

Open Shelf

December 2003

mesa public library young adult advisory council book review newsletter

This month:

The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien

The Giver by Lois Lowry

Angels Watching Over Me

by Lulene McDaniel

Poets Against the War by Sam Hamill, ed.

The Lost by Jonathan Aycliffe

Batman Archives, Vol. 1 by Bob Kane

The First Part Last by Angela Johnson

Ella Minnow Pea by Mark Dunn

letter from the editor



Every December we YAACers practically glow with anticipation, awaiting our favorite day of the year... The premiere of the latest *Lord of the Rings* movie!

But as you wait in line the eve of December 17th, bedecked in your homemade hobbit costume (complete with faux furry hobbit feet), preordered tickets to *Return of the King* clutched in your stubby little hobbit hands, you may find yourself...bored. After all, 24 straight hours waiting in line will bore even the most die-hard Tolkienite. To remedy this dilemma, we at YAAC respectfully submit these books for your waiting-in-line needs. We've got horror, dystopian fiction, romance, a "progressively lipogrammatic fable," Batman, and yes, Tolkienites, *The Hobbit*. Enjoy!

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Erin Hutchinson

open shelf editor



rating system

bad ★
so-so ★★
good ★★★
excellent ★★★★★

Visit the Library's NEW Web Site:

www.mesalibrary.org

and see the Teens page!

The Hobbit

By J. R. R. Tolkien

Bilbo Baggins is a Hobbit used to living in comfort, peace and with food. But when a gang of Dwarves and a Wizard, in search of a treasure lost long before to a dragon, arrive on Bilbo's stoop, he finds himself employed in their gang, off to find great adventure – exactly what he didn't want! He roams far away from his comfy Hobbit hole to endless challenges out across the land. He fights orcs, the strange mangled creature Gollum, spiders, Wargs, wolf-rats on the other side of the Misty mountains, and play riddles with a dragon. All the time, he's wishing to get back to that comfortable Hobbit hole.

The Hobbit is easier to read than the *Lord of the Rings* series, which is how I started. It begins very simply, allowing things to be explained, but at the end it seems like the writing has somehow become more complicated and involving. It also made things much easier to comprehend, revealing things bit by bit. There is a wonderful blend of danger, carefree life, and interesting new aspects when you remove a Hobbit from his home!

—Rosalinda Albrecht ★★★★★

The Giver

By Lois Lowry

Jonas is happy and doesn't have any problems in his life until he is picked to be a Receiver of Memory. This happens when all of the children in the community who are turning twelve are assigned jobs. Jonas is asked to go to an Annex where he sees thousands and

thousands of books. Where he comes from there are only two books, the dictionary and the Book of Rules. When the Giver starts to train him, he transmits very vivid memories of the past into Jonas. After Jonas sees a number of memories, including memories of Christmas, snow, the sunshine, and even color, he realizes that there is also such things as love and caring out in the world, and that their sheltered community is not the only place on earth. He has been locked up and kept from seeing beyond. He starts to see what it was like back and back and back, generations and generations ago. However, some memories are not that happy and magnificent. Some are very painful. Jonas has no choice but to lie to his parents and friends and to suffer the pain and the responsibility. He finds out stuff that he was not meant to find out, and that leads to trouble.

The beginning of this book is very slow and the point isn't clearly made on where the small community is located. As I read on, the book started to make sense and I got more and more into it. It is a very clever book that any teen can read and enjoy.

—Maya Patel ★★★★★

Angels Watching Over Me

By Lurlene McDaniel

It's Christmas. Seventeen-year-old Leah is stuck in the hospital with a broken finger, her mom is in Japan on a honeymoon with Leah's new step-father, and the doctors keep performing tests on her. Merry Christmas! Leah is confused because the doctors and nurses

won't tell her why she can't go home. After all, she only has a broken finger, right? Wrong. As it turns out, Leah has a special type of bone cancer. As she tries to cope with the fact that she will die, Leah gets to know her roommate, a young Amish girl named Rebekah. Through their friendship, and Rebekah's family, she learns that miracles can come in all different forms.

