

Books

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IN THE NEWS

MacNeil to receive Seattle Library prize

■ Television journalist Robert MacNeil will receive the Seattle Public Library Foundation's Bunn Prize and deliver the Robert C. Bunn Address on Sept. 21 in the 5th Avenue Theatre. The annual prize recognizes contributions to the nation's intellectual advancement in the arts and sciences. Free tickets to the 8 p.m. event, which will be signed for the deaf, are available at all library branches. Information: 386-4636.

BOOKS BRIEFLY

■ "Reservations Recommended"

by Eric Kraft
Crown, \$18.95



This droll, funny, surprisingly touching novel is a bittersweet look at the life of a man set loose in a confused and confusing world. It stars Matthew Barber, who first appeared as a young boy in an earlier Kraft novel — toy company executive by day, pseudonymous restaurant reviewer by night.

The executive is meek and mild, cowed by the abrasive people he deals with and crushed by the recent defection of his wife. He goes out with a woman he doesn't love, lusts after her teen-age daughter, makes up absurd new toys, and pines for his wife. The reviewer, meanwhile — who goes by the anagrammatic name B.W. Beath and writes for something called Boston Biweekly — is arch, super-confident, mercilessly rude and unstintingly nasty. Everything, in short, that Matthew is not.

The story is told in distinct chapters, belying the book's origin as a serial, with each helping centering on a restaurant and ending with Beath's review. As Matthew becomes more and more dissociated from reality, his two personalities begin to merge. The reviews (which are a riot, neatly puncturing the pretensions of us reviewer types) become less about the food and more about the man and his demons. The ending, which veers suddenly in a quite unexpected direction, is a shocker — but somehow fitting for this book, which hasn't got a dull moment.

Adam Woog