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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 "spring" rolls around for Arizona, it's time to welcome that glorious season of...the exact same weather we've had every other day of the year. Okay, so seasons only exist in theory around here, and we may not even *want* to think about summer, but there are other ways of tracking the passage of time. Take books, for example – have you ever stumbled across a book on a shelf, and suddenly remembered being drawn into that story? Were you whisked away to some far-off island? Did you discover your favorite humor columnist in there? Perhaps it was the book that inspired you to become an auto mechanic or a vegetarian.

No matter what genre, the books you've read have become a kind of tangible history of your interests, your thoughts, and your curiosities throughout life. Take a moment sometime this month to think about the old friends you have on the bookshelf; maybe even blow off some dust and pay a visit to one or two of them. Books may come and go in our lives, but the memories they give us, and the things we learn from them we will carry throughout all seasons of time.

– Hilary Waterman
Branches Editor



Princess Nevermore

By Dian Curtis Regan ★★★★★

A beautiful young princess named Quinn was born in a magical kingdom called Mandria. This place has magical creatures, wizards, and witches and it is located underneath the earth's surface.

Melikar, an older powerful wizard, has a wishing pool that looks into upper earth. Princess Quinn longs to go into the other world and explore its surface. One day she gets her wish and is magically sent to earth by accident from the wishing pool.

She meets three people there that let her stay with them. Quinn told them her secret and they promised to keep it. While on earth, she learns about "weird" cultures and objects (i.e. telephones). She faces both terrifying and wonderful moments during her stay on earth. She later wants to go back home, but doesn't know how. Will she ever get home or will she have to live at upper earth?

I thought this book had an amazing story and a suspenseful plot. It is worth reading again.

- Desiree Fuschino

Ivanhoe

By Sir Walter Scott ★★★★★

As I wandered through the library aisles one day, Ivanhoe, by Sir Walter Scott, caught my eye. The summary on the back only intrigued me more, and I knew I just *had* to read it. I'm pleased to say I wasn't disappointed.

The plot centers around the Norman-Saxon conflict at the end of Richard the First's reign. When the story began, I admit I was a bit confused, and it wasn't until much later that I realized who Ivanhoe was and what his connection to Cedric "the Saxon" was. After that, however, I began to get into the story and understand it. The words flowed brilliantly in a

colorful tapestry that described how Cedric's dream to unite the Saxons and overthrow the Normans was shattered, yet at the same time his ward Rowena's true love Ivanhoe (also his son) returned, and with him King Richard Coeur-de-Lion. That's putting it very generally, however; what made me fall in love with the story were the miniscule details, twists, and unexpected humor. I loved the way Scott popped into the story, addressing the reader personally as though he were telling the story in person. He gave background information whenever I needed it, and the language was not as intimidating as it first seemed.

Of all the characters in the book, my favorite would have to be Rebecca the Jewess. The Saxon lady Rowena was proud, kind, and stubborn (though not nearly as stubborn as her guardian Cedric), but her character was not deeply involved with the "goings-on" of the book. True, some of the problems that arose were because of her: the knight DeBracy's assistance in a kidnap, the Saxon, Athelstane rushing to Rowena's defense and seemingly being killed on the spot, and lastly, Ivanhoe's banishment from Cedric's house in the first place. However, she herself was not present for much of the book. Cedric's temper got on my nerves, and although the fool, Wamba's jests made me laugh, he was too minor a character to be my favorite. Rebecca, on the other hand, was determined, quiet, humble, kind, and many things I could only aspire to be. The pureness of her heart and her faith pulled her through the struggles she endured. Many times the dilemmas were caused by her religion (combined with her beauty) and how vehemently others were opposed to it. Near the end of the book she was accused of being a sorceress and condemned to burn at the stake, yet she defiantly said "May heaven be praised! Death is the least of my apprehensions in this den of evil."

Rating System

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

Though the distant setting (both time and place) of Ivanhoe makes it harder to relate to, Sir Walter Scott did a wonderful job in making it come alive. His meaning is sometimes hard to comprehend because of his word choice, but that's what a dictionary is for, right? Overall, I really admire Scott's writing ability, exhibited in Ivanhoe, and his wry sense of humor.

- Shaoyuan Wu

Beast

By Donna Jo Napoli ★★★★★

Orasmyn is a young Persian Prince who carries the same responsibilities that his father did before he became king. He must go and mingle with the people before the festival and sacrifice that is tradition in his religion of Islam. But by allowing the wrong animal to be sacrificed, Orasmyn angers a *pari*, or fairy, and is cursed. Because of this curse (the specifics of which I will not divulge – you have to read the book!), the Prince finds himself changed into a beast. Knowing that he cannot survive in Persia, Orasmyn travel to India and then across Europe, to France. This is, of course, where he meets Belle and where new trials emerge. It is up to Belle to break the curse, but unfortunately, she has no idea that there is one.

