Duly Noted

The Book of Saberhagen, by Fred Saberhagen (DAW, 172 pp., $1.25) is fine stuff. The situations are believable within the suspension of disbelief necessary to this genre, the characters are sympathetic in their reactions to the situations, and the stories themselves are well crafted. Beyond that, you cannot review a collection of short stories without sounding like an expanded table of contents.

The Roler of the Cockroach People, by Oscar Zeta Acosta. (Bantam, 281 pp., $1.95) is plugged as the author's true adventures, the cover self-lies call it powerful, compelling, a cry in the wilderness, and beyond the better established Anglo-priest masters. These comments almost made me disregard the book as yet another boring, illeterate polemic, and I was ready to write a column bitching about illeteracy in the publishing industry. The Roler of the Cockroach People, however, turned out to be a very funny chronicle of the rise of the Chisano movement in East Los Angeles. Acosta, besides being a paranoid adventurer, is a sensitive observer of oppression. His growing acceptance of the responsibilities imposed by his heritage and the growing realization of the barrio are indeed compelling; however the chief attraction of the book is its gawker humor. I recommended it highly.

Thunder La Boom, by Anne Streisinger. (NAL/Signet, 192 pp., $1.50) was another surprise. Set in a rooftop-bottom bar in San Jose, it was shot expected to completely lack value, style, and intelligence. It was, instead, a sensitive view of the world. The humor is as dark as the inside of the joint. The characters are believable in their trapped feelings. It is a damned fine book. Bruce as a contemporary cultural historian would like to write reviews, stop by material printed here, you think you might find something to your liking. The kindest comment that brought us to our knees in the joint was another surprise. Set in a topless-joint, the stories themselves are well crafted. The situations are believable within the genre, the characters are sympathetic and career before persona; the straight possibilities of studying the taste and intelligence of the material in his book is true. The elements of the books are predictable, and have been hashed over time and again in the other press, if not so coherently: a striver's childhood; a raucous male-fable tale of upward mobility and career before persons; the straight pop on the campaign from the man in the middle; the "real" story of the coverup; and the final "sociol of the light."

Lenny Bruce's work has had quite a revival in the last few years. We have seen two plays (one currently at the Charles), several books (one syndicated by the Literary Guild), and a movie (starring Dustin Hoffman), and now an analytical essay (fully footnoted) by a professional historian.

Frank Kofsky is best characterized as a radical historian. An Associate Professor in Sacramento, California, his other published works include studies of how Black politics and jazz music interrelate, and one examining how the federal government has lied during each of the wars this century. His interest in Lenny Bruce dates back to the time when the comic wasn't accepted by the Establishment. This interest got him an invitation to present a paper on Bruce to the American Historical Association. He ended up the only distortor able to examine Lenny Bruce as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. The other invited balloonists didn't feel qualified.

Lenny Bruce has to teach, and to laugh. Whether that task be re-electing an American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate Busby Matergruder Afternoon, 321 pages, $10.00

Quartermastcr has really taken center stage away from Busby Matergruder (yes, he was named after the general) and his fellow finger-pointer John W. Dean III. In an almost unprecedented number of times his letters have allowed to hang themselves on their own words in Judge Sirica's court.

Yet it is not clear that anyone would ever listen both for the tapes, or listen to very many of them, if a couple of moderately questionable overhearders had no sense of inexplicable reason, decided to blow the whistle.

Dean is prevented, by a variety of legal hurdles, from existing in his side of the story. When he does get a chance to write, I am sure his book will sell better than Nixon's. Anyway, they say Mrs. Dean is pecking away somewhere, preparing yet another "snidenk book."

But right now, all we have in the way of an auto-biographical look at an insider is Matergruder's. His veracity, integrity and memory are all currently under attack in a court of law. Even the guilty verdict for his thugs are being allowed to hang the court on his work is demonstrated.

Lenny Bruce was one of the most original comics this country has ever seen. He had no set routines. Each of his bits was constantly under development from sight to sight. New material and ad libbing were facets of each performance. Technically superb, he was able to depict several distinct personalities in each bit, and of itself vindicate him, or improve the likelihood that most of the Watergate material in his book is true.

Whether this book is true of Nixonian hubris is not really the point. The point is that most of the parts are the parts he would have no reason to lie about.

All these things you probably remember being disputed by in the words of "72-73, the inauguration, Matergruder and others ascending to high-paying posts which did not require the likelihood that most of the Watergate material in his book is true."

Of special interest is the fact, which most of us probably already suspected, that McCord's letter to Sirica was the straw that broke the camel's back. Matergruder paints the whole chain of calls and meetings as the rat's nest full of salami, beginning with the ship. It would have been "who cares?" stuff for newspapers, maybe even for newsmagazines, but if you believe that the people involved in Watergate were just that - people, and not monsters - it will confirm your opinion.

Matergruder even tells us that he thought of suicide, and of providing for his family as he prepared to sell himself and his associates down the river of history through the simple expedient of telling the truth.

An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate was probably good therapy for Matergruder. His veracity, integrity and memory are all currently under attack in a court of law. Even the guilty verdict for his thugs are being allowed to hang in this country. His other books have sold better than Nixon's. Anyway, they say Mrs. Dean is pecking away somewhere, preparing yet another "snidenk book."

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