

An Interview with Organized Konfusion, page 8A

Artsweek

The Arts and Entertainment Supplement to the Daily Nexus, for the Week of September 29th, 1994



Rena Tom's Look at Modern Japanese Fiction, page 2A

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BOOKS OF MAGIC AND WONDER FROM JAPAN

Summer, despite work and visits home, still seemed to last an endless length of time. However, it was the perfect opportunity to catch up on reading that hadn't been accomplished during the school year. My most memorable reads of the summer have been from Japanese fiction, translated into English. I am not referring to melodramatic tales about the death of the samurai class, however, nor about haiku poetry, which to me has many of the characteristics of fresh sorbet — bright and intense but best appreciated in limited quantities.

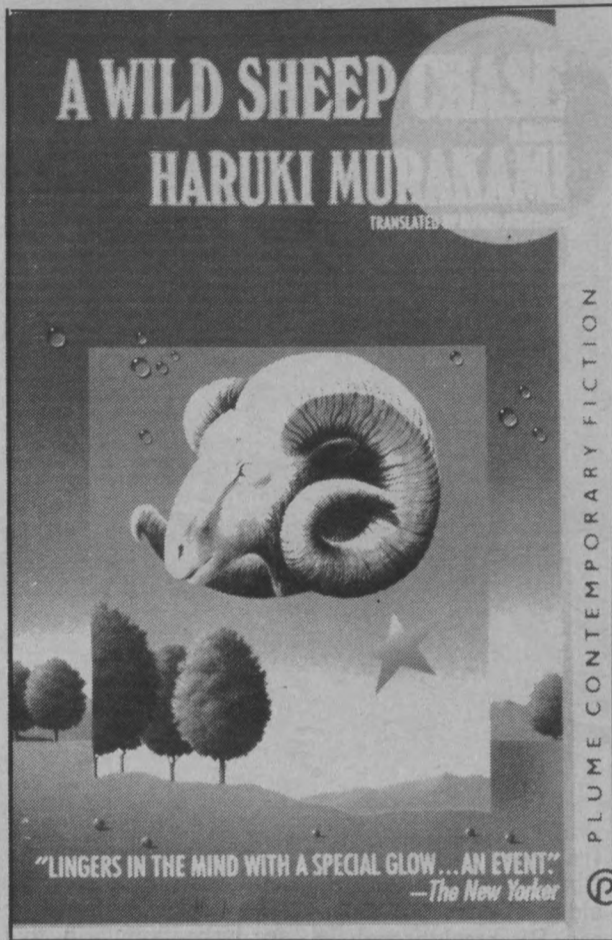
I'm talking about Japanese writing of the last 20 or 30 years, as searing and ultramodern as any created by contemporary writers in this country, and yet retaining a sweetness and charm not often found on the Times' bestsellers list. This quirkiness exudes from these novels despite the fact that, as translations, they are susceptible to different readings by different translators.

One essay I read by a travel writer about his visit to Japan painted an admirable yet chilling portrait of a society whose collective thought boiled down to "Everything in its own time." While this may make Japan a model of efficiency, the author wrote, it also bred an atmosphere where one traded personality to achieve a collective

balance with one's community. It typified a land where sold-out stadiums at baseball games dutifully cheered for the home team on cue and remained perfectly silent the rest of the time. Current Japanese fiction seems to be battling this tendency to demand order and civility, even though it is the essence and cornerstone of Japanese culture. The fact that

these books, which abound with magic and paradox and improbable situations, are extremely popular in Japan as well as abroad, may indicate that Japanese society also hungers for change and unpredictability, even though the current system "works."

One author I am exploring is Haruki Murakami. He has won the presti-



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gious Tanizaki Prize in his home country for *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in 1985 and has also authored *The Elephant Vanishes*, available in translation through Vintage International, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, and the two-volume *Norwegian Wood*. His newest book is entitled *Dance, Dance, Dance* and is the sequel to

took the world by storm — not with controversy, but with good old-fashioned storytelling. I have friends as far away as Iceland who have discovered and enjoyed this book. *Kitchen* is comprised of two stories — “Moonlight Shadow,” and “Kitchen,” which won a magazine prize for new writers when she was 23. She has followed it up with two other novels, *Tu-*

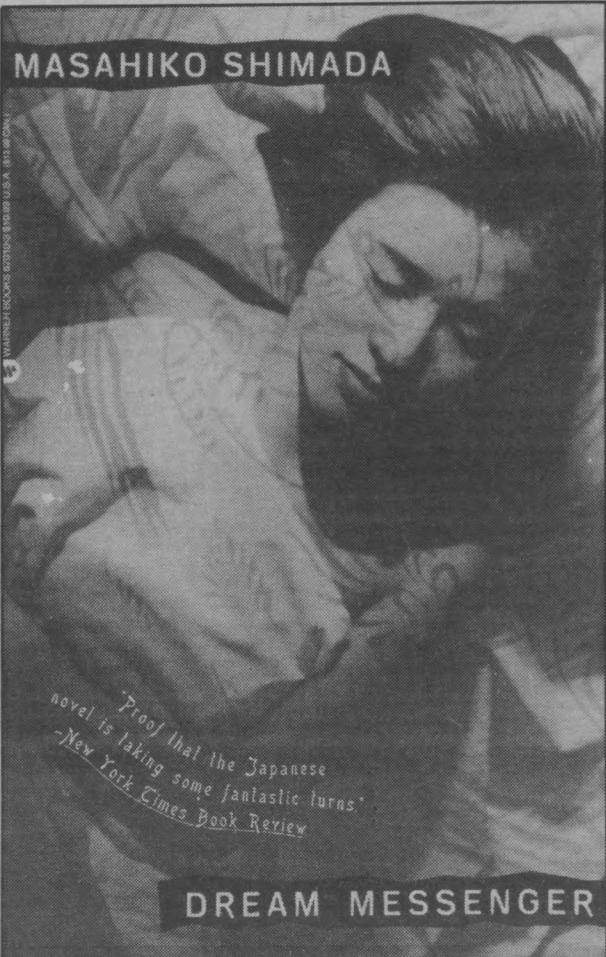
does not degenerate into mindless sexuality; his novel also has themes of spirituality and unreality as he focuses on the portent of dreams and the workings of the unconscious mind, a little like Neil Gaiman’s comic book series, *The Sandman*, but applied to the dazzling pace and excitement of modern-day Tokyo and New York. The story is told in some chapters by a young woman who is empowered to act as a private detective for a rich old woman, and in others by the woman’s missing son, who apparently has a voice in his head called Mikainaito and lives equally in dreams and reality.

