

GALACTIC RAPTURE
by Tom Flynn
Prometheus Books, New York 2000
500 pages US\$19.95 sc
Reviewed by PEG TITTLE

This 'alternative sci-fi' novel is delightful, brilliant, and in my top ten of all time! Read it!

To paraphrase the jacket and press release, Earth in the year 2344 is a small player in a galaxy of some highly advanced planets and some incredibly backward ones. A wealthy and sophisticated people, the Galactics, keep 40,000 of their 42,000 planets in permanent quarantine - for their own amusement. Earth's only redeeming qualities are its two lucrative exports. One is a perversely engaging mass entertainment medium known as 'senso': undercover 'Spectators' with bio-implant full-sensory 'cameras' go undercover on quarantined planets to provide documentaries of the primitive savages for the entertainment of Galactic audiences. The other export is Terran religions, for which the jaded Galactics have a limitless appetite; Roman Catholicism and Mormonism get starring - and deservedly decidedly unflattering - roles. The novel is basically a satire on religion and 'infotainment'.

Admittedly, the premise of entire worlds (with life, death, and assorted maimings in between) existing for others' entertainment is a little sick - but no sicker than the premise of an all-powerful god creating and overseeing an entire world with life, death, and assorted maimings in between).

Though of course many of the main players in the novel are men, there are a lot of women - in particular, the two heroes are women; Flynn gets extra applause just for that! (And for the knuckles that are so clenched they turn beige - took a while for this little whitebread wafer to get that one.)

The dry, wry humour is often reminiscent of Douglas Adams and Terry Pratchett. The conversations between Parek (Christ on Earth) and Larue (the god named God) are particularly hilarious, and the arithmetic gag with birthdays is pure Monty Python. (*Galactic Rapture* should

definitely be made into a movie.)

My only complaint is that I had trouble keeping the characters straight (despite a cast list at the back of the book) - but I don't know how Flynn could've done with much fewer, given the necessary complexity of plot (which I confess I also had trouble keeping straight - the synopsis on the jacket helped).

My only concern is that those who most need to read this won't get through all 500 pages ('course most of them never got through the complete *Bible* either and that hasn't diminished its influence).

Flynn is, as many will know, senior editor of *Free Inquiry*. So I suspect he has already contacted Rushdie for tips on how to avoid a fatwa (well, two fatwas).