

Wordsmith

Reno audiences can see Bay Area screenwriter and journalist Jonathan Kiefer's new film, *Around the Sun*, during Reno's July 25-28 Cordillera International Film Festival. Learn more the festival lineup and location here: www.ciffnv.org.

Nice to talk with you.

It's exciting to talk to the News & Review because, of course, I used to work at the Sacramento paper years ago.

Arts editor, right?

Yes, that was from 2005 to 2008, or thereabouts. And I worked with Bob Grimm a little bit.

You've written for impressive publications—the New York Times, the Village Voice.

Oh, thanks! After SN&R, I moved back to the Bay Area and continued freelancing, which is what I'd been doing before taking the job. I put in a few years doing that. It was a weird time because, of course, the economy went south. It was sort of a scary time to be freelancing, but I did pretty well through the network of alt weekly papers—because I'd been doing film reviews myself ... and then eventually sort of thought that I should put my money—or, ideally, I guess, somebody else's—money, if you're making a movie—where my mouth is. I have my friend [director] Oliver [Krimpas] ... whom I met way back when in the film department



at Boston University. ... We had another project that didn't quite happen. It was kind of too big and too ambitious. But then he told me that he knew somebody who had a chateau in France in which we could shoot for free. ... He showed me some pictures of the place. ... At that time, we'd tried to make this other movie—and it was so complicated and everything was so expensive. As first time feature makers, it was sort of an uphill battle. I had gotten to this point where I'm like, "Let's just use what we have and be really, really frugal about everything. It's like, you have this great location—and let me see if I can make a story out of that. We'll make something that's really minimal, just so it's achievable." And, so, the whole story kind of spun out of that place. This particular chateau ... had an interesting history. It was the site and the setting of one of the first books of popular science,

Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds by Bernard de Fontenelle.

Wait, wait! The chateau has a connection to de Fontenelle?

It was where, in the 17th Century—it was a sort of off-site salon spot for Persian intelligentsia. ... And de Fontenelle was a guest of this place, and he was, I think, kind of inspired by the hostess who received him there, among other distinguished literary types and wrote this book—which is basically explaining, popularizing the heliocentric model of the solar system, which at the time was sort of a dangerous idea. ... It was something I thought we had to use to make the movie. So, yeah, the story is kind of an adaptation of that—or it's inspired by that.

Tell me a little about the film.

It's basically a duet. It's two people. The guy is Gethin Anthony, who was in *Game of Thrones*. And the woman is Cara Theobald, who was in *Downton Abbey*. And it's sort of a series of scenes in which they meet for the first time, and she talks about the heritage of the property. ... And it's under the auspices of him as a film location scout coming to check it out, presumably to see if it's workable as a location for a movie. ... But as the story progresses, there's a kind of looping narrative where things start to turn out a bit different than that. And you start to question who they are and what their relationship is or if it's sort of a projection of [de Fontenelle's] book. □

NOTES FROM THE NEON BABYLON

BY BRUCE VAN DYKE

Glorious photography, seamy cases

I've been catching up lately on episodes of the eternally amazing PBS show *Nature*, and I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary work being done by the fleet of filmmakers that continue to go out into The Sticks of our astounding planet and come back with these riveting images that are both (1) in color and (2) in focus.

One recent show was about tiny creatures of various places and how they get by, and there was footage of this technicolored spider the size of a grain of rice doing his mating dance for his mate who will eat him after they do the deed, and I'm sittin' there saying, "Man, this guy got the shot, and it's one helluva shot! Bravo, solitude-loving cameraperson with an abundance of patience. Your fantastic skills are not going unnoticed or unappreciated."

Speaking of the Jeff 'n' Don show, this is a swell time to remind ourselves that in 2016, a woman named Katie Johnson filed a lawsuit against Epstein and—looky here!—Trump! I'll be darned! In her suit, Johnson claims the two defendants "did willfully and with extreme malice violate her civil rights by sexually and physically abusing Plaintiff Johnson by forcing her to engage in various perverted and depraved sex acts by threatening physical harm to Plaintiff Johnson and her family."

The actions described happened in 1994, said Johnson, and the suit was first filed in California in April 2016, but dismissed for technical errors. It was then re-filed in New York in June 2016, but was dropped on November 4, five days before the freaking election, because, Johnson says, "threats to her life kept her away."

Well, gee. How sordidly interesting. So what do we got? Meritless lawsuit from a crafty, scheming young golddigger? Or a legitimate action taken by one of the many teen girls molested and abused by a wealthy sex maniac and his good buddy who just now happens to be the Pervert Of The United States? Well, considering that (1) Epstein is a major slime-bag, (2) he and Trump socialized often in the '90s and '00s (yes, Epstein was a member of Mar-a-Lago), (3) at least 20 women have accused Trump of sexual assault, and (4) Trump has undoubtedly paid women big bucks to STFU, well, then maybe we have to admit here that Katie Johnson's story, as unsavory and repellent as it is, just might not be all that outlandish and far-fetched. She just might be telling the truth. And isn't that just super? □



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