

Monstrous Meat Puppets to attack Omaha

By John Payne
Senior Editor

For the past 11 years, the Meat Puppets have been proving that they've got more than a great name. The Phoenix-based trio has consistently impressed critics, while its raucous concerts have made the Puppets underground favorites. Tonight they'll attack Omaha's Ranch Bowl, 1606 south 72nd St., with a live show that's sure to be monstrous.

concert

Led by the manic stylings of guitar hero Curt Kirkwood — and this guy really is *something else* — the Meat Puppets have produced seven albums on the SST label, their last being 1989's "Monsters." This year the brothers Kirkwood (Curt also sings, Cris plays bass), along with drummer Derrick Bostrom, made the jump to a major when "Forbidden Places" was released on London Records. The switch allowed the Puppets to spiff up production values, while leaving their trademark sound of guitar abandon

fully intact.

"We had a little bit more money," Cris Kirkwood explains from his Arizona kitchen. "We got to go into a nicer studio and just smooth a few things out."

And "Places" is smooth. From Curt's Gatling gun vocal delivery on "Sam," to the pure guts guitar of "Nail it Down," the release is a real house rocker. It also may come closest to capturing the spirit of the troupe's live show, which is just real damn fun.

"We still don't do song lists," Curt explains. "I mean we have a basic idea of what we should play, but we just let the mood of the moment dictate the show."

And the mood often dictates a round of musical chairs, with band members swapping gear midway through the show.

"Those guys are a little more crotchety about it now," Kirkwood jokes. "It's like 'don't touch my stuff!' Mostly we just have big holes where whatever wants to happen can happen."



See MEAT on 14



Courtesy of London Records

The Meat Puppets will perform tonight at the Ranch Bowl in Omaha.

Portrayal of small town life succeeds with insight, humor

"What's Eating Gilbert Grape"
Peter Hedges
Poseidon Press

By Sean Green
Staff Reporter

"What's Eating Gilbert Grape" recounts the screwy small-town life of a lot of University of Nebraska-Lincoln students know and love (or hate).

Peter Hedges' debut novel concerns Gilbert Grape, a 24-year-old grocery boy, and his life in the small town of Endora, Iowa.

Told through Gilbert's narrative, the story is honest and straight to the point. The thoughts and experiences Gilbert relates are humorous, insightful and sometimes pathetic.

But what, exactly, is eating Gilbert Grape? You name it.

His family is dysfunctional, to put it mildly. For starters, his father hanged himself when Gilbert was a child. His mother, a former beauty queen, never leaves her house, or even her recliner, and has become so enormous the floor under her chair is on the verge of collapsing.

Momma Gilbert has only three topics of conversation: What's for dinner, the location of her cigarettes and the 18th birthday of her retarded son.

Gilbert's older sister Amy cooks for the family and keeps a shrine to Elvis in her bedroom.

His teen-age sister Ellen is a sex-pot. She becomes a born-again Christian, only to wind up drinking beer and having sex with Gilbert's loser friend Tucker.

Arnie, the retarded Grape, lives for pony rides at the circus, and after spending the night sleeping in his bath water (because Gilbert forgot to take him out), refuses to go near water.

Aside from his family, Gilbert has other things eating him.

He works at a small grocery store that not only refuses to die, but cannot

Gilbert's life matter-of-factly, writing:

"All I know is that Arnie's big 18th birthday is going to be something else. And if Momma hasn't fallen through the floor and if Arnie has died in his sleep and if Ellen isn't pregnant and if the other Grapes haven't gone further off the edge, maybe, maybe we'll be okay."

The food metaphor is the unifying thread of the story, and it goes far beyond the names of the characters.

Every turning point in the novel revolves around food, be it Momma Grape stuffing her face with potato chips as she asks Gilbert why he hates his life, or the town religious nut telling Gilbert, "We are all little broken eggs till we turn to Christ."

The erosion of small-town life is perhaps Hedges' strongest theme. Gilbert scorns the town's pathetic attempts to modernize and glamorize, yet he is uncomfortable when Becky tells him it's what's inside that counts.

As a first-time author, Hedges is clever, talented and skillful. His characters have a haunting quality of familiarity.

This novel will be sweet music to those tired of hearing that their generation is too materialistic to produce anything of artistic value.

Anyone who's ever lived in a small community will be amazed at Hedges' accuracy and brilliance.



