

Edge Short Guide

Edge by Michael Cadnum

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Overview

Zachary is adrift in the world. He has cut himself off from most of his past, dropped out of high school, broken up with girlfriend, lost touch with his best friend who moved away, and seems content in his discontent.

He is also angry at the world, an anger that often explodes in violence. When a random act of violence enters his life—his father is shot during a car-jacking—his life begins to spin out of control. When it appears that the person arrested for shooting and paralyzing his father will go free due to a lack of evidence, Zachary becomes obsessed with seeking vengeance. Retrieving a gun he acquired years ago, Zachary is determined to see justice done.

Cadnum says that like his earlier novels *Calling Home* and *Breaking the Fall*, *Edge* is based on a true event. In those books, however, the idea sprang from an article he read in the newspaper. As he explained to Shoemaker, the events in *Edge* happened closer to home: A friend of mine was shot and badly injured in a carjacking, and I understood the hunger some people have to take revenge—to get a gun and bring justice to the man who did this to my friend. That anger and sorrow was the seed that eventually grew into my novel.... I have a great hunger to know why people do such violent things, and to discover how we can live with the aftermath.

About the Author

Michael Cadnum was born on May 3, 1949, in Orange, California. He still resides in California, making his home in the San Francisco Bay area, which also serves as the setting of his young adult (YA) novels. Like many authors, Cadnum recalls writing as one of his first passions. As early as sixth grade he wrote a novel. The work, concerning dinosaurs wrecking vengeance on a village, was never published, but Cadnum told young adult literature critic Patty Campbell that his mother read it and suggested that "I write something cheerful." It was not advice he would heed, as his YA novels are considered "dark"—loaded with random acts of violence which shatter lives. In addition to fiction, Cadnum was constantly writing poetry. He published his first poem when he was only 16 years old.

Cadnum and his wife, Sherina, have been married for 30 years. After completing his undergraduate degree at the University of California in Berkeley, he enrolled in the creative writing program at San Francisco State University. He got his masters there in 1974, but it took many years, and many odd jobs including working in a furniture factory, as a substitute teacher, and running a suicide prevention hotline, before he published his first novel in 1990. That novel, *Nightlight*, was actually the 10th book he had written; the rest he was unable to publish. One of those books, *In the Dark Wood*, he revised and published, to much praise, in 1998. During his salad days, he continued to write poetry, publishing in numerous anthologies and literary magazines, as well as chapbooks. His first poetry collection, *The Morning of the Massacre*, was published in 1982. Although he has not published a book of poetry since 1993, Cadnum's poetic muse is still active and he told Campbell, "I love writing poetry, and I do it almost daily, as a kind of a yoga, a discipline like a concert pianist practicing every day."

Cadnum, unlike many authors for young adults, does not just write teen novels. In addition to being an award-winning poet, he has also written several popular and critically acclaimed horror novels. These influences are obvious in his YA novels, which are among the most lyrical of any YA novelist, yet also describe horrifying events.

They are no monsters in Cadnum's YA novels; just all too human young people (normally male) who find themselves caught in horrible circumstances, almost always involving a terrible act of violence. Like Robert Cormier, to whom Cadnum is often and rightly compared, these are not ordinary problem novels or explorations of violence. Nor are they straightforward tales of good and evil. These are complex stories written in simple yet tense prose about "good kids" doing "bad things" and sometimes, as in *Edge*, contemplating doing evil things. *Calling Home* features a murder, *Breaking the Fall* involves a crime spree, *Taking It* is about shoplifting, while *Rundown* focuses on a young woman who lies to the police. The two other novels—*Zero at the Bone* and *Heat*—focus on the aftermath of a life altering incident.

Cadnum's novels emerged just as young adult literature was changing—from the suspense thrillers written by such authors as R. L. Stine, Christopher Pike, and Caroline Cooney—to a more thoughtful, challenging literature, which Cadnum's work epitomizes.



