

By Tom Elliott

Books

Sci-fi, money and more

Over the winter I have delved into a number of interesting and eclectic books (some of which I'd requested for Christmas) that I'd like to share briefly with you.

Say what you will about Tom Wolfe, but he always delivers, and his epic *A Man in Full* (Tom Wolfe, Bantam Books, 787 pp., pb., ISBN 0-553-58093-0, \$8.50) hits the mark again. Set in today's cosmopolitan Atlanta (isn't almost everything these days?), the novel tells the story of "good ole Southern boy" Charlie Croker, a real estate baron faced with financial ruin. Add in a few subplots involving Charlie's "second wives," a banker who had the misfortune to get his mistress pregnant, an out-of-work laborer facing an appalling streak of bad luck, and a black college football star accused of raping the daughter of one of Atlanta's most prominent white families, and you have the makings of a real page-turner. One of Wolfe's strengths is describing scenes in vivid detail, scenes most of us will never witness in real life, as when he describes the ritual of mating a high-blooded stallion and a prize mare.

Now you've got to admit that *Magnificent Corpses: Searching through Europe for St. Peter's Head, St. Chiara's Heart, St. Stephen's Hand, and Other Saints' Relics* (Anneli Rufus, Marlowe & Company, 245 pp., pb., ISBN 1-56924-687-4, \$13.95) is a memorable title! There are literally thousands of Christian relics on display all over the world — pieces of the "true cross," bones (and sometimes entire

bodies) of mortals elevated by the Roman Catholic Church to sainthood, the alleged "holy grail," and even pieces of the foreskin of Christ himself. Although the author is Jewish, she's been fascinated by such relics since childhood. Here you'll find accounts of the remains of well-known saints — St. Anthony, St. Francis Xavier, St. Vincent de Paul — as well as those of the lesser known and the unknown. Rufus's little asides about the sights she encounters on the way add a sort of witty travelogue to her tale of adventure.

Some of you may remember the taboo-shattering book *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (Louise Armstrong, Pocket Books, 291 pp., pb., ISBN 0-671-68056-0, \$5.99) when it came out in the late 1970s. The author has updated it with a "10 years after" introduction and afterword, and it's just as shocking as it was back then. Beginning with Armstrong's experiences as a child sexually abused by her father, she weaves in stories of other "survivors" of father-daughter incest. To my surprise, Armstrong gives this topic an even-handed perspective, being understandingly opposed to such practices yet not engaging in "male bashing." She is even open-minded enough to acknowledge that there may be cases where no great harm ensued.

Timeline (Michael Crichton, Knopf, 450 pp., hc., ISBN 0-679-44481-5, \$26.95). OK, so you say Mike's output hasn't been up to snuff lately, that nothing comes close to *The Andromeda Strain*. As in *Jurassic Park*, the characters in this tale also find themselves in an unfamiliar and terrifying situation (the Middle Ages) and have to

use all their craft and cunning to survive. He is not the best of writers stylistically, and his structure and vocabulary seem aimed at readers who have never gone beyond the eighth grade (and considering the quality of literacy that schools are turning out these days, he may be right on track). It is passably entertaining, but not worth the \$27; if I were you, I'd wait for the paperback version.

Of course you know that I must have read at least one UFO book somewhere along the line, and this time it was *Passport to the Cosmos* (John E. Mack, M.D., Crown Publishers, 320 pp., hc., ISBN 0-517-70568-0, \$24). As you may recall from past reviews, Dr. Mack (professor of psychiatry, Harvard Medical School) is one of the more credible writers and researchers in the UFO scene and a man who has earned the right to be accorded some consideration. In this sequel to his earlier book *Abduction*, Mack continues to recount stories of "experiencers" of this phenomenon but also devotes a good part of the book to the amazingly similar experiences and beliefs of people from non-Western cultures (including tribal shamans). He advances the theory that these visitors are likely from another dimension and are here to make us aware that we live in a multidimensional universe.

Now on to the raft of books that has come in over the past few months. Problem solving, getting rich and science fiction seem to be the predominant themes. Interestingly, there seems to be a growing trend to let you test-drive a book

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