



Branches



Summer
2004

Book Review Newsletter of the City of Mesa Library
Dobson Ranch Branch Young Adult Advisory Council

Letter from the Editor!



Hello everyone! The school year has come to an end, leaving many of us with a nice long break. Fortunately, you have in your hands the largest issue of *Branches* of the entire year: the summer issue! So use some of that free time to take a look at all these great reviews and possibly do a lot of reading!

Being editor has really been awesome, and thank you for using *Branches* to explore the many different types of literature out there. 'Bye everyone! Have a great summer and keep reading!

—*Nehal Thakkar*
Branches Editor

Send comments and suggestions to
filmimoney@yahoo.com

Rating System

start a fire	★
punishment for bad children	★★
decent	★★★
I would read it again	★★★★★
masterpiece	★★★★★

King Lear

By William Shakespeare

★★★★★

Typically, Shakespeare's works are hard to read. The prone-to-sound-like-poems-or-

lyrics style of writing mixed with concepts and phrases of the Renaissance time period is definitely a whirlwind of confusion and misunderstanding. Nevertheless, *King Lear* (with a lot of help from a Shakespeare class and teacher) is an easy-to-get, heartfelt tragedy. The play involves two different characters: Lear, the king of England; and Gloucester, a duke and Lear's loyal subject. Both men decide to twist their situations around hoping to benefit in the long run. Lear divides the kingdom into three unequal pieces for each of his daughters. But to earn the largest portion, they each must tell him how much they love him...the best. Meanwhile, Gloucester decides to give his illegitimate son the family name. This son, greedy and bitter, decides that's not good enough and plots to murder his way up to the throne. Shakespeare is able to recreate a historical event that ends with numerous shocking deaths and eventually the return of a rightful ruler.

—*Linh Nguyen*

Books are a uniquely portable magic.

—*Stephen King*

My Grandfather Jack the Ripper

By Claudio Apone

★★★★★

Thirteen-year-old Andy Dobson is the average typical English boy. His mother runs the family boarding house called Jack-in-the-Box, he goes to school, and his best friend is the girl he hopes to marry (go figure). Nonetheless, Andy has a special power that his family wants to keep secret. He is a psychic who can relive the past through objects. And after meeting a new boarder —

college student Massimo — Andy learns that there was a ghastly murderer who haunted the London streets over 150 years ago: Jack the Ripper. Even scarier, Jack's last victim before he disappeared was a girl who lived at Jack-in-the-Box in Room 4, which has always been locked and is never spoken of. With Massimo's help, Andy goes back in time to find out who this unknown murderer was, only to learn that back in his time, another person is carrying on Jack the Ripper's legacy and is going after the people Andy holds dear to his heart. **My Grandfather Jack the Ripper** is a cute story for young adults with a surprising ending.

—*Linh Nguyen*

Someone to Love

By Frances Lantz

★★★

Fifteen-year-old Sara Dewherst isn't scared of standing up for what she believes in, whether it be demonstrating for vegetarians during lunch or screaming at her rather controlling, elitist parents for being so narrow-minded. No, Sara enjoys her life, loves practicing her rights and falling in love with one of her partners in crime, Mac.

But things begin to change when her parents decide to adopt a baby belonging to Iris Boone, an 18 year old girl who lives the wild life. Sara instantly forgets about her own world and begins to envy and wish for a life like Iris'. Iris is able to do whatever she pleases, working and living in her own apartment with her boyfriend.

Nonetheless, Sara's parents forbid her to continue her friendship with Iris, believing that she lives another life that includes abuse, drugs, and alcohol. Sara refuses to

listen, and soon she tries to change her life to not only add in a new baby sibling, but an older sister as well.

Someone to Love is a different book that I found to be interesting, but very odd. I would recommend this novel, but only if you're running out of things to read.

—*Linh Nguyen*

Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.

—*Francis Bacon*

Ninjas, Piranhas, and Galileo

By Greg Leitich Smith

★★★★

Sometimes being a good friend isn't as easy as it seems. Elias, Shohei, and Honoria have been fast friends since kindergarten, but what will happen between them when the annual Peshtigo School Science Fair finally comes? Once again, quiet Elias is a reluctant science fair participant, but he finds himself challenging the authority of Mr. Eden, the teaching tyrant of the chemistry department, when his project goes horribly wrong. Meanwhile, Shohei, a self-proclaimed slacker, is facing problems of his own: his adoptive parents, the O'Learys, have decided it is time for him to start "hearing" his Japanese ancestors, and he doesn't know how much more *futomaki* he can take. Honoria, the insect-loving lawyer-in-training, discovers that it's a lot more difficult than you'd think to get a best friend to "like" you — at least, much more difficult than teaching piranhas to eat bananas. Humor, wit, and more than a bit of science are woven into this nice afternoon read about what it takes for three friends to find out about the Land of the Rising Sun, Galileo's choices, and the eating habits of a *Pygocentrus nattereri*.