Although Cadnum writes about subjects which could be found in thrillers, such as revenge in *Edge*, he is not penning mindless thrillers; he is writing hard-edged intense fiction. There are no red herrings, cliffhanger chapter headings, or other thriller tricks. Instead, Cadnum uses a clipped narrative style with short sentences and sharper images. The dialogue—including often what is NOT said—is excellent. There is a feeling of incompleteness, as if information or feelings are being excluded, which makes sense as Cadnum's first person narrators, like Zachary in *Edge*, are disconnected from the world.

Like Chris Crutcher, Cadnum writes about damaged kids trying to repair their lives. Plot and story matter in Cadnum's work, but each book is character driven.

Events happen to his characters and they must react. At the same time, most books also have a character struggling with making a big decision, which is the case in *Edge*.

These reactions and decisions are the narrative drive in Cadnum's psychological sketches of young people in crisis and, often of their own choosing, in danger. The danger element stems from the character's desire to become complete, to feel alive. If there are monsters, they are located deep in the psyche of the characters as they try to figure out their lives, try to tell right from wrong, and try not to fall too far over the edge. His work is full of teens who are disconnected from their families, friends, and selves, and who feel adrift in an increasingly violent world. Cadnum's characters, like most teens, think they are invulnerable; they think they can walk on the edge and not fall over, only to learn how sharp, dangerous and scary life can be.

In *Calling Home*, Peter turns to drowning his sorrows in alcohol after accidentally killing his best friend. However, drunkenness does not dull the feeling that he is gradually being inhabited by the spirit of his dead friend, whom he impersonates on the phone in reassuring calls to the boy's frantic parents. This is not a pretty novel, nor is Peter particularly likable, but Cadnum locks his readers in . . . and pulls them through slowly. *Calling Home* is Cadnum's calling card and hooked many readers on his works. Librarian Joel Shoemaker writes that *Calling Home* introduces the writer's "trademark elements—deep, sensitive development of characters' feelings and motivations; aberrant behavior of some kind; lack of connection between the teen and adult characters—while striking out in various directions in terms of plot. Each succeeding book was stylistically interesting, challenging, mature, and also somehow disturbing." Stylistically interesting, challenging, mature, and also somehow disturbing is an apt description of *Edge*.



Setting

Like many of Cadnum's YA novels, *Edge* is set in the San Francisco Bay area. Zachary and his mother live in Oakland, while his father lives across the bay in San Francisco.

Almost all of Cadnum's characters are children of divorced parents. Although it appears at first as if Zachary is a child of the streets, he lives quite comfortably with his real estate agent mother. His father is a writer. This landscape is also familiar territory for Cadnum who says he is "interested in the problems of being upward and mobile. When you have parents who . . . have interesting professions . . . what pressure has this put on the family." Zachary's school, however, is not the stereotypical suburban school, instead it seems more like an urban battleground.

The first scene of the book depicts Oakland's Lake Merritt as exactly that, an urban battleground. Here, kids from all over Oakland, "a mix of race and attitudes," converge and clash. Zachary is in the midst of a "rumble" complete with helmeted police sorting out bodies while a helicopter shines its light overhead. The fight is broken up with tear-gas, like a riot scene: The events in the book, in particular the car-jacking, do happen everywhere in the United States, but are, in the minds of most, centered in large urban areas. The setting of the urban area is contrasted with the various suburban areas that Zachary and his partner, the Chief, visit delivering spa tubs. The contrast between the "hard life" that Zachary and the Chief live and the luxury in which the customers dwell no doubt fuels part of Zachary's anger. In Zachary's world, the streets are not safe: they are the setting for the fight which lands him in jail, the riot where he finds the gun, the swiping of his car, and the shooting of his father. In many Cadnum books, the characters, like Mead in *Breaking the Fall*, choose danger. In *Edge*, Zachary is surrounded by it. It is a hostile environment that reinforces his anger. One of the final scenes, when Zachary visits the neighborhood of the man who shot his father, describes the area as being full of barking dogs and windows covered in iron bars. All of these elements make the setting of *Edge* seem like a dark ride.

