

BOOKS

Waugh's classic *Scoop*—but this book is overplotted and rather raggedly put together, both in the opening pages where excess exposition spills out of virtually every sentence and slows action annoyingly, and at the story's needlessly manic climax. Still, along the way Sawislak provides a generous amount of pointed satire and sheer, mean-spirited fun. *Dwarf* is perfect summertime reading.

—Bruce Allen

THE GLAMOUR A NOVEL CHRISTOPHER PRIEST



The Glamour
by CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
Doubleday, 302 pp., \$15.95

THERE COMES A POINT IN MOST OCCULT novels when the author sidesteps a crucial question: Why don't his characters seek psychiatric help or peer counseling or hydrotherapy—anything but accept the reality of the vampire, werewolf, or pulsating house that seems to be plaguing them? To his credit, British writer Christopher Priest makes a similar point the focal one of his new novel. The protagonist, Richard Grey, comes down with temporary amnesia rather than admit that he and his new flame Sue can turn themselves invisible by switching on "the glamour."

This is also a thriller with some meat to it. No, not the slashed-up meat that Stephen King and company serve up. Metaphysical meat. Priest gives the glamour to people who are already invisible in the sense of going through life unnoticed, people who feel they don't belong anywhere. "The beach was beginning to repel me," the vacationing Grey confesses before recognizing his power for what it is. "I felt like an intruder, entering a living diorama and interfering with its natural balance." And the author spins deft variations on his gimmick, including two ingeniously kinky sex scenes featuring members of the opposite visibility.

Why, then, am I unable to recommend the book wholeheartedly? For one thing, the writing is flat and unevocative, seldom rising above low-grade-fever pitch. For another, Priest goes a long way toward blunting his metaphysical impetus by tossing in a Borges-like twist at the end. "We all make fictions," some heretofore absent supernarrator lectures us. Yes, but not all of us muck them up in the last few pages. Nonetheless, *The Glamour* is an intelligent, even challenging occult novel, one of the few I'm aware of that unsettle the reader not by the blood they spill but the conundrums they pose.

—Dennis Drabelle

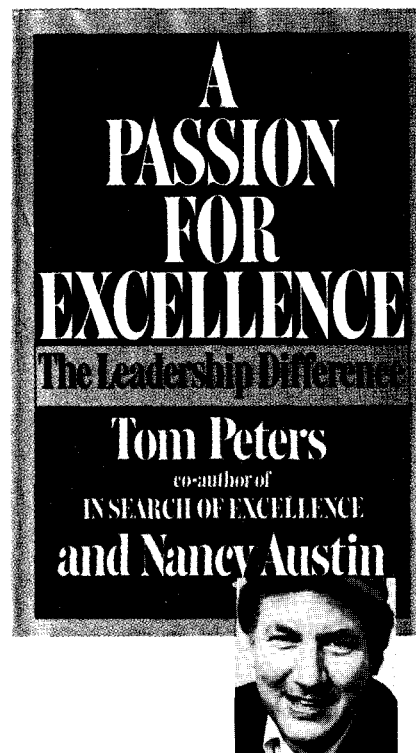
A Passion for Excellence

by THOMAS PETERS

Random House, 437 pp., \$19.95

JUST THREE YEARS AFTER PUBLICATION of his international best seller, *In Search of Excellence*, Thomas J. Peters has again harnessed his raw enthusiasm for first-rate management in the unquietly titled *A Passion for Excellence*. Peters (teaming this time with co-author Nancy K. Austin), proclaims with an emotion-charged fervor more often associated with jungle redoubts than head office anterooms, that a "revolution is brewing." The kind of fact-based, data-based analysis that has dominated management textbooks and techniques is being swept aside by the informal, nontraditional, people-oriented methods of management.

Peters and Austin extol business leaders who inject passion, pride, and purpose into the myriad of tasks that produce



winning products, processes, and services. They laud the "cheaters" and "skunks" (in fact, the book is dedicated to the skunks): those people who are "highly innovative, fast-moving and slightly eccentric... operating at the edges of the corporate world."

The future lies with the iconoclasts and corporate flakes who bring passion to their work. Wise managers will look for and support people who buck the system. And, of course, they're there—in the corporate nooks and crannies, scrapping for funds, pushing forward proposals that are often deliberately against company policy.

Interestingly, and importantly, not all the examples of such leaders are from corporate America. One, Jan Carlzon, is head of Scandinavian Air System, and another, General Bill Creech, headed the U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Command. Others include a black high school principal and a single-store grocery operator.