In *Dream Messenger* are open references to drugs, homosexuality, and other topics considered somewhat shocking to even our society. What is even more interesting, though, is that one can glean from Shimada’s book a Japanese viewpoint on Japan itself. While his observations may not be definitive for all of Japan, it is quite unusual to encounter in writing a different opinion about the importance of power and money, and the importance of love and family, from a closed society that normally refrains from revealing anything about itself.

The differences between Japanese society and others are also explored, generally in a matter-of-fact manner that can reveal both humor and sadness. In an anecdote about a rock star named Tetsuya Nishikaze who was into orgies and drugs: “According to this friend, Tetsuya wanted to do everything other big rock stars did; if he kept it up, he’d end up like Sid Vicious and kill his girlfriend and die of an overdose. Trouble was, this friend said, it would never happen — rock stars, you see, don’t OD in Japan.” It is ironic that this friend thought Tetsuya had to die in order to be as famous as other rock stars, considering the inglorious deaths that have affected rock groups such as Nirvana, The Gits, and Hole in the recent past.

A problem with modern Japanese fiction is that most people don’t know it exists — its availability in bookstores is sporadic. All of the books mentioned above were available in Japanese for many years before they were translated and made available to other countries. *Dream Messenger*, for example, was published in Japan in 1989 but underwent translation and was published by Warner Books in the U.S. only this month. Fortunately, I have spotted most of these novels at the Earthling and other bookstores, as well as the UCSB library. Slowly, we in the west are being allowed to see modern Japanese society from an insider’s viewpoint; less uninformed and more intelligent speculation will hopefully result.

—Rena Tom



A Wild Sheep Chase. Murakami has taught at Princeton and has also translated works by Chandler, Carver, Fitzgerald and others into Japanese. His breakthrough in writing came while he was managing a jazz bar in Japan, and his various life experiences pop up in his characters. They reflect the fact that the author is a diverse and intelligent human being, and help disprove the money-driven, passionless stereotype that is unfortunately perpetuated in America.

Murakami has been compared to authors such as Tom Robbins and Thomas Pynchon, Kafka and Borges. He indulges in fantasy by introducing dwarves that take over your body, and a sort of cyberspace, into his plots. He incorporates references to pop culture from America, like movies that feature Bing Crosby or Charles Bronson, and music by Ray Charles or John Coltrane. He blends these “cultural-bites” with the new culture from Japan, such as riding bullet trains through cities, late-night noodle shops, and karaoke.

These details make for fascinating reading by themselves, but Murakami’s books also function to dispel many myths about Japanese society in general. His characters stress about the same things we do, have idiosyncrasies, odd sexual urges, the works. Because many people still think of Japan as a very traditional and staid land (which it is, to an extent), *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and other works represent one kind of “import” that no one can complain about.

Another author currently enjoying popularity is Banana Yoshimoto, a young woman whose short first novel *Kitchen*

gumi and *NP*, and a couple of collections of essays. Yoshimoto is a rare commodity in Japan, just as she would be here, as a respected female author. We see, by her popularity, that the position of women in Japanese society is slowly changing, and while she is not a feminist, her main character in “Kitchen” is an independent young woman who must decide what course her life will take when her grandmother, her only family, passes away.

Yoshimoto writes more from reality than Murakami, and focuses on the concerns of the youth culture in Japan today — the people who are attempting to fit work, entertainment, and relationships into a life already crowded with family and tradition. She is




very good at delineating the dynamics of relationships between young adults, and at first glance can be pigeonholed as a “Generation X” writer. However, her characters resemble “real” people and lack the typical angst emotion and hip language and style that seem to typify writing about and by young people today.

Finally, *Dream Messenger* by Masahiko Shimada shatters the rather sexless image imposed on Asian men in this and the last century by the media. The characters’ talk and actions are frankly erotic at times, and yet Shimada

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O'ROURKE BEATS KEY

One of the pleasures in the reviewing of books business is that every publicity house East of Plat-form Holly insists on enveloping the quiet and surely sore-eyed book critic with a cornucopia of the latest in "must-reads."

Because reviewing is a business — it is not for nothing they drown the Nexus with review copies — books are apt to come

across my editor's desk that some sycophant executive at Dell Horror deemed perfectly profitable.

Take *Dead In The Water* by Nancy Holder, for example, a 413-page book about what it will be like when you drown:

"In seas of love and blood they will drown, one at a time, in agony. And for their company, they will

have those who have drowned before them, and those who have received a message in a bottle..."

And these people get published?

Then there's the occasional small press like Baskerville, who just sent us *The Book of Frank!* The author, Simon Black, is perhaps known for authoring the overly sentimental *Me and Kev* — a sure-fire tear-jerker about a man who combats his alcoholism by loafing about with his dog. (Charlie's *Travels with Steinbeck* sound sorta familiar?)

Back to Frank, lest I digress ad infinitum. The new book is apparently about, and I quote, a nihilist punk prophet who quits his job, lets his life slide, and ends up on the street stealing pantyhose to sell on the black market for bread money.

You can probably tell by now that reviewing books is, well, intriguing. Then again, the occasional gem of novel does find its way across the aforementioned editor's desk and onto my lap.

Case in point: satirist Patrick Jake O'Rourke's latest anthology of Rolling Stone articles *All The Trouble In The World* (Atlantic Monthly, 340 Pages, \$22), a brash serving of ridicule and humor from a relatively freethinking iconoclast.

