



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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'Mr. Peanut' by Adam Ross is an impressive debut novel. It initially tells the tale of Alice and David Pepin, married for 13 years and clearly struggling. Alice's death introduces Doctor, imaginatively turned "Detective" Sam Sheppard, the infamously exonerated wife murderer of the mid 1950's. The novel then morphs into the story of the Sheppard marriage. There is more than one book here; David Pepin is writing a novel as well, so you read never quite certain what will happen and whose universe you inhabit. I found it very unusual and addicting.

'Blind Descent' by James Tabor is an armchair adventurer's delight. The world of Mexican and Russian super caving is literally opened up. The commitment of cavers to a somewhat obscure sport that requires unbelievable physical strength, tactical knowledge and an explorer's brave heart is impressive. There are huge egos, dramatic rescues, death and victory wrapped up in fascinating scientific background on these huge caves.

'The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet' by David Mitchell is excellent historical fiction set in late 18th century Japan. The Dutch trading base on the island of Dejima, just off Nagasaki, is the setting. Jacob is the clerk on a five year assignment, sent by the Dutch East India Co. to audit the books and try and stem the trading corruption on their base. The book is beautifully written, using language dense with detailed descriptions, ideas, historical asides and moving, well developed characters. The frustration of the isolated Dutch is well portrayed.

'War', by Sebastian Junger is very fine reporting on the daily life and times in combat on the front lines in the Korengal Valley of Afghanistan. Junger spent eighteen months shadowing a platoon from the 173d Airborne as they went on patrol, manned outposts in isolated mountains and fought in deadly firefights against the Taliban. The book takes a hard look at the gritty reality of combat and death and the fact that combat can be thrilling for those involved. The men in this valley are taking on a disproportionate share of the combat experience in this war and this book makes their sacrifice clear.



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'The Ivington Diaries' by Monty Don is the perfect antidote to this summer's heat wave. His "diary", taken from 18 years of jottings about the gardens in his Hertfordshire home, was the perfect way to be in a garden without actually doing any work! He recently retired from his regular series with the BBC, and is a well known and beloved gardening expert in the UK. Beautiful photographs enhance the vignettes. He is passionate about the elements of soil alchemy, water and weather and the constant state of change in a garden. The author also shares stories of his family life and his occasional frustration and depression; you understand the importance of the garden in getting him through those times.

'The Cookbook Collector' by Allegra Goodman is a terrific read about Emily and Jess, two sisters living parallel lives in California. The book begins in 1999 at the height of the internet bubble. Jess works for an ex Microsoft executive in a rare bookstore and Emily is the CEO of Veritech, a high tech company going through an IPO. Her significant other Jonathan is also an internet pioneer. As always, Goodman has developed characters that are sympathetic despite their imperfections. There are moments of terrific comedy and real pathos. Goodman has a razor sharp eye for human imperfection and the efforts people make to connect. Her research on the internet bubble and old cookbooks really makes the book come alive.

'The Glass Rainbow' by James Burke continues the Dave Robicheaux series. I found this book darker than the previous ones in the series. There is unrelenting evil in the atmosphere as Dave and Cleve Purcell trawl through the swamps of Louisiana looking for the murderer of young girls. There are more than enough suspects and cynical cops to keep you guessing. The writing is very atmospheric; the gloom of the delta is palpable. Dave's daughter comes under direct threat for the first time, which makes for an unusually tense plot line.

'A Vintage Affair' by Isabel Wolff is a charming summer read. Set in London, the main character has left her corporate life as an auctioneer and recently opened a vintage clothing store. There are the typical but not at all dull romantic and family complications, and a back story involving a child's coat. The details about vintage clothes are fascinating. If you are at all interested in the history of fashion this is the book for you.

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