

REVIEWS

WHILE THE WORLD SLEEPS: WRITING FROM THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS OF THE GLOBAL AIDS PLAGUE

Edited by Chris Bull; Thunders Mouth Press, 2003; \$16.95 softcover

Reading *While the World Sleeps* made me feel guilty and not because of the probably insufficient thought I've given the disease of AIDS through the years. No, I felt bad because the urgency of the topic, combined with the quality and diversity of writing compiled by editor Chris Bull, made it such a page-turner I felt almost as if I were trivializing the seriousness of its subject by treating it like some kind of beach read, devouring it one impassioned, compulsively readable essay after another.

From the foreword by the notorious no-bullshit AIDS activist Larry Kramer ("I dislike most pieces in [this book], including mine") to the last entry, a *Wall Street Journal* report on the rampant spread of HIV in Russian prisons, the book definitively organizes, in chronological order, thought on the disease from intellectuals (Leo Bersani, Susan Sontag), celebrities (Greg Louganis) and those whose names were made through their outspokenness (Randy Shilts, Marlon Riggs).

That some pieces, like Louganis', seem puffy and sentimental, and others, like Mary Fisher's address to the 1992 Republican National Convention, are overly disingenuous or insular, hardly matters. Each entry provides context—a building block in the reader's understanding of the tortuous path AIDS took through its many physical, psychological, emotional and political implications.

While the World Sleeps is emotionally blunt and honest about the overwhelming numbers (lives, infection rates, dollars) of AIDS; it's an easy, fascinating read, but it's not light. "Depressing" isn't too strong a term for it. Hope, however, can be found in the very existence of such a book. If knowledge ever equaled power, the proof can be found here.

—Christopher McQuain

WIGFIELD: THE CAN-DO TOWN THAT JUST MAY NOT

by Amy Sedaris, Paul Dinello and Stephen Colbert; Hyperion, 2003; \$13.95 softcover

Fans of Comedy Central's offbeat series *Strangers with Candy* will be pleased to see that Second City alums Amy Sedaris (David's little sister), Stephen Colbert (currently jibing on *The Daily Show*) and screenwriter Paul Dinello have teamed up again, this time to pen a freaky satire of small-town scams and saviors.

Wigfield is an acerbic slice of backward

Main Street, an inbred off-ramp hole in the ground where strip clubs and used auto parts stores compete for exit-sign placement. But Wigfield also happens to wallow in the shadow of the Bulkwall Dam, a massive pork-barrel idiocy that the government is bent on tearing down, washing away the makeshift settlement.

In stumbles journalist wannabe Russell Hokes in search of a 50,000-word testament to his hefty, well-spent advance. Realizing the element of human interest in a small town edging toward extinction, Hokes begins to interview the locals. And thereby hangs the thread on which Sedaris, Dinello and Colbert hang their hat—a delightfully disturbing mix of peculiar characters that rely on small-town wits to save their own lives (or at least make their misfortune less unfortunate).

For your consideration: Wigfield's three self-declared mayors; High Priestess Thea and her earthy-crunchy life partner, Amythys; Lenare, the local taxidermist/mortician; Julian Childs, a thespian staging plays with rabbits. They're all lurid, off-center and altogether compelling.

Peppered with crazy portraits by popular designer and photographer Todd Oldham, *Wigfield*, just released in paperback, makes for a sardonic sendup. And don't forget to stop over at *Wigfield.com*, if only to find out if the stage tour version will be coming to a town near you.

—Timothy Krause

DIFFERENT DRESS

by Lori L. Lake; Regal Crest, 2003; \$19.95 softcover

Sometimes you're not looking for good literature or the next Great American Novel. Sometimes you just want a little escapism. Enter the lesbian romance novel.

With a background in music production, I was looking forward to reading Lori L. Lake's *Different Dress*—a romance that takes place on a country music tour. Some girl-on-girl action, a little lesbian drama and happily ever after.

What I got instead was way too much information. Lake likes to describe little details. The problem is these details add no real value:

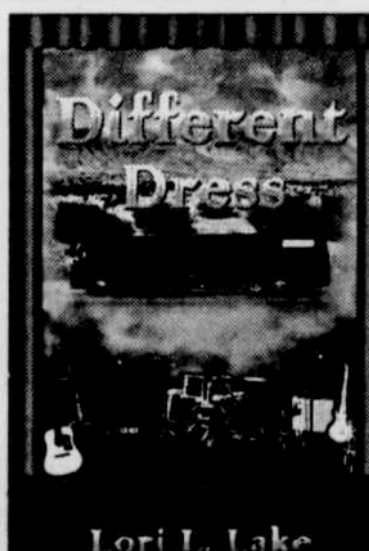
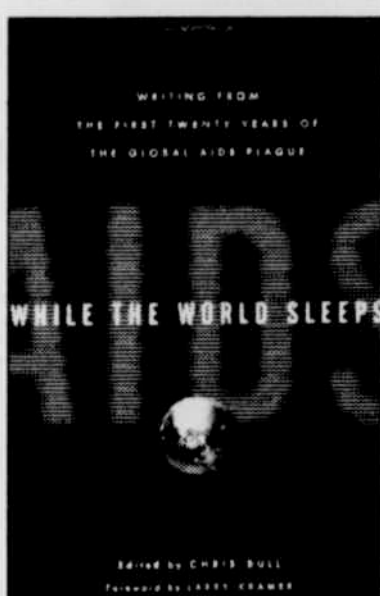
After breakfast, she paid, left a good tip, and headed out of the restaurant.... She made her way across the parking lot to the semi, unlocked the back, and threw open the double doors. It took a little work, but she got the ramps pulled out, then scooted up into the cavernous opening. They kept the things they needed least often toward the back, with the PA system, gear, and equipment toward the front.

And that's only a fraction of the paragraph. In all, Lake spends 350 words getting Jamie's motorcycle out so she can go for a ride! Life is too short for this.

Lake is a decent writer and has a great ability to create compelling characters—I found myself really liking Kip, the up-and-coming singer, and Jamie, her love-interest stagehand.

What Lake needs is to remember what lesbian romance is really for and to get a good editor who can cut the story in half. Then *Different Dress* will be worth reading.

—Kathy Belge





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Support Groups Available

For Women who Partner with Women

The Hambleton Project and the Susan G. Komen Foundation have collaborated to provide these free resources to our community:

- ✦ Bi-weekly support group for lesbians/bisexual women with cancer and their partners/caregivers
- ✦ 8-week bereavement group for lesbians/bisexual women who have lost a loved one

These groups are currently held in both Portland and Salem.

For specific meeting times, locations and more information call the Hambleton Project: 503.335.6591 (PDX) or 503.581.8356 (Salem)



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