

open shelf

November
2004

city of mesa library young adult advisory council book review newsletter

letter from the editor



And we're back on themes!

Last month I attempted a Halloween horror stories-type letter, but there weren't enough reviews. This month, I'm ready to try another theme. ^_^

November is the month when we Americans celebrate Thanksgiving, reliving past events. To honor that, this month's issue is almost entirely historical fiction, excepting **The Tao of Pooh** because, quite frankly, Pooh rocks.

Also, note this month that our rating system has expanded from a four to a five-star basis. That taken care of ...on to reviews!

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rating system

bad; needs work ★
so-so ★★
average ★★★
good ★★★★
excellent; perfect ★★★★★

Visit the Library's Web Site:
www.mesalibrary.org
and see the **Teens** page!

A Great and Terrible Beauty

By Libba Bray

One of the best things about being in YAAC is that every year, you get to choose one book that is going to be your "Favorite Book of the Year." My favorite book this year is a book entitled **A Great and Terrible Beauty** by Libba Bray.

This story takes place in the late 1800's. It's about a sixteen-year-old British girl, Gemma, who has the ability to see into the future, visit the spirit world, and make things happen with her thoughts, like summoning the wind. After the mysterious death of her mother in India, she goes to London and is sent to a school for girls. There, she realizes that a young, enigmatic lad who is against anything to do with magic is following her all the way from India to Britain. Upon meeting, he warns Gemma not to use her magical powers, or terrible things will happen, especially in the spirit world. But how can she stop using her magical abilities when the only way to see her mother again is by visiting the spirit world?

This is an exciting and engaging story that throughout has many scintillatingly suspenseful twists that keep you at the proverbial edge of your seat and compelled to read more. Although the novel has a bit of a classic feel, it is light and easy to read. So, just sit back, relax, and read this gripping

This month:

A Great and Terrible Beauty by Libba Bray
The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara
The Red Badge of Courage
by Stephen Crane
Pirates! by Celia Rees
The Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff
Walking on Air by Kelly Easton
Grey is the Color of Hope
by Irina Ratushinskaya
Sister of My Heart
by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

book. You have my full guarantee that you will truly enjoy it.

—Gerald Del Rosario ★★★★★

The Killer Angels

By Michael Shaara

Of the two historical fiction books I have read, this one is the more pointless. It is a book dealing with the Battle of Gettysburg, which is located at the dull end of the Civil War. The earlier bits of the war are amusing: spectator warfare, bands of gypsies following brigades, and amazingly stupid generals are all fun to watch. Shaara has a straightforward writing style—so straightforward that it makes a boring bit of history even more boring.

—Jeremy Davis ★★

The Red Badge of Courage

By Stephen Crane

Henry Fleming, or "the youth," joins the Union Army, completely disregarding the life he's leaving behind. He then realizes that he's made a huge mistake when confronting the horrors of war that he's become a part of. His courage is the only thing that will pull him through.

The descriptions and figurative language within this novel are excellent. However, this is the only strong point

within this “classic.” The plot is dull, mainly consisting of battles and between-battles, and the characterization is fairly bland. If you’re into classic novels or Civil War fiction, check it out. If not... avoid enlistment.

—*Joe Tuccillo* ★★ ★

Pirates!

By Celia Rees

Normally I don’t read historical fiction, but as with **East**, it was on the Teens’ Top Ten nomination list, so I decided to read it. The basic plot is very similar to the Bloody Jack books—a girl wants to get away from life, so she goes to sea. However, instead of being a street urchin who goes to the Royal Navy, the main character (Nancy Kington) is fleeing an arranged marriage and joins a pirate ship. Nancy and her “slave” Minerva Sharpe are on the run, and an old acquaintance of Nancy’s agrees to take her on board his new ship, *Deliverance*. The acquaintance was a sailor who chose to go on the account when the ship was taken by pirates, and is now captain.

During their piracy, Minerva reveals that she is really Nancy’s half-sister, which kind of explains why they are more like best friends than slave-and-mistress. I was very disappointed with the ending because the author builds and builds and builds up the story—then the books just ends. She doesn’t go into much detail at the end and has too much detail in the rest of it. Anyway, I’m going to leave you with this: I don’t care whether you read this book or not. If you like historical fiction and abrupt endings, be my guest.

—*Deidre Oberpriller* ★★ ★

The Tao of Pooh

By Benjamin Hoff

When first taking a look at the principles of Taoism, many people turn to reading the convoluted translations of ancient scholars, attending mind-numbing lectures that really don’t have much

relevance in the long run, or immersing themselves in the culture and then getting confused when trying to adapt to a completely different lifestyle.

While all those people go about trying to furiously understand Just What Taoism Is, the calmer and more level-headed take a look at **The Tao of Pooh** by Benjamin Hoff. **The Tao of Pooh** explains Taoism as it should be explained: by telling a stuffed bear just how perfectly he and his friends illustrate this philosophy. Excellent book.

—*Beth Dormandy* ★★ ★★ ★

Walking on Air

By Kelly Easton

June is anything but normal. She has been walking tightropes since she was very small for her father’s religious revivals. Her family constantly travels across the country, so June has nothing—no real home, no friends to speak of, except a few long-gone acquaintances. But when her father is arrested, she may get another chance at life.

This book blew me away within the first two pages. Be prepared for a shocking and sad tale that will keep you hooked for all time. I highly recommend it!

—*Maggie Humphrey* ★★ ★★ ★

Grey is the Color of Hope

Irina Ratushinskaya

Those of you who have read about the Holocaust know about the horrific camps and their conditions. But the Holocaust ended in 1945. In Russia, under Stalin’s regime and beyond, prison camps remained alive and well all the way into the early 90’s. Irina Ratushinskaya, a poet, is sentenced to seven years in one of these gulags for her political protest and poems about the Soviet government. This book, her account of the time she spent away from her husband in a freezing prison camp, displays vividly the terror of the KGB. Anyone who’s read Solzhenitzyn’s **One**

Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, and wants to see a gulag from a woman’s point of view—READ THIS BOOK. You’ll be glad you did.

—*Andrea Alonge* ★★ ★★ ★

Sister of My Heart

By Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

A graduated YAACer raved about this book for years, so when I happened to find it (lying on the floor, no less), I remembered her and picked it up. Thank you, Ella.

Sister of My Heart is the tale of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, and the surprising twists of fate that lead them away from their childhood home in India and separate their worlds in marriage. But neither of them gets the life they’ve expected, and they have to find a way to keep going without the companionship they cherished while growing up.

Okay, there is absolutely no way I could do this book justice: even Ella, who is a far better reviewer than I, could only scratch the surface of this beautiful novel. It’s so cliché, but “read it for yourself to find out.”

—*Alyssa Ratledge* ★★ ★★ ★

What is YAAC?



The Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) is a group of teens from many of Mesa’s junior and senior high schools. They hold meetings twice monthly to review books for this newsletter and to plan special activities. They also help the librarians in Mesa Public Library’s Young Adult Room at the Main Library as volunteers and assist with programs.

If you are interested in becoming a member of YAAC, call (480) 644-2734 or stop by the Young Adult service desk and ask for an application.

Learn more at:

 mesalibrary.org
City of Mesa Library on the Web

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