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Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Carpet Diem
Author	Justin Lee Anderson
Date	May 2020
Stars	

You'll have seen on the cover of this story the British Fantasy Society make the bold claim that if you enjoyed 'Good Omens', you'll love this book!

They are not wrong either!

I enjoyed it so much I'd go further, I enjoyed it MORE! That's because it's funnier. No exaggeration, I giggled all the way through it. Let's face it, sustaining humour throughout an entire book is bloody difficult. You don't see many 'comic fantasy' novels for this reason, it takes skill to write them. Justin Lee Anderson has that skill – big time.

I think the secret lies in his characterisation. Every person in the story (human and otherwise) is realistic within their own parameters. You believe in them, in their actions and in what they say. So when they do something funny, or make a comment that causes you to laugh, it's because we've engaged with them and believe in that moment. In other words, it's not contrived humour. You can't sustain that.

There are so many wonderfully vivid characters in Carpet Diem. Each one brings a quality that adds to the comic mayhem but also the excitement, because this isn't just a story to make you laugh. There are moments that keep you in suspense, have you guessing, make the story twist and turn in unexpected ways. The plot barrels along at a good pace, there's never a moment to catch your breath.

Simon Debovar is a painfully shy and retiring hermit of a middle-aged man who suddenly finds himself caught between the machinations of heaven and hell. He's helped by a variety of characters who he encounters along the way as he tries to absolve himself of his responsibilities to an angel and a demon while aware that he holds the fate of the world in his grasp. There is his Aunt Harriet (I had an image of Ethel Merman in It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World in my head!) who is hilarious and outrageous. The wonderfully inventive Faunt who helps Simon despite his tendency to turn cervinae (to avoid spoilers!) at times and a chorus of others who are driven by their own crazy agendas to thwart or help Simon. Each and everyone is crucial to the plot and eccentric enough to remain credible yet also funny.

That comparison with Good Omens got me thinking about why I thought it was better. (Certainly, an equal). A lot of it is down to the tiny, human observations of these characters, the minor details that prove important so often. (Such as the subtle ways Simon changes over time). But also the laconic phrasing of the storytelling, the wry commentary.

This is such a great story. You can't help but laugh as the story propels you into mayhem!