I dare not say the word

P.J. O'ROURKE



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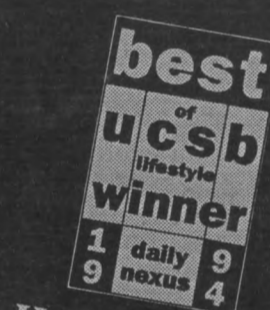
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Republican because Rourke likes sex, hates Patrick Buchanan and has done more than his share of ingesting illicit drugs. Besides, pronouncing that term always leaves my mouth arid, as if Reaganomics even stole the moisture off of my tongue.

But even if he's not a party favorite, conservative he is.

O'Rourke's subtitle, after all, reads *The lighter side of overpopulation, famine, ecological disaster, ethnic hatred, plague and poverty* — subjects few people who didn't vote Buchanan in '92 find amusing today.

O'Rourke sets out in this book to deconstruct fashionable worries, which is admittedly not a bad thing. Remember "Perot for President"?

Said author makes fun of Santa Cruz environmentalism, sort of. Y'know, where rich kids from the suburbs wear Birkenstocks and third-world necklaces only to engage in ecological correctness and other events in the olympics of victimization on behalf of people or plants that don't know them, or care to.

See ROURKE, p.15A



WHITE MOON RISING

The new Jean-Claude Van Damme movie, *Time Cop*, tells the story of the police who defend the world from those who travel backwards in time with "intent to alter."

The main cop, Walker (Van Damme), is married to Melissa (Mia Sara). The Bad

and taking a beating himself (which is important when you're the hero.) But a thinking man's action or sci-fi movie it is not.

Highlander and *Dune* are among the many great, thought-provoking sci-fi movies which *Time Cop* doesn't measure up



Guy, McComb (Ron Silver), is a U.S. senator who is using time travel to help finance his bid for the presidency.

You may have noticed the brevity of that paragraph. Well, that's how the movie goes. There isn't much more, except some really stunning special effects. Billed as a thinking man's action movie, I ran to the theatre hoping to see Van Damme act. He seemed so capable in the "Entertainment Tonight" interview I saw not so long ago. He is capable, but only of kicking and punching all the bad guys,

to. Time travel always poses plot paradoxes, like how and when past interference will affect the future, but what this movie lacks is interesting characters. Van Damme does act, he just doesn't do a lot of it.

To his credit, Van Damme's on-screen squabbles with his best friend feel realistic, like a real argument with a real friend. (Such accuracy is all too rare. In a scene in *Bloodsport* in which coconuts

See TIMECOP, p.13A



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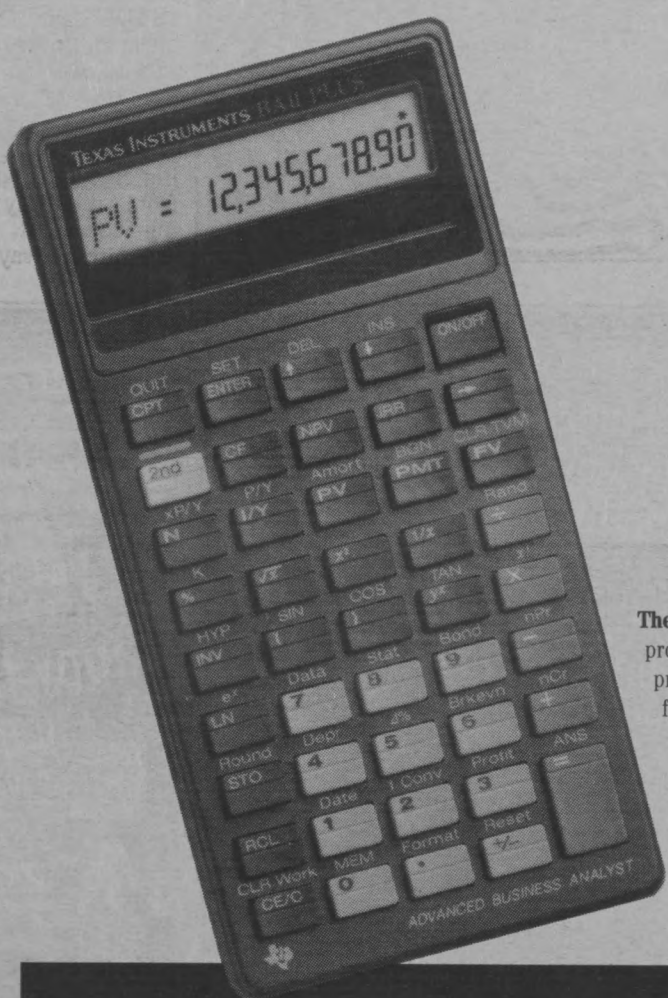
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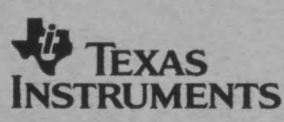
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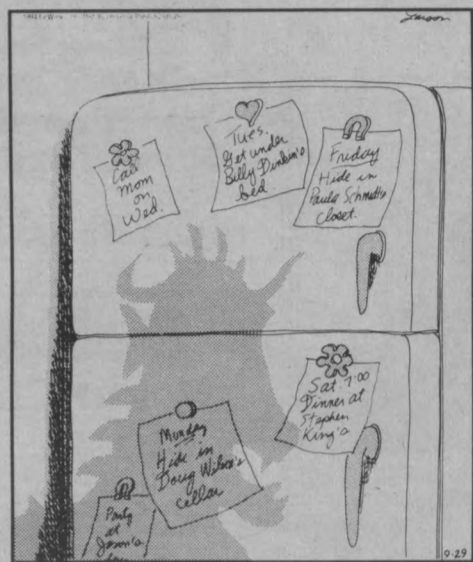


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Every once in a while I get really enthusiastic. I don't know why — it's usually just hormonal. This time, I have a reason. Everybody should drag everybody they know to see *Après L'Amour* playing at the Riviera starting Oct. 7. I don't care how much they don't like foreign films. Subtitles bother ya? Not an excuse.

Even if they ask you what it's about, don't worry if you don't know — this review will tell you. It may take a little longer than *Time Cop*, but it's worth it.

