

For Sunday 1/15/2012

Good morning! This is Andy Haas.

You're listening to "Reading Between the Lines" brought to you by the Friends of the Homer Public Library.

Remember those new year resolutions you made a few weeks ago? Don't worry you still have 11 months to go. This is what I suggest that you do today. Stay in bed. Send someone out of bed to make coffee and perhaps brownies for breakfast.

Don't get out of your pajamas until you go skiing. Afterwards, build a fire and read a good book. I am reading a great book from the Homer library that you may want to start on. Should you be worrying about your resolutions? Should you be reading Aristotle or Plutarch? Quite simply, no.

You should be escaping reality by reading Haruki Murakami, an exceptional Japanese author specializing in magical realism.

Right now, I am reading his most recent novel, 1Q84. It's April of 1984, and a young woman in a taxi is stuck in a Tokyo traffic jam. As she worries about being late for a meeting, the taxi driver tells her she has a choice: She can get out of the cab, go down a nearby emergency stairway, and take the subway — but, he warns her, the world might never be the same. And of course it isn't. To be honest, I am not sure that it is as good as

his earlier books. But if you liked his earlier books, you'll hunker down and enjoy this 1000 page read where Tokyo is controlled by little people who appear from the mouth of a dead goat. So far, the most intelligent thing they seem to say is ho-ho. But maybe they will get more profound.

If this is will be your *first* Murakami, I suggest that you start off with an earlier book such as Kafka on the Shore. How can I describe this plot? First, a 15-year-old Kafka Tamura runs away from Tokyo and his sculptor-father who kills cats to make flutes from their souls. Kafka meets both a trans-gender librarian of a private library and its enigmatic owner who take care of him. The second strand begins as an X-File recorded by American Occupation forces, and narrates how a group of wartime evacuees foraging for food in the Japanese mountains glimpsed a possible UFO before losing consciousness for several hours. All evacuees recovered, except for one boy, Nakata, who remained in a coma for some weeks before waking up, as he says, "not very bright", but with the power to talk to cats. After that, it gets a little strange. As always Murakami includes redemption through classical music, prophecy, and slightly bizarre sex.

But you want reality? Look out your window. That's snow and darkness out there.

Once you finish Kafka on the Shore, try some of Murakami's other books like Norwegian Wood. The narrator recalling his past, begins with the question "What if I've forgotten the most important thing? What if somewhere inside me there is a dark limbo where all the truly important memories are heaped and slowly turning into mud?" And I ask myself, when once in our country there were flashes of lightning in the desert, is there now simply mud?

These books are not merely escapist. Rather the alternative worlds are two competing value systems. They are like a Zen Buddhist koan. They pose non-ordinary questions that will hopefully question your new-year resolutions. The riddles are universal, and your answers should be profound.

These Murakami books are all at the Homer public library. Their hours are Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tune in next Sunday morning at this same time for "Reading Between the Lines" right here on KBBI 890, Homer!