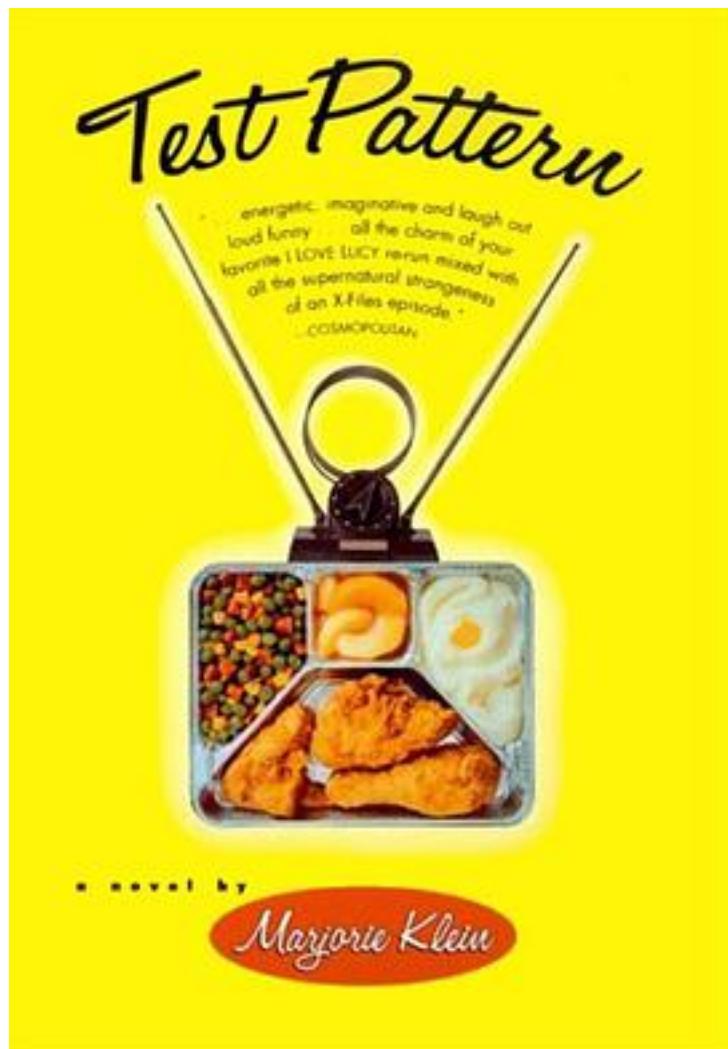


Test Pattern



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出版者:Perennial

出版时间:

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780060959531

From Publishers Weekly The boob tube becomes an oracle in this smart but uneven debut that fails to do justice to its inventive premise. Part sentimental coming-of-age tale, part screwball comedy kitsch-fest and part magical realist fable, the novel suffers from stylistic overload. Chafing at her "dull as dog food" life in 1954 Newport News, Va., housewife Lorena Palmer is sure that the arrival of the family's first TV spells her salvation from biscuit-making and supermarket shopping. Programs like The Arthur Murray Party reawaken dashed show-biz dreams whose pull Lorena cannot resist, even at the expense of her marriage to moping shipyard worker Pete. Lorena initiates an affair with an old high school crush whose cousin Wally works for Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts, the program that (Lorena imagines) will bring her fame as a dancer. Never mind that Lorena is comically untalented; she will stop at nothing to join the pantheon of small-screen gods and goddesses whose lives seem more real than her own. At the same time, Lorena's 10-year-old daughter, Cassie, sees another kind of future in the hypnotic test pattern that appears between shows. A sort of pop-culture Cassandra, she catches glimpses of the Oprah Winfrey Show, Ronald Reagan's election, the Apollo moon landing and the Kennedy assassination. When a harbinger of immediate domestic disaster appears on the test pattern, her strange gift finds frightening validation. Cassie's prophetic power (a literalizing of TV's Greek root, "far-seeing") is a clever conceit, but the sacrificing of subtlety for name-dropping kitsch vitiates the novel's impact. (Feb.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. From Library Journal In 1954, the Palmers of Newport News, VA, are the first on their block to own a television. Eleven-year-old Cassie not only gets to watch her favorite shows (Howdy Doody, Ozzie and Harriet) but discovers that events from the future appear in the TV's test patterns. She watches American Bandstand and Roseanne and learns, for example, about the election and death of JFK, the move of the Dodgers from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, and Ronald Reagan's metamorphosis from actor to politician. She also watches with horror as the test pattern reveals a serious argument between her parents. For Cassie's mother Lorena, the new set offers a way out of her boring life as a housewife and mother: a chance to audition for Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts and strut her stuff as a dancer. Lorena's and Cassie's stories are told in alternate chapters, with Lorena's chapters told in the third person, and Cassie's in the first person. One unfortunate result is that mother and daughter seem to be existing in different novels that never quite cohere into one. In addition, because the adult characters are uninteresting stereotypes, and Cassie remains firmly one-dimensional, few readers will care what happens in either story. Not recommended. A Nancy Pearl, Washington Ctr. for the Book, Seattle Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. See all Editorial Reviews

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