

Ancient Sorceries And Other Weird Stories Algernon Blackwood

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REVIEW OF ANCIENT SORCERIES AND OTHER WEIRD STORIES ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

- The humor and tension are grounded in both the characters and the situations in which they find themselves. It's a tidy novel with no great action scenes and no auctorial fireworks. Nevil Shute tells the tale simply and with a muted affection for everyone involved. Dennis Scott works in the post-war British government and is chief of testing programs designed to insure aircraft safety. I may get these organizations mixed up because I'm not familiar with any of them. New to the job, Scott surveys the ongoing programs and finds Theodore Honey, an queer, middle-aged engineer, experimenting with metal fatigue on the tailplane of an expensive new passenger airplane, the Reindeer. Curious about this froggy little troglodyte, Scott surveys the Reindeer tailplane now taking a pounding from hundreds of vibrators in Honey's isolated corner of the universe. The vibrators reproduce the stresses encountered in flight. Scott asks what Honey expects to find out. "I expect the tail to fall off after 1440 hours," replies Honey. Scott gapes because Honey doesn't seem to care about a couple of things that less eccentric people might find important. One is that, if Honey's theory is right, all Reindeers now in service will have to be grounded and it will cause an uproar in a strapped England in which goods are still rationed because of the debt incurred by the war. The second is that, if Honey is right, hundreds of passengers and crew will die as, one by one, the tails fall off the airplanes and they fall out of the sky. What follows is a fascinating story of solving conundrums in aeronautical engineering, of family dynamics, of character traits, and of romance. The story is plot driven and moves logically through time and space, never hard to follow, never difficult to read, but it's also sprinkled with ludic tidbits that are sometimes hilarious in an understated way.

Honey is clearly an intelligent mathematician and engineer. The guy has a vision. But he's also otherworldly, a fool who doesn't own an ordinary mop or know anything about electric water heaters. The little home he shares with his twelve-year-old daughter is cluttered and filthy. He spends what spare time he has investigating certain obscure features of pyramids and the apocryphal peregrinations of Jesus Christ, including a kind of vacation the savior took at the site of King Arthur's Camelot. Scott backs Honey and his theory up, against the dismissive attacks of establishment figures. Some reviewers have called the novel "dated," and I suppose it is. The most advanced aircraft are propeller driven. Women yearn for stability and homes. But so what? "Ulysses" is dated too. Nobody rides around in horse-drawn coaches anymore. And, man, is "The Iliad" dated or what? Personally I found Shute's description of the typical nuclear family rather appealing. Take the stewardess, Marjorie Corder, that Theodore Honey finds himself thrown together with by circumstance. She's twenty-five, she's been a nurse and a stewardess. She's been all over the place and seen much of what she wants to see. And she falls for Honey and wants to spend her life taking care of him, his daughter, and their home. Granted that it all looks a bit retro today, but if women should feel free to pursue careers, why shouldn't they feel free to NOT pursue a career? Nietzsche argued that two people living together had a "nest", while a person alone "had, at best, a cave."

There's nothing I'd have enjoyed more than coming home after a hard day in the jungle and having a wife give me a massage, bring me my slippers, mix me a drink, light my pipe, and see to it that my wounds were properly treated and bandaged. Of course, there are advantages to living alone too. You can talk to yourself, you can curse rapturously at will, walk about in your underwear, prop your feet on the table, stagger around drinking out of the bottle, smoke poisonous cigars, watch ESPN day and night, burp without discretion, and so forth -- but I'd trade it all for an obedient, beautiful, wealthy, sinuous, undemanding, loving young wife. Where was I? Oh, yes. I've read the novel twice -- the first time about thirty years ago, then again just recently. It was enjoyable both times. It doesn't carry much of a moral message. It's not "profound." It's an entertaining and involving tale. Try it, you'll like it.

- I received this book as a Christmas present from my in-laws (of all people). I was a bit hesitant - do they really know what I like to read?! Surprise surprise! They got it right! "Bet Me" is one of the best books that I've read lately. The characters pull you in and you keep turning pages to see what kind of crazy situation they'll get themselves into next. After reading "Bet Me" I went to the library and checked out other Jennifer Crusie books. "Bet Me" got me hooked!