books were like this I would be in heaven! And the people go up in a treehouse! How cool is that? I would recommend this book to anyone who wants a good read! Exciting and enjoyable plot, fantastic characters, and a good moral. What's not to love?!

Ollielouise says

A very detailed exciting book. It felt like you were in the story. When it seemed like it was over, a new problem came up like in real life with twists and turns! I recommend it to everyone!

Monique Valcourt says

Great way to get young kids thinking about the environment and about how they can make a change if they just have the courage. I felt like I was one of the kids. Will definitely be using this in my classroom.

Sharon George says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. After spending many summers camping in the redwood forests in Northern California, I became a volunteer at the Visitor Center in Avenue of the Giants in Humboldt County. This book is well written, gives factual information about the coastal redwoods and reminds us to protect these majestic trees for future generations,

Yapha says

Julian Carter-Li has been staying with his aunt and uncle for the past few weeks while his mother is in China. It is very clear to him that they don't want him there, though he gets along quite well with his younger cousin Preston. When Julian finds himself alone for several hours in his uncle's office, he notices first an email with his name as the subject, and then an irresistible email just below it. Although he knows he shouldn't, he can't help but read them, which is how he learns that his uncle's company plans to cut down a stand of old growth redwoods outside of Willits, CA. He and his best friend Danny strike up an email friendship with a girl who lives on a farm next door to the redwoods. With her help, they devise a way to get Julian up to the farm and out of his aunt and uncle's clutches and hopefully save the redwoods.

Operation Redwood looks at family relations as well as the need to save what is left of the old growth forests. French manages to give the reader the necessary facts without sounding preachy or didactic. Highly recommended for grades 4 & up.

Deckthehalls says

I did not think I would like this book because I don't like having environmentalism crammed down my throat. BUT....I was very pleasantly surprised! Operation Redwood has a great plot and fun characters. Yes, the story is totally "environmental" but not in a superior or preachy way. The environmental theme doesn't overshadow the story but nicely co-exists with it. Also, the author's tone doesn't have the human-hating edge that often turns me off to environmentalist propaganda. Instead, the author emphasizes good stewardship of the land and preservation of the rare and beautiful natural things which share our earth. I can swallow that and even get behind it! I enjoyed the story and in the end I was right there cheering for the kids in the story and wanting to save a redwood or two!

Well done!

Brady Geary says

This book was one of the best books I have ever read. The book, which is about four kids trying to save a redwood forest, is printed on recycled paper. I like how the one main bad guy has a son who is also interested in the redwoods and doesn't want his dad to cut down all the redwoods. I liked the reference to Julia Butterfly Hill, who lived in a redwood tree to save it, just like the main characters.

Rebecca says

Operation Redwood follows Julian Carter-Li and his adventure to save the Redwood forests. Julian intercepts an angry email sent by Robin a girl who lives near Big Tree Grove, a forest full of Redwood trees (sent to his insensitive and greedy uncle, Sibley Carter.) Julian exchanges emails with Robin and soon he realizes the importance of the redwood trees and flees to Big Tree Grove under the guise of an exchange student. He eventually gains the trust of Robin and her family, but problems arise when the family finds out that Julian is the nephew of the one person who intends to cut Big Tree Grove down. Julian has a choice of being loyal to Big Tree Grove or to his family.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Sally Kruger aka "Readingjunk" for TeensReadToo.com

In OPERATION REDWOOD, four young kids take on big business to save a forest full of giant redwood trees.

Debut author S. Terrell French has written an adventure filled with creative ideas, spunky ambition, and a love of the environment.

Julian Carter-Li is staying with his uncle and aunt while his mother travels to China to photograph Buddhist temples. Things are not going well. Julian doesn't seem to be able to do anything according to the strict rules his aunt has established, and his uncle seems constantly disappointed in him. In fact, while alone in his uncle's fancy office, Julian stumbles across an extremely insulting email. It appears that his uncle believes Julian is unruly and "sullen" just like his late father. Julian can't believe what he is reading.

