Alex and the Wednesday Chess Club
by Janet S. Wong

Alex first learned to play chess when he was four years old. He loved it. He loved the pieces, the challenge, and the sweet taste that winning left in his mouth. He loved it until he played a chess game with moldy old Uncle Hooya...and lost. Then Alex decided to give up chess for good. Now in third grade Alex wants to give chess another try. He joins the chess club and discovers that chess is fun again. He plays his friends, he listens to the coach, and he practices at school, at home, and on the computer. Alex is a chess maniac! All of this practice is leading up to the big tournament, where Alex finds himself face-to-face with Little Cousin Hooya. Memories of his earlier defeat return, but now is his chance to finally beat a Hooya. Is Alex up to the challenge? Janet Wong's lyrical text, complemented by Stacey Schuetts bright illustrations, will inspire chess players of all ages to practice, practice, practice -- and to avoid moldy old Uncle Hooya!

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My Personal Review:
The core of this story is formulaic (kid suffers setback, kid gives up, kid bounces back, kid finds success). But it was written by someone who obviously understands the world of scholastic chess, and chess is therefore more than a parable for the lessons of life: it is the central feature of the story. The humor and moral are subtle and understated; while they clearly went over the "kid reviewer's" head, it's easy to see why from the sense of humor he displayed in his review. Other readers should not be thrown off the scent by someone who didn't get it. Kids should be attracted by Alex, who finds something he likes to do, decides to stick with it, and perseveres to succeed even though he fails several times beforehand. But this is as much a book for adults as kids: a sly tribute to a mother who understands both the benefits and the attractive power of chess and who was wise enough to "put up with" junk food, missing chores, and an ego funk in order to get Alex hooked on the game. Smart woman!
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