

Readers Can Bone Up On What's Hip By KEVIN WALKER
KEVIN WALKER
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Am I to understand you've never even listened to the Velvet Underground? You don't know about Chet Baker or the films of Hal Hartley? You aren't down with Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" or William Gibson's "Neuromancer"?

You are just so ... unhip.

Or so you might feel after reading "Hip: The History" (Harper, \$14), John Leland's exploration of American popular culture and how it has become a touchstone for people worldwide. The back of the paperback edition even includes lists from Leland, a New York Times reporter, on the most hip books, films, music, etc.

The book is interesting, what I read of it, including the lists, but personally it struck me as something of casual interest, something only closeted geeks with nothing better to do might obsess about. Plus, references to Count Chocula and Pavement's "Slanted & Enchanted," well, we've been doing that sort of thing around here for years, and a general circulation newspaper in West Central Florida couldn't be that hip, could it?

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the extremely unhip topic of dragons takes center stage in P.R. Moredu's "The World of Eldaterra" (HarperCollins, \$16), which is noteworthy for the fact that, as a publicity stunt, the author faked the existence of a real dragon embryo suspended in formaldehyde and newspapers around the world wrote about it.

Turns out he had paid a large amount of money to get the fake embryo made by special-effects experts, but he still got his publicity. Is the book any good? Early reviews are positive. It concerns dragons, naturally, trying to move from a parallel world into ours.

On a more serious topic, two new books explore mother-son relationships. The nonfiction "Raising Boys Without Men" (Rodale, \$24), by Peggy Drexler, explores how single moms are raising, according to Drexler, "the next generation of exceptional men" without help from men. The other, also nonfiction, is "Returning Frankie's Rocks" (Tarcher, \$27), by Dana Hornig, and it focuses on a boy who finally connects with the memory of his dead mother. Finally, the "King Kong" books are already arriving. The new movie version of the classic is due this year from director Peter Jackson. The latest books include "Living Dangerously: The Adventures of Merian C. Cooper" (Villard, \$27), a biography of filmmaker Cooper, who created "King Kong." The book includes a forward from Jackson, who opines about how Cooper's original "King Kong" movie influenced him powerfully and helped him fall in love with movies.

FOOTNOTES BOOKS

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[John Leland is hip; you can be too.](#)

["Raising Boys Without Men"](#)

[By Peggy Drexler](#)

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