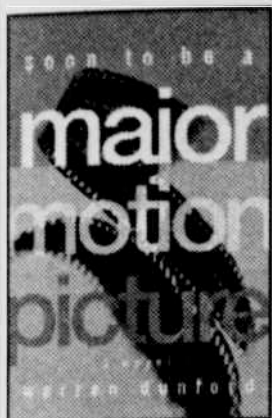


BOOKS



SOON TO BE A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE
by Warren Dunford.
Alyson Books, 2000;
\$12.95 softcover.

Lauded by Canadian critics when it was first published in 1998, Warren Dunford's novel arrives south of the border this month. The perfect beach book, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* turns up stateside just in time for winter. But it can take your mind off gloomy gray weather as easily as it can distract you from the fact that your skin is about to burst into flames.

As our neighbors up north already know, it's not really being made into a movie with any haste—although the fast-paced and suspenseful story would translate well. When the protagonist, an aspiring screenwriter and frustrated fag, accepts a fairly fishy offer to flesh out a scenario pitched by a peculiar producer, hilarity ensues. This tale is more of a Dashiell Hammett than an Agatha Christie: The mystery isn't terribly difficult to decipher, but kooky crooks and a dash of real danger make for an exciting ride.

Soon to Be is also recommended reading for aspiring artists of all persuasions who are toiling in obscurity and approaching middle age at the same time. The three artsy characters' personal and professional triumphs cannot fail to inspire the unrecognized genius. —Christopher D. Cuttone

THE NOTORIOUS DR. AUGUST: HIS REAL LIFE AND CRIMES
by Christopher Bram.
William Morrow, 2000; \$26 hardcover.

Strange bedfellows

A scribe, a slave and sexy Jews are the subjects of three new books

Some novels are main courses; others are breads, wines or desserts. *The Notorious Dr. August* is the whole damn meal: intricate, satisfying and good for you as well.

Christopher Bram, author of six books including *The Father of Frankenstein*, from which arose the movie *Gods and Monsters*, has written a book that is more than mere fiction; it also has the feel and function of good classic literature. This novel is so rich in detail and so intricate in its plot, you might be fooled at times into thinking it is historical biography.

The Notorious Dr. August begins in the last days of the Civil War as young August Boyd finds fate tossing him together, in every sense of the term, with newly emancipated slave Isaac Kemp. August becomes a spiritualist who communicates with spirits through his piano improvisations—a talent neither he nor Isaac are fully willing to trust.

As time and travel bond the men together, Isaac begins to turn his affections toward Alice Pangborn, a young, uptight and inconveniently white governess. The three become entangled in a secretive, complex triangle that ultimately is tried by the fire of tragedy.

Victorian in its style, scope and politics, this



novel reflects the present turn of the century in subtle yet undeniable ways: conflicts between sexuality and religion, between classes and races, between realism and spiritualism, between one's innate desires and one's upbringing. Bram also deals head-on with the complex and—in our society, anyway—taboo subject of sexual love between an older man and a young man. He seems fascinated with the collision of creative genius and sexual desire, and here, as in previous novels, we learn that collision occasionally can be a volatile one.

This novel explores the necessity and price of telling the truth, especially to those we care about the most. It asks us to destroy the categories in which we conveniently, although detrimentally, place people: moral or sinful; bisexual, straight or gay; black or white; real, spiritual or fake. And luckily for us, in this era of pop psychology and quickly wrapped-up happy endings, Bram sticks to the complicated, enigmatic, truthful tale-telling that has made him one of our finest and most intriguing novelists. —Glenn Williams

KOSHER MEAT
Edited by Lawrence Schimel. Sherman
Asher Publishing, 2000; \$14.95 softcover.

As a title, *Kosher Meat* doesn't leave much to the imagination. (The headless model's blue and white shirt open to



reveal rippling abs and bulging pecs....) Yet the back cover demurely suggests that booksellers and librarians classify this item as Literature/Judaica. Well, there are bound to be some paradoxes when religion and sexuality are juxtaposed.

Editor Lawrence Schimel has previously contributed some very fine nondenominational smut to various erotica anthologies, and he's done a lot of serious, scholarly work as well. Who better, then, to put together a mostly-erotic-but-not-gratuitous, definitely-Jewish-but-still-universal and fictional-yet-historically-accurate montage of *fin de siècle* gay life?

