

Local author masterfully crafts a great read

"The Orphan's Guilt"

Archer Mayor

Minotaur Books, 2020

The book opens as Vermont State Police Officer Tyler Brennan arrests John Rust for driving under the influence. While the stop is routine, Mayor emphasizes Brennan's cautious approach to Rust's car: "Days when a Vermont cop could almost depend on spending his career without pulling his gun on duty ... had been relegated to the past."

Brennan's caution is unnecessary; in fact, the two form a kind of bond as the booking proceeds. Casually, Rust mentions that this is the second time that day he has heard the ticking sound of deathwatch beetles—so called because they can be heard only during vigils for the dead. They are so quiet, in fact, that the damage they do goes unnoticed until investigation reveals that they have destroyed a house's beams from the inside.

Brennan assures Rust that the ticking is only the hot water pipes; and he forgets the beetles entirely, for Rust says that his brother died earlier in the day.

A reader alert for symbols, however, should keep the beetles' hidden damage in mind, for as the plot progresses, it reveals

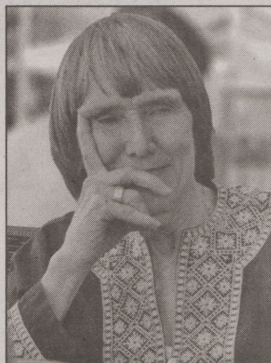
destruction that has been hidden for three decades.

The investigation begins the next day, after Rust has come to lawyer Scott Jezek about the DUI. Jezek finds that Pete Rust was a totally helpless victim of a birth defect, and that John Rust, whose mother OD'd and whose father left the family, took sole care of his brother almost all his life.

Jezek, knowing that Rust faces jail time (the DUI is his fourth), calls in private eye Sally Kravitz and asks her to help him find out more about Rust's selfless service in order to "soften up" the state's attorney. Kravitz's interviews turn up not a birth defect, but the possibility of violent abuse; that turns Pete Rust's death into a 28-year-old homicide, and lands the case in the office of Joe Gunther, Willie, Sammie, and Lester—the Vermont Bureau of Investigation.

Gradually, Gunther and his colleagues uncover the story of the brothers' ambitious mother, their grunt-work father ("a bottom feeder on his best day"), and money that initially has no ascertainable source.

Following a trail three decades old, the VBI, Kravitz, and young reporter Rachel Reiling interview contacts of the Rust family who are still



One-Minute Book Reviews

Laura Stevenson

living near Brattleboro. Many of those people have unsavory pasts of their own; others clearly have something to hide. Meanwhile, John Rust has disappeared.

This is the 31st Joe Gunther mystery, and as always, readers know they are in the hands of an expert from the first page. Unlike "Bury the Lead," which ranged throughout Vermont, this book is set almost entirely in Brattleboro, Westminster West, and Springfield—all carefully and perceptively described.

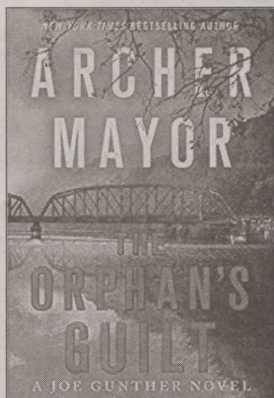
While it has grim scenes enough, it doesn't venture into psychological horror, as did "Bomber's Moon." The age of the crime and the number of criminals could, in other hands, make the details of the search slow the plot, but Mayor keeps it moving by developing the characters surrounding Gunther, who is in this case a minor figure.

Fans of Willy and Sam will be gratified to witness their warm partnership and the development of their precocious daughter.

Readers who enjoyed the incipient friendship of Kravitz and Reiling will welcome their active part in this investigation.

And even the most plot-conscious readers will appreciate the craftsmanship of the book's masterful prologue and epilogue.

It's a great read.



Virtual college fair offers a look at all of Vermont's schools

VERMONT- Looking at colleges in Vermont? Mark the calendar for Wednesday, December 2, from 3 to 8 pm, to "tour" Vermont's colleges and universities at the Vermont Virtual College Fair, hosted by Vermont Student Assistance Corp.

Register and schedule virtual visits with the schools of interest. Each college visit lasts 45 minutes with a presentation, video, and opportunity to talk with admissions representatives.

Participating schools include Bennington College, Castleton University, Champlain College, Community College of Vermont, Landmark College, Middlebury College, Northern Vermont University, Norwich University, Saint Michael's College, Sterling

College, University of Vermont, and Vermont Technical College.

Most colleges are waiving their application fee for students who attend the fair and apply for admission in December. The fair also celebrates the third annual "Choose Vermont" scholarship program. VSAC is joining the state and colleges and universities to offer scholarships to students who commit to attend a Vermont school by June 1, 2021. Both out-of-state and Vermont students are eligible to apply.

Students who commit to attend a Vermont college or university between December 1 and June 1, 2021 and then register will be entered to win a \$5,000 scholarship.

VSAC is calling December Ver-

mont Applies month, with scheduled online workshops covering everything education- and training-related: like how to fill out the common app; tips to write a resume; successful interview strategies; applying for scholarships; education and training alternatives to college; and how families can best support their college-bound student.

Throughout December, VSAC outreach counselors will be available for personalized appointments to help students and families complete their FAFSAs, Vermont state grant applications, scholarship applications, and answer any financial aid questions.

For more information and to register visit <https://www.vsac.org/vermont-applies> or call (800) 642-3177.