

THE BUNS OF CAMERONE

● THE BUNS OF CAMERONE is MacFat's sixth book. The dust-jacket says it's a thriller in the true Fleming/Le Carre tradition. I would prefer to call it a thfiller—it combines the preposterousness of a thriller with the eleventh-hour look of a filler. If you are ignorant of what 'filler' means, ask the nearest journalist.

MacFat attempts to combine, in BUNS, a look at Koel Howard, a noted writer of tourist guides and an acknowledged burlesque actor, with the life and the business instincts of McAlister Camerone. Camerone meets Howard at the very end of the book—in fact, he's about to meet his Maker when Howard pushes through the crowd of mourners around Camerone's bed with a strange offer—he can, he claims, draw Camerone a map showing the route to the Pearly Gates, with notes on motels and Hertz car-hire depots along the way. Camerone refuses the offer, and at a seance after his death, his widow is told that his soul is wandering in Purgatory, having lost the way to Saint Peter's outpost.

Camerone emerges as a powerful personality as MacFat constructs his life from scraps of information he elicited from Camerone's ex-butlers. Starting off as a baker, Camerone earns a considerable reputation for making delicious hot cross buns, currant buns, sugar-speckled buns, and of course, the ubiquitous plain bun. Camerone exhibits his genius when he designs his plain buns so that one can easily dunk them in today's narrow cups of coffee.

The Depression forces Baker Camerone to close shop. But the clever man starts a new operation—that of manufacturing artificial buns of hair, for spinsters and schoolmarms with hair-loss problems. Sales boom, as women all over the United States queue up to buy 'Camerone's Buns', so that when their widower suitors take them out on moon-gazing dates, they would look suitably prim and coy.

Camerone has to shut his Hair Bun division too, when disappointed suitors unite to protest against his products. The trouble, it appears, is that no suitor likes to see every gray-haired little lady on his street sporting the same bun

Fortnightly Take-off on Bestsellers



of hair that his beloved does.

● Things look bleak for Camerone, until his quick mind suggests another line of business (though of course, I ought to credit MacFat with all this bunning—pardon the punning). Camerone begins breeding and selling pure-white Buns (which, if you aren't aware, are male Bunnies) to thousands of pathological laboratories all over the USA. His sales message is blunt: scientists have for far too long used 'rabbits' for their experiments, he feels, and it's time someone differentiated between the male and the female of the species. His Buns, he claims, would end the dilemma of scientists who require only male rabbits for trying out contraceptive capsules for men.

But even this venture has to be scrapped, after a decade, because most of Camerone's Buns are wiped out by an epidemic of a mysterious disease called Hefner's Complex.

And so Camerone hits on his most successful idea: that of opening Playlady Clubs in all major American cities. Playlady Clubs, as you would have guessed, are lipstick versions of the institution that our own Katy Mirza belonged to. Camerone capitalises on

the prevalent International Women's Decade, and staffs his Playlady Clubs with Buns, i.e., virile young men who walk around in their swimming shorts and entertain the Clubs' select membership of minked and raccooned ladies. Camerone also publishes a magazine called — you're right — Playlady — in which a monthly series of nude pictures of Mister Americas (past and present) is splashed

All this brilliance has to end somewhere, and the reader senses MacFat losing his edge towards the final chapters. Though the earlier portions are replete with little anecdotes illustrating MacFat's opinion that Camerone is a true-life Vitto Corleone, the last chapter has him being rather hot-bloodedly stabbed by a Playlady Bun he tries to seduce. Of course, you'll say Pasolini started the trend, but then Camerone, as I said at the beginning, dies in his own four-poster bed, and not on a garbage heap.

● THE BUNS OF CAMERONE, is therefore recommended for all the repressed women of India. I can imagine what the more imaginative of them will do: float "Khelnari Mandals"

—CHAITANYA KALBAG