

# Rant & Rave

## Book reviews for you, by you!

If you're like us, you've been waiting the whole school year for summer to come so you can read the books YOU want to read—not the ones your English teacher assigned you, but the ones you've been staring at longingly while you crammed for tests and typed papers late into the night. Fear not, intrepid readers! Summer is almost here, and that means plenty of time to sit by the pool, under a shady tree, or in the back seat of a car on a road trip, reading to your heart's content. If you're wondering what to read next, our reviewers have some great suggestions for you, everything from epic fantasy and chilling non-fiction to murder mysteries and manga, with a few classics thrown in, as well.

Four times each year, we collect book reviews from teens across Asheville and Buncombe County and publish them in *RANT & RAVE*. Our reviewers rate books on the following scale:



### *Tears of the Giraffe*, by Alexander McCall Smith



It is uncommon to find many novels set in Botswana. Let alone mystery novels. Alexander McCall Smith, however, has set this entire series of books there (twelve so far and counting). This is not the only component that sets Mr. Smith's book apart from other mysteries, though. Authors such as Agatha Christie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle focus on the "who?" and "how?" components of their novels and short stories, while Mr. Smith strives to answer the question of "why?" Why do these characters commit the acts that they do?

*Tears of the Giraffe* is the second book in Mr. Smith's award-winning *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series. This series follows the adventurous Precious Ramotswe, or, as she is called by even her fiancé, Mma Ramotswe. Mma Ramotswe is a "traditionally built" woman (she wears a size 22 dress) who spent the money that her father left her when he died on the very first private detective agency in Botswana. What makes her business even more unique is that she is a lady detective.

At the end of the first book in the series, *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, Mma Ramotswe agrees to

marry Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, the reliable mechanic, and in *this* book, their relationship and family is developed when Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni adopts two orphans. On the professional level, Mma Ramotswe solves the cases that come to her at the agency with the help of the newly promoted assistant detective Mma Makutsi. On the personal level, she tries to acclimate herself to the idea that she will soon be gaining not only a husband, but a son and a daughter as well.

This book is very leisurely; at no point could it be considered action-packed. This works to both its advantage and its disadvantage. The book is a calm read with interesting characters, settings, and concepts. However, at times it can be slow going. If Mr. Smith were to keep the pace up a little more, the book would be much more readable.

Overall, *Tears of the Giraffe* is a wonderful read. Unlike the first book in the series, it does not end on a hook. This book does not need one. It's so good that you're left eagerly awaiting the next book in this delectable series. If you're looking for something similar, try other novels by Mr. Smith. For mystery novels with a similarly self-assured and splendid protagonist, try reading Diana Gabaldon's *Lord John* series.

— Martha Speegle-Snell, 12th grade  
Black Mountain Library

### Do you want your review published in *RANT & RAVE*?

Anyone ages 11 to 18 can submit a review. Look for a submission form at your local Buncombe County public library. (Or write a review in your own style – just make sure to tell us your name, the author's name, and the title of the book.) Turn your review in at any library and look for it in the next issue of *RANT & RAVE*! Deadline for the Fall issue: Aug. 18, 2012.

**Graceling, by Kristin Cashore**



*What is the book about?*

In a fictional world, Katsa, the king's niece, is gifted with a "grace," a special talent that, in her world, puts you under complete control of the king, to do his bidding. All too soon, her grace is revealed to be exceptional at the worst thing in the world: A talent to kill others. When a neighboring kingdom's elder goes missing, Katsa teams up with the elder's grandson, Prince Po, to find him, and destroy a man with a grace even more horrible than Katsa's.

*What did you like?*

I loved Katsa, the heroine. How she's not afraid to do anything, how she never doubts her abilities. The characters in the book are the best part, especially the antagonist, King Leck!

*What did you NOT like?*

It was a little morbid for my taste. At some parts, it can move a little slow. But other than that, it was excellent!

*Would you recommend this book to your friends?*

Definitely.

*Lasting thought you took from the book. . .*

Don't underestimate yourself and your abilities.

— Anonymous, 11th grade  
Weaverville Library

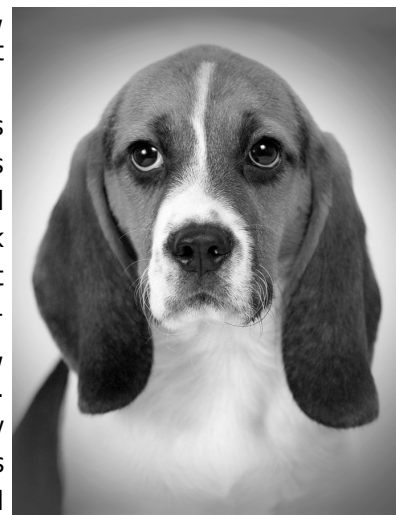
**Where the Red Fern Grows, by Wilson Rawls**



The book I chose for this review is *Where the Red Fern Grows*, by Wilson Rawls, the story of a young, poor Southern boy named Billy Coleman who buys two young hound dogs for hunting. The story is a triumphant tale set in an early 1900s rural setting in the Ozarks. The boy and his two companions, named Old Dan and Little Ann, grow together and develop a deep bond that lasts until the heartbreaking end.