It is Zachary's car, in fact, which serves as another major setting of the book. Many scenes take place as Zachary drives around the Bay area, both in his own car but also as part of his job as a delivery person. This is a deliberate choice on Cadnum's part. The bay area has great public transportation, but Zachary is always driving. This makes sense: Zachary is detached, he does not want to be with other people. He is on a journey back and forth not just across the Bay Bridge, but also between his past and his future. But mostly, the car gives Zachary a sanctuary, or as Cadnum writes "driving a car—especially if it's your own car, even a hulk with a chassis rusted through—sometimes makes a person feel like playing it safe." Throughout the book, Zachary has rejected playing it safe by dropping out of school and cutting himself off emotionally from his family. Zachary's journey in the book, depicted in the numerous scenes taking place in a vehicle, is about him moving back to safety. Yet ironically, it is an incident involving a car—a car-jacking—that changes his life. It is only when someone takes away something he loves (his father), that the path his life was taking begins to change.

Social Sensitivity

Although they are not major themes of the book, Cadnum is also percolating a couple of social, even political issues, underneath the surface of *Edge*. The first is the notion of justice. It is obvious to the reader and Zachary that Steven Ray McNorr is the person responsible for shooting his father, but he will probably never be punished for the crime. As a subtext of the novel, Zachary learns, with great frustration, the vagaries of the legal system. He shows up at each hearing determined to see justice done, only to be denied. The cruel irony of the book, as one review pointed out, is "Zachary and his parents hold the moral high ground but will be paying a heavy price for years whereas the criminal escapes punishment."

Teens, inundated with the influence of television shows and real-life events such as the O. J. Simpson trial have a growing interest in the justice system. Also, older teens, who are Cadnum's primary audience, are starting to deal with the sometimes uncertain nature of concepts like "fairness" and "justice." *Edge* brings to life what many regard as extreme flaws in a justice system that allows guilty people like Steven Ray McNorr to go unpunished. It is, as is said in politics, a "hot-button issue."

Another issue bubbling under the surface in *Edge* concerns Zachary's tough facade. There is a great deal of writing, research, and debate on the subject of the emotional life of boys. Much of it focuses on young men exactly like Zachary who keep emotions buried. Cadnum writes that Zachary wishes for a different emotional make-up, one that "didn't feel pride and anger." It is these emotional states, the research suggests, that are the heart of the male right-of-passage. Zachary is such a "boy"—he talks tough, but in the end does not choose violence. He shrugs off caring about anything, even taking the GED when asked about it, but is in reality studying diligently. His relationship with his mother, what there is of it, seems typical of that between many sons and mothers—wrought with conflict and managed from a distance. Keeping distance from emotions, from intimacy, and from showing vulnerability are Zachary's main concerns, reflecting in many ways the psychological make-up of many male teenagers.



Literary Qualities

Michael Cadnum is widely recognized as the one of the foremost stylists writing fiction for young adults. In his books, HOW the story is told is just as important as WHAT story is told. His style contains three primary elements: a gift for language and detail, the conscious decision to withhold or delay information to readers, and a tone which reflects the emotional life of his teen characters. Together, these three elements make the reader work, make decisions, go forward without knowing everything, and sometimes fight through a maze of details and incomplete information. In essence, the reader takes on the same role as the main character: trying to figure it all out. At one point, Zachary states "details were all that mattered." Because of this, Cadnum creates, as Patty Campbell noted, "young adult novels that are not for sissies—or for lazy readers."

