

the bookshelf

Cold Heaven
Brian Moore
McClelland and Stewart, 1983

by Jens Andersen

The Sahara desert, according to the *World Almanac*, is 3,325,000 square miles in area. If you mentally shaved off the top 1/4 mile of the Sahara and compared the resulting volume with the volume of a grain of sand (volume: one cubic millimetre) you would find that it takes approximately 3×10^{24} grains to equal the Sahara's volume.

Now take the map of the universe

depicted in the June *National Geographic*. If you compare the volume of our solar system with the volume of the known universe you would discover that there is room enough in it to fit about 1×10^{31} solar systems. In short: the solar system is more like a *molecule* in a grain of sand in the Sahara.

And if you tried to fit a human into this perspective, you would find that he/she is a mere germ on a pimple on an electron in a molecule in a grain of sand in the middle of this vast Sahara. To say that a human even exists in such universal terms is something

of an exaggeration.

The premise of this book, however, is that the god of this cosmic Sahara is so concerned with public relations on one particular electron in the desert that he wants some of the germs on the electron to build a shrine on a certain pimple on the electron, in order to celebrate the gods greater glory, as manifested in another almost non-existent germ by the name of the Holy Virgin Mary.

Worse, our great god with the petty vanity goes about his microscopic task in a most unusual way. He has a vision of the germ Mary appear before another female germ of an adulterous and unbelieving disposition, begging her to make the pimple (a large rock on the coast of California) into a place of pilgrimage.

When the woman tries to forget this vision, God haunts her with nightmares, and has her husband run over by a boat and killed. The he brings him back to life, has him escape the morgue, and run off with his puzzled wife in hot pursuit. Along the way God terrorizes her with ominous meteorological phenomena like lightning, threatening clouds, and sinister sunshine.

After a few plot devices they both wind up in Carmel, California where the vision first appeared. Here the husband swings between life and death, in response to whether the wife is co-operating with God about the shrine at the moment. In the end she reluctantly co-operates, just enough to get some nuns to witness the vision as well. As a result the shrine moves toward realization (as God apparently ordained-Moore is actually rather quiet about the subject of God and his motivation), the ominous weather ceases, the husband gets well, and the woman is free to abandon him and continue her adulterous and unbelieving ways (how stubborn and unreasonable these atheists are!).

End of story.

Well, I am willing to believe, for the sake of a story, that God works in mysterious ways. I don't believe, however, that he would engage in trivial undertakings in the manner of Stephen King writing his latest spooker for the unwashed masses. As old Nietzsche said, if such a ridiculous god actually existed he would have to be opposed.

Kurasawa's *Kagemusha* Sept. 14; and *Sophie's Choice* Sept. 15.

Up and Coming

FILM

National Film Theatre: *A Second Chance* with Catherine Deneuve Sept. 9, 10, 11, 12; *Lina Wertmuller's Seven Beauties* Sept. 9, 10, 11; and *Annie Hall* Sept. 12, 13, 14. At Zeidler Hall in the Citadel.

Princess Theatre: Australian director Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (Sept. 8, 9) and *Starstruck* (Sept. 9, 10, 11). *We of the Never Never* Sept. 10, 11; *West Side Story* Sept. 11; *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Bus Stop* Sept. 12; *Catch 22* Sept. 13; *Not a Love Story* Sept. 14, 15;

GALLERIES

David Belcher's "Journey into Light" at Latitude 53 until Sept. 11.

An exhibition of large format photographs and reproductions of "living things".

Laura Vickerson's "Recent Stuff" at Latitude 53 until Sept. 11.

Mixed media works on paper and plaster.

DANCE

National Ballet of Canada presents *Don Quixote* Sept. 25 & 26 at the Jubilee Auditorium. Tickets at BASS.

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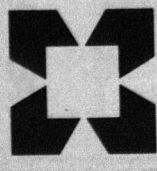
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