

The World Of Video

ZOOMAR. By Ernie Kovacs. 348 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co. \$3.95.

A FIRST novel by TV actor Ernie Kovacs, "Zoomar" is in the pattern of "The Great Man" and "The Pitchman," in that it exposes the seamy side of TV practices. Mr. Kovacs has created a sort of Mr. Roberts of video—Tom Moore—who expresses many of the author's thoughts about the medium. Television-naive Tom becomes disenchanted with such things as the overwhelming importance of politicking and the helplessness of a talented employe persecuted by a vindictive boss. Since "Zoomar" is essentially a light and sometimes frivolous novel, however, most of the author's thrusts are satirical ones—at rating systems, commercials, lecherous producers, admen patois, protocol and the subtle phraseology used by agents and stars in haggling with producers at contract time.

Zealous Tom Moore manages to adapt himself to the ritualistic behavior patterns of this new society. His show-beauty contest eliminations to promote shoe polish achieves good ratings. He manages to re-sign the M. C. Charlie King (a comic who is as outspoken as Ernie Kovacs), and is upped in salary and position, coming into conflict with the odd creatures who inhabit TV's exosphere. Shrewd as well as full of integrity, Tom bests one of them—by the device of producing embarrassing, unposed photos. During all this he learns about the abuses of telethons and integrated plugs, the torch borne by his secretary, the capriciousness of sponsors and his ineluctable affection for his good sport of a wife.

BESIDES being a roman à clef, "Zoomar" seems in great part autobiographical. The author's character and personal experiences are reflected in two people: happily married, self-analyzing, antic Tom and the cynical veteran of TV battles, Charlie King. Of the two Charlie is the more honest and appealing character. For all Tom's erudition and announced integrity, the reader gets the idea that for him two separate sets of moral values obtain: one by which talented Tom can find his way and another, stricter one for the rest of humanity.

In "Zoomar" a major TV personality sounds off about some of the things and some of the people that, rightly or wrongly, have bothered him professionally for the past decade. At the end there is a cogent plea for more imaginative programming. If the book reads less like a novel occasionally than a salute to true friends, its message and revelations are none the less important to a public all too uncomprehending about the pressures inherent in one of the world's most vital media. Mr. Kovacs enlightens us about them, and about himself.

REX LARDNER.

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