



The Great Weather Diviner: The Untold Origin of Punxsutawney Phil

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Morgan James

(270pp)

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*In the distinctive fantasy novel *The Great Weather Diviner*, a groundhog matures because of his compassion for fellow animals.*

In Rob Long and Andrew Dolberg's fantasy novel *The Great Weather Diviner*, a groundhog learns about his family's legacy in Punxsutawney.

Junior is a descendant of Lord Philip Weathersby Rodington VII, a great weather diviner. Accustomed to hearing bedtime stories about a war in which the elder Philip played a critical role, Junior is a restless student. He yearns for adventures beyond his town, where his classmates are destined for mining jobs. But his father, who is the colliery's owner, expects Junior to follow in his stead.

Junior wrestles between a sense of duty and his personal convictions. His relationship with his father is fraught: sometimes, he feels compelled to show his father respect; at other times, he is eager to cast aside his family traditions. Details surrounding his family's role (such as that diviners must honor the nature gods on what is now known as Groundhog's Day) add further pressure about his future. Then Junior learns the truth about the conditions in the mines—and learns that his father, who is prone to grandiose speeches, has cut wages and fed the miners a different story about the weather than he shares with his fellow noblemen.

The Punxsutawney setting, where the social divisions are stark between townsfolk and miners, isn't always developed in terms that suggest rural Pennsylvania. There are lords and estates, and conversations are sprinkled with colloquialisms that evoke the British Isles. Nonetheless, the background, with its one-room schoolhouse, is appealing and quaint, coal furnaces and all.

The cast is busy with various animals and their descendants, many of whom have disagreements and rivalries between them. In this mix, Junior also balances the stories that he's heard with news of a white demon and mysterious guardians. He has to determine the differences between handed-down legends and the truth; it's intricate work. He also finds a harmonious enclave to help. And Junior's challenges come into greater focus in the wake of a flood, after which his absorption of his family's motto ("Rodingtons step into the breach") leads him to seek help through a series of tense, thrilling dangers that culminate in renewed hope for a stronger community.

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KAREN RIGBY (August 17, 2023)

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