

Books

Capsule Review

'Reservations Recommended' bristles with wit

RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED

By Eric Kraft. \$18.85. Crown Publishers.



By Regina Tracy

Let's face it - the two great obsessions of the 1980s were sex and food. These and other aspects of modern life are brilliantly skewered by Eric Kraft in his latest novel, **Reservations Recommended**.

The hero is Matthew Barber. He's a divorced, mild-mannered vice president of a toy company. But at night Barber changes into the witty, urbane B.W. Beath, restaurant reviewer for Boston Biweekly Magazine. It's sort of a yuppie version of the Inferno, as Matthew/Beath serves as the guide to places like the Alley View Grill, where the staff have "already mastered indolence, indifference and ignorance, the three essentials of contemporary, sophisticated service." Or Flynn's Olde Boston Eating & Drinking Establishment, which has succeeded in looking old "through the simple expedient of, apparently, not cleaning the place for the last hundred fifty or so years."

These expeditions both parallel and bring into sharp relief aspects of Matthew's life, as he tries to reconcile his two selves with his past, decide whether he'd rather date his long-time girlfriend or her teen-age daughter, deal with the stresses of career, home, ex-wife - in short deal with everyday life in urban America. But as B.W. Beath might put it, life is not a bowl of cherries flambe, and **Reservations Recommended** inexorably builds to a shocking and violent climax.

Reservations Recommended bristles with intelligence and wit. Eric Kraft (a former Newburyport resident) may write the funniest restaurant reviews in the business. Like the best satirists, Kraft resists making **Reservations Recommended** a series of cheap, though hilarious shots - rather he has succeeded in combining a sardonic commentary on contemporary society with his delight in the foibles of human nature.

Also by Eric Kraft:

Herb 'n' Lorna

The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences & Observations of Peter Leroy