Après L'Amour (*After Love*) follows the lives of people who fall in and out of love with each other frequently. Set over roughly six months in the life of the narrator, Lola (Isabelle Huppert), it follows the travails of several relationships — hers and those of her friends and colleagues.

To create an ellipse, one must do the following: draw two points. Tie a loose string between the two points. With a pencil, stretch the string taut and draw two semicircles around the points, one above them, one below. Theoretically, the two curves join to form an ellipse. This will all come in handy later.

Here's the cool thing. Plotwise, the movie is about two people and as such it resembles an ellipse, with two points around which the action centers. The really cool thing is that it works. All actions taken are completed, all relationships entered are defined. In other words, the ellipse joins itself and closes.

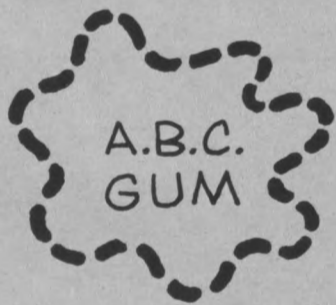
The actions taken and the relationships started are thus: Lola (point A), at the start of the movie, is together (loose string) with long time partner David (point B, played by Bernard Giraudeau.) Shortly after this is established at a book-signing party for her latest novel (did I mention she was a writer?) she dives into an *après*—party tryst with invitee and musician Tom (Hippolyte Girardot) and a semicircle starts.

That same night we discover David has a family — the other semicircle starts — from a previous relationship with Marianne (played by the single-monikered LIO,) who was not at the party. So the action centers simultaneously around David and Lola. An unusual structure is

See APRES, p.13A

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GAMERS RUN AMUCK

Consider for a moment, if you will, the television game show. No, really — think about it, because if you do, you'll realize that nothing could be more downright American than this unique combination of glitz and glamour, brains and dumb luck, lovely merchandise and cash prizes.

There might be better analogies for our culture, but none of them can adequately explain why a certified moron is just as likely to make a billion dollars as a bonafide genius. Being a brilliant rocket scientist might pay the rent, but if you had invented the Pet Rock, you'd be set for life. Likewise, a Ph.D. might get you a shot on "Jeopardy," but half a brain would make you the all-time Super Champion on "Card Sharks." Game shows embody everything America stands for: shallow entertainment, competition for big money, 15 minutes of fame for everybody and a never-ending stream of consumer products. Intelligence is recommended but certainly not required.

But game shows weren't always the way we find them today. There was a time, long before "Hollywood Squares" began its assault on the collective American IQ, when only the smartest guys and gals got the honor of being game show contestants. In the 1950s, when television

was still a wild and woolly frontier, people tuned in to prime time game shows such as "Twenty-One" and "The \$64,000 Question" to be impressed by the knowledge of some exceptionally smart folks. That interest made the ratings soar and established game shows as a multi-million dollar industry.

But money inspires greed, and greed inspires conspiracy and scandal. Television game shows experienced their own celebrated scandal in 1957 when it was learned that some of the shows had been rigged to ensure maximum ratings. After an investigation that was big news in its day, several careers were trashed and the game show industry was regulated to ensure that it wouldn't happen again.

This scandal wasn't exactly a shadowy figure on the grassy knoll, but as the new film *Quiz Show* demonstrates, it's a pretty good story. The latest from director Robert Redford, *Quiz Show* tells the story of the semi-famous scandal and the events leading up to it. The film offers a fascinating slice of 1950s American life, gives a provocative hint of the early days of television, and makes you start pondering the game show as a national institution. It also happens to be a damn good movie.

After director Redford, the only name most people

will recognize on this film is Rob Morrow of "Northern Exposure" fame. Morrow plays Dick Goodwin, a recent Harvard Law grad and member of a Congressional office who breaks open the scandal of the popular NBC game show "Twenty-One." Goodwin isn't really the central character of the movie, but his relentless pursuit of the truth makes him the driving force of the story, and Morrow does a nice job in the role. His on-again, off-again (and constantly phony) Massachusetts accent is annoying but not terribly so.

Granted, as conspiracies go this one was far from Watergate; as one character aptly put it, cheating in a game show is "like plagiarizing a comic strip." But like the original Congressional Hearings on "Twenty-One" in 1957, *Quiz Show* keeps viewers enthralled because of its sheer entertainment value. It is slower in some parts than others, but the two-and-a-half hour movie never drags. The suspense of waiting for the other shoe to drop — as it must — keeps the film interesting throughout.

And never once does anyone say "Big Bucks, no Whammies!"

— Scott McPherson

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KONVERSATION OF KONFUSION

INTERVIEW BY MONTY LUKE

Complex. Funky. Intelligent. Clever. These are just a few of the adjectives that come to mind when referring to Organized Konfusion. With an unmatched lyrical style, Organized Konfusion burst into the world of hip hop three years ago with a debut album that marked the beginning of a new lyrical aesthetic, one that focused not only on what was being said, but also the unique and unusual manner in which it was delivered. Artsweek's Monty Luke recently caught up with Organized Konfusion to discuss guns, the music industry, and their new album, *Extinction Agenda*.

Artsweek: Is it true that when you guys finished this album, *Extinction Agenda*, you had to redo a lot of the songs?

Prince Poetry: What happened was, a lot of the samples we used didn't get cleared.

AW: How has your relationship with the label been overall? I mean, I know we're sitting in the belly of the beast right now ... but if people out there want to get signed, they should know what's up.

PP: I been tryin' to tell people to really make sure you go through a thorough situation with the contracts, all the technical stuff, 'cause everyone's looking at TV, and looking at the flowers, but without the seeds being planted the

correct way, there ain't gonna be no flowers. A lot of these record labels, you got to understand, they only talk one language and that's money.... The last two years has been hell on earth for Organized Konfusion. All I can say is, if it wasn't for the people, the reporters bein' there, supporting, and without publicity, the shit's not going to be seen. If it wasn't for the supporters, the fans, the reporters, the radio shows, I'd probably be working doing some other shit.