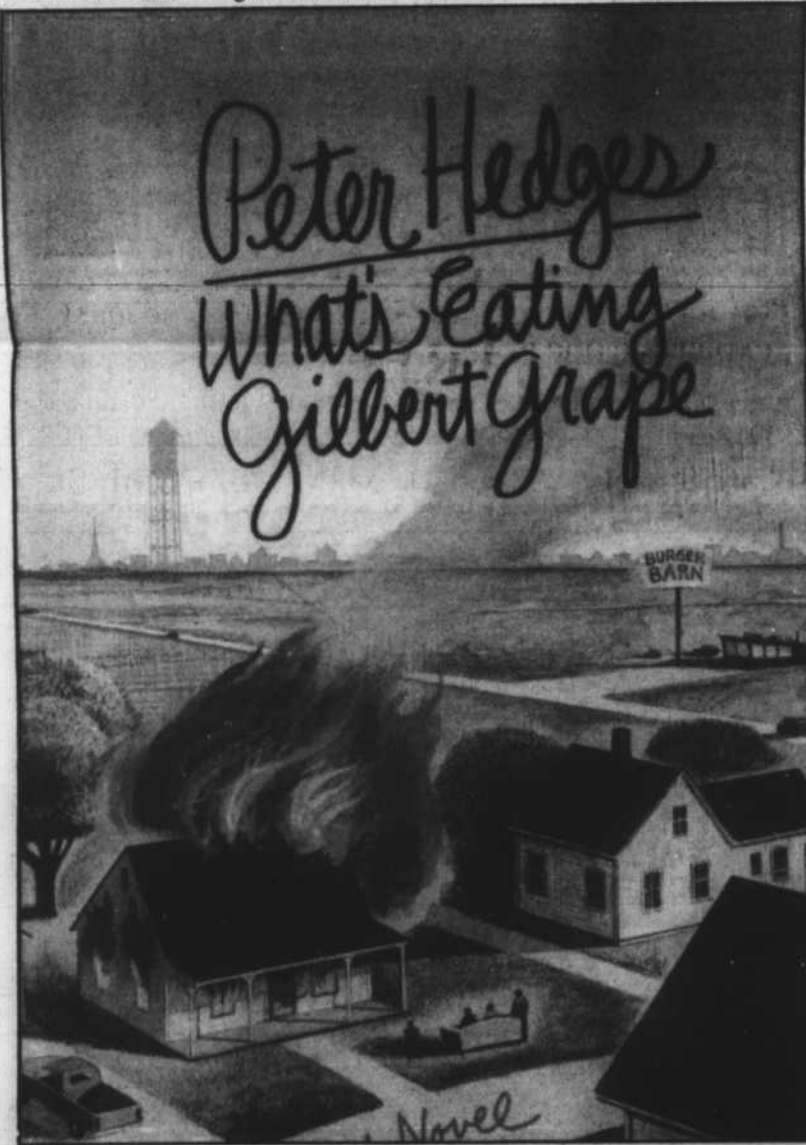
compete with the Food Barn on the edge of town.

Everything Gilbert knows about sex he learned from his affair with a middle-aged housewife.

Lance Dodge, a classmate of Gilbert's, returns a town hero because of his television newsman fame.

Finally, there's Becky, a new girl whom Gilbert falls in love and lust with. Only 15 years old, the sexy Becky sees right through Gilbert's facade, much to his annoyance.

Hedges relates the problems in



Courtesy of Simon & Schuster

Grocery headlines do not answer question of who leads the world



Mark
Baldrige

"I WAS ABDUCTED BY UFO ALIENS"

That's what the paper said — at least the headline. I couldn't read the whole story because I was in the express lane, but I caught the gist.

It seems that this guy was out minding his own business in a desolate wasteland, when an enormous space craft appeared in the clouds. A beam of light hit him on the forehead and next thing he knew, he was laid out on a dissecting table in a creepy dark lab. Here's what was next: They'd

swap his brain for a chicken's — and he was a little worried about it. But it didn't happen.

These little guys came out of the shadows and told him, "Do not be afraid!" It was telepathy, of course. They went on to tell him that they were watching our planet, and that we had nothing to fear from them; that they were guides to help us through this next hard test in our history.

Reading this, I was so surprised. I'd never have guessed it.

It's a complicated world. It's nice to think that someone has the "Big Picture." Space creatures see it all from above; they have perspective. If we could just contact these little green guys of indeterminate gender, we might take one giant step forward in human evolution.

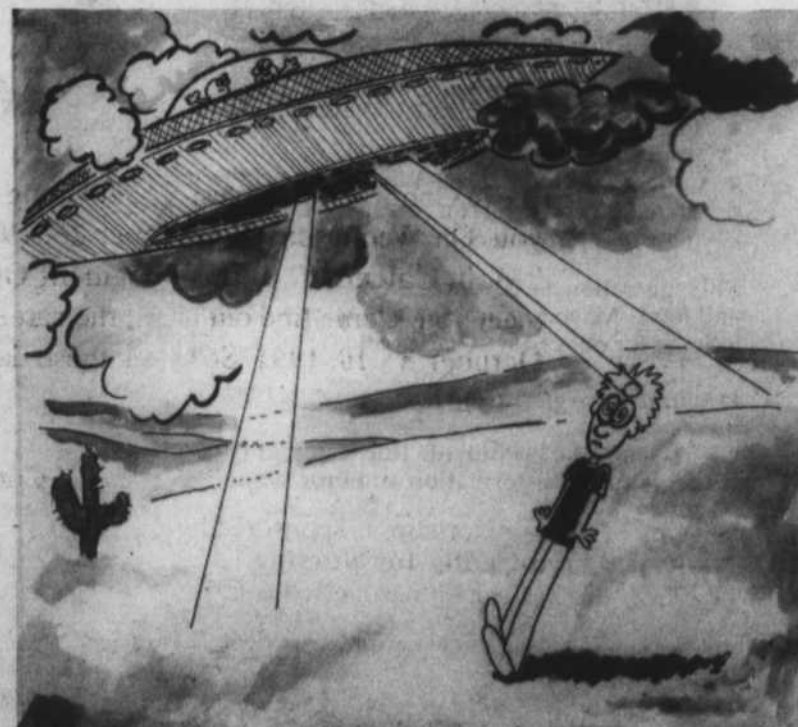
Unfortunately, if our extra-terres-

trial mentors offer any clue, human evolution may be not so fun. We'll have to give up noses, pinky fingers, body hair and genitalia. But, heck, we'll get ESP — and technology that'd make corporate Japan green with envy. Of course we'll all be green. For some reason, that seems essential to higher evolutionary consciousness. All the aliens are, anyway.

Maybe they're really a shade of blue, like Krishna.

If the prospect of moving up the Darwin Scale does not appeal, or we despair of help from beyond the biosphere, there is always just "The Beyond."

God has spaceships of Her own, perhaps. And when the Almighty seems too distant, too uninvolved by the human



Lisa Pytko/DON

See BALDRIDGE on 14