



Penumbra

Braden Bell

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Penumbras

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Penumbras Braden Bell

Conner, Lexa, and Melanie are back! Just when they think life is normal again, a dangerous shadow creature begins to hunt them. The trio must develop their powers in order to conquer this new peril and protect their school. Filled with action and even more magic, this book continues the exciting adventure in the Middle School Magic series.

Penumbras Details

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Author : Braden Bell

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From Reader Review Penumbras for online ebook

Emmy says

This is the 2nd book in the series, with more yet to come. When three junior high age kids start to experience some weird and mysterious things the fun really begins as they kindle or transform into Magi. As a Magi they are part of a group who use Light to fight Darkness and evil.

In this book, the kids continue to develop and learn how to use the Light to fight evil.

Even though these books are written towards a young teen audience they really sucked me in. The characters are likable, with at times slightly annoying junior high traits. The story moves along at a great pace with great character development and believable victories and setbacks (as believable as sci-fi type books can be).

While these books deal with Light fighting darkness, they are done in such a way that get you thinking and involved but aren't too "dark" and remain great and clean for younger readers.

Even if you aren't a sci-fi fan but like books with a little magic you will really enjoy this series and I definitely recommend it for pre-teens on up.

This book is especially filled with a great lesson about forgiveness, of one self and others, and overcoming darkness.

Lynn says

Penumbras is the second in the Middle Grade Magic series by Braden Bell. The previous title, The Kindling, introduced us to three middle school friends, Connor, Lexa, and Melanie, whose beginning magical powers attracted the attention of dark forces placing them in danger.

Sounds like a novel that would capture the attention and imagination of a junior high student with plenty of action to keep them enthralled, doesn't it. Why would I recommend that you read this with your youngster?

Bell's work has many layers. Below the entertaining story line is an undercurrent of complex emotions and relationships, giving adults who have forgotten those difficult years great insight into the tween and early teen years.

The situations include friendship becoming romance, which open the door for important discussions regarding dating behavior.

Some of the characters have worries they don't express to others, allowing you a chance to pry some concerns loose from your own kid.

Reading together is a great bonding activity, and this title can be enjoyed by adolescents and adults.

You don't have to worry about the content, language, or situations.

The danger posed by the Darkhands gives you an opportunity to review important safety precautions with your family.

A discussion of good and bad secrets will occur when you read the major plot twist in this volume.

Connor's memories of the Shadowbox allow the readers to discover that few people are entirely good or completely evil, a difficult lesson even for adults.

The emphasis is on communication and relying on trusted adults, which can help reinforce faith in parents.

It's a really, really fun book to read.

Dorine White says

The Story-

Conner, his sister Lexa and Melanie are back in this sequel to *The Kindling*. They are in training, learning to master their skills as magi. But, because Dr. Timberi is injured, he can't train them properly. Plus, there is a dark shadow hunting them. Conner worries, because at first only he sees the dark shadow, and he is hearing voices in his head. Voices that want him to join the dark.

My Thoughts-

Okay, I have to say that I liked this book better than the first. The plot is more organized and the point-of-views don't swim around. It is a lot easier to follow. I do have a concern about the title, *Penumbra*. The reader actually needs to begin reading the story to find out what the title means (the grey area between light and dark).

Story wise, Bell does a great job bringing teenage woes to the forefront. Conner continually worries that he is destined to go dark. It affects everything he does and his relationships with his friends and family. I really like the ending of the story, where Conner looks inside his soul and makes his own decision.

His sister Lexa is a bit of a pill. She is very dramatic and upset about the relationship developing between Conner and Melanie. A true stubborn, jealous teenager.

And then we have my new favorite character- Pilaf. I love this guy. He is the oddball who suddenly shows powers, but is not a magi. One of my favorite parts of the story is finding out further information about who he is and what he can do.

The story ends with a cliff hanger that will have readers wanting book 3 right away. 4 Stars!

LuAnn says

Another fun book in the series by Braden Bell. Middle school students who have already read *The Kindling* will enjoy this one too. As the story continues, the kids work to balance not only their newly discovered

capabilities to Kindle which allows them to protect their school, but also work in time for music rehearsals and auditions for The Sound of Music. Oh, and don't forget the budding romance that Conner and Melanie develop, despite his twin sister Lexa's jealousy and feelings she's no longer part of the group.

The crafting of story and development of character was much better this time around, something that adult readers will especially notice. Middle school readers will appreciate the action scenes galore, although at times I felt like we should have less action and more understanding of how the characters were feeling. About halfway through it seemed we were sitting back, watching the action from the sidelines as event after event was being thrown at us, almost as though we were watching a highlight reel from this summer's action movies.