AW: There are a couple mentions of that on the new record, references to *Snakes and stuff like that*, right?

PP: It's definitely out there, you know. Everybody's got their good and their bad side ... A lot of people's getting involved with this rap shit, and they look at the ghetto and be like, "oh, those people." What are those people? Those people can talk and express themselves just like you can, it's just how the system is getting so separated ... you know the world is coming to an end, so we just trying to keep it real while we here.

AW: Personally I think your debut album is a landmark in hip hop. But is there anything you would have done differently about it?

PP: Preproduction ... would have come out sounding tighter, but our whole album is a vibe, you

know what I'm saying, so I think it would have been the same.

Pharoahe Monch: We go on so much of a feeling, like on the single ["Stress"], at the point where we were in the studio doing that song, vibing that music for the single, there was some shit going on, so we expressed it ... People listen to the album, they're going to be like,



"they curse more on this album than the last," and even my mom is like that, but she understands what we were going through at the time.

We were doing songs like "Bring it on Muthafucka." That's how I felt. That might not be how I am, it's not an excuse, but it's an expression on the

song. As far as the relationship with the label, they making changes and it's cool right now, but there been some rough spots ... (laughter)

PP: Some straight up bullshit. The first album, I think it did what it did, people got it, they appreciate it. I mean, to have people like Fishbone ask, "oh, can I get a copy of that album," is enough. When

business for two more years. But quarter way through the album, we decided to call it "Stress" because it was kind of interfering with what we're trying to do with the album. Visually we progressed, and business-wise we progressed, but it's still a vibe group.

One day we feel like killing, one day we feel like being the next peacemakers.

PP: There ain't no way you're going to be the same person 365 days a year, so it's like we not trying to get caught up in a little niche. Hip hop consists of original songs. It's just the songs have a lot of parts to them — a lot of people not keeping all the parts. A song could be very creative. You can talk about guns, but how you talking about guns? "TEC-9," "Wreck Mine," "Disconnect Nine," all that shit rhymes, but a rhyme is two words. It could be anything.

It's how you do it, how creatively you do it, and ask yourself, no one would have thought about doing it from this perspective. Give people another way of opening up their minds. If you decide you're going to talk about guns and there's 25 records, you should listen to all 25 and say "I'm going to stay away from all that shit and do something totally different." But it's still about guns. It can be done, but

people don't know how to be creative with their words and their concepts.

AW: Why do you think that is?

PP: Because they getting caught up in the political stage of it ... they're looking at Snoop Dogg's fuckin' Lexus, but he didn't get that because he just sat there, he worked for that shit...

AW: As far as credits, who did production on the new album? You guys did it yourselves again?

PP: We did 7 or 8 tracks, Buckwhyld did three. He's a upcomin' producer that's like out of this world, he's on his way to blowing up. He did a Beastie Boys remix featuring Q-Tip.

AW: Q-Tip was also on your record, right?

PP: He did a few songs for O.C.'s debut album, and a House of Pain remix. There's another guy, Roc Weiler, he's in a group called Cross Breed. He did production for the Flatliners, which is coming out on Def Jam. He did production on Ask Me, which is a singing group — I think they're still on Def Jam — and he did a song for us. We're just trying to work with some new people who's tryin' to come up and do somethin' for themselves, give 'em a chance, but it's got to be tight.

AW: What does the title of the new record, *Extinction Agenda*, mean?

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PM: I hate to be bleak in my outlook on life, but when I watch the news and I see the events and the earthquakes and all this shit, we look at this time here as rented time for our seeds, for us, things are going to be extinct soon, if things don't change with hip hop, things are going to be extinct soon. So this album is ... touching on things we feel people need to do to keep it going ... And I mean all people.

PP: *Extinction Agenda* means to me that we going through an era that we going to have to get rid of what's keeping us stressed out. Not to say it's promoting violence or anything like that, but if you on some bullshit and you bring it to us, you going to catch it, that's one. Two, I look at it as a big barren land, and I'm walking through that shit, and I see mad severed arms, holding mikes. That's what it means to me because, it's like, it's happened already. People's careers are in these niches, and these gimmicks they coming up with, they end up being deceased after 2 or 3 years, and hip hop is something we trying to prolong, a different type of music.

Supposed to be for everybody, you got to keep it universal, not in the same format over and over again...

AW: How can a group like *Organized Konfusion*, a group that I think lyrically and thematically, in the spectrum of hip hop, is fairly to the left, it's hard enough for a lot of record execs to understand a Snoop

Doggy Dogg, and I think a group like *Organized Konfusion* is even harder to understand...

PM: I understand what you're saying, because if I was A&R at a label, and I had a group that was throwing different flavor at me, I would really have to sit down and take my time with that group. And in the past, things have been rushed, but I can't front, we don't want a niche.

...This year we know who our music is for, it's for open-minded individuals, we got mad radio shit on our album, we got the to-the-left shit on our album, and just like the last album we could have looped Rick James or Good Times or some shit, and the hook could've been "shake shake shake your ass," we could've went to the beach and did the video and shit, but you know, we chose to reach the few, and we went on the road, and found that the few was not the few...

PP: The reason why people might not understand Snoop Dogg or *Organized Konfusion*, because people take it out of context, of what I mean. I don't have nothing to do with your skin color either. ... If you leave this desk and you mingle with people, and say "look, this is what I'm trying to do," I don't think people in the hip hop community look at color. I really honestly think people would be like "he's trying to get to know this shit, so let me kick it with him how I feel."

AW: What are your favorite tracks off the record, and why?

PP: "Straight Bullet," 'cause it's another gun song, but it's not coming at you from the same direction ... I don't want to get into that shit 'cause I go way back, I get extra deep, 'cause that shit is some other shit. Gunpowder was made to fuckin' build. I don't know how that shit got turned into a gun. But guns is in the street, everybody has guns, some have guns to protect themselves, some have guns for the wrong reasons. Them shits got here through the system ... so when I see a kid in the street with a gun, I'm saying it's his fault, 'cause he knows what he's

damn thing, I've had people who's just been ran up on for no reason. So I tell brothers, if you got a gun, try to keep that shit at home, 'cause I know in New York right now you got a baseball cap, you got a nice car, you getting pulled over and your shit is getting ripped up, they'll be in your fuckin' car. If they're going to go, "he's got a baseball hat, he's driving an Infiniti," that could be your pop's car and you could have a record deal. So don't try to beat the system, try to exploit the system ... 'cause everyone's a different individual, everyone's taken in

body's capable of murder, show a kid how to pull a trigger ... so as far as rapping about it, I'm like tired of it.

