

Cordwainer Smith reading order -- dissent

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 12 Sep 1997

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David_Lebling — 12 Sep 1997, 09:18

Rostrum, Nutria, alga, et al.,

I'd have to disagree slightly with the Rodent of Unusual Size.

Don't read Smith in the chronological order set out in the NESFA books (but do buy them -- run, do not walk!).

Read "The Ballad of Lost C'mell," then "Scanners Live in Vain," then "The Game of Rat and Dragon." After that, I would move on to "Alpha Ralpha Boulevard" and eventually "Norstrilia." Read "On the ... Planet" (really a novel in three episodes) last. Read the very early stuff and the very late stuff (including posthumous collaborations with his wife, Genevieve) only if you feel the need. (Although, "Western Science is So Wonderful" is an absolute hoot -- more like Rudy Rucker than Smith).

The idea is that you should read the middle stories, where the Instrumentality figures prominently, first. You should absorb the stories like you would absorb a huge, complex tapestry -- the publication order would be better than the "history" order, but still start with C'mell and Lord Jestocost. Also, don't read the introductions, timelines and afterwords until you've read everything else.

No one should read the Narnia books starting with "The Magician's Nephew." No one should read Smith starting with "War 81-Q" (or whatever else is first).

I am Of a Certain Age, and started reading the late, lamented Galaxy about when "The Ballad of Lost C'mell" was published. I was hooked, and a great deal of the wonder of it all was figuring out what was going on in the whole future span Smith imagined.

As they say, "the Golden Age of Science Fiction is twelve."

-- vizcacha
(david_lebling at avid.com)

ps: It is such a pleasure to find other Wolfe fans out there, and to have them be Smith fans as well! Ah, bliss.

Kevin J. Maroney — 12 Sep 1997, 11:22 · follows David_Lebling

At 09:18 AM 9/12/97 -0400, you wrote:
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"The Game of Rat and Dragon." After that, I would move on to "Alpha
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Hmm. I've read only the Smith stories that were in the Del Rey "Best of" volume (boy, I miss those!--I have the NESFA volume and just haven't read it yet. I seem to be alone in liking Smith

and not particularly liking "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell", preferring (by a wide margin) "Scanners", "Rat and Dragon", and "Alpha Ralpa".

Regardless, no one who takes sf seriously, or who likes Wolfe, should be without first-hand knowledge of Cordwainer Smith.

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