But no matter, my students loved The Kindling and I think they will not only love this one as well, but be anxious for more, a treat Bell promises us in the final line.

An exciting second book, worthy of being added to the library shelves.(Review copy provided by NetGalley)

Andrea says

Penumbras is the second book in Braden Bell's *Middle School Magic* series. I read the first book, *The Kindling*, over a year ago, so I particularly liked that *Penumbras* includes some recap (and that it's included in a way that feels smooth and shouldn't be redundant to readers who just read book one).

The story starts off with a bang, and then slows down as the kids are trained and Conner tries to figure out what he's become. I'm a bit of an impatient reader, so I was glad when the action really picked up. I found myself very emotionally involved-I even cried a few times!

There is a little bit of awkwardness with the pet names Dr. Timberi uses with the kids, and Lexa's quest to break down his emotional wall with lots of hugs (what with teacher/student etiquette), but I enjoyed getting to learn about Dr. Timberi's past and what makes him tick.

The ending is pretty exciting (and a bit of a cliff hanger). Sadly, book three isn't written yet, but this is a fun (and clean) series that I'd recommend to middle grade readers.

A bonus to *Penumbras* is that it's more than just an entertaining story. There is a great reminder about the good in people, and how the adversary wants us to think the worst of ourselves. Readers get to feel the importance of not giving up on the light within. Well done Braden Bell!

Laurie says

Warm up your credit cards, or start counting out the Benjamins, because you're going to want to buy both of Braden Bell's magical books. "The Kindling," his first YA masterpiece, is matched and perhaps surpassed by its sequel, "Penumbras." These are more than great reads folks.

"Middle School Magic: Penumbra," the velocious, magical sequel to Braden Bell's highly successful, "The

Kindling," enchants readers while matching that middle-grade gem spell-for-spell, situation-for-situation, and theme-for-theme.

The struggle to hold darkness at bay has matured Conner Dell, sister Lexa, and his secret love, Melanie, and "Penumbra's" tone reflects the consequences facing off against the forces of evil has had on these Tween-aged magis. Their previous battles have made the trio stronger and more skillful magi, but Connor in particular learns that sparring with dark forces has consequences that can tarnish even the purest of hearts, pulling even the best of friends apart.

Bell, a Ph.D author/educator knows his audience and their world, and once again, he delivers a stellar read that hits all the right buttons. Bell's books have depth. On the surface, they are fun, smart, action-packed reads written with a masterful pen that merges crisp middle-school dialogue with sizzling action that pops.

Bell doesn't dummy-down to his readers. These books contain smart vocabulary, and better yet, each page and subplot invites readers to dig deeper, to think, and to explore critical values such as loyalty, faith, honesty, trust, and love.

Adults will enjoy these books as much as their youth, but more importantly, though their youth may not be off chasing Darkhands, Bell's honest characterizations of these young heroes remind parents that their own middle grade youth are daily engaged in battles of their own.

"Penumbras" definitely entertains, and makes a great chapter-a-night family read, but it offers much more to savvy families. Before it's public release, reviewers already nominated Penumbras for a coveted Whitney Award. I highly recommend it as a pick read of 2013.

Heather says

Ok, first of all I need to say that the author is a friend of a friend, and I promised to review for him after reading it. I hadn't read the first book in the series yet, *The Kindling*, so I read that as well. That said: I truly enjoyed this book, and it is my intent to review it as if I had picked it up at the library, instead.

I liked the first book, *The Kindling*, but it isn't until this second in the series that Mr Bell's characters really begin to come to life. While the first book was a great beginning, and introduced the characters to us, the action moved more quickly, to me, than the depths of the characters could sustain at times. When it ended, I felt that there was more, like it was half of the first book, instead of the completed book, a prologue to the series. That is not to say that i didn't enjoy it! It was a very satisfying book, and I would happily recommend it to young readers, even those as young as nine. That said, keep reading, because I truly enjoyed *Penumbras* much more even, and am looking forward to reading both of the first two books in this series aloud to my children, (5, 10, and 12, although my five will be a tag-along listened in this case.)

In *Penumbras*, Bell's imagery and symbolism become more full-bodied, and his characters much more dynamic. There's the same jump into action as in the first book, but in between the action, Bell's imagery and descriptions of the scenes leading up to the action become more fulfilling. Kind of like the difference between enjoying a scoop of ice cream, and enjoying a scoop of homemade ice cream... both are good, but the flavor of the second is more intense, with afternotes of different ingredients. This book, too, has afternotes of pleasurable topics and things to think on later, which is one reason why I'm looking forward to

sharing it with my children.

