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A Novel of Silver John

Many eons ago a humanoid race with supernatural powers roamed the North American continent. But when vast hordes of Indians migrated across the Bering Strait land bridge, the Shonokins soon became a defeated people. The few remaining Shonokins were able to survive and evolve into an all-male race with man-like features except for cat-like eyes and an elongated third finger...

In a small southern mountain town, the Shonokins have resurfaced and are led by Brooke Altic, a recognized leading citizen. Altic is interested in recruiting Silver John, a young mountain man whom he meets at a local music festival. John and an old grizzly mountain farmer and his pretty daughter Callie Gray all get caught up in the Shonokin's effort to enlist John for their revolutionary plot.

Manley Wade Wellman (5/21/1903–4/5/1986) was an American writer. While his sf & fantasy stories appeared in such pulps as *Astounding Stories*, *Startling Stories*, *Unknown & Strange Stories*, he's best remembered as one of the most popular contributors to the legendary *Weird Tales*, & for his fantasy & horror stories set in the Appalachian Mountains, which draw on the native folklore of that region. He also wrote in a wide variety of other genres, including historical fiction, detective fiction, western fiction, juvenile fiction & non-fiction. Karl Edward Wagner referred to him as "the dean of fantasy writers".

Wellman was a long-time resident of North Carolina. He received many awards, including the World Fantasy Award & Edgar Allan Poe Award. Three of Wellman's most famous reappearing protagonists are Silver John, aka John the Balladeer, the wandering backwoods minstrel with a silver-stringed guitar; the elderly 'occult detective' Judge Pursuivant; and, John Thunstone, also an occult investigator.

After Dark Details

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Aaron says

This story works because Wellman has such a deft touch with Silver John, but the plot is honestly pretty dopey. It could have maybe worked as a novella, but the ins and outs of the antagonists' plans are just plain dumb and due to the deliberate narrative tempo of the Silver John stories the audience has plenty of time to mull over how uninteresting the nemeses are.

Michael DiBaggio says

Other reviewers have already done a good job of explaining Silver John and author Wellman's enchanting depictions of Appalachian mystery and supernatural danger, so I needn't say anything more about that. If you've never read the Silver John stories, you really don't know what you're missing. They're wonderful, and After Dark is too, in its own way. Unfortunately, it's just not up to the same level as the short stories, so I recommend you start there if you want your first taste of Silver John, and come back to this book later. You'll also be able to understand and appreciate several of the references that John makes to his past adventures.

So yes, this book was worth reading and I enjoyed it, but I also felt a little disappointed after reading not just the Silver John short stores in "Who Fears the Devil?", but also the John Thunstone short stories where the evil Shonokins first appeared. Since the Shonokins generally live out in the country, predate the Indians, and apparently live in Gardinels (man-eating houses whose insides are like stomachs), they seemed like a perfect match up for Silver John. The confrontation just didn't live up to what I imagined, and in fact the Shonokins seemed somewhat half-hearted about their scheme. Or maybe they were just too arrogant to go about getting rid of the heroes in a more direct fashion. The Shonokins, though always chilling and giving the impression that they'd be a real terror to the unprepared, always ended up looking like incompetents when matched against someone with even a little bit of occult knowledge ("Can you afford to keep blundering?" John Thunstone once asked a Shonokin assassin). In After Dark, they take their blundering incompetence to a new level.

If you're wondering how I can make remarks like that and still give this book four stars, then you've probably never read a Silver John story. They're just that darn enjoyable and captivating.

Debra says

Stephen King recommended author. In 1981's *Danse Macabre*, King dedicated his book as follows: "It's easy enough - perhaps too easy - to memorialize the dead. This book is for the six great writers of the macabre who are still alive." The six listed were Robert Bloch, Jorge Luis Borges, Ray Bradbury, Frank Belnap Long, Donald Wandrei, Manly Wade Wellman.

Bill Kerwin says

This second novel in the Silver John series, although not up to the mythic quality of the short stories, is superior to Wellman's first full-length effort, "The Old Gods Waken." The basic plot is pretty standard--the good people have something the bad creatures want, so they attack the good guys' cabin after sundown, when their evil power is strongest--but the atmosphere is suspenseful and tense, and the evil creatures themselves (the "Shonokins") are interesting, and scary.

Give it a try. It's an easy read and hard to put down.

Julia says

This is one of Wellman's John the Balladeer/Silver John books. They're stand alone books set in rural America. Think the Ozarks, Appalachians, etc. John is a wanderer who travels with his guitar strung with silver strings, a store of stories and a general knowledge of American folklore. He lends a hand to help out with problems of mundane or supernatural origins.[return][return]This particular books deals with John trying to over come a race of evil supernatural beings and their worshippers. It's interesting and fast paced. It's hard to find, and very enjoyable.

John Bruni says

This is possibly the finest John the Balladeer story. The only thing that would have made it perfect is if he met up with John Thunstone. As it is, John faces off against the Shonokins and it is just as awesome as it sounds. I'm so glad I still have more stories of John to read, and, of course, the novels. The cover is a bit cheesy, but the story is impeccable, once you get used to the way John talks. (But of course, any Wellman fan would know that already.)

