

Spencer, David

HOW I BECAME A
FISHERMAN NAMED PETE
Baskerville (320 pp.)
\$21.95
Mar. 2003
ISBN: 1-880909-65-0

A meticulously crafted coming-of-age tale by recent college graduate Spencer. Tom Banner, at twentysomething, is so innocent that he almost begs to be taken advantage of. A dock manager at a Baltimore shipping firm, he dutifully swallows any indignity that his cretinous boss Steve sends his way, whether it's sitting through the same corporate orientation film with each new batch of employees or scouring out the staff kitchen to save the cost of cleaners. How is he rewarded? With dismissal, once Steve discovers that Tom never repaid the \$80 he never even knew had accidentally been added to his paycheck. Steve even threatens to charge Tom with theft, and the innocent lad panics and skips town. He hides out in Ocean City, Maryland, with Leah Greene, the niece of a Baltimore friend, and waits for his friend and co-worker Conrad Begg to call when the coast is clear at home. Leah works in a bar and is obviously unhappy and lonely. She seems attracted to Tom, but there's something so odd and distant about her that Tom tries to discourage her—and her uncle Fritz, who is determined to set the pair up for some reason neither Tom nor Leah can understand. Tom takes odd jobs, then finds something more permanent when Fritz's friend Joe mistakes Tom for someone named Pete and hires him to work on his fishing boat. Tom isn't a natural-born fisherman, but he hits it off with Joe, who offers him a salary and place to live if he stays on. Tom's tempted but wants to get back to his old life in Baltimore. Or does he? By now he and Leah have fallen in love—but Tom still has to learn what Dark Secret she's keeping from him.

Disarmingly simple, despite its hairpin twists and buried secrets: Spencer manages to convey the real wonder of discovering life for the first time.

Suzuki, Koji

RING
Trans. by Robert B. Rohmer &
Glynne Walley
Vertical (352 pp.)
\$24.95
May 2003
ISBN: 1-932234-00-4

First in a trilogy by a newcomer publishing house that promises high-class works from Japan. *Ring* has sold three million copies in its native country, says Vertical, been filmed there, and the film remade here as a postmodern horror mystery released by DreamWorks as *The Ring*. In one month in 1990, four Japanese students who live fairly near each other die mysteriously of heart failure. Tomoko Oishi dies in the family kitchen, Shuichi Iwata on his motorcycle while waiting for the light to change at an intersection, and Haruko Tsuji and Takehiko Nomi in the front seat of a car while undressing for sexplay. All four have faces constricted with horror and seem to be pulling their heads off or blinding their vision. Tomoko happens to be the niece of Kazuyuki Asakawa, a journalist, who links all the deaths and sees a story in it. Japanese journalism has been through a heavy period of occult reports, and Asakawa's editor only hopes it has all died down. A card Asakawa finds in Tomoko's desk leads him to discover that all four victims had watched a video tape they'd been warned against viewing—a tape, as it happens, that's something of a virus (in Asakawa, its horrific images cause sweat and shortness of breath). Then comes the message: *Those who view these images are fated to die at this exact moment one week from now. If you do not wish to die, you must follow these instructions exactly* Then the phone rings (hence *Ring*) and unspeakable bugs invade Asakawa until he slams down the receiver. Too late, though: he has a week to live. He brings in brainy Ruiji to help him, and Ruiji watches the tape. This stifling sense—is it an evil energy? Then Asakawa's wife and daughter watch it You have seven days to live after reading this review. Is that your phone ringing? (*Author tour*)

FICTION IN BRIEF

García, Cristina—Ed.

¡CUBANÍSIMO!: *The Vintage
Book of Contemporary Cuban
Literature*
Vintage (368 pp.)
\$14.00 paperback original
May 13, 2003
ISBN: 0-385-72137-4

Nicely varied selections from 25 authors are organized by Havana-born novelist García (*Monkey Hunting*, p. 332, etc.) into sections titled after various indigenous dances (e.g., “Rumba,” “Mambo,” “Salsa”). Token excerpts from the poetry and “War Diaries” of 19th-century revolutionary José Martí are followed by material composed mostly since the 1959 Castro takeover. The poetry tends toward the florid or obscure (exceptions are Heberto Padilla's Borgesian “Self-Portrait of the Other” and María Elena Cruz Valera's witty “Love Story for Difficult Times”), and of the handful of nonfiction pieces, only an excerpt from Miguel Barnet's earthy, gripping *Biography of a Runaway Slave* seems distinctive. Selections from novels by Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and exact contemporary José Manuel Prieto (author of the Nabokovian *Nocturnal Butterflies of the Russian Empire*) are noteworthy, and of eight short stories included, the standouts are Calvert Casey's gently humorous “The Walk” and journalist Ana Menéndez's seriocomic portrayal of political exiles withering away in Miami, “In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd.” An illuminating and altogether worthy addition to an excellent series.