—*Hilary Waterman*

Stravaganza: the City of Masks

By Mary Hoffman

★★★★★

Lucien knows he's dying. He has nothing to do except suffer through the effects of his chemotherapy, day after day. This all changes, however, when his father brings home a mysterious little notebook that he found in an old abandoned house. This notebook turns out to be a Talisman — and Lucien turns out to be a Stravagante, a traveler between two worlds! In the world of Talia, a strange mirror image of Earth's

Renaissance Italy, Lucien gets caught up in a power struggle for the control of the famed city of beauty, Belleza, the unearthly twin of Venice. Can he help the majestic Duchessa while keeping his secret safe? And most importantly, what will he do with this second chance for a life?

—*Hilary Waterman*

The Fountainhead

By Ayn Rand

★★★★★

If you enjoy reading Nietzsche, Orwell, or Brontë, you will enjoy reading **The Fountainhead**. However, if you enjoy reading Fitzgerald, Ludlum, or even Nora Roberts, you will also enjoy reading **The Fountainhead** by Ayn Rand.

The reason that this book can balance the seemingly opposite tugging of an excellent philosophical theme and a page-turning plot is due to the excellent characters and the way they fit into the jagged, rough, skyscrapered setting of Manhattan in the 1920s and 30s. From the protagonist, hypertalented architect Howard Roark; to his rival and counter-point, Peter Keating; to Howard's lover, daughter of a fellow successful architect; his patron, most especially, for he is the one who has a persona closest to Howard; and finally, to his nemesis, newspaper columnist Ellsworth M. Toohey, also the opposite of the philosophy which the author embraces, seem to interact in such a way that make their struggles, loves, obsessions, and fits of passion seem heroic, even Olympian. Due to the greatness of these characters, the plot seems to breathe on its own, and merges easily with the overarching theme and philosophy of the novel. You may not even realize you are reading a philosophical novel until you reach the end of the book and discover that you already agree with the entire summation of the philosophy of the novel that occurs there. This book is really that powerful and moving. It feels like a skyscraper thrusting above all other buildings, showing its powerful lines, boundless with energy, creating one proud, total message.

—*Thomas Cong*

Fast Food Nation

By Eric Schlosser

★★★★★

Every day, in America, three-quarters of us buy fast food. What we may not realize is

that behind the glittering images of the burgers, shakes and fries, just like the looking glass in **Alice in Wonderland**, there lies another world, just as nonsensical and different as the world in that book. In this book, the author, Eric Schlosser, starts at what could be considered the origins of fast food, the cities of Burbank, San Bernardino, and Anaheim, California. From there, he travels to the headquarters of McDonald's and studies the American corporate culture. Then he heads off to the High Plains to show you what is truly in the meat. The food safety conditions in the slaughterhouse he investigates are, how shall we say, not particularly comforting. He ends with the global realization of the American Dream; the dream of being able to live in a spacious single-family house, own their own car (and get stuck in traffic jams), and fatten oneself on a cornucopia of fast food. Now, in almost every major city around the world, we can go into a fast food restaurant, feel the cold rush of air conditioning, buy a hamburger, and eat hamburger meat that has a .1% feces content and 6-7% nerve tissue constant. But don't be bothered. You are what you eat.

From **Soylent Green** — *Don't worry about where the food's from. Just shut up and eat.*

—*Thomas Cong*

The One-Armed Queen

By Jane Yolen

★★★★★

Scillia is young, stubborn, and next in line to be queen. To make things worse, she only has one arm and isn't really White Queen Jenna's daughter. Jenna took Scillia from Scillia's mother when she died and raised her as her own. Too soon, King Carum dies and White Jenna leaves with him, promising that they will rise again when the Dales need them. Scillia returns to the castle only to find that her brother, Jemson, has usurped her throne and become king. Desperately, Scillia tries to stop her mad brother and his followers from destroying the Dales, rallying her loyal followers to overthrow Jem. Though the beginning is a bit boring, once you get into **The One-Armed Queen** it's hard to stop reading. Jane Yolen is truly a master of science fiction and fantasy as she weaves this fantastical story, reminding us of the things that truly matter. They say blood is thicker than water, but sometimes that's not true.

—*Shaoyuan Wu*

Spellfall

By Katherine Roberts

★★★★

I enjoyed reading **Spellfall** because of all the twists and turns the plot takes. **Spellfall** is about Natalie Marlins who, though she doesn't know it at first, is the daughter of a spell mage. She finds out about a group of Casters led by a man called Lord Hawk who created a weapon to destroy the spell mage council's soul tree, a living, intelligent, giant tree that houses the council. With Hawk's son Merlin she sets out to stop him, causing her stepbrother and best friend to be dragged in as well in an attempt to save her. In the end, the experience unites Natalie's sheltered family, bringing about miraculous changes to those involved. **Spellfall** is a cute story and a good read, but it is a little confusing at times.