Another email that attracts Julian's attention is from a young girl complaining that IPX, his uncle's company, is planning to destroy an area of redwood forest known as Big Tree Grove. Although he has never met this girl named Robin, Julian can relate to her anger that a huge company like IPX, that already has more money than he can imagine, would want to destroy something as important and historical as the redwoods just to make more money selling lumber.

Julian keeps the emails he reads a secret until he hears his aunt's plans to send him off to Math Camp for the summer. He appeals to his friend, Danny, for help. When he tells Danny about the emails, Danny begins to concoct a plan that would keep Julian from spending his summer doing math calculations and instead possibly saving the redwoods.

What follows is a daring adventure. Julian and Danny scheme to get Julian out of the city and off to Big Tree Grove where he can help Robin protect her old-growth forest. They may be just a few young kids, but they have big ideas. Even when their plans seem to be wrecked by Julian's annoying and interfering aunt, they manage to use creativity and determination to keep their eye on the goal.

OPERATION REDWOOD provides excellent reinforcement for conservation lessons and the importance of preserving our natural habitats. It would work for readers in the 8-13 age group for independent reading or as

a great classroom read-aloud.

Jessie Lindsey says

A young tree-hugging me would have looooved this book.

Betsy says

I wonder if contemporary children's authors ever look at the writers of the past and think to themselves, "It was easier then. You could get away with so much more." Morality, at least in retrospect, was so clear cut and uncomplicated in the books of the past. You could have a kid defeat a great big villain with relative simplicity and folks wouldn't object at all. Or maybe not. That's how we think of old children's books... as simple. But when you try to sit down and think of all the realistic novels of the past, their conclusions are never as free and easy as all that. I'm mentioning all this because I just finished, *Operation Redwood*, one of the finest children's novels of the year, and while reading the book I kept thinking about how author S. Terrell French never cheats her readers. She is constantly covering her tracks and making this a strangely realistic middle grade novel, albeit one about kids trying to take down a big business. It's a first novel on the author's part, but French has crafted an interesting, intelligent, and ultimately satisfying debut that will undoubtedly garner more than a few fans. A book that shows us that doing the moral thing is a complicated business.

Let's say you're sick and your uncle Sibley Carter (who you've been staying with while your mom works in China) has left you in his office for hours and hours. You are Julian Carter-Li and after your nap you're bored. You sit in your uncle's chair and there, right before your eyes, is an email in his in-box with your name on it. And after that? A message with the subject of "Sibley Carter is a moron and a world-class jerk." It has begun. Prying where his eyes should not be, Julian learns that his uncle intends to destroy a patch of ancient redwoods and that the plucky girl who lives near them needs Julian's help to stop the destruction. But what can a couple of kids really do? How about faux emails, daring escapes, a sit-in, and other plans? One thing's for certain. After this summer, Julian's life will never be the same again.

I think what I love about this book is how firmly it is rooted in reality. Not that I think this kind of story could actually happen in the real world, mind. But French has a wonderful sense of inserting real elements into a story when you least expect them. Kids (and adults) will walk into this book with a certain set of assumptions. So when they find that the child protagonists have clever plans that sometimes work and, more often than not do NOT work, that's going to be a little shocking. Also shocking? Your hero runs away, gets to a beautiful place where you believe the rest of the book will take place, and then long before you're even halfway through the novel his aunt comes and whisk him far far away. Whoa. It's like the cover and the concept of the book were leading you astray. They're not, but it feels that way for a second, and you become more wrapped up in the reading as a result.

Over and over again I noticed Ms. French was refusing to leave loose ends dangling or logical plot points flailing. How did Robin get Julian's uncle's personal email? "My brother's taking a journalism course, and he was telling us how a lot of people, even big CEOs, read their own e-mail and their addresses are just their names and their company web addresses." Pretty good explanation, eh? The book's chock full of them.

Either it was workshopped within an inch of its life, or Ms. French understands how to have things make sense.