The influence of Cadnum's poetry is perhaps best noted in his eye for detail. Objects abound: for example, when Zachary first walks into his father's hospital room, it seems he takes in every detail, notes each object in the room. In doing this, Cadnum is not only letting his readers see through the eyes of his characters, but letting them use all their senses: Smells, sounds, and even tastes. An excellent example is the short, powerful descriptions Cadnum uses to allow his readers to "hear" the action in the book: "the Velcro did not release at first, clinging, a harsh, sandpaper rasp." Almost every chapter, it seems, contains a reference to food. Meals are described. To some readers, this type of precision seems maddening, but to others these details define the character of Zachary. They sense the world through his eyes. Cadnum also makes his reader's work. He does not tell them at the end of the first chapter that Zachary has found a gun, instead he reaches down to touch "cold steel."

The poetic influence is also evident in his heavy use of similes. An object is described and then compared: "flicked her address book like a fan" or "the yellow rope was slick, like lizard skin." Places are compared: "the police station in Oakland is like a post office." Actions are described and compared: "like someone deliberately making mistake." But again, it is in describing his character's emotions that Cadnum shines.

At one point Zachary describes his emotional state as "like I was living in a rented body." The similes do two things. First, they give the book a flow and rhythm that, though not poetic, at times has a lyric quality to it. Secondly and more importantly, the narration once again reflects the narrator's emotional state. Zachary does not have all the information he needs; he is searching for answers and clues, and thus he does want to do what anyone would do: he compares the unknown to the known.

At the same time that Cadnum is loading down the book with details, vivid descriptions, and similes, he is just as significantly leaving out lots of information. One reviewer described the style as "relentlessly elliptical, with events that begun, then ignored, and then finally explained." The structure of the book is not a smooth straightahead narrative, but instead it skips back and forth in time. The most important events shaping Zachary's behavior are not revealed until near the end of book. We see him act and then learn why, rather than getting the cause and effect up front. Cadnum provides



clues, but the puzzle will not be solved until later. The book is not a mystery, but the details of the character's life can be at times. Within the first chapter, Zachary alludes to an incident with a teacher that caused him to drop out of school, but the details are not uncovered until much later.

Similarly, his arrest is alluded to but the details are revealed only at the end. The best example of this is the role the gun plays in the book: Cadnum "introduces" the gun in the first chapter, mentions it briefly again, and then it does not reappear until the very end of the book. The choice is deliberate: it is an old playwright's "trick" to introduce the weapon in act one to build the suspense about when it will be used in act two. But more than that, Zachary literally buries the gun and forgets about it. Since Zachary is telling the story, the object remains buried from the reader's view until the end, although like Zachary we always remember it is there.

Another Cadnum technique is to use fragmentary dialogue. While the book has plenty of dialogue scenes that are quite normal, there are just as many that are not and with good reason. An example is the scene when Zachary learns over the phone that his father has been shot. Cadnum does not give the reader the whole picture: just Zachary's responses. We do not hear his mother tell him how his father is doing, only hear Zachary saying to himself "critical condition." Later, when the police detective talks with him, Cadnum does not provide the dialogue for the detective, only Zachary's response, saying "you caught him." This fragmentary style of dialogue coupled with other elements adds to the weight of the book. The reader, like the narrator, is not getting the whole picture; it does not come together easily. It is a challenge.

The style, it seems, comes from Cadnum's writing process. When writing, he says he attempt to become the character: to see what he sees and to know what he knows.

Cadnum told Shoemaker that "I have discovered something about writing from a character's point of view—the power of the first person voice. It liberates a writer to be someone he really never dreamed of becoming, and I feel it gives me a special power as I sit down to write. I feel myself becoming one of my characters as I sit at my desk." In doing so, everything about how the book is written becomes a mirror of the character's emotions. Zachary's detachment from his life equals the almost detached narration. He can describe objects, but he cannot describe his emotions. Just as Zachary walks away from situations, like school or his girlfriend, he avoids revealing the deEdge 151 tails in the book until he has to. Cadnum as Zachary sums it up best when he writes "he knew I didn't like to tell everything right away."

