



Fools Errant

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In the Penultimate Age of the Archonate, callow young fop Filidor Vesh is perfectly content to spend his days in the pursuit of shallow amusements, until he is summoned by a wizened old dwarf in need of a voluntary good deed -- deliver a parcel to his uncle, the all-powerful and original 98th Archon, sole ruler of the world. So begins Filidor's reluctant odyssey through peculiar provinces peopled with odious denizens, including such road killers as mutant rodents, alien ants, and a vengeful thumaturge. Now in terra incognito, his narrow conception of life shaken to the extreme, Filidor will strive to say and do the right things...and grow up in the process.

Fools Errant Details

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Author : Matthew Hughes

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James says

Before reading this book you should read Jack Vance's "Dying Earth" or "Cugel's Saga". If you take my advice and you don't like these, skip the rest of the review, this book is not for you and you have at least read a classic. On the other hand, if you like your books to ooze purple when you squeeze them, read this book! Matthew Hughes started out as a writer for politicians and CEOs and nobody except Vance empurples the page better.

Michael says

Great story! Very fun to read, and also great for building your vocabulary. I normally consider myself to have a great vocabulary, but I had to look up words like "quotidian" and "tonorial".

Shane says

I haven't read Jack Vance so I can't compare Hughes works to his. I can say this was a really fun read. The language and color did an excellent job of painting a world gone just a little wrong. I am looking forward to reading more.

Stelios says

3 1/2 stars

KA says

Sean Russell wrote, of this book, "Think *Gulliver's Travels* written by P. G. Wodehouse," and that is the perfect description. The allegorical aspects annoyed me at first, but I was won over in the end by the sheer weirdness and the Bertie Wooster-like nature of the protagonist.

Jenson Merriam says

The best SF&F book I have ever read this far. Chock full of exciting adventure, moral lessons, and humorous dialog, Matthew Hughes presents a wonderful book. Although, this book is one that needs to be sold with a dictionary because of its use of highly intellectual words.

Boone says

Excellent. Everyone says Hughes is very Vancian, and it's true, but he's different, too. The biggest difference is that the characters are a little more fleshed out.

Really enjoyed the story. It does follow the common "quest" format in fantasy but still offers lots of humor and randomness with all the wit and sarcasm you'd expect in a world built on The Dying Earth.

Highly recommended for Jack Vance fans. I'm now a Matthew Hughes fan and plan on reading all of his works.

Kenny V says

I liked this well enough but not as much as Hughes' Raffalon series in F&SF. It was a fairly typical "immature youth grows up throughout an adventure" with a touch (i felt) of a Gulliver's Travels type of vibe. From the way it is written I think an alternate title could be "An Idiot Abroad" though that is already taken and actually quite inaccurate. While the main character, Filidor Vesh, is a bit insufferable at times the people living in these lands are more so. The societies are egocentric, one dimensional, and felt quite cardboard. There tended to be one defining characteristic in each of them and it was taken to such an extreme that each and every citizen embodied it and acted strongly upon it, usually in opposition to Filidor who is ignorant of their traditions. As each individual society (including his own) essentially tries to murder him for his lack of social graces or ignorance of customs I found the whole world to be unrealistically barbaric. For what the book was trying to accomplish it worked well enough, even if the "life lessons" felt a bit contrived, but for world building it left something to be desired.

A bigger complaint, though also less important, were the names for the characters. I found them quite odd and other than suggesting an "otherness," which shouldn't have been since I believe this is a "future earth" setting, they didn't seem to have any sort of thought out basis. Maybe Matt would be able to suggest some though.

The best part of the book was the wax-wane cycle of magic as a power. I felt that fit perfectly. Essentially the idea is that magic and logic exist on an axis. As magic waxes its laws exert more influence on the world and magic users regain lost strength. When it wanes the rules of logic take over resulting in a world not so unlike ours today where magic may not be used at all, or only rumors are left. Due to the time in between the population tends to forget that magic either did exist, or did not exist, and it takes over as the "norm" with only the truly knowledgeable aware of the pendulum. This was a great way to explain how magic may not exist now, but in a future earth (and past for that matter) it may again. I think that concept alone could be fuel for many stories.

Mark says

Matthew Hughes is genuinely funny at times, but I found this story painfully repetitive as its hero visits (and helps cure) a variety of dysfunctional societies in a distant future earth. As magic was introduced into the story there were few boundaries on what could happen (the proverbial "tennis without a net") - so I felt little emotional involvement.

Aaron Singleton says

A fun and humorous picaresque tale set on Old Earth concerning a spoiled young man and his older and no-nonsense travelling companion. Each chapter is headed by a story fragment which relates a tale set in Old Earth's history and is great fun in itself. Each chapter is also a complete story in itself, while also driving the whole tale forward.

As the two main characters travel Old Earth, we are introduced to many strange and wonderful towns, cities and especially societies, and the pair never fail to get into some kind of trouble. The fun is watching them try and get out of it!

If the fun and wonder has gone from fantasy, this is where it went, I think. Also check out the sequel, Fool Me Twice, and anything else with Matthew's name on the cover. You cannot go wrong.

Dani Byrne says

amusing and even a bit edifying, not as predictable as it might at first lead you to believe and yet comfortably familiar.

Syntactical Disruptorize says

This is a first-rate Dying Earth novel which is never explicitly named as such. The author honors Jack Vance's world and legacy while never sinking to the level of pastiche. The story's structure is pure Vance, an epic journey across a many-colored world. His characters are vibrant, diverting, and charming in their rascality. The societies the protagonist encounters exhibit a Vancian variety, each acting according to its strictures yet evolving and thriving. I enjoyed it so thoroughly that those who saw me read it remarked on my wide, delighted grin.

Richard says

This is basically popcorn for the mind, but I happen to like popcorn once in a while.

Edie Ishii says

I started this book while recovering from an operation gone wrong. It was so nice to have a well constructed

fantasy world to go to. The adventures were so engaging that I found myself wishing my visitors would leave so I could pick the book back up and see what was happening. The humor through out was a BIG bonus! Since reading Fools Errant, I have bought, read and re-read every Mathew Hughes book or collection I could get my hot little hands on. Each one has been a delightful and thoughtful journey.

Jesper Lie says

hahaha
