



BiblioFiles

By Ruth Freeman

Readers' Advisor @ the Rowayton Library

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Robert Brookhiser has written a new biography of President James Madison, who was all of five feet tall but possessed of a towering intellect. He was famous as the father of the US Constitution, married to Dolly (perhaps our first political wife), commander in chief during the War of 1812, and overall fixture in the formative events of the country's founding. This Founding Father never got a dedicated TV series but is equally fascinating as Adams.

'Feast Day of Fools' is the rather bleak latest work from James Lee Burke. Hack Holliday and Pam Tibbs deal with the contemporary issue of immigration in the Southwest. Evil abounds, blood flies but there is a curious feeling of exhaustion that permeates the book's characters and literally makes it feel heavy. I finished it because as always Burke has created a twisted plot you want to see resolved, and he is a wonderfully atmospheric writer.

'The Marriage Plot' by Jeffrey Eugenides is beautifully written. The coming of age tale of Madeline, Leonard and Mitchell, graduating from Brown in 1982, will resonate with many readers. It's a credible story of the struggle to grow up and find your path once sprung from the safety of college. The book explores a love triangle, mental illness, religion, semiotics and the challenges of absorbing tremendous change in your life. The numerous story threads and timelines are masterfully juggled by this very talented author.

'The Burning Soul' by John Connolly brings us a still beleaguered Charlie Parker, returning to help find a kidnapped girl in a disappearance which may be tied to a convicted child murderer in a previous case. Parker is a haunted man and there are elements of the supernatural in this series, just enough to keep things edgy. Connolly has written an atmospheric thriller about Parker's efforts to come to terms with the question of whether criminal rehabilitation is feasible.

'The Vault' by Ruth Rendell, the sequel to "Sight for Sore Eyes", brings Inspector Wexford out of retirement to investigate four bodies found in the abandoned cellar of a mansion in north London. As always the city of London is one of the stars of the book and Wexford spends a lot of time walking the streets as he tries to solve the crime without the benefit of a badge.

'The Dovekeepers' by Alice Hoffman is the story of the Masada siege, which ended with the Jews committing mass suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. Even though the ending is preordained the lyrical writing and brave characters make a strong impression. The human ability to find joy and even love in the midst of disaster is not a new theme but it is compelling and well developed in this novel.



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'The Dog Who Knew Too Much' by Spencer Quinn is the continuation of Chet and Bernie's investigatory adventures, told through the sharply observant eyes of Chet the wonder dog. Chet's wry observations of the human condition never fail to amuse the reader. The bad guys don't stand a chance against this duo.

'Trail Magic' by Carl McDaniel is a book about the "creation of a positive energy home" in Oberlin, OH. McDaniel did a tremendous amount of research into ways to minimize a house's footprint. The book is replete with details on every aspect of this type of construction, complete with plans in the back. Recommended reading for those contemplating this step and anyone interested in reducing their impact on the environment.

'Boomerang' by Michael Lewis is a hoot, showing us a book about the global financial crisis can be humorous. He devotes chapters to various countries' unique disasters, beginning with Iceland – the nation where fishermen became investment bankers with predictably dysfunctional results. His brand of wry humor holds up through snapshots of Ireland, Greece, Germany and the US.

Molly Stevens has written the seminal book on 'Roasting'. She did a huge amount of research and has come up with a really accessible, beautifully designed and organized treatise on roasting everything you can think of. Her picnic shoulder recipes are delicious and she has a particularly good section on vegetables. Highly recommended. 'Bobby Flay's Bar Americain Cookbook' is really fun to cook from. Many restaurant chefs produce cookbooks that are vanity projects full of impractical recipes. This is not in that category. Flay has taken the best of American flavors from all over the country and created recipes even an inexperienced cook can produce with delectable results.

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