


Branches

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



Letter from the Editor!



As the holidays roll around again and mid-terms loom over the horizon for many a student, it's a sweet relief to take a break from studying. During these times many of us muse about how nice it would be to read something *other* than **As I Lay Dying**, for the fourth time in a row. Unfortunately, it's been so long since the carefree days of summer, that we hardly know where to begin looking for some delicious winter-break reads, let alone which books to choose. Fear not! Help is on the way! With our reviews in hand, you'll be able to find something to suit your fancy, no matter what your tastes.

Also, remember that while you're browsing here for books of your own, it's a great time to gather ideas for holiday presents. Do you remember the great review you read about **The Chronicles of Narnia**? It sounds like something your little sister would love. What about **The**

Big U? It could be just the thing to give to crazy ol' Uncle Melvin. Whether you're just browsing for fun, or you've got a mission to complete, **Branches** is here with the pick of the season. Happy Holidays!

—*Hilary Waterman*
Branches Editor

The Playmaker

By J.B. Cheaney ★★★★★

It all began with a mysterious clerk and that fateful shilling, the hot and dusty day Richard Malory arrived in bustling, colorful, and dirty Elizabethan London. Driven by hard times and the death of his mother, Richard is a simple country boy who finds himself in town, desperately seeking work and searching for any hint of his long-lost father. The only clue he has to his estranged parent's whereabouts is the name of a certain London lawyer, Martin Feather. But alas, despite all Richard does to find him, he feels that he's come to a dead end—that is, until he is attacked, robbed, and threatened at knifepoint to get out of town. Naturally, this only steels Richard's resolve to discover what is going on, and more importantly, how on earth a rather quiet fourteen-year-old figures into it all.

With the help of a girl, Richard finds the best place to hide in all of London—as an actor on the stage in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the play group headed by the famous Shakespeare, in

view of all but seen by no one. When he tries to piece together the plot he has gotten himself tangled up in, Richard swiftly uncovers a web of royal intrigue and religious conspiracy that runs deeper than the Thames itself. Richard only knows one thing for certain—he must get to the bottom of this, or instead of Juliet, *he'll* be lying in the tomb by the time this is over!

Riddled with mystery and steeped in a good pot of historical fact, this tale of adventure and suspense will leave even the most casual reader racing to the finish—for who knows what will happen to poor Richard? Will he simply act out the part that's given to him? Or can he learn to become his *own* playmaker?

—*Hilary Waterman*

The Magician's Nephew

By C.S. Lewis ★★★★★

The Magician's Nephew is the first book in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia. Set in London, England at a time when our grandparents are young, the readers witness the first encounter of the book's main characters: a young English girl and a grubby sensitive boy. Exploring the upstairs attic and enjoying many times of make-believe together, newfound friends Polly and Digory enter the forbidden office of a magician who happens to be Digory's uncle!

Uncle Andrew offers Polly a yellow ring which, when she puts it on, makes

Rating System

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

her disappear into an unknown world. Of course, Digory feels obligated to follow his friend and so their adventures begin. They find themselves in a warm and cozy forest, then in the desolate land of Charn, a room full of silent and still lords and ladies and much more.

A hilarious adventure arises when the wicked Queen of Charn is transported back to England and Digory, Polly, and even Uncle Andrew himself witness the creation of the mystical land called Narnia and its wonderful creator, the lion Aslan. This book is chock full of excitement and surprises and is sure to please young and curious readers of all ages.

—Kierstyn Lyts

Something Wicked This Way Comes

By Ray Bradbury ★★★★★

Jim Nightshade and Will Halloway are best friends despite being different as night and day. They're just two normal boys in a normal town until the mysterious "Cooger and Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show" arrives. Suddenly, strange things begin to happen: their teacher is somehow turned into a little girl and a lightning-rod seller is squashed into a malformed dwarf. Jim is drawn to the nightmare like a moth to light, while Will tries desperately to shut it all out, and their friendship since birth threatens to fall apart. Chilling and intriguing, I would recommend this book to anyone who likes a good scare.

—Shaoyuan Wu

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night

By Mark Haddon ★★ ★

This original novel, a national bestseller, is taken from the point of view of Christopher Boone, an autistic teenager.

After finding an innocent dog murdered, Christopher sets out, determined, to find the one responsible. His quest, unknowingly, leads him into one of the most daring things he has ever done: being on his own in a new place.

I thought this book was clever, with a one-of-a-kind voice. It had tidbits of interesting facts all through it. Some parts, though, tended to last too long and all his run-on sentences eventually became annoying. Other than that, it was OK and an excellent first novel for Mark Haddon.

—Kristin Fuschino

The Big U

By Neal Stephenson ★★★★★

For all you neophyte ASU-bound partiers and pranksters, **The Big U**, by Neal Stephenson, is a must-read. It is more than just a book of parties and pranks, however; it is a story about several students trapped within what could euphemistically be called a large public educational institute, A.K.A. American Megaversity. It has all of the associated ills, such as a massive nine-tower dorm called the Plex (modeled after the infamous Commons of Boston College), crazy frats, and many crazy student organizations, such as the Stalinist Underground Battalion and the Temple of Unlimited Godhead. It also has some rather uncommon issues, such as a nuclear waste dump in the basement "to provide revenue for eternity," and a society of Crobratislavonian janitors who dream of world domination. Part tragedy, part comedy, and part university, **The Big U** is a humorous yet enthralling page-turner that will keep you reading for hours on end. I only gave it four stars, though, because it is slightly hampered by uneven character development and an inconsistent point of view.

—Thomas Cong

Anthem

By Ayn Rand ★★★★★

I don't tend to enjoy futuristic writing, especially those that predict "the doom that is coming," an unpleasant commentary of society in its downward spiral. Ayn Rand's Anthem, however, pleasantly surprised me. I was delighted to find that by the story's end, I could actually feel hope through the despair.

Equality 7-2551, the protagonist, is challenged by the ideals of society. His thoughts and writings lead him to record his history; his experiments and convictions lead him to run away, choosing exile over being brainwashed. In his previous society, children are taught that everyone must think alike, in the name of equality and brotherhood. No individual is revealed; even first person singular pronouns are strictly forbidden from their vocabulary. Equality 7-2551 also feels a nameless emotion for a female, a fellow street-sweeper. Their new names for each other reveal their enlightenment: the Unconquered, and the Golden One. Upon finding a house of the past, more modern than anything they've ever seen before, a library of books opens the Unconquered one's mind to new ideas and the word "I." It is there that he selects the name Prometheus for himself, as the one who must suffer eternally for bringing fire to man. The Golden One is renamed Gaea, mother of a new kind of god. Here, they learn of the corruption of the word "we," and the worthlessness of equality and liberty if man cannot enjoy it for himself and himself alone. I loved the philosophy presented in such an understandable story, especially as a very short and engrossing read. I read it twice while "doing homework," so it should be no problem for our highly intelligent readers to revel in Anthem's song.

—Jessica Guo

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Teens
page at
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Dobson Ranch Branch Library

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



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