I read this book in the seventh grade and I still remember it to this day. The story reminds me of my days when I was young and loved my animal companions that deeply. Those days are long gone, but this tale brings back those fond memories of my younger days. I'm not too sure what the theme to this book really is, but I always thought it was respect.

The author's writing style was quite interesting. I could read this book for a while without getting overwhelmed by large, cumbersome words. The all-around flow of the book was smooth and fluent. I didn't spend much



time wondering what the author meant, or was trying to say. Also, I had no trouble trying to figure out what was going on. The language of the book was basic, but at the same time, had a hint of Southern sophistication that was correct for the book's setting.

*Where the Red Fern Grows* truly is a classic that is rivaled by few in the Southern tale category. A book that is another classic is *Old Yeller*. A book with similar writing style is by Fred Gipson. That book also has a similar story as *Where the Red Fern Grows*, where a young boy has a similar deep bond with his canine companion, and have their bond tragically ended.

As a Southern boy raised in that country style, I have a deep love and fondness for this tale.

— Jacob Laughter, 18 2

**GET YOUR ZOMBIE ON!**

**Join the Weaverville Public Library's Teen Awesome Group for their Book Movie Trailer program series!**

TAG teens voted to create a book trailer for *The Forest of Hands and Teeth*, by Carrie Ryan. They have read and discussed the



book and written the script, and they're now preparing to film the trailer. At the finale, they will screen the final cut at a red carpet library event!

All teens 12-18 welcome ; join in at any time. Call (828) 250-6482 for more information and to sign up for e-mail updates.

***The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien**

*What is the book about?*

Frodo Baggins, a hobbit from the Shire, travels across Middle Earth to destroy the One Ring, and crush Sauron's reign. *The Lord of the Rings* is split into three books, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*, although Tolkien originally intended it to be one whole book. His publisher insisted on splitting it into a trilogy.

*What did you like?*

The epic adventure, the diverse characters, the use of ancient languages, the battles, the conflicts, the creatures, and Tolkien's unique writing style. Basically everything.

*What did you NOT like?*

Nothing. *The Lord of the Rings* is AMAZING. It is my favorite book series.

*Would you recommend this book to your friends?*

HECK YES.

*Lasting thought you took from the book. . .*

*The Lord of the Rings* is known as the greatest fantasy tale of all time, and reading it myself, Tolkien's work inspires me, because I enjoy writing fantasy tales.

— Claire Eubanks, 11th grade

***Sailor Moon*, by Naoko Takeuchi**

*Sailor Moon*, by Naoko Takeuchi, is about a 14 year-old girl named Usagi Tsukino who meets a magical cat who tells her that she's been chosen to be a guardian. She transforms into a crime-fighting magical girl who goes by Sailor Moon. She first transforms when her friend's family's jewelry store is being robbed. In the rest of the first volume, she meets other girls that were chosen as guardians, Ami Mizuno, who goes by Sailor Mercury, Rei Hino, who goes by Sailor Mars, and Makoto Kino, who goes by Sailor Jupiter.

*Sailor Moon* is a classic manga and anime series. It was one of the first series that helped bring anime to the United States, and it started up the "magical girl" series in Japan. For a lot of anime and manga fans, *Sailor Moon* is their introduction to the genre. I never actually watched or read the series when I was younger. It's harder to get into for older teenagers, because the series is disgustingly cute, and after being an anime fan for a long time, the typical cut, sparkly, magical girl series gets boring.



Also, the art style in *Sailor Moon* isn't something a lot of fans now would be used to seeing. It uses an older manga drawing style, which even compared to more modern anime styles, gives the characters huge, sparkly eyes, pointy noses, long limbs, and gravity-defying hair. I didn't really like the style, because I'm used to the slightly more realistic style that most manga artists use today. I liked reading it, because of how important the series is to the anime and manga genres now, but it's hard to get into because of the art style and the magical girl genre.

I would recommend this series to any of the few anime fans who haven't already read it. It's a classic anime and manga that I think any fan should at least try out. For someone who isn't familiar with anime and manga, it would be quite strange to read. Mostly, I would recommend this to people who are familiar with anime and manga, because of how important the series was to bringing anime to the United States, despite how hard it is to get into because of the art style and genre.

— Sierra Barlowe, 17

***The Knife Man: Blood, Body-Snatching, and the Birth of Modern Surgery, by Wendy Moore***



Today, surgical students are each given their own cadaver to dissect and textbooks that detail what they are seeing. With this corpse, they are able to explore the inner workings of the human body with their own two hands. But what did these students do before people were given the option of donating their bodies to science, before scientists understood the intricacies of our anatomy? John Hunter is the man who advanced the field of medicine to such lengths that today he is considered the father of modern surgery, artificial insemination, experimental biology, early evolutionary theory, dental implants, and taxidermy.