A Passion for Excellence is exhausting in its revivalist fundamentalism of getting back to basics. It puts attention where it should be: on people—as leaders/managers, as workers/owners, and (yes) as customers—whose energies can and do make the crucial difference between success and failure in any organization.

—Brandon Sweitzer

MIAMI VOICE

Jerome Cramer examines the new genre of South Florida novels.

From John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee to television's "Miami Vice," life and violent death in South Florida have been the subjects of an increasing number of artists and writers.

A decade ago, starting with Tom McGuane's *Ninety-Two in the Shade*, South Florida seemed the perfect place to recoup from the excesses of the 1960s. McGuane's friend singer Jimmy Buffett could rhapsodize about "Margaritaville," where sensitive souls could relax, own a sailboat, and make a little money playing pirate by running small shipments of marijuana to sell to friends. Nothing serious, of course, just stringing out adolescence in the sun.

But guns with silencers hissed and knives soon flashed in Margaritaville. As the drug traffic mushroomed into a \$100-billion-a-year industry, a number of the good-time kids that Buffett and McGuane described turned up floating face-down in the water, their sailboats stolen or sunk by mobsters much more serious about the illegal drug business.

As the real-life violence increased, the heroes of novels and television quickly switched from preppies playing at pirate to cops who worked to keep ordinary people safe amid this madness.

John D. MacDonald has seen this change and has been writing about life through the eyes of Florida's oldest beach bum detective, Travis McGee, for a full twenty-one novels. The books have always been well crafted and entertaining, but in the past few years McGee too often sounded old and bitter, the tough-guy stance reading more and more like a caricature. *The Lonely Silver Rain* (Alfred A. Knopf, 232 pp., \$15.95) breaks that pattern, and the lucky reader finds Travis McGee mellow, caring, even (gasp) coming to grips with the notion of growing old. Now that he's worked through his identity crisis, he's smarter and tougher than ever.

McGee has to find the lost boat of an old friend, but he accomplishes that task

only to discover dead bodies aboard. One body belongs to a niece of a South American drug kingpin, and the murderer wants to place the blame on McGee. The word comes down: Travis is "to have an accident."

John D.
MACDONALD
A TRAVIS MCGEE NOVEL



THE
LONELY
SILVER
RAIN



MacDonald, always the master at plotting, holds us tight to the action, allows us to see the changes in McGee's attitudes, and produces a page-turning tale that makes this a perfect book for summer reading. He even seems to care about the vagaries of his underlying subject: the pernicious influence of the drug trade. McGee escapes from this book unharmed, as always, but only by using the skill, determination, and experience of an older man. Tough guys might not dance, but they can age gracefully.

In contrast to MacDonald, Russell

Banks grabs ahold of Serious Fiction to swat at the evils of South Florida (and the world) in *Continental Drift* (Harper & Row, 366 pp., \$17.95). Here we meet Robert Dubois, who flees the life of an oil burner repairman in the depressing dark of New Hampshire for a shot at a new life in Florida. Here, too, we travel with a Haitian refugee, Vanise Dorsinville, suffering through her odyssey from Haiti for a glimpse of the American Dream along highway A1A. These two are thrown together in the book's gruesome climax, a heartless crime that brings the book's images into clear focus. It's a grim tale, offering a Dos Passos-like version of an evil South Florida society driven by greed, politics, and forces beyond the power of struggling individuals.

If there is such a thing as an anti-yuppie book, this is it. Banks takes aim at an America that destroys "young men and women without money, with trades instead of professions," and he rails at the economic powers that are "trying to bend them around the wheel of commerce." Banks tells the story well, and the book's power and clarity make it gripping, if uncomfortable, reading.

By now you might scratch your head and ask: Isn't South Florida that nice place where I went on spring vacation in college, where I sent my widowed aunt for the promise of sun, sand, and palm trees? The explanation of how crime and Aunt Sadie's retirement exist side by side comes most clearly from John Rothchild, author of *Up For Grabs* (Viking, 212 pp., \$15.95), an extremely well-written work that offers us a personal tour through the history of Florida's drugs, crime, and money. Rothchild, who arrived in Florida in 1972 as a journalist to cover the Republican National Convention, moved into a Miami mansion/crash pad, and has lived in Florida ever since.

His view is historical, objective, and fun to read, but often as chilling as the view offered in *Continental Drift*. Florida, Rothchild asserts, is an economy that first