

## Jungle Fun, Dancing Men & Women Photographers

Reading *Black Orchid*, a new romantic adventure novel written by, according to the book's dust jacket, "Nicholas Meyer author of *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and Barry Jay Kaplan" (Dial Press, \$8.95), one can almost smell the popcorn. What a movie this one will make!

What reader, caught up (however involuntarily) in this rich, lush saga of love and danger in the jungles of the Amazon, will not long to actually see and hear the orange-haired dancer Athéné "gasping and panting like a racehorse" in the arms of travel-worn soldier-of-fortune Harry Kincaid — or the same Kincaid's coupling with the calculating Mercedes Coutard in the mud of the Rio Negro? What heart will not thrill to the spectacle of an opening night at the opera, full of secretive flirtation and intrigue — but on the very edge of the mysterious, foreboding rain forest? What pulse will not quicken as Kincaid and company kidnap the plantation owner's beautiful daughter, Dolores Mendonca, even as a

*Black Orchid* is a successful, undemanding entertainment, almost worth reading for the comparative novelty of its setting alone. It is not so carefully written as Meyer's Holmes books were: Meyer's Dr. Watson would never have permitted himself the inelegance, for instance, of speaking of "three ships that had to be gutted and the holds rebuilt to accommodate the girders." And some of the language borders on pure pulp: "Don't go," she begged, knowing no shame now, only her own desperate desire," or "We have several advantages," the Colonel said . . . "We know the river; he does not." But the book is mostly easy fun — and is easily as full of decorative detail as, if no more enduring than, the city of Manaus was herself.

*Women See Men* (McGraw-Hill, \$12.95 hardcover; \$7.95 softcover), edited by Yvonne Kalmus, Rikki Ripp, and Cheryl Wiesenfeld as a successor to their previous book, *Women See Women*, may or may not say something about men, or about women, or about the spaces (or lack of spaces) between the two halves of the human species — but it certainly doesn't say very much about photography.

With a handful of exceptions (Eileen K. Berger's ritualistic "Two boys fighting in landscape"; Karen Tweedy-Holmes' comic nude, "Franks"; Inge Morath's classic masked portrait of Saul Steinberg; etc.), the images presented here are mostly pretty

# In Print

splendorous costume ball in her honor spins on and on? And — let's face it — which of us will not watch with fascinated horror as piranhas nip at Kincaid's legs (for all is not orange-haired dancers and plantation owners' daughters for travel-worn soldiers-of-fortune), or as the adventurer's assistant is eaten to the bone by killer ants?

Ironically, *Black Orchid* started out as a movie — or, anyway, as a movie script. Meyer, whose witty and well-crafted Sherlock Holmes parodies — *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and *The West End Horror* — established him as one of the best and most clever of our popular novelists, grew fascinated with the true story of the city of Manaus. A kind of boom town built around the rubber trade, Manaus, deep in the Amazon wilderness, was, in the late 19th century, the sixth-richest city in the world — with a sophisticated system of public transportation, complete electrical power throughout, and an opera house said to have been more magnificent than La Scala. Based loosely on historical fact, Meyer wrote, as a screenplay, a story about a man sent to Manaus by the British to steal rubber seedlings for replanting in Southeast Asia — in order to break the Brazilian monopoly on the product. Meyer's script was bought but never produced; he liked the story well enough to buy it back from the studio and to work on turning it into a book, with the help of Barry Jay Kaplan, a college friend of his, who had written "a dozen romances and gothics under various pen names." It will be Meyer's sweet revenge on whatever laggardly studio bosses they were, presumably, if *Black Orchid* is bought again for film production — as it almost certainly will be, and at a good price to boot.

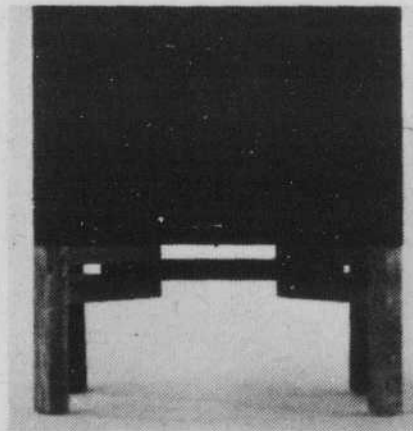
dreary ones, undistinguished as craft and unconvincing as art. (And too many of the really good female photographers in America today are missing — Claire Steinberg, Lynn Davis, Jane O'Neal, Jennifer Griffiths, even Annie Leibowitz, even Deborah Turbinville.)

The equivocal introduction and pretentious text are by Ingrid Bengis, author of *Combat in the Erogenous Zone*.

Another, rather more interesting, volume of photographs of men is *Danseur: The Male in Ballet* (A Rutledge Book, McGraw-Hill, \$19.95) by Richard Philp and Mary Whitney. "Ballet has long been stigmatized by men in America," the authors note, "as a 'sissy,' 'elitist' art form, but as dance increases in popularity and our society relaxes its puritanical guard about male self-expression, more and more men are attracted to dance." Some of the most famous and best of the men who have been attracted to dance, despite its stigmata, in the recent and distant past — from Nijinsky to Nureyev to Richard Cragun, Anthony Dowell, and the remarkable Peter Martins — are shown here, in action, in rehearsal, and in repose. The text is sensible and the photographs, which include some original material by Herbert Migdoll, art director of *Dance Magazine* and *After Dark*, are eminently workmanlike.

*Dream Diary* (William Morrow, \$4.95) is a harmless non-book — a cleanly designed little journal inspired by Hugh Lynn Cayce's advice that "The best book on dreams you will ever read is the one you write yourself." Presented here are neatly-lined pages in which one's dreams may be recorded, a check-list of important dream imagery, and

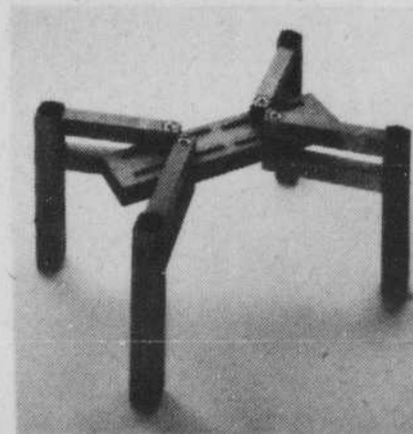
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