The tone of Edge is typical of the tough-guy novel such as Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930). In Edge this tone can put one off at first because the supposed tough guy is a young man with a decided lack of backbone—a bully who quits whatever he starts, telling himself that he does so because someone was mean to him in school, or that he is better than the people around him, or that he has no future anyway. This tone is relieved by the poetic language of the novel and the honesty of the dialogue: "They dropped the charges," she said, sounding like a gangster's mom, used to this.



She didn't start the car. We sat there staring ahead at a blank wall, green cinder block.

"The owner of the tropical fish store," she said, "called up to tell what he saw, you taking on half the East Bay. He laughed about it.

Can you imagine a business owner having a sense of humor about a broken window? He said if you're going to get into another fight, he wants to be in the front row."

I kept my mouth shut. I'd like to meet this man, whoever he was, thinking this was funny.

"What I want to know is why couldn't you wait?" she said.

"Why couldn't you wait until you're eighteen and out of school before you decide to tear big chunks out of people. Because then you won't be my problem, Zachary. You'll be on your own."

This passage is representative of the blunt straightforwardness of honest emotion found throughout the novel.

These perfectly calibrated words are those of a woman who already feels cheated by life to her hostile and violent son who has been arrested for fighting a group of young people. A businesswoman herself, she naturally would note the store owner's seeming lack of concern over a broken window, and frustrated by a son she cannot control—a real mother as opposed to a faultless one—she expresses what she certainly would feel.

Themes and Characters

Zachary's journey is the story of Edge.

Early in the book, his father quotes Napoleon to him: "character is destiny." Edge concerns the development of Zachary's character. He is obviously troubled, lost, searching; disconnected. It is not the events in the book that change Zachary; it is Zachary who changes Zachary when he decides to make different decisions. In the beginning he acts in anger and violence; at the end of the book he rejects violence as a solution.

In the beginning he looks to his co-worker, the Chief, as the person he admires most; at the end of the book he realizes that that person, all along, was his father. In the beginning, he just does not care a great deal about anything, he is aimless and drifting; at the end of the book he becomes focused and purposeful. Finally, at the beginning of the book Zachary seems almost disconnected from his own life and from society. At one point he describes himself as a "smart zombie." At the end of the book he has recon148 Edge nected with his family, but most importantly, he has connected with himself. A random tragedy that befalls his family provides the catalyst that forces him to take control, to move from living on the edges of life and back toward the center.

The other characters in the book are enigmas to the reader as they are to Zachary.

Readers never learn a great deal about their motivations, and we are only shown how they behave. Zachary seems to have great affection for his mother in his actions and words, although he seems to deny it at other times. He feels the same way towards his father, even more so after the shooting.

Cadnum commented to Shoemaker that "when Zachary realizes that his father will not recover from his gunshot wound, Zachary loves his father more than he ever has before." His relationship with Bea or his mother is unclear. His relationship with the Chief is key, because the Chief acts as a father figure to him. Chief provides Zachary with things he seems to need most: acceptance and guidance, assets he does not have at home or elsewhere in his life.

Families are always a concern of Cadnum's, in particular, the consequences of divorced parents on children. In Edge, as in most of his books, not only is the main character the product of a broken home, so are most of the other characters. If a family, which for children is "supposed" to stay together and hold things together, vanishes, then what is left? What gives life meaning? This is one of the many questions posed in Edge. Cadnum writes that it is "danger, and even grief, [that] give our lives shape and meaning."

In Edge, as well as his other novels, this theme is again explored.



Zachary is a riddle in some ways. He seems to want security and safety, yet makes choices, such as dropping out of school or allowing his anger to get the better of him, that deny him those very things. There is nothing to center him, and it is unclear until the end of the book even if Zachary has a moral center. Zachary, like other Cadnum characters, is looking for a center, a foundation to build a life on. The elements are not there: school does not engage him, his best friend moves away, he seems not to have real interests or hobbies, his family is not stable, and his life at school is soaked in violence. The assets he needs are missing.

