

between the covers

SOCIAL STUDIES by Fran Lebowitz (Random House, \$9.95)

After the success of *Metropolitan Life* — Fran Lebowitz's first collection of essays that pokes fun at New York City's denizens — the author's Literary Agent thought he had unearthed a hot potato.

Consequently, Literary Agent apparently negotiated a deal for Ms. Lebowitz's second book before a single word had been written. At all. Not one page.

That was a mistake.

Her second collection of twenty-six essays, *Social Studies*, indicates that either Ms. Lebowitz — Greenwich Village's Erma Bombeck — ran out of targets in New York City, or she waited until the night before her manuscript was due to plug in her typewriter. Or maybe she should move.

Social Studies also indicates that a book should never be judged by its back cover — where all the critic's laudatory remarks are etched in stone.

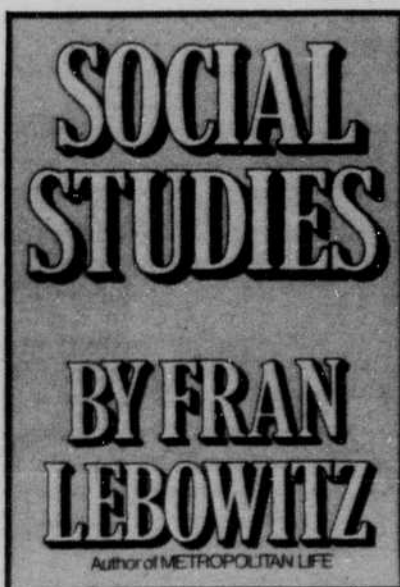
A *Los Angeles Times* critic described her writing as brimming with "fresh and arresting observations about the most exhausted topics." But it appears that Ms. Lebowitz has exhausted her arsenal of metropolitan jibes.

Another critic from the *San Diego Union* hailed Ms. Lebowitz as, "An original voice (who) has just arrived from the East, an advent for which I am immoderately grateful." I, for one, would be grateful if her voice would board the next

Eastbound flight.

And the *New York Times Book Review* said of 147-page assortment of puns, "There is character here as well as personality." Again, I must disagree with the critics and assert that I was in search of neither character or personality, but laughs.

But why try to describe Ms. Lebowitz's literary foibles when you can read the real thing? A few examples:



TIPS FOR TEENS

"Should your political opinions be at extreme variance with those of your parents, keep in mind that while it is indeed your constitutional right to express these sentiments verbally, it is unseemly to do so with your mouth full—particularly when it is full of the oppressor's standing rib roast."

POINTERS FOR PETS

"Dogs who earn their living by appearing in television commercials in which they constantly and aggressively demand meat should remember that in at least one Far Eastern country they are meat."

TRAVEL HINTS

"Under no circumstances order from room service an item entitled 'The Cheese Festival' unless you are prepared to have your dream of colorfully costumed girls of all nations rolling enormous wheels of Gruyere and Jarlsberg replaced by three Kraft slices and a lot of toothpicks dressed in red cellophane hats."

WAR STORIES

"War is, undoubtedly, hell, but there is no earthly reason why it has to start so early in the morning. Writers, on the whole, find it difficult to work during the day; it is far too distracting. The writer is an artist, a creative person; he needs time to think, to read, to ruminate. Ruminating in particular is not compatible with reveille. Instead, next to each (double) bed in the 'Writers' Barracks should be a night table minimally equipped with an ashtray, a refreshing drink, a good reading lamp and a telephone. Promptly at 1:30 p.m. the phone may ring and a pleasant person with a soft voice may transmit the wake-up call."

After reading this cross-section



Fran Lebowitz

tion of Ms. Lebowitz biting social commentary, the selective reader should be able to discern between spending his

time reading *Social Studies* or sinking his teeth into something worthwhile.

by gabriel boehmer

'Guide' strange, but funny

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY Douglas Adams (Pocket Books, \$2.50)

Arthur Dent had the "worst Thursday that ever happened": first, his house was in danger of being torn down to make room for a new freeway. Second, the world was destroyed to make room for a new intergalactic hyperspatial express route.

Sound strange? It is, but it's also incredibly funny. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is the printed form of the radio series that took Britain by storm last year, and is now being heard in America (KWAX has it on Saturday evenings).

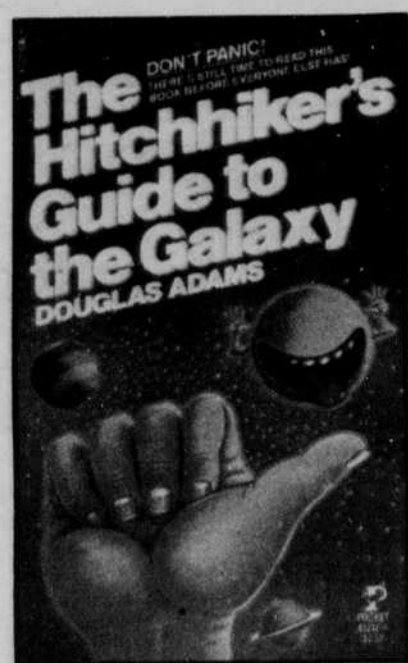
It's totally absurd, absolutely silly in places, and merely witty in others. The two main characters are Arthur Dent, a poor guy who's kind of shook up when his planet is destroyed, and Ford Prefect, a writer from Betelgeuse who got stuck on earth while researching a chapter of the real "Hitchhiker's Guide," a volume so large that is only sold in microcomputer form.

Prefect saves Dent from destruction, and the rest of the book documents their travels around the galaxy. They are captured by Vogons, who torment their prisoners by reading their unmentionably horrible poetry to them. After escaping, they bump into Zaphod Beeblebrox, the President of the Imperial Galactic Government, who has just stolen the brand new spacecraft which goes across the universe in a nothingth of a second. In the process, it often spontaneously

creates sperm whales, huge masses of fried eggs, and occasional groups of market analysts.

The book is fantastic if you're into science fiction and Monty Python, but could be pretty dismal if you're just looking for something to browse through while waiting for your nails to

have a free evening and want to get into a totally silly mood, don't miss *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.



dry. Adams is very witty, but almost too absurd at times for the story to make any sense. He has a way of skipping around that is creative, but often distracting.

If you think you'd be bored by Marvin the depressed robot, the discovery that the Earth was created by mice as a complex experiment to determine the Ultimate Question (they'd already found the answer: 42), and the reason why a towel is about the most useful thing you can have, don't read the book. But if you

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