

Renegades among the Tumbleweeds

Hewitt Freiburg

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This smart, complex plot weaves a tale of intriguing characters seeking authentic medieval documents.

A multinational group of scholars races to authenticate medieval documents that may have inexplicably been buried in Maine prior to European settlement in Hewitt Freiburg's *Renegades among the Tumbleweeds*. This intellectually dense story takes aim at fourth-century Roman emperor Constantine I and others who shaped the modern Christian church.

When a Japanese businessman receives a series of packages containing a centuries-old letter and a map of coastal Maine from a recently deceased Welsh professor and longtime friend, he sets out to determine whether something of biblical importance is buried there. What he finds in Maine raises more questions than answers: Are the documents real or faked? Why were they hidden, when, and by whom? Even if faked—entirely or in part—what is their monetary value, and is someone willing to kill for them? What do they reveal about the suppression of early Christian sects whose views and writings did not align with Constantine's will?

Ultimately, a Chicago attorney and her husband, who share a longtime interest in biblical history; an archaeology professor; a former NSA spy and friend of the Chicago couple; a professional authenticator; and the Japanese businessman and his assistant face off with a London art dealer for control of the cache.

The book is thickly peppered with factoids on everything from Roman history to different types of ancient paper and spear points to trivia about cities around the globe. Some of the injected facts are central to the mystery of the documents, while some are only marginally relevant. The latter often underscore the wealthy main characters' personal and professional accomplishments and their interests in fine art, food, literature, history, and luxury travel. These references might be most appreciated by readers who have the education and financial means to enjoy similar experiences. Many of the characters, as well, are retired or are approaching retirement age. Readers of a similar age might best relate to them.

The book is plagued by extraneous conversations between characters and by frequent redundancies in information, typically when characters repeatedly recount to each other recent twists in the mystery. Characters also spend a significant amount of time doing mundane things like checking e-mail and voice mail and arranging restaurant, flight, and hotel reservations. At more than five hundred pages, the book could have been made more succinct through more careful culling of such stretches.

However, the well-woven plot is ultimately compelling despite its complexities. Similarly, the characters are well developed, witty, and distinct enough from each other that they are easy to get to know and to keep straight. The action is well paced and builds to an exciting climax.

This is a generally well-crafted story that will appeal to those who share the characters' interests in biblical history and who share some of the characters' life experiences and accomplishments.

KARYN SAEMANN (December 9, 2014)

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