One of his many journeys of personal development in the book deals with his efforts to build a foundation for himself, to try and acquire the assets that will lead him towards constructive rather than self-destructive behavior.

Zachary's mother is described as a controlling person, while his father writes about science, trying to make the complex simple.

Both of their lives reflect a desire to keep things in check, to keep things in order.

Then, as happens in other Cadnum books, in particular *Heat* (about a girl injured in a diving accident), a twist of fate occurs disrupting everything. Cadnum shows lives built on the premise of keeping things safe, only—in a instant—to be changed forever.

Cadnum's personal experiences may have shaped this theme in him as a writer. He told Campbell that he was eight years old when he realized that anyone could die from an act of fate or making one small wrong decision: "A boy from my school climbed inside one of these fridges, for fun, maybe, or hiding from his friends. They didn't find him for many days." It is the aftermath of these invasions of violence or tragedy—the truth of the consequence that fascinates Cadnum and serve as a central theme in all his YA novels.

While events like random shootings cannot be controlled, Zachary can control his reaction to such violence by the choices he makes. How and why Zachary makes choices is a central theme of *Edge*. Zachary's decisionmaking is similar to that of Peter in Cadnum's first novel *Calling Home*. Both books are, in essence about this simple question: Will the character do the "right" thing? Will Peter admit to his crime? Will Zachary seek to avenge the crime committed against his father? What Cadnum does, however, is keep the heart of the story beating in the background, not the foreground. Zachary does not wring his hands or talk about his decision with anyone—the action is happening behind the scenes, in his mind. Up to the point of decision, it is unclear to the reader what Zachary will do, mostly because it is equally unclear to Zachary himself. Basic moral questions like what is right and what is wrong are ingrained in Cadnum's sometimes challenging prose.

This sense of morality is deeply evident in the revenge motif that is so central to *Edge*. Revenge is such a raw human emotion, easy for almost anyone to understand, but Cadnum does not exploit it or explain it; instead he lets Zachary feel its powerful pull, only to push back at the last moment.



Cadnum looks closely at the large theme of justice and justification. He lets his readers ponder questions about the right response to something so blatantly "unfair," such as the random act of violence that hurts Zachary's father. He lets readers tangle with the notion that concepts such as fairness, justice, and retribution have many levels. As Zachary weighs these issues, so do the readers. Interestingly, Cadnum does not stack the deck.

As Zachary stands at the precipice of acting out against unfairness by shooting McNorr, many readers may be rooting from him to pull the trigger, but just as many would want him to walk away.



Topics for Discussion

1. Had this tragedy not occurred, would Zachary have continued on the same path? Discuss what might have happened had the shooting never occurred.

2. Some critics fault Cadnum for the languid pace of his novels, while others praise the attention given to language and detail. Discuss Cadnum's style as a barrier to some readers while acting as a bridge to others.

3. If Edge was made into a movie, whom would you cast to play Zachary? Would you change the ending?

4. Cadnum said that some of his novels were inspired by newspaper stories.

Are there any recent news stories featuring teens that would make a good young adult novel? If so, why?

5. Cadnum attempts to get his readers to be "inside the head" of his characters.

How does he accomplish this?

6. Some reviewers pointed out that Edge exposed the flaws in the justice system.

Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

7. Should the person who shot Zachary's father been convicted for the crime? If so, what should his punishment be?

8. What do you think prevents Zachary from shooting Steven Ray McNorr?

9. The language, the settings, and the situations all create the atmosphere of Edge. How would you describe the overall tone of the book? Does it change or remain the same?

