

Moraga Men Read Books Too

Submitted by Dean Mayer

Skinny Dip; By Carl Hiaasen; Alfred A. Knopf, publisher, 2004, 355 pages

Lamorinda parents may be more familiar with Carl Hiaasen for his young readers' book, Hoot, than for his novels aimed at adults. But Hiaasen, a Florida-born author and Miami Herald journalist, has written some 10 novels for those beyond school age, including *Skinny Dip*, a piece of crisply written, satirical crime fiction filled with dark humor.

Our "Moraga Men Read Books Too" book group (see how you can join below) found *Skinny Dip* to be light, fun summertime reading that, of course, you can enjoy any time of the year. Call it Elmore Leonard meets Dave Barry, which makes for an entertaining blend that's just right for lazy Sundays, airplane flights or a few days at the pool.

Skinny Dip opens with incompetent marine scientist Chaz Perrone pushing his beautiful, heiress wife Joey Perrone overboard from a luxury cruise ship on the Atlantic, miles from Key West. Chaz isn't out for his wife's fortune. Rather, he fears Joey has discovered

the profitable pollution scam he's running on behalf of a ruthless agribusiness tycoon who wants to continue illegally dumping fertilizer into the endangered Everglades.

Unfortunately for Chaz, Joey, a former swimming champ, doesn't drown. She makes her way back to shore thanks to a wayward bale of Jamaican marijuana (how Florida can you get?) and Mick Stranahan, a moody, loner ex-cop who also has struck out in the marriage department. Then Joey (with Mick's help) launches a devious plot of revenge aimed at driving Chaz crazy and making him pay for his misdeeds.

Though Joey and Mick could be a little better developed as characters, their counter-plotting against the increasingly paranoid Chaz is compelling. Hiaasen also introduces several other fascinating characters, including a misplaced Norwegian police investigator and a rough but occasionally sympathetic henchman for the agribusiness tycoon. Scenes of the henchman's tender visits with an old woman in a nursing home are well-crafted.

Hiaasen is at his best when he describes the tragic destruction of the Everglades due mostly to greed and corruption by developers and puppet politicians lusting after a buck through the decades. It's easy to see why Hiaasen is regarded by many as an important environmental voice striving to save his beloved Florida from continued plundering.

Is *Skinny Dip* classic literature? No, but most of you should find it an enjoyable, satiric romp injected with mystery, over-the-top characters, make-you-laugh situations, and a few cynical truths about people and society.

"Moraga Men Read Books Too" meets monthly, usually on Monday night at Pennini's over pizza and a beverage. We're a small book group and welcome new members. We talk about the books, but we're not intense. We laugh about things and check out the sports on Pennini's big screen TV. To learn more or join us, please email dmayer@clifbar.com or call Dean at 247-0836.

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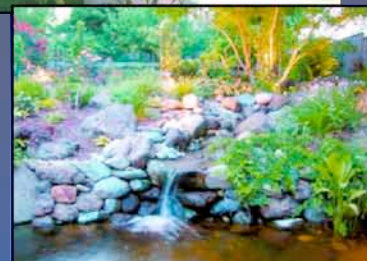
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