If you like fairy tales, myths, and legends, then Donna Jo Napoli is the author to read.

- Ally Schmidt

How Good is Good Enough?

By Andy Stanley ★★★★★

How good are you? Good enough to go to heaven, right? Yeah, c'mon. *You've* never killed or stolen, and you've kept those things called the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, you should think twice about that.

This hand-sized book sifts through thought processes such as these, shaking the groundwork of the belief that if someone does enough good deeds, or doesn't do enough bad ones, that person will gain a space in heaven. Anyway, how do you even know that's true? In the book's own words, "if you believe that only good people go to heaven, the only honest answer to that question is 'I don't know.' Why? Because none of us knows what we deserve; we can't find the standard by which we are being measured." Makes you think, huh?

That's only the beginning – every single chapter is full of these thought-provoking statements and tons of wisdom that shines light onto these issues. Don't have enough incentive to read the book yet? Just get a load of the way this guy writes – you'd think Andy Stanley was simply having a chat with you over a Starbucks coffee. He's not delivering a deep theological breakdown of who goes to heaven, who does not, and why, he's just giving his viewpoint and powerfully supporting

it. At the end, he brings you to a shocking realization of the truth, but he still lets you decide. I won't give it away – find out for yourself, like I did, what is the truth about this question: how good is good enough?

- Kierstyn Lyts

When JFK Was My Father

By Amy Gordon ★★★

I have this rather strange habit of picking out books from the library's re-shelving pile. I figure that if others have read these books and decided to return them rather than burn them, they must be okay. As it turns out, *When JFK Was My Father* is a decent book, though a bit trite. Maybe I read too much; however, books about budding young female writers whose lives brim with tragedy and drama seem to be a dime a dozen. This character Georgia, is different in that she writes to and converses with her spiritual father, President Kennedy; she also hears the guiding voice of Mrs. Beard, the original director and founder of Beard School. Georgia finds herself abandoned at boarding school, where her only friends are her English teacher (surprise, surprise), the maid, her stamp collection, and her photograph of the president. She hasn't much to look forward to, with a philandering father and a chain-smoking mother - her only hope is to find her Sand Prince and live in a sand castle on the beach, built by the memory of a kiss that happened "once upon a time." The novel was endearing and memorable, but it did not teach me how to become a writer; I do not live in Brazil, my parents are relatively normal, and I do not attend a boarding school with a resident ghost. I guess my only hope is that the next president is as worthy of my admiration and adoration as my father is.

- Jessica Guo

Possession

By Lynne Ewing ★★★★★

Have you ever felt like someone was taking over your thoughts? Like your body was there, talking and having a blast while you were watching for a distance? In the book *Possession*, Serena has that very thing happen to her. She ends up, on and on throughout the book, waking up walking, having no idea where she is, because someone keeps going into her mind and blocking her memories! This book is number eight in the *Daughters of the Moon* series, and is just as great as the first! If you haven't read any of the books, I suggest starting from the beginning, so you can fully understand this can't-put-down-your-book series that will blow any fantasy-loving girl away!

- Jennie Vaterlaus

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

By Douglas Adams ★★★★★

The Hitchhiker's Guide is probably the funniest book I've ever read. I know that sounds like I'm exaggerating, but I kid you not. Douglas Adams is, in my opinion, the best British author to ever come out of the 1980s.

It starts out with this guy, Arthur Dent, whose house is about to be demolished for a freeway overpass. Little does he know, the entire Earth is about to have the same problem, exactly the same. As Arthur is lying in the mud, trying to talk the men in the bulldozers out of tearing down his house, his friend Ford comes along and drags him to the bar. Arthur flips out because he doesn't know what's going to happen, but Ford does. You see, Ford is an alien – not from another country, however, but from a different *galaxy*. Just as the whole world is about to be blown up, Ford and Arthur catch a ride on one of the ships scheduled to "bulldoze" planet Earth. The rest of the story consists of Arthur and Ford trying to find somewhere to go in the galaxy, and their crazy adventures along the way. This book is filled with the dry, sarcastic humor that Douglas Adams is famous for, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

- Kelsey Phillips

What is YAAC?

Join other teens at the Dobson Ranch Library who love reading! Share your thoughts and ideas on what you have read by presenting book reviews at our monthly meetings and writing reviews for *Branches*, our bimonthly publication written and edited by teenagers. Members are considered official library volunteers. Group meets once a month. Applications are available in the Teen area. For ages 12-18 or grades 7-12.

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