

Oregon author explores eccentricity, community

Chuck Palahniuk shares vignettes about human connection

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TECHNICIAN (NORTH CAROLINA STATE)

The expression "stranger than fiction" is quite frequently used in our postmodern culture of reality television and eclectic nostalgia. Audiences are routinely exposed to the bizarre and grotesque on a daily basis. Despite this fact, even the most jaded readers will be surprised by something in Chuck Palahniuk's "Stranger than Fiction: True Stories."

BOOK REVIEW

The tone of Palahniuk's book alternates between playful eccentricity and surprising profundity. The frequently maniacal juggling act of these contrasting atmospheres should come as no surprise to fans of Palahniuk. After all, Palahniuk honed this skill in novels like "Fight Club" and "Diary." In his new book, the author's first work of non-fiction -- other than his walking tour guide of Portland, Ore., "Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon" -- the overriding theme is spelled out in the first sentence of the introduction. Palahniuk writes, "If you haven't already noticed, all my books are about a lonely person looking for some way to connect with other people."

The theme of discovering community and connecting with others is at the center of each vignette the book

comprises. These vignettes are organized into three categories: "People together," "Portraits" and "Personal." The section entitled "People together" contains a variety of stories that cover such diverse subjects as wrestlers, psychics and rural demolition derbies. The "Portraits" section is a series of revealing personal sketches of celebrities like Marilyn Manson, Juliette Lewis and Ira Levin. The final section of the book, labeled "Personal," will be especially appealing to fans of the film "Fight Club." The majority of this section is reserved for insights on writing "Fight Club," life in Hollywood and even the murder of the author's father.

The book's oddest vignette greets the reader immediately as the very first entry. This story is destined to confuse and shock those not

properly prepared to read a Palahniuk book. A Palahniuk book is best described as a potent cocktail of visceral energy, masculinity and eccentricity. All of these ingredients are present in abundance in the subsection "Testy Festy" from the "People together" vignette. The story chronicles the Rock Creek Lodge Testicle Festival, an annual event held in Missoula, Mont. The name of the festival should be an immediate tip off to the general nature of the festival's theme and activities. Be advised, the most imaginative ideas invoked by the festival name do

not compare with Palahniuk's play-by-play of events. The main drawback of this book is the lack of strong authorial commentary. Each story is chronicled in minute detail, but escapes substantial analysis and personal insight. This tendency is particularly disappointing in the section that recounts the murder of Palahniuk's father. Despite this flaw, the book works when viewed as a tapestry that illustrates the universal need for community and the sometimes-strange ways people fill this void.

'Napoleon Dynamite' offers its own sense of nerdy humor

The film's quirky cast of characters wins the audience's affections

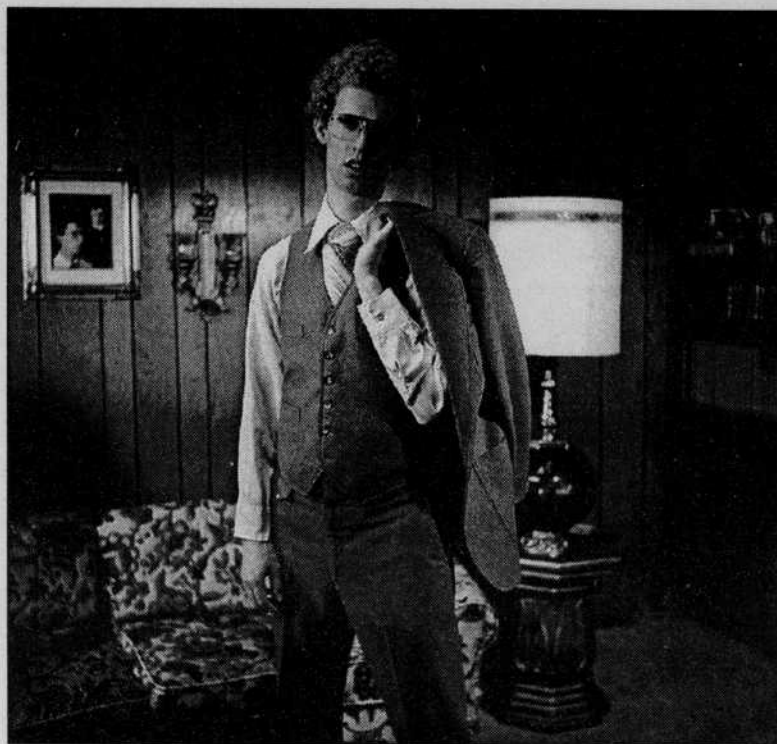
TRAVIS WILLSE
MANAGING EDITOR

The probably unnecessary tagline of greenhorn director Jared Hess's off-kilter comedy "Napoleon Dynamite" is "He's out to prove he's got nothing to prove." And although the self-contradictory mantra might apply well to the self-absorbed (eponymous) protagonist, it fits Hess's creation to a tee.

MOVIE REVIEW

The scattershot plot -- wherein Napoleon (newcomer Jon Heder), with the impatient plainspokenness only a high school übergeek could muster, coolly navigates sun-bleached and boring-as-hell Preston, Idaho -- is thin enough that the movie waxes documentarian, but linear enough that the half-conscious characters win the viewer's affections.

Hess's adept (but not masterful) balancing of the two feels effortless enough that the audience can bask in his directorial coups de maitre: capturing the sublimely clumsy interactions of the film's memorably winsome characters. To wit, a frustrated Napoleon plainly confronts his Uncle Rico (Jon Gries of "Real Genius" and, appropriately, "Twin Falls Idaho"), who is living in with Napoleon and his 31-year-old computer geek brother Kip (Aaron Ruell) while their



Courtesy

"Napoleon Dynamite" is a funny, if uneven, comedy about high-school nerds. Its characters and 'quotability' are this film's highlights.

grandmother recovers from a dune bugging injury, about his ineffectual company: "Grandma just called ... she said you can leave now."

"I didn't hear anything from her," Rico insists.

"She said you should leave because you're ruining everyone's life and eating all our steak."

All this jaw-aching silliness works because the characters are

two-dimensional enough that their conduct is pleasantly campy, rather than simply unbelievable. But delightfully, they're all too far from anything familiar to be tiresome caricatures: Kip is a hair-slicked computer nerd, but thinks himself something more: "Napoleon," he chides, "Don't be jealous that I've been chatting

Please see DYNAMITE, page 10

PULSE BRIEF

Famed 'glass guitarist' to play at Cafe Paradiso

"Glass Guitarist" Ned Evett will appear at Cafe Paradiso on Wednesday, August 11. Evett is widely considered one of the most innovative guitarists currently playing rock music, and has had his praises sung by such guitarist Joe Satriani and Guitarist Magazine.

"Ned plays a fretless guitar, which is a guitar that has no interposing frets along the neck," Evett's manager and publicist Tony Harrison said. "It's sort of a cross between a guitar and a cello. It takes a perfect sense of pitch and an amazing amount of muscle control just to play the simplest chord."

Evett's career has lasted for over two decades and he has performed on albums by Maria McKee, Rosalie Sorrels and Built to Spill. He got his



Courtesy

Guitarist Ned Evett will play at Cafe Paradiso on August 11. Evett recently released a solo effort, "I Stole."

Please see EVETT, page 10

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