

Tailor of Panama struggles for right fit

Yet, Geoffrey Rush shines in the film

ROBIN CONNER

Staff Writer

I don't remember why I put down John Le Carré's 1996 novel, *The Tailor of Panama*, a few years ago after reading only one chapter. I do remember that it was a fine first chapter, which is why I went to see how it turned out in the new movie adaptation from Columbia Pictures.

The Tailor of Panama, a spy thriller/comedy directed by John Boorman (*Deliverance*), paints an interesting portrait of the nervous political atmosphere surrounding the return of the Panama canal to Panama.

Tailor to the rich and powerful, Harry Pendel (Geoffrey Rush) comes equipped with some secrets of his own and manages to come up with more under pressure from British spy Andy Osnard, played by Brosnan. Though warned against spilling

the beans by his down-to-earth secretary and by hallucinations of his dead uncle Benny, Pendel winds up entangling his friends and family in his web of lies.

Jamie Lee Curtis tempts type-casting with the return of her "wife in the dark" role from *True Lies*, but is enlightened a little too late to get in on the action. That is, unless you count her flirtations with Osnard, James Bond's obnoxiously shameless and less talented evil twin.

So here's the skinny: If you just like to enjoy movies, you'll enjoy this one. You can't help but appreciate Rush's outstanding performance as the loose-lipped but well-intentioned tailor, who will keep you guessing on what he'll do next to save his soul. Curtis is definitely tolerable, and though you may not like Brosnan, you'll laugh at his cheap tricks, as well as those of

the incompetent and insane British and American governments, respectively.

On the other hand, if you feel that movies owe you something, you will still enjoy the tailor and the scenery, but feel distracted by Curtis and disgusted by Brosnan (not to mention his strangely effective come-ons, which had the whole audience wincing).

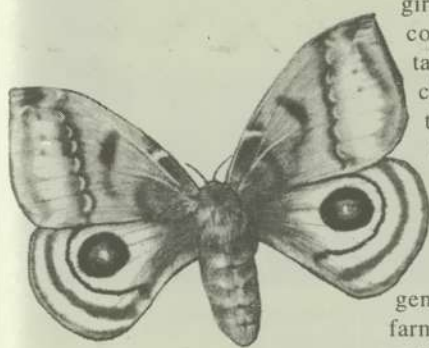
For better or worse, "The Tailor of Panama" is a film that is hard to pin down. Seriously silly one minute, seriously tragic the next; too real and surreal, it left me



British spy Andy Osnard, played by Pierce Brosnan, contemplates his next move in *Tailor of Panama*.

confused as to what label to put on it. My advice is this — don't even try.

Prodigal Summer blends intriguing characters with environmental issues



TAM OLIVER

A&E Editor

Barbara Kingsolver's latest novel, *Prodigal Summer* is filled to the brim with insights about nature.

Set in southern Appalachia, the book follows one summer in the lives of three women, who in different ways, are in touch with their environment. Deanna Wolfe, a wildlife biologist, lives in seclusion as she tends the Zebulon National Forest for the forest service. Her elation with the discovery that coyote have returned to the mountainous area and are about to produce a litter of pups is disturbed by the arrival of a young coyote bounty hunter.

Lusa Maluf Landowski, a city-

girl who marries a farmer, becomes the farm's sole caretaker after her husband's accident. Her knowledge of nature is vast, but it originates from books. She finds it easier to become attached to the land than to the farmers and their way of life that has been passed down for generations. If she stays on the farm, she has to find a way to make it pay for itself. Her search for a solution exemplifies the plight of many southern farmers who have depended on growing tobacco for many years, and now find themselves in a changing country.

The third woman is Nannie Rawley, an elderly farmer of organic apples. Proud of the fact that she was the first organic apple grower in Zebulon County, she is the bane of neighbor Garnet Walker's existence. Almost eighty-year-old, Garnet has a strong sense of how things should be and spends a good part of his day worrying about what Nannie will be up to next.

According to Garnet, Nannie

bribes everyone with her home-made apple pies and gets away with it to the extent that everyone in town has forgiven her for once having an illegitimate child. They've forgotten that she didn't have the shame to even hide her pregnancy and that she blatantly raised the child "...like she had every right to parade a bastard child through a God-fearing community."

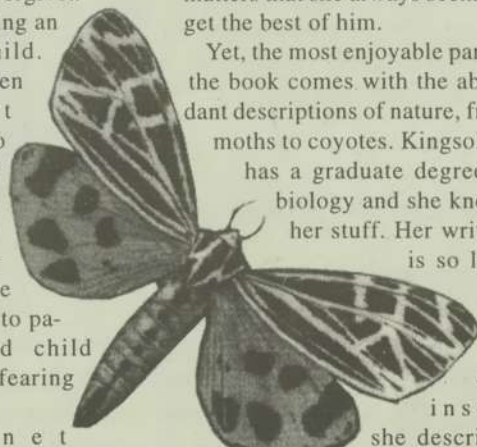
Garnet

Walker's unyielding sense of right and wrong provide some of the more humorous moments in the novel as he spies on Nannie and attempts to make her life as miserable as he thinks she is making his. Whether sloshing through a weed-infested ditch to yank up one of her home-made "NO SPRAY ZONE" signs that is posted along the roadside over his property line or simply hoping that the pesticide he's using drifts

over to her trees, he makes himself into a mean-spirited, yet comical, old man. It doesn't help matters that she always seems to get the best of him.

Yet, the most enjoyable part of the book comes with the abundant descriptions of nature, from moths to coyotes. Kingsolver has a graduate degree in biology and she knows her stuff. Her writing is so lyrical that every insect she describes becomes a pleasant short story within itself. Her understanding of nature allows her to intersperse environmental lessons for those willing to listen.

The interaction between well-developed characters makes the fiction novel *Prodigal Summer* enjoyable. At the same time, it gently persuades the reader to consider environmental issues important to our continued existence and points out how we are interrelated with each other and all of nature.



Return to India

Authors' night features tales of the Indian Diaspora in fiction and memoir

As a part of International Celebration Week, Authors' Night tonight will feature two women writers that honor their Indian heritage through works of fiction, memoir and cookbooks.

Mira Kamdar, Senior Fellow at the World Policy Institute at New School University, will be reading from her memoir *Motiba's Tattoos: A Granddaughter's Journey into Her Indian Family's Past* which tells of her grandmother and her family's immigration to Burma and then the United States from India.

Kamdar's writing has appeared in publications around the world, including *The International Herald Tribune*, *The Times of India*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times*.

Bharti Kirchner is the author of two novels and over 70 articles about Indian cookery and fitness that have appeared in magazines such as *Food and Wine*, *Writer's Digest*, and *The Seattle Times*. She is the author of four cookbooks including *The Bold Vegetarian*, *The Healthy Cuisine of Indian and India Inspired*.

The event will be presented in the Gregory Forum at 7 p.m. and is co-sponsored by Friends of the Library and the English Department. Although admission is free, contributions of \$2 to Friends of the Library will be appreciated.

Authors' books will be available for purchase and signing.

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