—Lora Eubanks ★ ★ ★ ★

Poets Against the War

Edited by Sam Hamill

The title is fairly self-explanatory. The book is a collection of poems by poets, famous and unknown, war vets and schoolchildren, American and Iraqi. Some of the poems are rather graphic, so it's not for the squeamish reader. It is very touching, however. It sheds some light on America's favorite pastime.

—Beth Dormady ★ ★ ★ ★

The Lost

By Jonathan Aycliffe

Weird. That is the only adjective to describe this book. Add about 1,000 "verys" and you're close to the level of weirdness this book entails.

Not that it's bad. It's such an interesting blend of fact and fiction that you can't help but keep reading. The story follows Michael, (in Romanian, "Mihai") by presenting letters and documents from various people. He has inherited a castle in Romania that no one every mentioned, and he goes there to check it out. It turns out that his father and grandfather ran from the Castle Vlaicu because...well, if I told you, why would you read it? But as they say in Spaceballs, "It's not what you're thinking. It's much, much worse."

—Alyssa Ratledge ★ ★ ★

Batman Archives, Vol. I

By Bob Kane

If you enjoy reading Batman, this is the book for you. It is a collection of Batman graphic novels from when it first came out. It took me a while to read it, but then, that's what happens when school starts in the middle of the first adventure. It was a pretty good book, with the exception of the repeated phrase "Bruce

Wayne, who is really the Batman!" or some similar variation. But then, I guess it's there for those with very short attention spans.

—Deidre Oberpriller ★ ★ ★ ★

The First Part Last

By Angela Johnson

Bobby gets an unusual present for his sixteenth birthday—a pregnant girlfriend. Although Bobby is only sixteen, and he finds himself raising a little girl, whom he loves. Social workers had told Bobby and Nia, his girlfriend, that they should put the baby up for adoption, if only for the sake of their baby. But they don't. When all their plans are set, Nia is struck with a disease, and Bobby takes on the role of caring for the child himself, learning the true responsibilities of being a father.

This is heartwarming and heartbreaking, leaving the reader wanting to know more about the characters and the situation. It tells the story in flashbacks from the present day to past events leading up to the present, giving the reader the full knowledge and power to think about the causes and effects of the previous decisions. I was so intrigued by this book that I finished it in one day. I suggest it to all readers. It gives a new definition of what responsibility and love truly are.

—Rosalinda Albrecht ★ ★ ★ ★

Ella Minnow Pea

By Mark Dunn

The land of Nollop is home to the creator of the famous sentence that contains all 26 of the letters of the alphabet—"The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog." The Nollopians are very proud of their land's literary heritage, and have an obsessive devotion to language. The sentence is even memorialized on a marble placard in the capital. Disaster strikes when a letter from the famous sentence falls from the placard. The elderly members of the Council that rules the land of Nollop decide that this is a message from beyond the grave. They think it is from the writer of the notorious sentence saying that the fallen letter should be eliminated from the land. People who speak the offending letter or possess any piece of paper with the letter on it are subject to banishment.

Soon, letters are dropping like flies from

the placard and it becomes increasingly impossible for the Nollopians to communicate. An underground rebellion swells as the Nollopians struggle to get their precious letters restored.

Few book covers require translation, but *Ella Minnow Pea's* does. According to the cover, the book is a "progressively lipogrammatic epistolary fable," meaning that the book is composed of letters to and from various characters, and as the book goes on, certain letters begin to be eliminated from use. Clearly, this is not your normal novel!

Much in the spirit of *Animal Farm*, *Ella Minnow Pea* warns about the dangers to a society when people are forced to censor their speech. Even more entertaining are the verbal acrobatics of the citizens of Nollop as their letters are eliminated. Overall, I would definitely recommend *Ella Minnow Pea* to anyone who loves liberty and the English language.

—Erin Hutchinson ★ ★ ★ ★



January 2-31, 2004

The City of Mesa Library is sponsoring its sixth annual **Battle of the Bards Poetry Contest** for teens and adults. First, second and third place prizes will be \$75, \$50, and \$25 gift certificates to Borders Books & Music. Teen entry forms, for ages 12-17, will be available at the Main Library Youth Services desk and at the Reference desks at the Dobson Ranch and Red Mountain Branch Libraries.

Winning entries will be read at the **Battle of the Bards Poetry Reading** at the Main Library on Tuesday, April 27, 7-8:30 p.m.

Learn more at:



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