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## HUMANITY IS WASHED UP - TRUE OR FALSE?

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**Byline:** By CAROLYN SEE; Carolyn See's most recent novel is "Golden Days."

**Lead:** LEAD: **EINSTEIN'S MONSTERS** By Martin Amis. 149 pp. New York: Harmony Books. \$12.95.

**Text:**

**EINSTEIN'S MONSTERS** By Martin Amis. 149 pp. New York: Harmony Books. \$12.95.

"I AM sick of nuclear weapons," Martin Amis writes in his introduction to "**Einstein's Monsters**," a collection of five short stories about life before, during and after the surely upcoming nuclear holocaust. "They distort all life and subvert all freedoms," he writes. "Not a soul on earth wants them, but here they all are." And thus, perversely, he begins his argument with an inaccuracy. The history of the atomic age has become the thinking man's pro football, filling in conversational gaps at every level. Nuclear weapons give men teams to root for and celebrities to talk about, while sounding safely grown-up and important. Enrico Fermi or Vinny Testaverde, does it matter whom you talk about as long as it involves the manly arts of competition and destruction? And what is nuclear winter or doomsday itself if not humanity's final Super Bowl? (Plenty of women, too, extract a certain nauseating comfort from nuclear weapons. Not since the grand old days of unnatural childbirth have they had such certain proof that men are beasts and women comparative saints, that this is a villain-victim world with strictly laid-out rules: the victim gets her reward in heaven, while Edward Teller, Caspar Weinberger and their fans will surely simmer for eternity in hell.) The questions of how and why we've invented nuclear gadgets may be dealt with solemnly, as in Richard Rhodes's recent book, "The Making of the Atomic Bomb." Horror and literature and even the nature of the sublime may be evoked. What could be more serious, after all, than the death of the planet? But Mr. Amis, the author of "Money," "Success" and other novels, takes another view. In his last story here, "The Immortals," a survivor (who's sure he's lived forever) says crankily: "Just as I was thinking that no century could possibly be dumber than the nineteenth, along comes the twentieth. I swear, the entire planet seemed to be staging some kind of stupidity contest." And it's that point of view that informs all of "**Einstein's Monsters**." Mr. Amis's hypothesis is that between the sociopathic right wing and the softhearted left, 99 percent of the human race has been playing dumb at the most profound level.

Again, in the introduction Mr. Amis remembers having asked Graham Greene what

life was like before the bomb and after: "He said that he had never really thought about it." (Never really thought about it!) And Mr. Amis duly records arguing with his famous dad, Kingsley, about the subject: "Anyone who has read my father's work will have some idea of what he is like to argue with. When I told him that I was writing about nuclear weapons, he said, with a lilt, 'Ah. I suppose you're . . . "against them," are you?' " And Martin suggests (half-kidding?) that maybe this generation of fathers, who "emplaced or maintained the status quo," will have to die before we can even begin to look at a future without weapons.

Until that uncertain time, Mr. Amis takes a look at what it's like to live the way we do. Since no one cares in the least for women and children anymore, let's start squashing them up now is the drill in "Bujak and the Strong Force," except that Bujak, a very strong fellow, decides against revenge when his mother, daughter and granddaughter are raped and bent like pretzels. It's Bujak, a kind of London neighborhood Popeye, who has the most articulate thought here about the nuclear world: "All peculiarly modern ills, all fresh distortions and distempers, Bujak attributed to one thing: Einsteinian knowledge, knowledge of the strong force. It was his central paradox that the greatest - the purest, the most magical - genius of our time should have introduced the earth to such squalor, profanity, and panic."

What kind of men could have done this? **Einstein's** disciples must have been ape-crazy, and in "Insight at Flame Lake," Mr. Amis matter-of-factly follows out this line of thought. A boy child of a dead (schizophrenic) bomb maven is wildly intelligent but schizophrenic himself. He vacations with an uncle, his wife and baby. The wife's sexuality is dreadful to him; the baby visits him nightly in his dreams - hideously enlarged to monster size. Some deaths have to occur here, and they do. IS humanity through? (Answer yes or no.) In "The Immortals" the answer is yes, of course, with our last souls dying of loneliness and bad jokes, but in "The Little Puppy That Could" (and how Amis pere must have gnashed his teeth over this one), the author pulls every string, turns evolution upside down to think up a happy ending for our beleaguered species.

A word about Mr. Amis's style: it's rough, new-seeming, laconic, lower-class, insolent, careless. You do not have to wear a three-piece suit to write about the nuclear world, Mr. Amis suggests, nor must you carry a sign to protest it. Just put your brain into gear and pay attention. By doing that, Mr. Amis has created stories that please at least as much as they horrify.



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