

“A Peace to End All Peace” a *New York Times* bestseller, by David Fromkin
Book Review by Betsy Verner (L, '99)

There are the Max Millers, Jerry Mattinglys, and Steve McKenzies of the world who have a photographic memory with regard to the broad span of events that have shaped the Middle East over the centuries. And then there are the rest of us. If you, like I, have difficulty “connecting the dots” as Max likes to say, then David Fromkin’s *Peace to End All Peace* is a “must” for the METS corner of your bookshelf.

Fromkin carefully walks his reader through Europe’s “Great Game” of imperial expansion in the later part of the 19th Century. He painstakingly describes how, even as World War I was in progress, rivals jockeyed for position to pick over the potential spoils of a weakening Ottoman Empire. As Constantinople’s control eroded, we learn why the “land bridge” of Palestine emerged as a prize of greater and greater importance.

As Britain sought to establish relationships with Zionist leadership in Europe on behalf of the Jews, as well as secure her interests with as many Arab sheiks, muftis, and tribal leaders throughout the Middle East as possible, some negotiations took place openly in the form of public declarations, some took place in secret, and some were contradictory and duplicitous. Virtually all resulted in misunderstandings that continue to plague the Middle East today. In 1919, as the Paris Peace Conference was getting underway, Field Marshal Earl Wavell, one of General Allenby’s officers in the Palestine campaign, made his prophetic observation: “After ‘the war to end war’ they seem to have been pretty successful...at making a ‘Peace to end Peace.’”

In refreshing our collective memories as to how and why the Allies drew the lines in the sand that established the modern states of the Middle East, Fromkin outlines this geopolitical “chess board” in a most readable style. It certainly ain’t a “beach read,” but it will re-stimulate a reader’s curiosity for the region and provide a broader historical lens through which one can watch the evening news.