The individual stories in *Kosher Meat* run the gamut in their treatment of religious tradition, gay male sexuality and all the weird ways the two intersect. Fantasy and fact, love and lust, healing humor and old-school orthodoxy—just think of all the permutations.

Only one of the stories strikes me as perhaps too specialized (i.e., over my gentle head). Sex, of course, transcends cultural boundaries, but in *Kosher Meat*, Judaism is neither a safe haven for the Jewish reader nor an unexplored territory for the gentile reader. Comfortable and challenging at once, these stories are all about men who are gay, who are Jewish, who are human. —CDC jn

CHRISTOPHER D. CUTTONE is a Portland freelance writer.

GLENN WILLIAMS writes poetry, prose, plays, periodica and porn in Portland.

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dinner date?

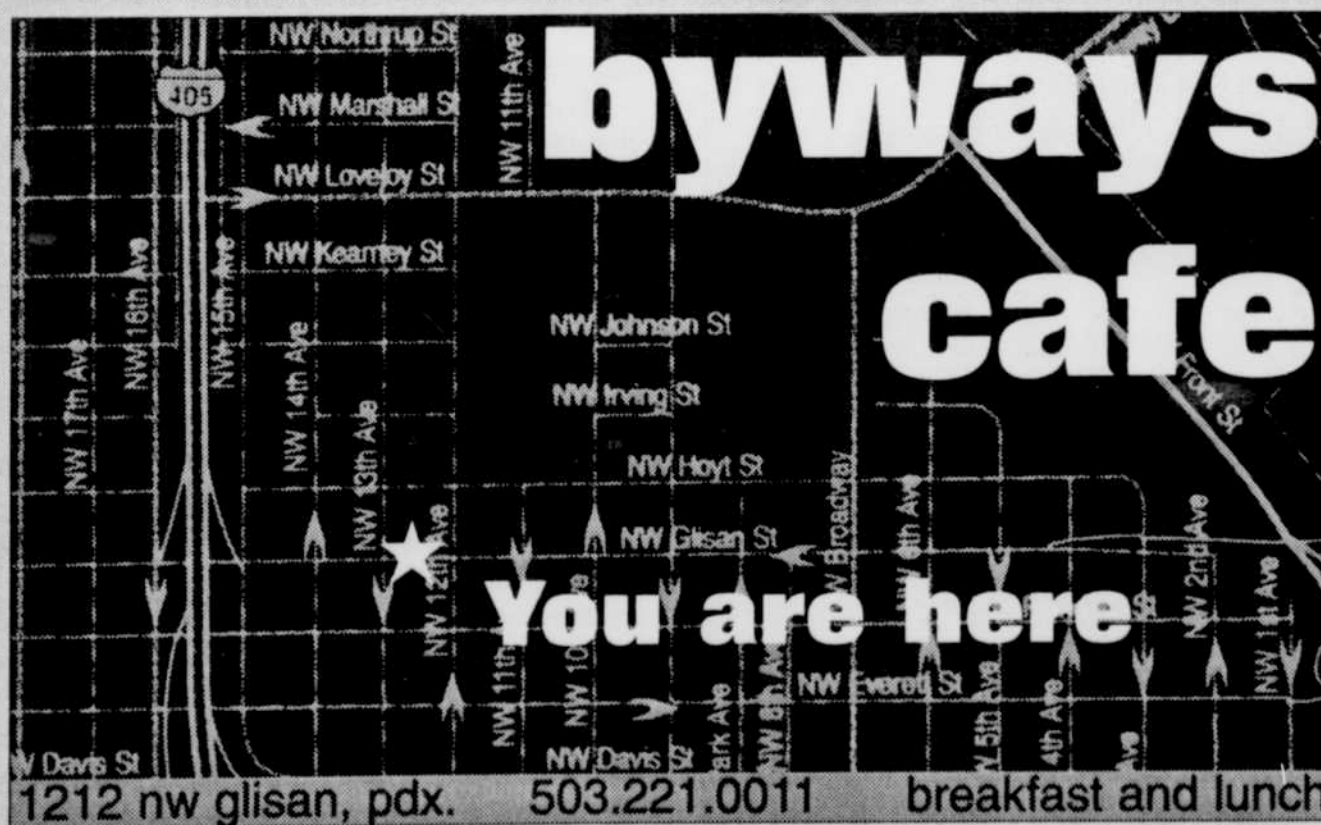
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