



TEEN SERVICES COMMUNITY SERVICE TEEN BOOK REVIEW

Serafina And The Twisted Staff By Robert Beatty Reviewed by Emily Rusielewicz

Name: Emily Rusielewicz

Grade: 7

Book Title: Serafina And The Twisted Staff

Author: Robert Beatty

Number of Pages: 370

Rating (on a scale of 1-5): 5/5

Character List:

- **Serafina** - Serafina is a 12 year old girl who lives with her adoptive Pa at the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina. She works as the Chief Rat Catcher for the Vanderbilt's. Serafina is not like the typical young girls her age. Serafina discovers she is a catamount, a shape shifting mountain cat just like her birth mother. Serafina becomes the protector of her home, family and friends when a mysterious man shows up and strange things start occurring at the Biltmore Estate.
- **Braeden Vanderbilt** - Braeden is Serafina's best friend. His parents died when he was young. He lives with his aunt and uncle at the Biltmore Estate.
- **Serafina's Mom** - Serafina's mom is a catamount, a shape shifting mountain lion. She is the protector of forest and is raising her two cubs in the Blue Ridge Mountains.
- **Lady Rowena Fox - Pemberton** - Lady Rowena is a rich, and snobby English lady who is a guest at the Biltmore Estate. Serafina did not like her at first because she was very mean to her.
- **Essie** - Essie is a helpful maid who works at the Biltmore Estate. Serafina and Essie are friends. Essie helps her get ready for the Vanderbilt's ball.

Review:

Sequel to *Serafina And The Black Cloak*. Only weeks ago, Serafina had defeated the Man in the Black Cloak who threatened her and her friends. One night, while Serafina was out in the forest catching mice, she comes upon a horse driven carriage. She sees a man with silver eyes and a twisted staff exiting the carriage. The strange and terrifying man spots Serafina, and he sets his wolfhounds after her. The strange man appears to be controlling the hounds. Serafina barely escapes, and believes that the stranger was not working alone. Strange occurrences are taking place at the Biltmore Estate which cannot be explained: all the birds and animals seem to be fleeing the forest in fear. Serafina is constantly being attacked by animals. Things start to get even stranger when Mr. Grathan, a detective, starts questioning her and her best friend, Braeden. He wants to find out about the disappearance of the Man in the Black Cloak. Serafina starts to grow suspicious of the many visitors that are staying at the Biltmore and wonders if they are working for the strange man. She is not only dealing with the fact that she, her friends, and family are in danger, but the truth of who she really is: a catamount, a shape shifting mountain lion. There is the possibility that she may never be able to transform herself into a mountain lion and may be trapped in human form.

When Serafina thinks her problems couldn't get any worse, the unimaginable happens: she is attacked by her best friend's dog, who seems to be under some kind of spell. In the struggle to get away, the dog leaps from the balcony and is seriously injured. Braeden is devastated to hear that his dog may not survive. To make matters worse, Lady Rowena, an English lady who is a guest at the Biltmore, lies to Braeden and tells him she saw Serafina push the dog over the balcony. Serafina pleads with Braeden to believe her side of the story and that she would never hurt the dog. Serafina is heartbroken and leaves. After, Serafina encounters a feral boy named Waysa, in the forest - the same boy that helped her escape the wolfhounds attack. Serafina learns that he is working with her mother and is protecting her half-siblings while her mother is searching for a safer place to move to. Serafina also learns the truth about her real dad - he was a shape shifting mountain lion who died protecting them from the same dark forces that has returned to destroy the people and animals of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Serafina knows in her heart that she cannot run away, but must stay and fight to protect the people she loves and cares about. She makes the decision to return to the Biltmore Estate and fight the dark forces.

The author Robert Beatty lives near the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. He enjoys exploring the actual Biltmore Estate and the forest of North Carolina. He incorporates the historical Biltmore Estate and the surrounding forest as the setting for his novel. The author does a good job of capturing the attention of the readers throughout the book. The readers are taken immediately into the struggles, challenges, and friendships of the main character Serafina. Beatty brings us face to face with a young, powerful and brave girl who feels like she can't fit into a human world or an animal world. The story transitions itself well, right from the beginning when we meet the strange and suspicious man, to when Serafina defeats the dark force. The only flaw that I have found in the story is the unexplored relationship between Serafina and her mother. In the beginning, Serafina struggles to have a close bond with her mother, but she must leave to take care of her young cubs. Readers are left wondering why her mother would not stay and help her daughter defeat the dark forces. However, the content in the book does outweigh this minor flaw. Serafina creates a deeper bond with her friend Braeden and her Pa. Maybe in the next novel the author will further explore the relationship between the mother and Serafina.

I think that teen readers will enjoy this book because many teens can relate to the struggles of trying to fit in and be normal. Sometimes people need to stand up and face their fears and not run away from them. This book teaches this very well. I would recommend this book to teens who likes action, adventure, suspense and historical fiction books.