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The Draco Tavern



Synopsis

When a tremendous spacecraft took orbit around Earth's moon and began sending smaller landers down toward the North Pole, the newly arrived visitors quickly set up a permanent spaceport in Siberia. Their presence attracted many, and a few grew conspicuously rich from secrets they learned from talking to the aliens. One of these men, Rick Schumann, established a tavern catering to all the various species of visiting aliens, a place he named the Draco Tavern. From the mind of bestselling author Larry Niven come twenty-seven tales and vignettes from this interplanetary gathering place, collected for the first time in one volume. Join Rick and his staff as they chronicle the seemingly infinite alien species that spend a few moments pondering life and all its questions within the Draco Tavern. The stories include "The Subject Is Closed," in which a priest visits the tavern and goes one-on-one with a chirpsithra alien on the subject of God and life after death; "Table Manners: A Folk Tale," in which Rick Schumann is invited to hunt with five folk aliens, but he's not quite sure what their hunt entails--or if he will be the hunted; "Losing Mars," a previously unpublished tale in which a group of aliens who call Mars and its moon home arrive at the tavern only to find that humans have mostly forgotten about their neighboring planet; and many more.

--This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

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Customer Reviews

Loved it when it was first published and I still do. Not too many science fiction stories have that kind of longevity. It's the next best thing to being there.

I've been critical of Niven in my reviews of his most recent works. While some of his earlier works are among the very best science fiction, his more recent novels have been disappointing. With the publication of his Draco Tavern short stories, there's a return to his earlier form. Partly because he is writing to his strengths. These stories span the period 1977-2006. Some of the older stories seem to have been revised a bit for this collection. But the stories illustrate what Niven has always done best: examine strange ideas. Not his limited skills at characterization, or his plotting. He's best at dreaming up ideas and exploring their implications. And his aliens have always been aliens. Rick Schumann owns the Draco Tavern, and these are his stories. The owner-bartender is the narrative voice, and the adventures mostly, but not exclusively, happen to him. The stories are fairly short - some are very short - and involve the interaction of aliens with humans and with each other. Niven's subjects range from the existence of God to the perils of advanced computing. The last half of the collection focuses on various aspects of terrorism. I have the impression that some of them may have been revised to alter their focus. The refocus is mostly successful. But I wonder why Niven chose to be topical. Reviewers should keep in mind this is a collection of loosely linked short stories. They were written over a period of nearly thirty years. So they offer only limited continuity, and there are some inconsistencies. But they do not seriously detract. The stories are fun, thought-provoking and offer glimpses of Larry Niven's best writing. Recommended.

This collection of 27 short stories by Larry Niven is perfect to tuck in the bottom of your computer bag and read while you are waiting for something else to happen. Because the stories are short, straightforward and set in a comfortable and familiar--for Niven fans--setting, you can pop in and out of the book without effort or irritation. For this kind of readability it is nostalgically similar to Isaac Asimov's collections, such as *50 Short Science Fiction Tales* and *100 Great Science Fiction Short Stories*. Enough about the format--the content is good, too. A series of interesting bar discussions happen in the Draco Tavern. Because the bar is next to Earth's one alien spaceport, it is constantly full of off-planet visitors, consuming exotic drinks and puzzling over the oddities of human culture. Bartender Rick Schumann offers helpful explanations, mediates disputes and cashes in on the occasional million-dollar idea. Readers profit as well, from Larry Niven's fascinating walk-on cast of alien species and his inexhaustible supply of "big ideas." This book was a 2008 Christmas present from my 13 year-old daughter, Katie, who spent a week's allowance on it for me. It made my Christmas day, as I was able to pop in and out of it while opening presents, cooking Christmas dinner and juggling friendly interruptions from family and friends. Thanks,

Katie--a great choice!

I've never understood why people would re-read a book, until I got this one. I love it. It's a collection of short stories, but they all revolve around the same thing "The Draco Tavern". Beautifully written, and so much mind candy oh my god. I've re-read the book, I've lent the book to someone, I ended up moving, so I re-bought a copy and read it again. Yes, it's that good.

These are short stories set in the near future, mostly consisting of stories told in "The Draco Tavern" which is a bar on Earth built to serve alien races. Similar to the one in "Star Wars" or the one Spider Robinson used to write about. The basic premise is that modern-day Earth is discovered and then periodically visited by interstellar space liners run by a powerful but non-aggressive race, and also containing all manner of other races as passengers. Kind of interesting, and not entirely implausible if you think about it. Some of these stories are Niven at his best, because the stories are so short that they do not at all require much in the way of character development. Instead, some of these stories center around one or more quite imaginative ideas and for that reason are often startling and entertaining. Once the stories started to be about the Draco Tavern and its bartender, and not the aliens themselves and their interaction with humans, I thought that the stories went downhill. I did not at all care for about the last third or so of the collection. Still, this is a decent collection of short stories representing Larry Niven at or near his best. Niven aficionados will like this collection.

not one of Niven's best, but a good read with his wonderful creativity as a companion

This collection of tales included some that were new to me, and provided me with a single place to go for that Draco Tavern goodness. In this fictional universe, Earth was visited by aliens years ago. As a minor planet, we only get a few visits a year, but the passengers have to have somewhere to go. They dock at Pluto, and the place to go there is The Draco Tavern. Owned and run by a man who got rich with a casual remark by an alien, the Tavern is a place where people (those who can pass the screening and get to Pluto) can meet aliens. These stories are hard science fiction, concentrating on science that is more or less as known today. Nevertheless, there is a reality to the characters, and most of the plots are driven by the differences between cultures. This gives the stories an appeal to those that don't like 'straight' science fiction. I like Larry Niven because he brings a humanity and richness to his stories without leaving behind the good old science fiction.

Larry Niven has a knack for making the impossible seem so "normal". It's pleasant to take a walk in Niven's universe. It makes me feel like a kid again.

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