AW: Let's talk about "Stress" and the song "Maintain." I think what they say is that this time is real crazy, and as black people, or as people, as human beings it is a struggle every day to maintain that humanity in us. I wanted to give you a chance to express what that's about.

PP: "Stress" is really like our way of expressing the different forms of stress. Stress has a million topics under that. You could be stressed from having a million ego-tripping artists, and you gotta sit and do your fuckin' job, and talk to a dick, you know, and everyone has their own form of stress ... you hear that same song on the radio 40 times a day, that's just fucked up, when his man might have a record that's dope and "yo, why don't you just give him two of those slots?" There's a lot of shit that's just not getting exposed.

"Maintain" is a song telling people to chill, even myself. Everybody has a fuckin' piece of racist in 'em, "Maintain" is meaning to try to think first. If a

white officer pulls me over, my attitude is like, "What the fuck," I'm ready to scream and shit. If a black officer pulled me over, I'd be like [no big deal]. And that's shit that people don't realize that they do. ... Because if I would've gave that cop a chance, like "yes, officer,"

you never know, don't fuckin' matter that he's white, he might've been that one white guy that's not with the bullshit, you know what I'm saying, instead of judging him like a white guy that was with the bullshit. And so it has gotten into situations where a lot of times I would scream at cops, they'll say "why you so high headed for?" and he's standing like *what's wrong with you?* and I feel like a total dick, after I was screaming at him without giving him a chance. So I try to maintain first.

That song to me is a dedication to [Monch] and his father, 'cause I lost my mother a long time ago but my pops is like my friend, and when he lost his father it was a really ill feeling. His pops had a mad influence on the group, like he'd come into the room [and say], "That beat is dope but it ain't hard enough!" and you got a parent coming from the era he came from, giving you that support, that shit is mad strong. So "Maintain" is a song telling my partner to keep your head up. Death comes in mysterious ways, that shit comes real sudden but we just gotta try to handle it and get over.

AW: Who are your influences lyrically?

PP: Kool Moe D., Whodini, Kool G. Rap, Treacherous Three, Rakim, Public Enemy, all the lyrical people, all the people who was on some real flow and you felt that energy come up.

See KONFUSE, p.11A

"WE COULD HAVE LOOPED RICK JAMES OR GOOD TIMES OR SOME SHIT..."

doing, but that shit just didn't get in his home because he just felt like going and getting it, that shit got in this country and in his place some kind of way. I don't get involved with that part of that shit. If I know somebody who's got a gun, I'm not going to tell them not to keep it. I've had friends who have been robbed, they ain't did a

for their own personal shit, so when it comes to that gun shit, I be like to each his own, I'm not telling nobody to fucking hand their guns in because I don't know how it feels to have a gun stuck in my mouth, and I don't think that I will be a nice guy after it happens either.

PM: Getting back to the gun shit ... it's like every-

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By Kevin Carhart

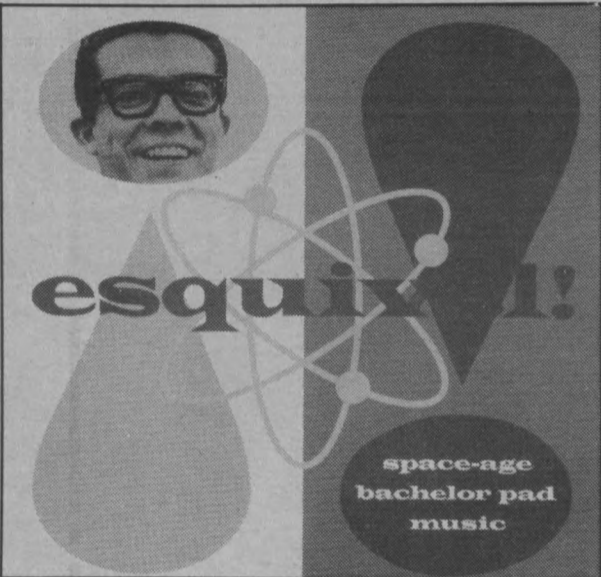
A new best-of compact disc from the Mexican bandleader Esquivel is being released by Bar/None, in the middle of an apparent resurgence in "lounge" and "cocktail" music. Some of the ultra-glib reviews of this new trend really get my blood boiling.

"Grunge, at least in Manhattan, is redundant," writes Anya Sacharow in *New York* magazine. "... a handful of bands is reclaiming punk by dressing it in a dinner jacket, soaking it in martinis and sending it crooning into the neon night."

"People are sick of everything being so hard and serious," said Nirvana biographer Michael Azerrad. "This is fun."

"It's hard to imagine that the Cocktail Nation could actually someday replace the Alternative Nation," writes Karen Schoemer in *Newsweek*.

The whole equation makes my skin crawl. Why were things hard and serious, before? Grunge has always been a noisy, unlistenable genre. It did not deserve to capture the national imagination. We could do worse than for something with melody and a clean sound to be picked



up with the same fervor. But what's it all worth if the flannel sheep can be turned into velvet bow-tie sheep at the drop of a hat? "Hard and serious" didn't signify anything — it was just a stupid, empty trend waiting to die.

Esquivel is a hero to some new lounge groups, like Combustible Edison, Love Jones and Black Velvet Flag. (No one's mentioning Grenadine, but they're good too.) The bandleader made groundbreaking, Latin-influenced instrumental easy-listening pop in the '50s and '60s, laced with bongos, strange instruments like the early Moog or the theremin, nonsense syllables, and horn section blasts. If you have an ear for the appropriation of mundane sounds in a hipper context, you may like it. *And if you like it, like it for good.*

The Bar/None CD features all the stereo effects, neat methods, and bits that make him worth listening to. It's fun. But according to a friend of mine who's a longtime fan of Esquivel, they have no excuse for making it only 40 minutes. There's much much more, but a large audience's unwillingness to look for vinyl probably makes the CD an exclusive. It's kind of a ripoff, but it's all we'll get on CD for a long, long time.