As we learn more of their history and families, and as little hints in the first book become more amplified, even if left unanswered (as most good series have unanswered trails within them...but they become more developed with time, as Bell is progressively doing in his series.), we figure out more of this battle between good and evil, and the heroes quest set out for the twins, Connor and Lexa, and Melanie, a school friend. While written clearly enough for the younger preteen reader, Penumbras is stronger in a multitude of tiny ways than Kindling- the strengthening of the character's personalities and relationships with each other, the addition of "side characters" who seem like they will become more important as the book progresses, the addition of a fulfilling romp through a world within our own, yet separate from it- a both fantastic, yet plausible, symbol of good versus evil, and all the deception and confusion that comes along with trying to choose the right side in the battles that both our protagonists and our children face daily.

My preteen daughter, who is still in the "romantic-ness is soooooo embarrassing, let me run from the room if people kiss on TV" stage, isn't bothered by the budding romance between two of the characters, because Bell's handling of teen romance is hearkening back to a better time- acknowledgement of hormones, but not dangling into lust, and allowing the characters to be true friends, not true lovers, as seen in many series for this age group. I also love that the strongest characters, the most powerful magically, that is, show strength through the development and use of their natural talents, and link into their powers through the use of those talents, which vary from mathematics and musical gifts, to foreign languages and the liberal arts. I love that it is set in a "normal" middle school (well, at first it appears normal, as far as any middle school can be normal) with all of the associated risks and frustrations, and yet the main trio of characters are seen as not perfect and beyond having trouble nor victims wallowing in sorrow, nor noble knights on pedestals, unable to do any harm or cause any sorrow. In this second book, they have become real people, real children truly fighting against evil in a frustrating, dangerous world. I think that any young person, likewise fighting against frustration, temptation, anger, angst, and all of the other difficulties in the world, will find solace, humor, and some comfort in this series. There's a bit of a cliff hanger....but all that means is that I'm looking forward to reading and reviewing the next in the series.

Heather says

Full review at Fire and Ice <http://fireandicephoto.blogspot.com/2...>

It's been quite a while since I read book one, The Kindling, but if there's one thing this series has, it's "stick-to-it-iveness." The characters and plot are well crafted and so unique I was able to pick right back up with book two and remember what was going on. It's also a book that once you put it down it stays with you.

Conner and his twin sister Lexa are right in the midst of a battle between light and dark, good and evil, but this time around there is a blurring of the lines-- shades of gray that are being fought on a personal battlefield deep within the soul. The team of brother & sister, plus their sidekicks, Pilaf and Melanie must retreat to Mockingbird Cottage (don't you love the name) to train a little harder and protect themselves from the shadows and dark hand forces which seek to destroy them from the inside out.

Somewhere along the way Conner and Melanie begin to develop feelings for each other and the sweet middle school magic of first love starts to soar. Lexa won't have it--she begins to feel jealous, like a third wheel and we really see her drama queen side start to come out. She is real, someone you can picture walking right out of your middle school cliques of friends, always thinking the world must revolved around

her next starring role. And Pilaf...what can we say? I'm pretty sure he's somewhere on the autism spectrum, as he is brilliant but admits he can't read facial clues or nuances in social interactions. Thank you to Braden for painting imperfect people who are dealing with those trials and character flaws we all experience.

What I loved is that this is a book that explores the trauma related to abuse in a easy to swallow yet understandable way for children. Conner is much more than he things he is--he has divine heritage and the supernatural assistance of workers of light to assist him in fighting those that work against him. While he is facing deep inner conflicts as a result of his time with Lady Nightwing, the evil mastermind of darkness, he also has the aid of light to help heal his soul. There is so much more than magic going on in this book! Content wise there was a little too much action for me in the ending scenes (the series really needs to be made into a movie...it would be awesome) and some moderate violence involving a knife and other weapons. But, I think it's one your middle school children will enjoy.

I recommend it for ages 12 and up as well as adults.

There is much about Penumbra that I will never forget! Wonderful world building, colorful characters, rich descriptions and tons of action. Great job Braden!

Rachael Anderson says

Loved this one even more than the prequel, if possible. It's my eleven-year-old son's favorite series by far, and he can't wait for more. Keep them coming, Braden!

Lara says

Almost exactly one year ago, I reviewed *The Kindling*, which is the first book in Braden Bell's Middle School Magic series. I had been unsure if I would like it, since fantasy is not my favorite genre and I generally don't read it.

I was wrong--I really liked it. And I have been waiting on pins and needles for this second installment because I was dying to know what would happen and have some questions answered.

