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Book Review

Comic Kraft

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Eric Kraft has deservedly developed a cult following over the past decade for his series of comic novels about his fictional alter ego, writer Peter Leroy, such as "Herb 'n' Lorna" and "At Home with the Glynnns."

Kraft's latest, "Leaving Small's Hotel," finds Peter and his innkeeper wife Albertine with a hotel boiler that threatens to burst at any minute; giant frogs, chinchillas and other experiments in free enterprise that run loose about the Small's Island, off the fictional Long Island town of Babbington; and a leaky roof. Understandably, guests at Small's Hotel are few and far between.

Approaching fifty, Peter finds himself in a serious mid-life crisis: his publishing contract has been canceled due to public demand for something more violent and gruesome than "The Unlikely Adventures of Larry Peters," Leroy's series of books for young adults. Peter embarks upon a new series entitled "Murder While You Wait," featuring Rockwell Kingman, assassin for hire. Though he can barely stomach the high body count, he can think of no other way to solve their money problems. Dreams of movie deals dance inside his head. Albertine, however, has a more practical approach: after twenty-one years as an innkeeper, she decides to put the hotel up for sale.

While they wait to find a buyer, Peter gives nightly readings from his memoirs, "Dead Air," which record such youthful exploits as the time he manufactured flying saucer detectors and spied upon a lonely young matron next door.

While Peter must change the focus of his writing with the times, Kraft gives readers more of the same humor, affection and odd characters that mark his previous novels. The relationship between Kraft and his hero Leroy - and, in turn, that which exists between Leroy and the fictional Larry Peters - remain deceptively innocent, bringing to life, in a humorous fashion, the fictional world of Babbington as it exists in both the present and the past. Kraft's strength as a writer lies in his ability to draw characters that embody human frailty and compassion, the "immortal hilarity" that brings joy after sorrow.

[\(David Remy\)](#)

Leaving Small's Hotel

Eric Kraft

Picador, 346 pages, \$23

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