—Kevin Carhart

KONFUSE

Continued from p.9A

PM: When I first started writing, I was into like KRS-One as far as on the rap tip. But as far as on the vibe tip, Hendrix, Sting, we would listen to all genres of music and just be like, "the vibe where he's at is the vibe where we're at," so we're gonna flip it like this, so that it's just mad infinite and universal for us, there's no limit ... When you fuckin' make shit one-dimensional, you become close-minded.

AW: I noticed that on this album, there aren't that many fictional, storytelling songs like "Releasing Hypnotical Gasses," and "Prisoners of War," there weren't really any tracks like that on this album. Why?

PP: 'Cause it was more from a real life perspective, actuality is goin' on, that's where we was comin' from most of this time.

AW: Do you think you'll get back to that at some point?

PP: Yeah, I think we will. But what happened was, we just lost the imagi-

nation, that's all it was, the creativity is still there, we just were just more serious-minded.

AW: Is it true that you guys covered a Queen song, "Fat Bottomed Girls"? Whatever happened to that?

PP: What happened to it? I don't know, man, this motherfuckin' label went through so many transitions, it should've had a sex change. So it's like, I don't know, to work on something like that, it's powerful, man, to see so many engineers run up to the studio, "oh God, you're doing the Queen shit!" I like the experience, but as far as what happened to the song, I would like to know myself! Inquiring minds is asking! But just to do it was cool, because everybody was listening to "We Will Rock You," and the main songs that really like got crossed over to everybody no matter what color you was.



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APRES

Continued from p.6A used, of two separate, emotionally powerful plots, rather than a plot and some subplots. Each plot moves equally to complete the ellipse.

Enough about technique. The social implications of the movie are huge. Not one of these relationships has any sort of social sanction to it (except for a marriage at the end, the participants of which I will leave for the

screen). As David says, "Marriage is the leading cause of divorce," and so no one except Tom is married.

As a result, this is a very adult film, and if the movie lacks anything, it is interesting children. This movie's kids are almost an afterthought, more anchors than personalities, and it's unfortunate, because the situations they are put into might evoke some very interesting things from them.

See this movie. It's smart, funny stuff (even in another language), and for some reason, it portrays

passion and genuine interest between people in a way I haven't seen in a while. I guess it's because when these people are together, they really want to be together. That, in a way, may be the best thing about the whole film.

And I'm not tellin' how the ellipse closes.

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—Chris George

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TIMECOP

Continued from p.5A are dropped on his stomach from the top of a tree, he grunts as if he's actually enjoying it.)

And maybe in his next movie, he'll act as though he likes his wife. Melissa (Mia Sara) was great in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. But Ferris' go-anywhere, do-anything girlfriend goes nowhere, does nothing, and says very little in *Time Cop*. She seems an afterthought in the script, a character written in after the director found his producer was on a family values trip. It does her talent no justice, but her plain, honest face (played with great subtle deviousness in *Ferris*, but made stiff by a house and family in *Time Cop*) would not, in this script, upstage Van Damme.

Actually, the woman I was with set me straight on what the movie was about. She enjoyed it a hell of a

lot, and claims not to have thought at all about the film, neither before nor after. According to her, Van Damme's butt was the hero of the movie.

Of course, I missed it completely, but it does make sense. Every time there's a hero needed, someone who can wake out of a dead sleep to kill three heavily armed house breakers, Van Damme's moon is shining. When the girl is got, the butt makes sure things go smoothly.

I like this movie for the same reason I always like action movies — fighting is neat to watch when everybody who gets shot up deserves it. Good guys win, bad guys lose. For those interested in Van Damme's butt, there's plenty of that, too. This is not really a thinking man's movie any more than *Remains of the Day* is an action movie, but it's a fun hour-and-a-half if you can avoid nagging questions about time travel.

—Chris George

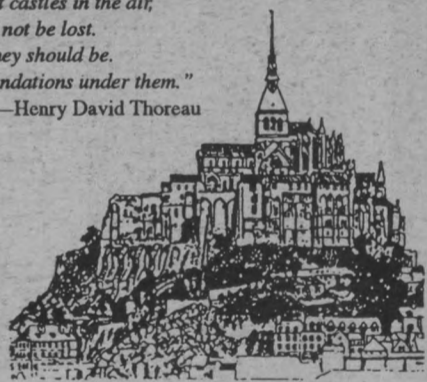
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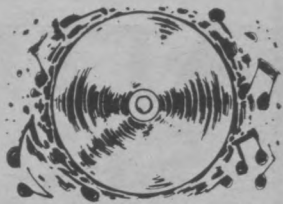
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Out of the torrent of Glock-packin', skins-hittin' rappers come *The Riders Of The Storm* by the Boogie Monsters. The Monsters choose to take a different path, as they step back to the traditional roots of storytelling and freestyling. They try to stay true to the game by only speaking what comes from the heart. With water as a theme throughout their music and lives, they preach individuality and understanding. "Without water, we can't exist

— if we stay fluid, we will survive. As an element, water's never confined, it can't be restricted and neither can we."

Musically, the Boogie Monsters like to pump slow, thick basslines, tight snare kicks, and a wide array of samples and original organ and guitar riffs. The production is among the most intricate and deep I have heard. Verbally, they are smooth and clear with styles somewhere between Pharcyde and Souls of Mischief.

The group consists of four MCs: Vex, Yodared, Myntric, and Mondo, who met four years ago while attending Virginia State University. After winning first place at Howard University's renowned hip hop convention, they used the cash to make a demo which immediately hooked them with Pendulum. *Riders of the Storm* is an impressive lyrical journey through the minds of these four intelligent young men.