So I was actually kind of bummed that Braden sent me the digital copy in the middle of my whirlwind last couple of months, because I had to wait to read it. But as soon as I started the book, I couldn't put it down and finished in a matter of hours.

The adventures of Conner and Lexa Dell and their friend Melanie Stephens continued--this time the book begins with Conner blowing up a school bus (but he didn't mean to!) and the excitement only gets better. Questions from the last book are indeed answered, and the fight between Light and Dark continues with some surprising twists and turns.

I love the way Braden has explored the light and dark, good and evil that exist within ourselves. The fight between light and dark isn't ever as clear cut as the bad guys vs. the good ones. We all have the potential to choose either light or darkness, and I love the way this book teaches that. (And, I may be wrong, but I'm guessing the third book is going to further that theme by teaching us that even if we initially choose

darkness, we can always come back to the light.)

My Chloe loved the first book so much that I ended up buying her hard copies of both books last week. She was so excited to hear that there was a second installment. I love the fact that it is an exciting book that keeps her entertained, but that leads to some gospel-centered conversations every time we discuss it.

I highly recommend this series--both for you and your children! It's absolutely delightful. And, of course, I am waiting with great anticipation for the next installment. I'd even be willing to stand in line at a bookstore at midnight dressed up as Dr. Timberi if it meant I could read it f

Lucy McConnell says

Premise:

Basically, there are two forces in the universe: light and dark.

They battle.

Light's good.

Dark's bad.

However, this being a middle grade book, the dark is middle grade bad. You don't have to worry about it being too dark for your kid to read. The bad things they do are like saying mean things (not explicitly explained) and the like. But, it's done well enough that you feel the character's remorse for what they did.

The cover for Penumbras looks kind of dark. But that feels appropriate because one of the main characters, Conner, is fighting against the darkness inside himself.

One of the underlying messages in the book is that we all have a choice. We can choose to let our light shine or we can choose to spread darkness. Pre-teens and teens are always looking for ways to have more control over their lives. They often don't realize how much power they have over themselves. This book opened up a great conversation with my son about choices and individual accountability and responsibility to self and those you care about.

Wrapping Up:

The author, Braden Bell, is a middle school choir and theater director. He gets his audience. Since I have a 12 year old who reads, like, superhero fast, I am always looking for new books to keep him happy. He's now read both The Kindling and Penumbras and is eagerly anticipating the third book which is scheduled for release next summer. I would recommend this book for you or your middle grade student.

Rhonda says

5 STARS

This sequel to Middle School Magic: The Kindling

Love it! Just don't ask me to pronounce the title right. I hate my memory I used to remember most of the

stories I had read. Took me a little bit to remember the Kindling. If I had remembered right off I would have read this the day I received it.

It is a magical book. At different times I was thinking this one character was a spoiled brat and needed to grow up. Then I remember she is only thirteen. Okay I was lost in the story. I will even admit to shedding tears for a bit. These characters made me care about them, worry about them, yell at them. It also left me wanting more answers. I would start the next book in the series right away if it was out.

It is quick to grab your attention right away. Full of battles between light and darkness. Lots of drama and teenage feelings.

It starts with the four friends on a school field trip. Connor and Pilaf are roommates. Connor sees something in his room. He tries calling Lexa his twin with his mind. Then he tries calling out to Melanie, but they are both out. He can't tell Pilaf what he saw. Pilaf can't know of their world changing since they Kindled. So he makes up a game and shows Pilaf a wolf shadow with his flashlight.

Then the wolf jumps off the wall and starts chasing him.

After that it really starts taking off and does not slow down much at all.

Connor is thirteen. He was captured last year and put in a Shadow box. He saw himself do terrible things and was told he was turning into a darkhand. Now he hears shadows talking to him. They want him to fully join the darkhands. He is in a fight most of the book. He does not tell anyone what all he suffered. His special gifts are speed and strength.

Lexa his twin kindled at the same time. She is used to being the star in school plays. She is always full of drama. She feels what others feel like sometimes. Her best friend is Melanie.

Melanie likes Conner but has hidden it till lately. Her parents don't really like her learning magi but have let her since her little sister was kidnapped. She makes others powers stronger. It is a rare gift.

Pilaf is Connor's good friend. Connor was protecting him when his powers first kindled. All of a sudden now he finds he can hear Connor speaking to others in his mind. He also sees auras. He can see light around those who use the light and darkness around those that use dark power. So Connor now has permission to share his knowledge with him.

It is probably aimed at middle school readers. I really enjoyed reading it. I think fans of Harry Potter, Ranger Apprentice, Percy Jackson will enjoy this series too.