10. Review Zachary's account of the incident that led him to quit school. Do you believe this was the reason? Why is it that people drop out of school?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. The car-jacking in the novel is the central event. Research this crime. How widespread is it? Does it just happen in urban areas or all over?
2. Zachary's father is expected to live his life being paralyzed. Research what advances are being made in science that would allow his father to walk again.
3. Zachary represents many issues being discussed in recent literature about the emotional life of boys. Why and what are people writing about boys? What events have lead to this examination of how boys are raised?
4. Zachary is the product of a broken home. Research the effects that divorce has on children, in particular in regard to risk-taking behavior among teens.
5. Zachary quits school, but does take the GED. Research, then compare and contrast the earnings and lifestyles of high school graduates against those of high school drop-outs.
6. Through out the book, Zachary often exhibits extreme bouts of anger. Research anger management techniques, in particular how they are taught in schools.
7. The setting of the book is the San Francisco Bay area. Research the history of this region focusing on the development of the cities of Oakland and San Francisco.
8. While Zachary finds a gun, many teenagers have access to guns. Research teens and guns.
9. Zachary considers seeking vengeance on the person who shot his father. This type of justice is called vigilantism. Research vigilantism, focusing in particular on recent cases.
10. In the book, Zachary is arrested for fighting. Research what happens to juveniles who are arrested. How is the juvenile justice system different than that for adults? How has it changed over the past ten years?



For Further Reference

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"Michael Cadnum." In *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost and Gothic Writers*. Detroit: St. James Press, 1998. Short essay focusing primarily on Cadnum's horror novels.

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Rausch, Tim. Review of *Edge*. *School Library Journal* (July 1997): 90. Short, positive review focusing on book's character development, pacing, and language. Review calls *Edge* "well-written" and the story "thought provoking."

Shoemaker, Joel. "A Path Into Daylight: An Interview with Michael Cadnum." *Voice of Youth Advocates* (June 1999): 97-100.

Long interview with author focusing on the influence of his poetry and his childhood on books for young adults. Focuses mostly on titles *In a Dark Wood* and *Heat*.

Shoemaker, Kellie. Review of *Edge*. *Voice of Youth Advocates* (December 1997): 314.

Long, very positive review focusing on the character of Zachary. Author compares Zachary to other Cadnum characters and notes that the "plot is secondary" to character development. Book receives journal's highest rating for quality.

Stevenson, Deborah. Review of *Edge*. *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (July/August 1997): 389. Calling the book a "psychology intense tale," Stevenson reviews the plot, which she calls a "bit contrived," and the character development.



Related Titles

Cadnum's previous novels for young adults feature a similar tough tone and uncompromising language.

A disaffected protagonist typically deals with loss—the death of a loved one or friend or, as in Zack's case, a best friend who has moved away. Edge complicates matters by having the main character not only lose a strong, energetic father through divorce and then a shooting, but to have that father replaced by a dependent one.

Although both *Nightlight* (1990) and *Sleepwalker* (1991) are likely to appeal to young adult fans of horror fiction, they are novels for adults; it is *Saint Peter's Wolf* (1991) that marks the transition from adult to young adult fiction. Although it features an adult protagonist, *Saint Peter's Wolf* has diction and themes that appeal directly to a young adult audience. Its main character is an alienated and frustrated man who is trying to succeed in a world that may be a little too tough for him—a situation which many teenagers experience.

His second novel, *Calling Home*, introduces the chiseled, take-no-nonsense voice that typifies the rest of Cadnum's novels for young adults, especially *Edge*, an aptly titled book that pushes the tone to its limits. *Calling Home* (1991) also introduces the unpleasant character type that has most disturbed reviewers. The unlikeable protagonist here plays horrible pranks on the parents of his best friend, who recently died—he calls them, pretending to be their deceased son. This type of disturbing protagonist may be the most important development in Cadnum's fiction so far, and it may be one of the most appealing aspects of his fiction for young adults. Even in a horror story, the menacing and disaffected protagonist truly seems to react to events like someone with a trouble-torn life.



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