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Weekend Review

**ON THE STAND: A WEEKLY ROUNDUP OF THE BEST MAGAZINE READS ON THE RACKS**

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The Walrus

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Professional bad writing requires an awful lot of discipline and skill, as Don Gillmor shows in a fun, thoughtful article on the romance novel pegged to the 60th anniversary of Harlequin Enterprises. Founded in Winnipeg, now headquartered in Toronto, Harlequin is the most successful book publisher in Canadian history, with an estimated 1,200 employees worldwide and sales of more than 130 million books annually. When you're talking about romance novels, you're talking about Harlequin.

Over the decades, not a few writers, wannabes and otherwise, have boasted that they could "write a Harlequin." But it's something easier said than accomplished. Harlequin has strict editorial guidelines, right down to the number of words required, and it takes a twisted kind of authorial genius to master the idiom's many formulas.

At the same time, Gillmor observes that the romance genre hasn't been a static thing. In the last two decades, Harlequin has introduced a variety of lines and series with names like Spice, Desire and Steeple Hill. The first two are targeted at readers wanting more sex in their love stories, the last a collection of religious-themed novels where "the unmarried hero and heroine [are forbidden] to stay overnight in the same house without a chaperone."

Love

Issue One

Lord, we don't need another mountain or meadow and we certainly don't need another fashion magazine. But has this ever stopped the folks at Condé Nast?

Love, published out of London, is the company's latest foray into fabulousness. The debut issue, on newsstands now, runs to more than 300 glam-packed oversized pages. Laminate the thing, screw in four legs and you've got yourself a fine end-table. Indeed, at \$16.95 a pop, this is one periodical that won't be heading to the recycle bin any time soon.

Using a nude Beth Ditto, the five-feet, 76-kilogram lesbian vocalist of Goth-punkers the Gossip, as cover-girl speaks to Love's aspirations as a sort of "street/boho" mag. But the cover price – and the inside pics of Ditto pal Kate Moss, Vivienne Westwood, Natalia Vodianova, Georgia May Jagger, Courtney Love et al. – means we're talking High Street here, albeit its rough-trade/tough-love side. While the premiere is undeniably a handsome hunk of gloss (with way more [female] nudity than Condé Nast's more establishment Vogue), you have to wonder if Love will be one more loser in the New Depression.

Middle East Report

Spring 2009

Speaking of birthdays, this year is the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran. To mark the occasion, Middle East Report dedicates all 64 pages of its latest issue to a multifaceted examination of Iranian society post-Shah.

That the republic has survived, to the point that it's now generally regarded as the major Muslim power in the

Middle East, is something of a miracle to many observers. After all, at the time of the Shah's overthrow, Iran had been receiving billions of dollars in U.S. aid and was home to hundreds of thousands of secularized engineers, scientists, doctors and teachers. Could such a country really be governed by a bunch of mullahs in ZZ Top/Rick Rubin beards and turbans and "steeped in esoteric medieval writings"?

New York history professor Ervand Abrahamian argues that the usual explanations for the clerical regime's endurance – repression and suppression, Shiite hegemony, the unity engendered by the Iran-Iraq War, among them – don't withstand scrutiny. Rather, the regime perseveres because of "economic and social populism." Eighty per cent of Iranian women can now read and write. Eighty per cent of rural households own refrigerators. Infant mortality, 104 per 1,000 in the 1970s, has declined to 25.

Illustration

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