—*Shaoyuan Wu*

The Subtle Knife

By Philip Pullman

★★★★

The Subtle Knife, the second installment in Philip Pullman's **His Dark Materials** and sequel to **The Golden Compass**, follows the adventures of Lyra and Will on their quest to save the universe. Will, only 12 and already having killed a man, sets out to find his father, but it soon becomes clear there is more to this mission than he thinks. Lyra and her ever-changing doeman meet him in the Specter-haunted city of Cittágazze where there are only children because Spectors feed on adult souls. The worlds Will and Lyra come from mirror each other and yet are not quite the same. In Will's Oxford, Lyra searches for answers but is instead betrayed by a man she begins to trust. He offers them a trade: Lyra's alethiometer (an instrument they need to guide them that he stole) in exchange for the subtle knife in the Torredegli Angeli in Cittágazze. In a confusing turn of events, Will becomes the bearer of the subtle knife and learns how to use it. They manage to sneak back into Will's Oxford to steal the alethiometer without getting caught. This is when things take a turn for the worse...until Will is suddenly alone again. Surreal, fascinating, and intriguing, I enjoyed this book to the last word and look forward to the last book of the trilogy – **The Amber Spyglass**.

—*Shaoyuan Wu*

The Man in the Iron Mask

By Alexander Dumas

★★★★

The Man in the Iron Mask begins with a man wrongfully imprisoned by his brother, the King of France. When he learns that he is the rightful heir, he escapes prison and goes on a danger-filled quest to take revenge and claim his birthright.

I gave this novel three stars because I think it takes too much time for the plot to develop. This novel is definitely for the more patient reader. However, after the first few chapters, the reader will find a lot of action, intense fights, and one of the best chase scenes ever written. So, for the reader who doesn't mind long beginnings, the book will be an extremely exciting read.

—*Niket Thakkar*

The gift of reading, like all natural gifts, must be nourished or it will atrophy.

—*Katherine Paterson*

My Ántonia

By Willa Cather

★★★★

Willa Cather's **My Ántonia** is a novel about growth and coexistence with nature. After his parents' deaths, Jim goes to stay with his grandparents on their farm in the hard countryside of Nebraska. There he meets Ántonia, an immigrant girl his age. As the story progresses, Jim grows up and interacts with all of his surroundings, allowing us to watch him mature into an adult. **My Ántonia** is a regional novel that is a must-read for realistic fiction buffs and those interested in history and frontier life.

—*Daniel Wu*

The Mote in God's Eye

By Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle

★★★★

The Mote in God's Eye is a sci-fi novel about the first encounter with an intelligent alien species by the human empire. A small, alien ship shot out of the Murcheson's Eye, or the God's Eye, as it is called by the locals because of its similarity to a bright red eye in the middle of the blackness of space. The pilot of the ship is dead when they find him, and as they examine his anatomy they find that he is not similar to the human body in the slightest. Curious, the human scientists

send a small expedition to the Mote, a small star near Murcheson's Eye, and find a civilization of small, intelligent aliens who keep a terrifying secret: every few generations or so, their society overpopulates their tiny world, degenerates into utter chaos, and everyone slaughters each other. This lasts until one faction or another seizes power and regains their technology. They also breed extremely quickly, and the only way to keep them from killing each other at the end of every cycle is to spread them out. They find no way to break out of their system — until now. The humans bring with them technology that enables the aliens to teleport to other systems. If the Moties, as the aliens are soon called, were to break out of their system, they would infest the galaxy until there is no room and they would turn on the humans. In the end, the humans set up a perpetual patrol around the Motie System to keep the Moties from expanding into other systems. All in all, this was a decent book, and it was pretty interesting, so I give it four out of five stars.

—*Caleb Chou*

Tithe

By Holly Black

★★★★★

When a dry spell hits Kaye Fierch's would-be rock star mom, the mother decides to pack up and head back home for a little R and R. Being home stirs up Kaye's memories of imaginary playmates from her childhood. Things start to get complicated when Kaye discovers something about herself that throws her into the role of being a pawn of the fairy courts. What she thinks of as her imaginary friends turn out to be real fairies that come back to either help or hurt her. Having to deal with magic, mothers, and one totally gorgeous knight who just won't go away is all part of 16 year old Kaye's new life. Definitely not for the timid, **Tithe** is a dark yet awesome book filled with detail and a fast plot that make the pages fly by.

—*Sarah Pate*

The Fairy Godmother

By Mercedes Lackey

★★★★★

In the world of the Five Hundred Kingdoms the tradition creates a fairy tale every minute, whether it be a girl becoming Sleeping Beauty or a prince a frog. Elena is supposed to be her kingdom's Cinderella.