It is a clean read that anyone can enjoy but might need some tissues for a bit.

I was given this ebook to read and asked in return to give honest review of it by Netgalley.

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Heidi says

Some writers just seem to have a gift when putting together their books. Bell is one of those kind of writers. This book is fabulous full of great characters, an action-packed plot, and a powerful theme. Middle school

can be such a difficult time for students, parents, and teachers alike. Bell's experience as a middle school teacher shines through as he highlights the struggles of Conner, Melanie, and Lexa. The three kids as new Magi face challenges beyond the normal middle school variety. After their experiences in the first book (The Kindling), all three face the repercussions of those experiences (I recommend you read the first book before you read this one, otherwise a lot of things will not make sense). Conner struggles with the awful things he experienced in the Shadowbox. Melanie faces opposition at home as well as her own academic tendencies. Lexa deals with feelings of jealousy and pride. All must continue their training because it is clear that the Darkhands have no intention of leaving them alone.

I think one of the things I especially love about this series is the role that the teachers play in helping Conner, Melanie, and Lexa continue to develop their skills and talents. In so many children's books, teachers are the enemies and clueless about the students, that is not the case in this book. In addition, there is enough action in the book to satisfy the most picky middle grade reader. The themes of light and dark, friendship and loyalty shine through bright and clear. That ending though is a heart-wrenching one and yet not surprising considering the character of those involved. Like most second books in trilogies, this one ends with a cliffhanger. I really wish I didn't have to wait until next year to read the next book. But for now I can highly, highly recommend this one.

Jinky says

(4.5)

Having not read the first book, I spent a good part of the read trying to get a handle on who's who and what's what. I think that if I had read the first installment, then it wouldn't have taken me as long to get a feel for the adventures that was laid before me. No matter, the briefing was there (one too many for me ..got repetitive), it just took me a little longer to get into the groove. Maybe reading this when I was tired and sleepy didn't help either. But whoa, did I perk up towards the last quarter of the book! There were predictable moments (hint: light vs dark) but I'm kidding myself. They were more a reader's wish come true. "Please, please don't let this be", you beg the read, and boom!, there's hope. So although you can guess where it might surely go, you can't really be certain that the author will take you there. But when he does take you there (or nearly there), then you cry, you smile, and you're promising yourself to read the next installment even if it means skipping a meal to pay for it. Truly, a beautiful book with an equally handsome cliffhanger.

The returning trio Magi students were great compliments to each other (physical, mental, spiritual). They, along with the teachers, fed life to the book. The addition of Pilaf was fantastic. He's my favorite and not only because I thought of rice at every mention of his name (hehe) but that he's innocently charming. I'm especially looking forward to seeing him in the third book and Dumbledore, I mean "this man".

I enjoyed the creation of the characters that accented their unique gifts. I like the message that such unique talents breathe confidence and purpose. Moreover, I really admired the lovely relationship between the teachers and students. Teachers really do care about their students in this middle school and will go to great lengths to protect them ..vice versa. Most of all, I like the subtle teaching of the principle that spiritual support (the Comforter, *term not from the book*) always abides and can overcome all darkness, even at the most bleakest moments. Cliché, but never too old for me!

Melanie says

We've met the main characters in *The Kindling* and have seen them interact with each other and now they're getting the training they need. Conner and Melanie like each other and Lexa and Melanie are best friends so they each have a lot of emotions to work through. It's not smooth sailing for any of them and we certainly see some flaws. I liked that, though, because it's very realistic.

I loved Dr. Timberi and look forward to learning even more about him. I also love the way Mr. Bell incorporated music into his story. I'm always excited to read a book where one of the main characters shares my name and Mr. Bell told me I'd like her and I do. Melanie is sweet and loyal and determined to protect her friends. Conner is also very likable and is a bit impulsive, which can get him into trouble. Lexa is the hardest one to like. In this book, she shows her less desirable traits and acts like a typical selfish 13-year-old at times. Towards the end, there are some emotional scenes that do give her a chance to reevaluate her behavior so we'll have to see what she learns in book 3. And the ending leaves me wanting to read book 3 right now!! Some questions left over from *The Kindling* are answered but we are left with new questions.

I felt that Mr. Bell did a great job with light vs. dark and good vs. evil and explaining the balance between them. This is a great discussion book for middle graders. It's geared toward that age group yet, as an adult, I am enjoying it. This is a series I definitely want my children to read and I highly recommend it to everyone!

There's an author interview and \$50 Amazon or Visa gift card giveaway (through Aug 9) on my blog: [Mel's Shelves](#)
