

# IN PRINT

## Bad Deeds

KURT NEWELL  
*Pinnacle, \$2.50*

Detective novels are like sculpture. Or doo-wop records from the Fifties. Or architecture. Form follows function around and around in a finely patterned dance. What we respond to is choreography, the skill with which the form is fulfilled, the route by which the conclusion is reached. When the sculptor or the vocal arranger, or the detective novelist, brings it off with a sense of novelty or surprise, then we've got beauty.

*Bad Deeds* is a beaut of a detective novel. It's got everything genre fanciers crack the covers for: a private eye protagonist with a hard-boiled hide and a touchable heart, a secretary who calls him "Boss," a full complement of Irish cops, close scrapes and a sense of danger that accelerates like Al Haig's pulse on entering the War Room.

Arnie Kahane springs into action when a jockey friend is the victim of a

brutal assault. Before long, Kahane is off and running—finding out more than he wants to know about doped fillies, L.A. racetrack politics and a bent fatcat with designs on the circuit's foremost female jockey.

He also dodges tommygun-toting Filipinos, reads *Dick Tracy* comics, bowls, drives out to the beach at midnight to clear his head (like Chandler's Marlowe), and falls into near love with an airhead dame who's "good in bed."

Kahane is believable (within the well-posted boundaries of the form). His pals and predators are well drawn and fall into their assigned roles with gusto. Best of all, they waltz and bop around a plot that keeps us turning pages fast. Well before halfway into *Bad Deeds'* 300-odd pages, we find ourselves trying to beat Kahane to the mystery's solution: who clubbed Wayne Teagueworthy? Who stands to lose the most if the goon is unmasked, and why did somebody pump lead into the quiet motel room where Arnie was shackled up with the gal jock?

Speed and action are *Bad Deeds'* chief virtues. That and in appropriately economic prose. (Vagrant witness Horace Ipps is described as wearing "a filthy Salvation Army suit that was baggy enough for two of him.") Ipps' temporary address: "Bushes, Victory Park racetrack. Forwarding address: Bushes, Hiialeah, Florida.") Newell's accomplishment is that he applies fresh twists and a sense of newness to a genre that, itself, has been worked over like a rummy, backstreet stiff. Good job.

Gene Sculatti

## Sixty Stories

DONALD BARTHELME  
*G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$15.95*

*Sixty Stories* combines works from the author's seven previous collections with nine uncollected pieces and a section from a novel, *The Dead Father*. It is a chattering fat gnome of a book, an enchanted little beast with a startling satchel of sorcerer's charms, including:

Chaos: "... I produced chaos she

regarded the chaos chaos is handsome and attractive she said and more durable than regret I said and more nourishing than regret she said."

Litany: "... *peuter, snake, tea, Fad #6 sberry, serviette, fenestration, crown, blue* ..."

Repetition: "... butter butter butter butter butter butter ..."

Philosophy: "The death of God left the angels in a strange position."

Allusion: "Judge de Bonfons arrives carrying flowers."

The 100-proposition story: "84. Should I go back for the Band-Aids?"

The epistolary tale: Dear Dr. Hodder, I realize that it is probably wrong to write a letter to one's girlfriend's shrink but ..."

And much much more, not the least of which is literary theory: "... Some people, Miss R. said, run to conceits or wisdom but I hold to the hard, brown, nutlike word."

Effects on the reader are (1) wonder (2) admiration (3) frequent, spontaneous, and unfeigned chuckles (4) frequent trips to the fat Webster's (5) recognition of common American

speech patterns (6) is he pulling my leg? (7) recognition of American follies and dreams (8) recognition of our (mankind's) common awareness of mortality (9) gratitude, etc.

"Surprise," to quote a character in one of the stories out of the original, sexual context, "keeps the old tissues tense." There is a kind of clean, surgeonlike workmanship in snipping apart the cluttered tapes of literary loopage in the storage bins of our brains. Reading this book is like having a tumorlike regret taken out.

Clarke Owens

## Death Notes

RUTH RENDELL  
*Parabon Books, \$9.95*

Death by misadventure" is the verdict when Sir Manuel Camargue is found frozen beneath an icy pond on his Sussex estate. The frigid fatality of a world-famous flautist may have been nothing more than accident. But no accident can explain to Kingsmarkham Chief Inspector Reginald Wexford

the mysterious visit made earlier to Camargue by a woman claiming both to be and not to be his estranged daughter, or Camargue's announced intention to disinherit Natalie Camargue Arno—an intention he did not live to fulfill.

Was Camargue's death accidental? Is the woman who calls herself Natalie Arno his rightful heir? These are the obvious questions in *Death Notes*, less obvious are the questions Wexford must ask himself as to what constitutes an identity. Is it something fixed and permanent like a passport, or a fluidity within us that alters not only because of how and where we live but from generation to generation? In *Death Notes* Wexford must read between the lines.

His suspicions take him to California, following the Pacific Highway for possible clues left in Los Angeles suburbs or Carmel motels where Arno may have lived. On that trail Wexford seeks as well an understanding of himself as an aging detective in a modern world.

