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- D. Pascoe, concert review

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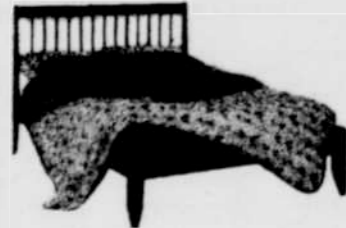
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BOOKS

Cutting edge

A machete-wielding lover seeks revenge in *Testosterone*, and a redneck dyke comes of age in the sharp *A Year of Full Moons*

TESTOSTERONE
by James Robert Baker. Alyson Books, 2000; \$22.95 hardcover.

This story is not for the faint of heart.

Testosterone is one of the most strange, angry, violent and deliciously quirky novels of the year. Deliriously fast-paced and highly charged with a dangerous eroticism, it is destined to become a cult classic, perhaps even outside queerdome.

The book tells the messy, drug-heightened tale of Dean Seagrave, a gay graphic novel writer and movie buff who suspects his lover, Pablo, has just tried to kill him by burning his house down as he slept. As he seeks out Pablo, he learns of the twisted, psychopathic behavior his lover has been hiding from him and realizes he is the only person who can stop this "emotional serial killer."

The first-person narrative is made extremely immediate and intense by taking the form of a transcript of tape recordings that Dean is making as he actually searches the streets, bars and homes of Los Angeles—machete in hand—seeking revenge on Pablo:

"I'll tell you this much. I'm out looking for action, some very serious action, today. I'm seeking catharsis, a visceral catharsis—that's what I'm up to right now. I'm a no-bullshit guy, and one angry queer, so don't fuck with me because I'm on a mission. Attention all breeders. You'd better part for me like the Red fucking Sea, because I'm plenty pissed off, and if you get in my way, I'll ram your rear-end and squash your little baby."

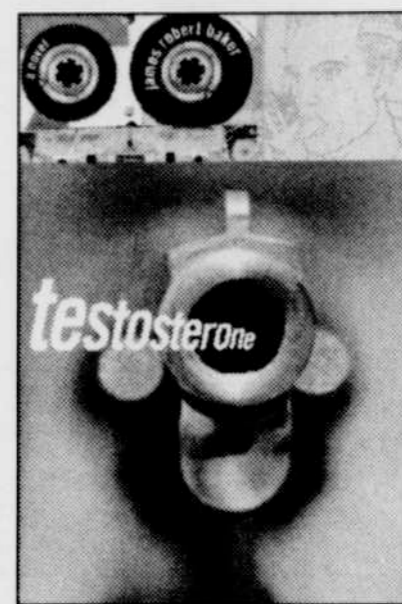
Of course, as the novel progresses, one begins to wonder who the real psycho is here, Dean or Pablo. As Dean's obsession for revenge escalates, his friends become more nervous and fearful for his own stability. The end of this novel is one of the most brutal, violent passages I have ever read and—I have to be honest—one of the most satisfying.

James Robert Baker was a unique new voice in gay literature, and his loss to suicide in 1997 was devastating to readers and fans. He wrote five books, most notably *Tim and Pete* and *Adrenaline*, both of which will soon be republished by Alyson Books. He was also a filmmaker and was highly praised for his cult hit *Mouse Klub Konfidential*, about a Mouseketeer turned gay bondage filmmaker.

Testosterone is not a tale for everyone. But for those of us who occasionally like a good mind-fucking, angry, erotic, roller-coaster ride of a novel, this is for you. —Glenn Williams

A YEAR OF FULL MOONS
by Madelyn Arnold.
St. Martins Press, 2000;
\$25.95 hardcover.

You could find it in the Lambda Award-winning *Bird-Eyes*, and it's back in *A Year of Full Moons*—the merciless, rigid structure of a diversity-blind society. Seattle author Madelyn Arnold's sec-



ond novel is not again set in a mental hospital, but the environment is equally stifling.

Jos, a brilliant 15-year-old baby dyke, tries to grow up in a poor, working-class family in the redneck town of Summit, Ky. Mom, once a talented musician, is relegated to the bedroom, where she is reduced to recovering from and producing more stillborn and premature babies.

Her flimsy presence, comparable to Jane Eyre's mad-woman in the attic, forces Jos and her twin, Ellie, to run the dysfunctional family of seven kids themselves. Dad, not much more than an unstable and cruel dictator, regularly throws violent fits to exert his power and regain his personal sense of control. The man considers Jos a "failed experimental system."

A Year of Full Moons stretches from its first chapter, "April is the cruelest month," in 1963 to exactly one year later with the final chapter, in which April is still "the cruelest month." The accurate illustration of Jos' painful sexual awakening conveys Arnold's sharp insight into the human psyche and unveils her strong sense of empathy. The lesbian awakening generally requires a temporary heavy toll, and that is genuinely represented in this cruel, yet enlightening, year.

A Year of Full Moons presents a fairly typical lesbian coming-of-age story with a lot of classic ingredients. Jos does not want to wear women's clothes or play with horsies.

Born a tomboy, she smokes cigarettes, changes tires and is interested in the mystery of explosives. Slowly but surely, she develops a gaydar of her own and figures out both herself and the hypocrisy of her hostile heterosexual surroundings:

"They'd want you to make them come and then they screech how they weren't gay! Then they remind you you're sick. And they might catch God and turn you in."

Interestingly, Jos' first affair with another queer dramatically leaps off the classical track. The representative pupil-mentor romance is replaced with a short affair with a stern, sadistic riding teacher, which gears up rather abruptly and could easily be mistaken for a Pat Califia scene.

Simultaneous with Jos' personal battle for civil rights, Arnold explores the whole backdrop of turbulent racial, class and gen-

der issues festering in the early '60s American South. A lot of issues at once but masterfully pulled together.

—Els Debbaut

MADELYN ARNOLD will read from *A Year of Full Moons* 7 p.m. Nov. 29 at *In Other Words*, 3734 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd.

GLENN WILLIAMS writes poetry, prose, plays, periodicals and porn in Portland. ELS DEBBAUT is a Portland free-lance writer.

