

a man does give a woman credit? Particularly if it is another woman. Let me give you an example. I have been dieting of late, as I think I have mentioned in the notice in the past. And I have been reasonably successful. In about four months I have lost about twenty-five pounds. Now I could brag about that. It hasn't been

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easy--food is one of my major pleasures. Reaching for your mate instead of your plate is a symptom of psychosis. Or maybe it is because at an early age I saw a documentary about anorexia and it traumatized me for life. So it has been tough and I could take all the credit myself. But that wouldn't be fair. Actually a lot of my diet is less restaurant-going and eating more low-fat high-vegetable foods at home. I know what you a picturing, some primeval sauropod honkered into a swamp, eating short trees. But it isn't that bad. Evelyn has found some recipes that really are quite good and at the same time are healthy. Some are extremely healthy and not quite so good. A few are superlatively healthy and I can't stand them, but let that pass. And Evelyn is willing spice the dishes so that they are tasty only to me and perhaps Gigantis, the Fire Monster.

Now you would think that because of solidarity women would like it when I credit Evelyn with the success of my diet, but that doesn't seem to be the case. When people ask me what is the secret of my weight loss is I look them in the eye and say "Evelyn's cooking!" I may even add that I think just about anyone could lose weight on Evelyn's cooking. But I get the strangest looks. And not all of them are friendly. [-mrl]

2. FEERSUM ENDJINN by Iain M. Banks (Bantam, ISBN 0-553-37459-1, 1995, 320pp, US\$12.95) (a book review by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Like everyone else, I'll start with a warning: Banks has chosen to write about a third of this book in a semi-phonetic rendering of what the point-of-view character (Bascule) is saying. It worked in FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON, because there it served as a way to show you the charcter's development. It worked in RIDDLEY WALKER, because

there it showed you the descent into illiteracy that had occurred. But it doesn't entirely work here, because it doesn't seem to serve much purpose besides slowing the reader down. Even Bascule says, "unlike evrybody els I got this weerd wirin in mi brane so I cant spel rite, juss 1/2 2 do evrythin foneticly. Iss not a problem cos u can put eny old rubish thru practikly anyfin evin a chile's toy computir & get it 2 cum out speld perfectly & gramatisized 2 & evin improved 2 thi poynt whare yood fink u waz Bill bleedin Shaikspir by the langwidje" (page 86). In other words, Banks could have cleaned up Bascule's spelling but chose not to.

Now iss posibul thers a reesin 2 do fings this way but I figir y bothir? (Sorry, I got carried away there.)

Count Alandre Sessine VII has been killed. Normally this would be even a minor inconvenience, but apparently this is a limit to the number of times he can be resurrected for real. Now he's in

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cyberspace ("crypt") and someone is killing him there, where there is another limit on how many times he can be virtually resurrected. (At least that's how it appears.) Meanwhile, Bascule's talking Ant Ergates has been carried off by a huge bird (Bascule being the character who can't spell), and Bascule begins a quest to rescue her. Other characters, at first seemingly separate from these plot lines, appear. But the main character seems to be the Great Hall, that giant castle whose towers are so tall that they extend above Earth's breathable atmosphere, but which may hold the secret for humanity's survival.

The problem with all this is **all** this. There is too much, and the descriptions too confusing, for me to enjoy this book. It may be a great literary triumph, but for the average reader, it will probably be too difficult to follow. Whether avoiding the odd spelling would have helped is anyone's guess, but as it stands I can recommend this only to those who are heavily into literary style. (This will probably go over like gangbusters at Readercon.)

[-ecl]

3. THE SUM OF US (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: David Stevens's stage play is adapted for the screen. A father and his gay son live alone together in a middle-class neighborhood in Sydney, each looking for a mate. The minimal story moves slowly, but the character development and the unusual father-son relationship make this a watchable and well-constructed film. Rating: +1 (-4 to +4)

David Stevens is probably most notable in this country for co-authoring BREAKER MORANT together with Bruce Beresford and Jonathan Hardy. That was a very political film. His SUM OF US, based on his own stage play, is a very different sort of story. At the center of this story are Harry Mitchell and his son Jeff (Jack Thompson of the excellent TURTLE BEACH and Russell Crowe of ROMPER STOMPER). We see them doing some very normal things like having dinner together. Jeff, as we quickly learn, is gay. Harry accepts his son's sexual orientation with a sort of stoicism. Most of the time he presents a face of complete toleration, but find him in the right mood and he will admit that he wishes his son would know the joy of "planting his seed and seeing it grow," as he puts it. And if you catch Harry drunk and with his defenses down, you can tell that his natural instincts are anti-gay. Still, he is a man of wit and intelligence who greatly loves his son and who, while in control, will make every effort to be supportive. Harry's determination to be not just tolerant but chummy with Jeff's

boyfriend Greg (John Polson) ironically is more of a hindrance than a help in that relationship. But if Harry is disrupting Jeff's relationship, Jeff's being gay may impact Harry's romance with an attractive divorcee he has met through a dating service.

Jack Thompson is a familiar face in Australian cinema and has been in such films as MAD DOG MORGAN, BREAKER MORANT, and THE EARTHLING. Here he gives a likable and nicely understated performance. This really is his film and even in moments of minimalist repartee with his son, a natural charm and wit shine through. Crowe is fully

credible as the son but somehow is not able to command the same audience empathy that Thompson does.

Stevens creates a real study in the degrees of tolerance among the families shown in this film. In Jeff's family the dominant emotion is love; in Greg's it is anger. Greg's father seems to have little use for his son, not even knowing that his son is gay. The one really unconventional touch in the style of this film is to have Harry and Jeff talk directly to the camera frequently. This technique is often used in films, but rarely to this degree. Curiously, this is not at all bothersome when it is first used, but toward the end of the film there are cases where it is awkwardly inappropriate.

This is a film with some comedy and some sadness that warmly explores an unusual father-son relationship. There are no thrills and no special effects, just a simple story. I wish this country would make more of this sort of film. It gets a laid-back +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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A great nation ... does not spend its entire national
wits for a couple of months in weighing evidence of a
single ruffian's having done a single murder....

-- John Ruskin, "Of Kings' Treasuries," 1864