"Boogie" and "Bronx Bombas" are old school jams with spacy keyboard work and echoing beats. "Muzic Appreciation" is a slow passionate ballad to their first love, music.

So if some of the hip-hop has been leaving a bad taste in your mouth lately, take a sip of this one. The Boogie Monsters are one of the best new hip-hop groups around.

—Matt Turner

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With lyrics that might make Luther Campbell blush and melodies that would make Lennon and McCartney proud, singer-songwriter Liz Phair is ready to tell you about guys, sex, and relationships — her way.

After winning a great deal of critical and popular praise for her debut album *Exile in Guyville*, Phair does not fall victim to the sophomore slump with her highly anticipated follow-up *Whip-Smart*.

Guyville received almost as much attention for its blunt lyrics as for its overall musical content. Although the album was a favorite of critics, winning the prestigious Village Voice Album of the Year Award for 1993, her explicit lyrics drew much closer examination. Lines like "I want to be your blowjob queen," and "I'm a little cunt in spring — you can rent me by the hour," made many curious about Phair's lifestyle.

With *Whip-Smart*, Phair doesn't seem to shy away from the controversy. On the album's first track, "Chopsticks," she sings, "He said he liked to do it backwards/ I said that's just fine with me/ That way we can fuck and watch TV."

Guyville, released on the independent label Matador Records, has sold over 200,000 copies. With Atlantic Records handling the distribution for *Whip-Smart*, the album could easily go gold.

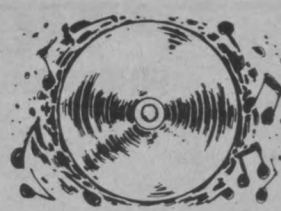
The album's musical style is simple pop, which deviates slightly from tradition, in that she does without a bass on many of the tracks. Phair handles most of the guitar duties, with her engineers Casey Rice and Brad Wood playing most of the other instruments. *Whip-Smart* retains the DIY (do-it-yourself) feel of *Guyville*, as Phair doesn't fall victim to overproduction or attempts at musical special effects. Her guitar playing, free from attempts at bombastic solos, complements the low-key mood of the album very nicely.

Her voice is sparse and deep, lending itself well to the uncluttered music and narrative style of the vocals. When she sings in a monotone, "I told him that I knew Julia Roberts when I was 12 at summer camp. We didn't say anything after that," on "Chopsticks," it sounds as if she is recounting a tale of a bad date to a friend, not singing a song.

The album's slower songs, "Shane," "Nashville," "Dogs of L.A.," "Crater Lake," and "Alice Springs" are its most powerful and musically moving, while its faster ones, like "Supernova," "Cinco de Mayo," "May Queen," and the title track are unbelievably catchy pop tunes. On "Nashville," Phair sings, "I won't decorate my love." The line is a metaphor for her approach to relationships as well as her music.

With *Whip-Smart*, Phair has moved into an elite group of singer-songwriter-guitarists. It's a safe bet to assume she'll stay there.

—Curtis Kaiser



MELL DO



YA PUNK?

ROURKE

Continued from p.5A

A quick target is UCSB's own Roderick Frazier Nash and his thoughtful book *The Rights of Nature*.

After Nash loosely equates today's environmental movement with the call for the abolition of slavery, ("Ownership, what some even call the enslavement of nonhuman species and of the environment, is again the explosive issue"), O'Rourke perhaps unfairly quips:

"Yes, we may have to give the environmentalists a Fort Sumter, but, since Nash and his type are as typically devoted to gun control, who's going to shoot back?"

But did I, who read the book so you don't have to, learn anything? Surely, in his chapter on overpopulation!

If everybody in the world lived in quarters as densely packed as the burgeoning borough of Manhattan, at 52,415 people per square mile, then all 5.3 billion of us can fit into former Yugoslavia.

Does that negate the world population problem, like O'Rourke claims it does? Well no. The task of feeding all of us has not yet been solved. Then again, who ever looked to a humorist for advice?

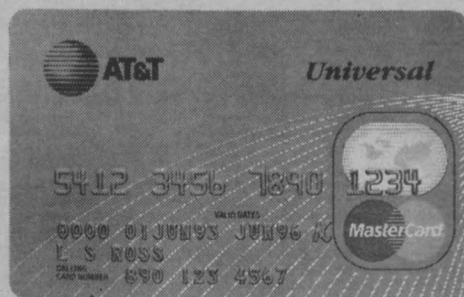
—Martin Boer

"Simplify, simplify."

Henry David Thoreau

"Hey, that's not a bad idea."

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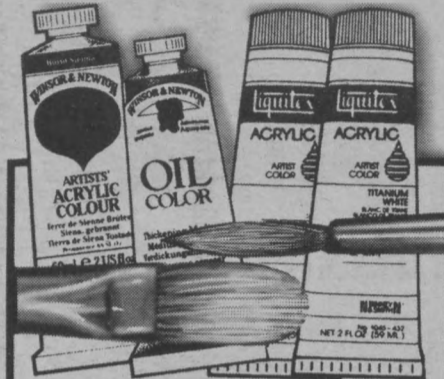
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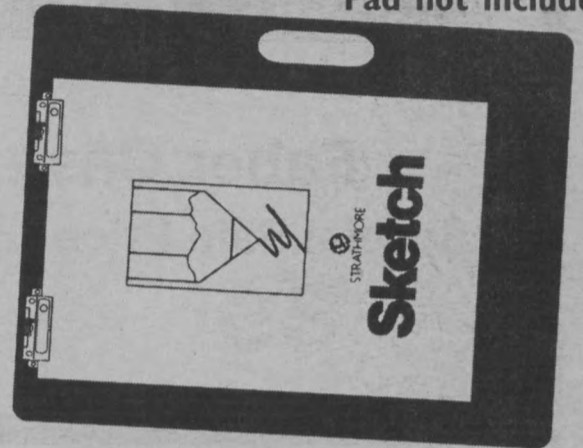
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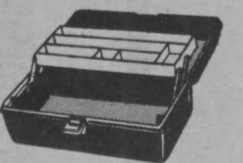
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