

NIGHT KITES

by David Barber

After reading *Night Kites*, M.E. Kerr's latest "young adult" novel, I couldn't help but feel that something just wasn't right. At first I couldn't put my finger on it, but then it came to me. I had just been patronized.

I suppose we in the gay community should be grateful for any coverage by the commercial press of a subject so close to all of our hearts. Yet I cannot recommend the novel for I feel it is seriously flawed.

The first few chapters seem inoffensive enough. The story unfolds

Book review

through the eyes of 17-year-old Erick Rudd. We are quickly introduced to the principal players -- his girlfriend, Dill; best friend, Jack; and Jack's girl, Nicki Marr. Erick has fallen in love for the first time. Complications arise when he and Nicki become sexually involved, which challenges his secure, orderly world.

As a subplot we are introduced to Erick's older brother, Peter. Kerr does a good job of foreshadowing Peter's illness, which eventually becomes known to the family (and reader) as AIDS. I found the passages dealing with Peter

to be written in a sensitive and realistic manner (by far the most interesting sections of the book) but felt that Kerr missed the opportunity throughout the rest of the novel to enlighten the presumably straight teenaged audience -- for which this work is no doubt intended -- about other, positive aspects of gay life.

It is this consistently negative portrayal of gay life throughout the remainder of the piece which I find to be disconcerting. Charlie, the principal gay character in the book, is stereotypically drawn as a sissy. When he gets beaten up we are told that he "finally got what he was asking for." Later on we are elevated to "fairy," "fag," and "maggot" status, finally being compared with "alcoholics, anorexics and Jesus freaks." It seems like none of these statements is really ever challenged in the dialogue that follows, just serving to reinforce the old prejudices. This is unfortunate, for the novel could have succeeded if it had dared to proceed further.

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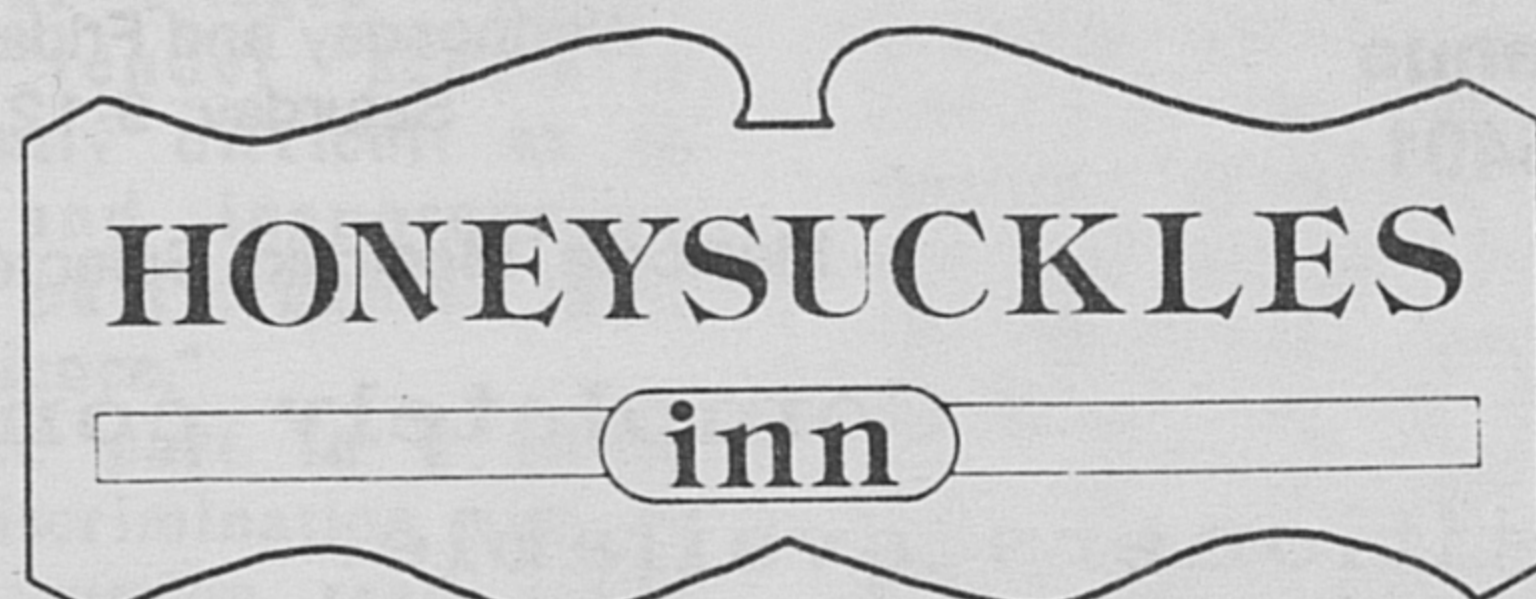
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September Calendar

Sept. 18
Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VLGR) bimonthly meeting, 7:30 pm, Peace and Justice Center, 186 College Street, Burlington.

Sept. 19-20
Shabbat gathering for Jewish women only on Huntington Open Women's Land (HOWL). Campout, rituals, music, dancing, workshops. For directions and/or info call Lynda Siegel at 658-0199.

Sept. 20
Integrity, 8 pm service, 8:45 program, St. Paul's Cathedral, Burlington.

Sept. 30
Interfaith/Ecumenical Spirituality Group for Lesbians and Gay Men. Formative meeting in Hinesburg, 7:30 pm. Come share your journey. For directions call Bill at 482-3528. Questions call Irv at (518) 547-8910 or 388-6751.

Oct. 2
VLGR meeting, 7:30 pm, Peace and Justice Center, 186 College Street, Burlington.

Oct. 3
Out in the Mountains monthly meeting, 6 pm, Peace and Justice Center, 186 College Street, Burlington.

Oct. 4
Integrity, 8 pm service, 8:45 program, St. Paul's Cathedral, Burlington.