You know the drill: evil stepmother, evil stepsisters, a ball, marrying the prince, living happily ever after. But there's one problem: the prince is way too young, so she goes looking for work. On the way, Elena stumbles upon a woman who offers her a job as her kingdom's fairy godmother. In no time, Elena is protecting the tradition from turning evil. Of course, her job usually puts her in the way of stubborn, arrogant princes. Finally, one prince gets on her last nerve, so Elena turns him into a donkey. She feels guilty afterwards so she takes him home to take care of him. One thing leads to another and Elena starts to write her own fairy tale. Although not Lackey's usual work, this book is still up to her level of entertaining plots! (for ages 16 and up)

—Sarah Pate

Ella Enchanted

By Gail Carson Levine

★★★★★

Ella Enchanted is yet another great Cinderella story. It is my favorite book because of all of Ella's adventures with ogres, centaurs, giants, princes, elves, evil stepsisters, and a curse of obedience. This book has a mix of laughter, tears, and excitement! With it being a new movie, I recommend you both see and read it! You'll enjoy both!

—Jennie Vaterlaus

Time of the Twins

By Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman

★★★★★

This book begins where **Dragons of Spring Dawning** leaves off. It starts out with Tika, a character from past books, in the Inn of the Last Home in Solace. Tanis, the hero of the lance, guides Crysania, a young cleric of good, to the Inn. There they split, and Tasselehoff Burrfoot, a prying kinder who means well, accompanies Crysania and leads her to Caramon. She then leads them to the Tower of High Sorcery in Wayreth forest, but they get stopped many times. They must stop for Caramon, who is completely drunk. Then, just as they are almost to the forest, Lord Soth, a dead knight, stops them. He then sends Crysania's soul to the resting place of her god. She is then but a shell on the earth. Caramon leads them all through the forest to the tower. They meet Par-Salian, the head of all magic. He then sends Lady Crysania and Caramon (and Tas by accident) back in time

to reclaim Raistlin, a powerful dark mage who wishes to become a god, and who also happens to be Caramon's twin. While they are back in time, Lady Crysania gets her soul back. Caramon also sobers up. He tries to kill a mage, but then finds out Raistlin has already killed the mage and taken his form. As time moves on, they must find a way to get back to their own time or they will die. The world is doomed, for a mountain blows and rains fire, known as the Cataclysm. This even is known to Caramon, Tas, and Crysania, but not to the people of the past. Will they survive?

This book was REALLY good! FANTASTIC! AMAZING!!! I couldn't put it down! I liked how the authors made this book an adventure, mystery, romance, and science fiction novel all in one.

—Colleen O'Connor

War of the Twins

By Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman

★★★★★

This book starts off where the previous book leaves the audience with a cliffhanger. Raistlin, a powerful mage of evil wishes to become a god, and will do anything to get his wish. He is even willing to sacrifice his own twin, Caramon, and the love of his life, Crysania. This is a touching story that is full of unexpected twists and turns.

—Colleen O'Connor

First Rider's Call

By Kristen Britain

★★★★★

The sequel to **Green Rider**, this book tells of Karigan G'ladheon's acceptance of her status as Green Rider after she answers the rider's call. But getting used to her new life as a King's Messenger isn't all Karigan has to worry about. The D'Yer wall is still breached and it's allowing evil to seep into the world. This evil is altering magic, drastically lessening it or changing it completely and all of the riders are suffering its effects. Karigan's fading powers have been changed so much that when she tries to make use of her brooch, she found herself going back in time and meeting her first rider. Unable to tell anyone of this because the captain has mysteriously locked herself in her room, Karigan is left to deal with Eltons, and the wall itself. But with an old, evil awakening behind the wall, the ending to this part of the story is very unexpected.

—Ally Schmidt

Night

By Elie Wiesel

★★★★★

This book is about the Holocaust. It is about the horrible years the author Elie Wiesel went through in his teens. When he was about 14, he was taken from his home and transported to a reception center for Auschwitz, one of the most horrible concentration camps for Jews in the world. Right when he arrived there, he, his family, and his friends had to go through the officer choosing and dividing the people. At that moment, Elie lost his mother and sisters forever. He would never be able to meet or see them again.

The story continues to tell you what it was like to live in the camp and to tell you what it felt like. Jews were afraid of being too weak, for if they were, they would be killed. You also get insight on the emotions of certain people and how some broke down and others kept the will to survive.

This book is a fairly sad but interesting book on the lives of the Jews in the camps. It can be dry at times, but it is really a fairly interesting book and you will probably be able to read it and see how strong and weak many humans can be and become.

—Christine Wu

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2425 S. Dobson Rd.
(602) 644-3441