Questions of identity suit Ruth Ren-

dell. Author of 20 mysteries and two collections of short stories, the British ex-journalist writes two very different kinds of novels. The Wexford series of police procedurals moves at the pace of Kingsmarkham itself, a middle-sized village feeling the intrusions of city life. These are sharp portrayals of ordinary people who find themselves extraordinarily linked by violent death. Rendell's non-series novels (such as *A Demon in My View*, which received the 1975 British Crime Writers Association Gold Dagger Award) explore the forces that lead individuals to commit outrageous acts. Her criminals are themselves victims of the necessary transition in English society from its past structured social classes to a chaos of classlessness.

*Death Notes* can be read at any point in the Wexford series with equal pleasure and respect for Rendell's mastery of the genre. Those reading the eleventh Wexford adventure need not return to the first for full appreciation of detective or author, and will find themselves satisfying the hunger mysteryphiles share for deeply-rooted

characters and suspenseful plotting.  
R. Sue Smith

## America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture

MARVIN HARRIS  
*Simon & Schuster, \$12.95*

To many Americans, it would seem the American dream has finally turned into a nightmare of cosmic proportions. One need only read the morning's headlines for confirmation of America's sad realities—seen in an evergrowing miasma of bloody violence, decaying morals, sexual confusion and economic uncertainty. But while many Americans simply throw down their newspapers in despair or stop reading them entirely, Marvin Harris attempts to sort out the whole mess via anthropological methods that, while not exactly scientific or original, do make for mildly amusing cocktail party conversation.

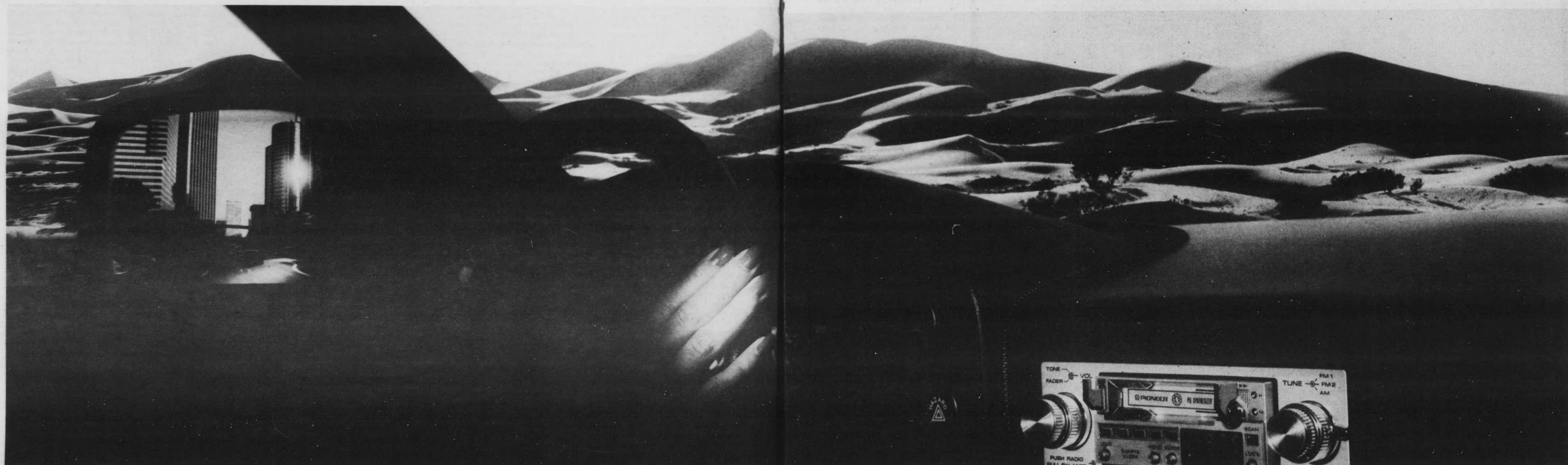
After spending a lifetime studying cannibals and kings, Harris, an anthropologist at the University of Florida, has turned his eye to analyzing America's problems in a pedestrian book entitled *America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture*. Here he examines the seemingly unrelated phenomena of American culture (including the rise of homosexuality, cults, crime, shoddy goods, women's liberation and inflation) and theorizes that they are all causally linked.

Acknowledging that we are a nation of manipulators and manipulated, Harris traces the root of our cultural troubles to the drastic changes that have occurred in America's economy and social structure since World War II. The twin terrors of American big business and American government are blamed, the former for uniting into all powerful oligopolies, the latter for being an inefficient bureaucracy that excels at proliferating more inefficiency. Together, says Harris, they've worked to destroy the very foundations of the American dream. But writing about cause and effect relationships is a

tricky matter; while Harris takes on some interesting issues—like why there's high unemployment among blacks, deteriorating nuclear families, women who work and vocal homosexuals—he fails to completely convince us of the connections between these phenomena. The most interesting chapter is that on homosexuality, in which Harris discusses the practice in primitive and vanished cultures.

Many of the questions Harris raises simply cannot be answered because American society has no yardstick by which to measure itself, being a unique nation of diverse ethnic and cultural entities without a common thread. In addition, and quite obviously, the new technologies of our time are going to affect America in ways we cannot yet predict since we have nothing to which they can be compared. One thing Harris' book makes quite clear—in an age of decaying morals, traditions and economy, America has very little to comfort it ... and much to fear.

L. R. Higa



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