

Vonnegut bids farewell to 'selfishness' books

book reviews

By Bruce Nelson

Breakfast of Champions or Goodbye Blue Monday, by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. is 50, according to him *Breakfast of Champions* is "the last of his selfishness books."

To stifle his selfishness, he bids farewell to all the characters he's created, and takes a final potshot at everything from Vietnam to coal mines.

Supposedly the story is about Dwayne Hoover, a Pontiac dealer, and Kilgore Trout, a science fiction writer. Hoover lives in Midland City. Trout is hitchhiking there for an arts festival where he will be an honored guest.

Hoover is going crazy, and Trout is going to give him information that will push Hoover into insanity. The information is in a story Trout has written in which he states that everyone is a machine except the reader.

Hoover reads the story and decides to assert his free will by beating up some machines (people). The book ends with Hoover locked up and Trout becoming famous.

Vonnegut tells almost all of this in the first chapter, so the reader won't have to pay attention to the plot. That way the reader can turn his attention to Vonnegut's summary of all that's good and bad about the earth.

Vonnegut's constant moralizing falls short. Sometimes only his humor keeps the reader reading. His ideas are good, but are becoming stale.

Champions won't hurt Vonnegut's following, but won't win him any new disciples either.

Confessions of a Hope Fiend by Timothy Leary. *Confessions of a Hope Fiend* reveals Timothy Leary as a sensitive person.

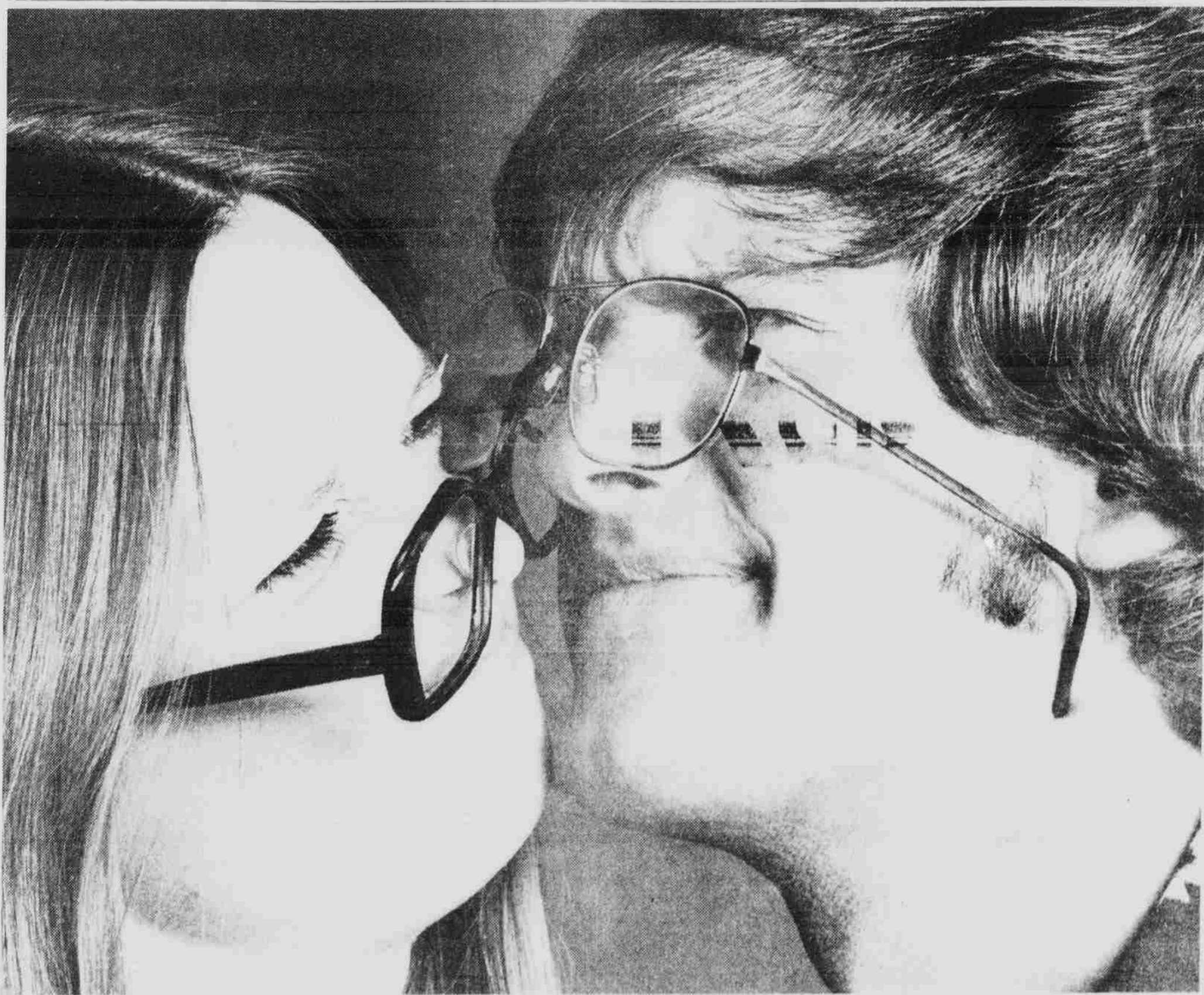
The book is an account of Leary's 1970 conviction for possession of drugs, his appeals and his escape from prison with the help of the Weathermen, a radical, leftist group.

The book details his search for refuge in Algeria and his association with black radical Eldridge Cleaver. Leary ends the book by explaining his growing dissatisfaction with the Black Panthers, another radical group, and his subsequent move to Switzerland.

Leary isn't a writer and doesn't profess to be one. He begins his story in a stream-of-consciousness style that he finally abandons, probably because he handles it badly. He then simply tells his story.

Leary's opinions of the Weathermen and Cleaver make the book interesting and provide perspectives one doesn't get from CBS or *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver's autobiography.

Personal opinions about Leary aside, the book is sincere writing and interesting reading.



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