

"And When They Appear" and Other Stories

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 23 Sep 2000

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Dave Lebling — 23 Sep 2000, 11:52

Tony Ellis wrote:

Both seem to be, among other things, rite-of-passage stories. They're about the bittersweet process of growing up and leaving behind the world of childhood with all its pretty lies.

I agree with Tony here. That was how "And When They Appear" struck me when I first read it. House advises Sherby to get in the freezer with his dead parents: this is not subtlety!

I also agree with Alga that it's a sloppy story. A lot of Wolfe's stories set in the "real world" seem oddly disjointed to me. The early one about a counter-culture revolution against middle management comes to mind (um, "Hour of Trust" -- just looked it up), and There Are Doors, which I reread recently and enjoyed more than on my first reading. (Though, rereading it, it took a great deal of effort to take Laura's society seriously, especially as it differed only in detail from our own. I know it's not intended as a realistic story, but the biochemistry makes no sense: "massive immune system shock," indeed! I guess no one there has ever heard of condoms or oral sex. Wolfe should have just said, "it's magic." Tina the goddess doll was great, though. She reminded me of Oreb.)

When Wolfe has some purely didactic point to make, he's not as careful with the details, perhaps. Though the details are always wonderful. The last paragraph of "Hour of Trust." Eek. Maybe "wonderful" isn't exactly the word.

In any case, one of Wolfe's perennial themes is that being out in the world isn't easy, being an adult isn't easy, making decisions isn't easy, etc. "And When They Appear" presents this argument in a particularly repellent way, but it's not that unusual, especially in his short fiction.

Characters in Wolfe books who have easy answers are almost always villains (North in There Are Doors comes to mind).

-- Dave Lebling
(aka vizcacha)