Someone (perhaps the author Mitali Perkins) once wondered why it is that authors of middle grade and YA fiction feel the need to compare their characters' eyes or skin to food when making it clear that those characters aren't white. "Her coffee colored skin." "His almond shaped eyes." Well Ms. French isn't falling into that trap, no sir. If she wants to make it clear that Julian has Chinese ancestry then there's his last name to consider (Carter-Li) and his eyes, which are mentioned as being "upturned" at one point. Race plays an interesting part in the book, then. In this day and age, racism has grown subtle. People use code words to cover up how they really feel. And in this particular novel, you've the distinct impression that Julian's aunt resents him, not just because he's been "imposed" upon them, but also because his mother was Asian. But of course she never actually **SAYS** any of this. It's far less obvious than that. And more realistic too.

They say to "show don't tell" when you're writing, so I was constantly amazed at how much bubbles beneath the surface of this book. Julian almost turns Robin's dad into a kind of surrogate father, but the text never has him figure this out or say as much. It just happens. And since we're getting everything from Julian's perspective, he has a view of his life that doesn't look too far beneath the surface of things. His aunt and uncle are constantly insulting his mother, so Julian naturally wishes to defend her from them. On the other hand, French makes it pretty clear that this woman is not exactly going to win the World's Best Parent of the Year Award anytime soon. She hears that her son ran away from home and his aunt and uncle are kicking him out... but does she shorten her assignment in China a little? She does not, the greedy thing. At one point Julian's grandmother speculates that maybe she was too busy a parent and should have given his mother more attention at home. Maybe that's why she's so flighty. Whatever the reason, Julian's just a bit too young to resent his mom's meanderings, but give him a couple years. Full-fledged teenagerhood is just around the corner.

At its core, this book is basically a big eco-friendly morality lesson, and that's tricky. More than once (and I think French acknowledges this) you find yourself wondering if it's worth saving the trees if Julian or Robin end up disappointing her dad in some way. It's strange, but she keeps the plot on such a down-to-earth level that that's where your mind goes. Generally realistic middle grade novels where kids have to defeat evil corporations who are about to harm the earth (Hoot and the like) don't spend a lot of time tying the book into real life. French does. When Julian says, "In school we're always studying the rain forests in Brazil and Africa. And people are always trying to get you to sign petitions to save the rain forest and buy special rain-forest nuts. And we never learned anything about people cutting down redwoods in California," I think a lot of kids are going to agree with that. We give our students the impression that disasters of this sort happen on other continents and to other people. So to hear that "national forests aren't like parks. They log there all the time," that kind of statement will probably surprise as many adults as it does children. The Author's Note at the back clarifies exactly what in this story is true and what's happening today. It makes it a little more real, and doesn't feel preachy in the process either. The book is a screed to some extent, but one you don't mind reading.

I won't tell you what it is, but this book manages to pull off a surprise reveal at the end that I'd bet a good 85% of adults reading the book won't see coming. In many ways this book makes for a natural companion to Jill Wolfson's middle grade novel *Home and Other Big Fat Lies* where kids want to protect trees from logging, but understand that the local economy relies on them. In a lot of ways, French's novel isn't as complex in terms of the logging economy, but it makes up for that by weaving a true emotional journey full of adventure, friendship, complex morality, trust, lies, and discovery. You believe in this book and you believe in the characters.

Ages 9-12.

Heather says

A fun book about conservation for kids - featuring a boy main character. What's not to like here!?

Recommended for 4th - 6th grade

Judy says

I enjoyed all the characters in Operation Redwood - it was funny and inspiring and exciting and realistic, all at the same time. The quality of the writing was beautiful - the prose was lucid and evocative, as well as emotionally truthful. I especially enjoyed the age range of the characters. This book is a classic.

Amy says

This was written by the sister of my midwife/nurse practitioner. If you loved Harry Potter, you'll love this book....it's excellent and I could hardly put it down.

Viola says

This book was fantastic. Julian, the main character, sees an email sent to his uncle and discovers that his uncle's company is planning to cut down a Redwood grove. It is up to Julian to save the trees. He and his friends move into a treehouse and refuse to leave. His uncle is furious. As long as the kids are up in the tree, his company can't level the grove. The local newspaper runs an article on Julian and his friends' efforts to save the trees, and others become involved. This book showed how even kids can make change happen.

Sps says

Fuse #8 review: "one of the finest children's novels of the year."

Super fun and true to its characters in a sort of Pinkwater way, though way more grounded and less wacky.
And San Francisco!