*The Knife Man* is divided into chapters that are both a specific person or animal and a body part (The Coach Driver's Knee, The Kangaroo's Skull, The Anatomist's Heart, etc.). Each chapter details how their title is relevant and delves into Hunter's life and career, as well as the conditions of his time period, the mid and late eighteenth century. John Hunter was a poor Scottish farm boy who came to London to join his elder brother William at his new school of anatomy. The brothers were each other's antithesis. John was the wild child who cursed, drank, and caroused with ladies of questionable reputation, but one might say he was also an anatomy prodigy. William, on the other hand, was a religious man who followed his era's mores. He went by the book when it came to teaching and learning. Unlike his brother, he wasn't as naturally adept with anatomy as his brother was.

John Hunter flouted the accepted medical texts and ideas, questioning everything and arriving at his own conclusions (that were nearly always correct and years ahead of their time), jump-starting eighteenth and nineteenth century medicine. Wendy Moore does a splendid job of relating his life and times with fascinating detail that is written to amaze and enthrall the reader. Since the book focuses not only on his life, but also on the science of anatomy in his lifetime and what that entailed (body-snatching), this book can't exactly be categorized as biography, more of a history -biography hybrid.

While Moore does a wonderful job portraying Hunter's career, she does not focus as much as I would like for her to on his relationships with other people. She especially negates his relationship with his children and wife. It must have taken a resilient woman to tolerate his anatomical antics, and the book would have been better if we had learned more of her and the children.

While reading this book, I was reminded of the book *Stiff*, by Mary Roach. The content of *The Knife Man* is similar to this book in that it is devoted to what happens to people's bodies once they die. This book's unique genre, however, reminded me of the book *The Monsters*, by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. This book, like *The Knife Man*, is mainly a biography, but is a mixture of genres that make it difficult to categorize.

— Martha Speegle-Snell, 12th grade  
Black Mountain Library



***The Ghost Writer, by Robert Harris***

*The Ghost Writer* is a novel about an unnamed man only referred to as "The Ghost." He's hired to write the memoirs of the ex-British Prime Minister Adam Lang, after the first writer, Mike McAra, suspiciously dies. A ghost writer is not supposed to get recognized for his work on a book. He simply interviews the client and writes a book for his client to publish.

The Ghost knows exactly what to do, as he has written many books about washed-up pop stars and aging actors, although he's literally gong into this with absolutely no knowledge of politics. However, he's confident as he flies to Martha's Vineyard in almost complete secrecy, because the manuscript is too valuable to Lang to be left in anyone else's care. As The Ghost begins interviewing Adam Lang, he realizes something isn't completely right about the Langs or Mike McAra's death. His death was called a suicide and quickly shrugged off by the Langs and the police, but not everyone on Martha's Vineyard so easily accepted it. The Ghost then

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starts his own private investigation, hoping to find out what the ex-prime minister is really hiding, but to his surprise, there's more to politics that he could ever imagine.

*The Ghost Writer* is a compelling book revealing the world of deceit in politics as told in the point of view of the main character, The Ghost. The Ghost has charisma and it's a real joy to read his story as he gives a true feeling to an actual British man in the profession of ghost writing. He has a sense of humor not only with himself, but to the people around him as he observes his surroundings. Robert Harris has written a cast of characters that are inevitably some of the most interesting characters I've read, all the way down to the least important of characters. The descriptions of Martha's Vineyard in the cold days of January literally make you feel the chilling wind upon your face as The Ghost describes it.

*The Ghost Writer* is sure to please anyone who enjoyed *The Lincoln Lawyer*, because it has the same mystery and suspense that will grip your enthusiasm and keep you wondering until the very satisfying end.

— Rachel Telleyrian, 11th grade

## Upcoming Events for Teens at Buncombe County Libraries

### Dream of Flight: Make Model Airplanes that Really Fly with the Asheville Buncombe Aeromodelers

11 a.m. Friday, June 8

Swannanoa Public Library

Space is limited. Please call (828) 250-6486 for more information or to reserve a ticket.

### TAG Meeting

4– 5:30 p.m. Friday, June 8

Weaverville Public Library

### TAG Meeting

4– 5:30 p.m. Friday, June 22

Weaverville Public Library

### Dream Big! A Visit with Young Adult Novelist Stephanie Perkins

6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 1

Pack Memorial Library

### Own the Night: Teen Self Defense with W.N.C. Center for Self Defense

3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 4

East Asheville Public Library

You must turn in a signed permission slip to participate.

Parents welcome to attend with teens.

Call 828-250-4738 for more info.

Check in with us online for information about future programs at [www.buncombecounty.org/Governing/Depts/Library/Teens.aspx](http://www.buncombecounty.org/Governing/Depts/Library/Teens.aspx)

OR

[www.facebook.com/BuncombeCountyPublicLibraryTeens](http://www.facebook.com/BuncombeCountyPublicLibraryTeens)

# OWN the NIGHT

The Summer Reading Program isn't just for your younger brothers and sisters. Teens can take part, too!

Here's how:

- **READ!** Earn a free book (for keeps!) after four visits to the library.
- **WRITE!** Turn in a review for *Rant & Rave*
- **VOLUNTEER!** Contact your local library to learn about volunteer opportunities.
- **HAVE FUN!** Teens are welcome at all SRP special events. Check the events calendar for suggestions.

