



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

May 2008

A Springtime Grab Bag

One of the things I like best about spring is its unpredictability. Temperatures fluctuate, beautiful blooms coexist with bare trees, and the air is constantly freshened by cool breezes. Since this is the first column I will write I thought it would be fun to mirror the swings of spring and review different kinds of books. The selections are all beautifully written with strong characters and a keen sense of place. Pull up your arm chair or porch swing and see what you think of the following suggestions.

'Twenty Chickens for a Saddle' is Robyn Scott's fascinating memoir of growing up in eastern Botswana in the 1980's. Her father was a doctor and she, her sister and brother were home schooled by their mother. Her descriptions of life in the bush, their "classroom" education, and the people they encountered are alternately humorous and touching. She does not shy away from difficult subjects such as the devastation that AIDS has wrecked on Botswana, and she is not afraid to poke fun at herself. It is a clear eyed look at growing up in unusual circumstances and all the complications and excitement that come with an unorthodox lifestyle. Highly recommended for its wit, insight and atmosphere. .

Coincidentally, one of the best murder mysteries published this spring is also set in Botswana. Entitled 'A Carrion Death' by Michael Stanley it introduces David "Kubu" (Kubu means hippo in the Setswana language), a detective in the Gabarone police force who tries to solve a grisly murder tied up in the lucrative diamond trade. Kubu also appreciates fine food and wine, which provides the author with ample opportunity to lighten the suspense with clever asides about the pleasures of fine dining. The action takes place in various spots in southern Africa as the dogged detective chases down the clues that will keep you turning the pages. It is also a realistic, well researched portrayal of life in modern Africa.

'The Red Breast' by Jo Nesbo is the second in a series featuring the Oslo based policeman Inspector Harry Hole. There is an intriguing background story that centers on Norway's role in World War II and how that conflict continues to haunt some of the present day characters. The themes of revenge and betrayal are the drivers of a well oiled plot that spins Inspector Hole in many directions before there is a "nick of time" resolution. The dual story line is suspenseful and guaranteed to hold your interest.



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'Life Class' is an historical novel by Pat Barker, best known for her 'Regeneration' trilogy. Here she returns to London as WWI is breaking out, moving the action to the Western Front as the war overwhelms everyone's lives. The novel concentrates on three young artists at the Slade School of Fine Art who must transition from a somewhat selfish world where creating art is their reason for being, to surviving at the front lines. The scenes of warfare and ambulance work resonate with more immediacy than those in London, perhaps because this author is most famous for her ability to recreate the horror of WWI. The descriptions of the towns after the battles and the rigors of caring for the wounded leave a lasting impression.

'Person of Interest' by Teresa Schwegel is an enthralling look at the family of Craig McHugh, a Chicago PD detective. Everyone in his family has secrets, complicating his undercover work and putting their lives in danger. The action is non stop and the characters are very well drawn, with his wife Leslie particularly intriguing. This is both a police procedural and a novel about a family in crisis. Risky behavior is central to the resolution of the book, lending it a nail biting quality. Highly enjoyable!

'The Blue Star' is a coming of age novel by Tony Earley. The character of Jim Glass first appeared eight years ago in 'Jim the Boy'. Both books are beautifully written, and the characters totally believable. Lovable Jim is being raised in Depression era North Carolina by two uncles who are some of the most engaging, albeit laconic, characters to populate recent fiction. The writing is spare and perfect. These books are very wise about the trials and tribulations of growing up, without being at all saccharine.

All these titles are available at the Rowayton Library, where the staff loves to talk about their favorites. Please come in and open a book!

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