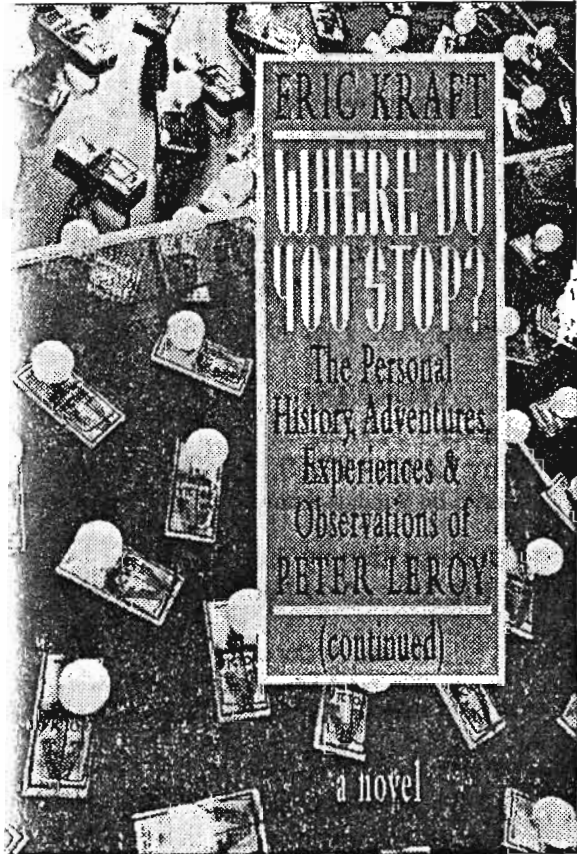


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here is a lot of pure humor and a good deal of truth in "Where Do You Stop?" ...

Science + nostalgia = a lot of laughs

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"Where Do You Stop? The Personal Adventures, Experiences and Observations of Peter Leroy (continued)" by Eric Kraft (Crown, \$15)

By Jim Erickson

Eric Kraft just keeps getting better and better. Maybe it's just me. But I'm not partial to books that theorize about the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and have charts and diagrams to clarify their points. And yet here I am both laughing with and being enlightened by such a book, and afterwards, waiting eagerly for Kraft's next.

The book starts with the eccentric but likable Mr. Leroy explaining the connections between his high school science teacher's legs and a scanning tunnelling microscope "only about one nanometer — that's a billionth of a meter, pal — above the specimen — so close that the electron clouds of the atom at the tip of the probe and of the nearest atom of the specimen overlap." (I have checked with some of my professional colleagues, and apparently this instrument is not mere science fiction.)

From here, "Where Do You Stop?" proceeds through a narrative of high school

and family adventures in the usual Kraft pattern of a world recognizably ours, enough so to inspire nostalgia, but pushed to somewhere near the edge of believability; all of the adventures in one unexpected way or other illustrate the principle of the intermingling of matter and ideas, eventually leading to an answer to the title question that satisfies Mr. Leroy and at least fascinates me. And again we are not in the presence of science fiction; at least, I suspect that all of Leroy/Kraft's theories may be true.

Along the way, we encounter a television contest show I would really like to see and some inventions I would really like to try out; it is surprising how many really good ideas there are in Kraft's comic world. Even the six epigrams that precede the preface are effective: They provoke curiosity as to how a publication titled "Niels Bohr, the Quantum, and the World," for example, can relate to a book of hu-

morous middle-age reminiscences of a rather unusual teenager with a fortunate tendency to meet enjoyable people and do amusing things.

Those who ignore the scientific principle underlying all the not-quite-nonsense will miss a lot, but they will still enjoy what will appear to be an oddly disconnected series of comic incidents of the type they indulged in at least partially and in their dreams when they were young; the luckier they were, the closer the memories will match the text; at times, they will overlap. Some may even want to reproduce the experiments with the flour can or the tableful of mousetraps and pingpong balls. The fun of this novel does not end with the text.

It is appropriate to the theme that one cannot be sure where the element of parody starts and stops; there is a lot of parody here, but there is also a lot of pure humor and a good deal of truth and even wisdom.

There is probably more that one can ask of first-rate light entertainment, but don't ask me where you can find it.



Kraft

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