

3 reviews of Strange Travelers from BIP

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 04 Feb 2000

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Jeremy W. Crampton — 04 Feb 2000, 13:55

Following are 3 reviews of ST from Books in Print. They relate to some of the discussions on this list esp. the Ziggurat.

Library Journal

(January 1, 2000; 0-312-87227-5)

Two tales featuring a pair of musicians wandering down an endless highway filled with stalled cars

("Bluesberry Jam"; "Ain't You Most Done?") frame this collection of 15 short stories by the award-winning author of the "Book of the New Sun" series. Wolfe's eclectic talent runs the gamut from

Russian folk tales to modern horror as he explores a landscape filled with ghouls, aliens, and chess-playing deities. Representing a decade of groundbreaking speculative fiction by a master of the

genre, this volume belongs in most libraries. Copyright 2000 Cahners Business Information.|

Booklist

(January 1, 2000; 0-312-87227-5)

Wolfe's latest collection holds 16 pieces that have appeared in an amazing variety of publications

during the last decade. Their inspirations range from music in "Bluesberry Jam" to comic books in

"Ain't You Most Done?," a tie-in to Neil Gaiman's famous Sandman series of graphic novels, which are

about as far removed from caped-crusader stuff as one can imagine. But then, Wolfe occupies a distinguished position on the frontiers of both sf and fantasy by virtue of originality of subject, capable

handling of detail, and command of language. Plot summaries don't do his work justice, but the only

caveat to make is that some of the protagonists are initially repulsive, and at short length, there isn't

much time to assimilate their complexities. --Roland Green|

Publishers Weekly

(December 20, 1999; 0-312-87227-5)

Not for the faint of heart or weak of stomach, this collection of Wolfe's stories published in the 1990s contains death by overdose, suicide, Armageddon, cruelty to animals, abuse of children, children willing to falsely accuse fathers of sexual abuse and a plethora of vampiric female figures eager to suck the life out of men. Opening with "Bluesberry Jam," Wolfe (The Book of the Long Sun series, etc.) creates an intriguing speculative future in which an entire culture arises from people who have been stuck in a traffic jam for decades. This conceit is ultimately negated, however, by the most tired of clichés in the closing story, "Ain't You 'Most Done," which is set in the same world. Also included are two Christmas stories: "No Planets Strike," a relatively sweet tale in which genetically modified animals aid the next Christ child, and "And When They Appear," which is less sweet, involving wonderful, mythic figures who visit, but cannot save, a small boy from a world gone mad. While Wolfe's prose is exceptional and there are a few gems here, such as "Useful Phrases," which delights in how words lead us to and reveal mysteries, there are also several tasteless and misogynistic entries. Chief among them is "The Ziggurat," in which a mother coaches her daughters in the art of false accusation and the father--whose wife leaves him broke--eventually regains all by finding a woman he can dominate and a technology he can steal. All too frequently in this volume, even when women show men "the pleasures of Hell," biting them till they bleed, men emerge loutish and triumphant. (Jan.) FYI: Wolfe is a recipient of the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement. Copyright 1999 Cahners Business Information.

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William H. Ansley — 06 Feb 2000, 23:32 · follows Jeremy W. Crampton

"Jeremy W. Crampton" <jcrampto at gmu.edu> wrote:
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[...]

I have to agree with the last review that Jeremy W. Crampton was kind enough to provide for us. My feeling on reaching the end of "Ain't You 'Most Done" was, "Oh, no! Not again!".

Wolfe has so many characters in this kind of predicament that I think the primary thing you should keep in mind when reading him is not "Find the wolf" (which doesn't strike me as being particularly helpful, even in the case of "The Ziggurat") but "When did the main character die and does he know it yet?".

Now, it may be that if I had read Neil Gaiman's Sandman series and could appreciate the tie in, I would feel differently, but I was really disappointed in the way "Ain't You 'Most Done" ended, especially since I thought Wolfe managed to make the basically absurd notion of a traffic-jam culture seem all too real and poignant.

William Ansley

Jim Jordan — 10 Feb 2000, 13:07 · follows William H. Ansley

At 11:32 PM 2/6/00 -0500, you wrote:

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William Ansley

Don't have my copy here, but I recall that the copyright date of both stories is the same, thus written together.

I suggest we give Wolfe a bit of space here. The traffic jam society is clearly symbolic of the "world," especially the world of today (in Christian terms, of course: the three enemies being the world, the flesh, and the devil -- Gevers, do we not see all three in this book?) and thus we should not have taken it as "real" SF to start with.

Nutria