Erik Graff says

I picked this up from the Science Fiction Book Club, fulfilling their conditions by buying several books over a year, thereby qualifying by their special introductory offer. This was one of the cheaper books available. It's speculative fantasy, not science fiction, set in rural America. Atmospheric, readable, unmemorable.

Jeremy says

The Silver John short stories still reign. Yet, you have to love the way the chivalric hero with Christian ideals would rather help his new friends fall in love rather than steal the girl or how the friendly locals quote Plato and cook chili while deciding how to battle the evil that is threatening their land.

Jay Rothermel says

Huge improvement over the first novel, The Old Gods Waken.

A fine folk supernatural thriller with a hint of Men in Black/Whisperer in Darkness in is about the seige of a mountain cabin.

Lance says

Interesting concept and the hero is one that I like. But the book did not hold my interest enough for me to want to track down any of the others in the series. The author as I understand it is very popular in some circles but I am not planning on reading anything else of his. I think this is a case where the idea was better than the execution.

Deborah Replogle says

Wellman's Silver John and John Thunstone series are some of my all times favorites. They evoke the mysteries of the Appalachian's and their folklore. These stories just take me to a wonderful place.

Randolph says

This is a Silver John novel. Silver John, or John the Balladeer, is a recurring character in Wellman's fiction who serves as a sort of wandering hillbilly/mountain man paranormal investigator. With no fixed abode he wanders the Appalachian mountains looking for opportunities to showcase his singer/songwriter capabilities on his silver strung guitar but ends up having to deal with all sorts of paranormal, and just plain normal, problems for friends he meets in the hills. Fortunately he is carrying around with him a lot of folklore and legend about various supernatural menaces and counter-spells to ward off the evil doers.

This oversimplifies Wellman's Silver John oeuvre and you will have to simply read it to get the true feel for Wellman's tale. Uniquely Wellman treats and writes about rural people with dignity and respect. He avoids any of the racist (yes racist) stereotypes that hick, redneck, and hayseed imply. He also is a deeply knowledgeable mountain folklorist.

Now to the "haints" in the particular novel. The Shonokins, a remnant of a pre-human but humanoid (maybe) species on earth, are trying to increase their power and influence in the world. They need a certain recalcitrant family's land to complete a power structure they are building and there is a particular jewel that Mr. Ben possesses that they want as well (reason not ever made clear). This is the setup for Silver John to come along and lead in the foiling of the Shonokin's plans.

The Shonokins are truly weird. A remnant of a pre-human race, we are never sure if they are really

humanoid, they may be shape shifters capable of assuming a human facade, or may be truly human in form. You are never quite sure. They always remain pretty covered up, wearing long coats and gloves even in hot weather, They have cat eyes and a longer ring finger than humans. Although they are weaker during daylight, they are not powerless to go out and do a deed during the day. They possess some level of supernatural power that isn't defined.

Sounds like a pretty good setup, right? There are a few problems with the novel that keep it from being in the best of Wellman's fiction. First, not much happens. Most of the time people are standing around talking or Silver John is narrating his thoughts. Most of the menaces encountered John easily defeats. Two, the Shonokins just aren't that scary and powerful, weird yes, but pretty impotent in the end. After all, most of the Shonokins were wiped out long ago by the Native Americans using stone age weapons. They are also pretty weak during the day, but here's the real kicker, they run like a rabbit when they see one of their own dead; can't stand, abhor is more apt, the sight or thought of it (this is never really explained). So if you can pick off one Shonokin you pretty much clear the battlefield. Silver John and the rest know this early in the story and none of them are afraid to exercise their second amendment rights throughout, although to his credit, Silver John only kills as a last resort.

There are some grating plot blunders as well. During the climax, the Shonokins, out in the open, call up a storm to root out Silver John and the rest of the people he is defending in Mr. Ben's log house. Torrential rain, wind, hail, lightning. How stupid is this? The unprotected Shonokins call up a storm to force the clan OUT of the cabin, meanwhile suffering the effects unprotected outdoors themselves? Ludicrous. Then they start to move the house about on the foundation. But Silver John and the others know the Shonokins don't want to kill everyone inside. What threat?

Frustrated by all the counter-spells in just a few hours (the Shonokins must have the patience of a meth addict), Brooke Altic, the leader of the Shonokins, bursts into the cabin, unarmed, and gets you know what? Blasted. Of course the rest of the Shonokins scatter like fleas from a dead rat and game over.

I kept thinking this must get creepier or more thrilling at some point but it never did. A group of school children armed with large sticks and rocks could vanquish a Shonokin horde without taking heavy losses.

Michael says

Very interesting "quick read" supernatural horror/fantasy story. The protagonist is Silver John or John the Balladeer a homespun type hero, a veteran of WWII, a folk guitarist (with a silver strung acoustic guitar), and singer who travels the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina fighting supernatural evil.

Don't want to give this away but I never heard of Shonokins before. According to Wellman they lived before "us humans" in this land and are biding their time and waiting for the chance to take the land back. Their time is "after dark". This tale and I assume all of the Silver John tales are told with homespun North Carolina vernacular and move along very quickly. John is not a sorceror or wizard just knows enough to stop witchcraft and sorcery.

I'm not sure if Wellman created Shonokins or whether they are a real legend in Appalachia. Either way it's a good read.

Kevin Lucia says

Excellent. Gotta love Silver John. Ending a little quick, with a little less action than I'd thought - (spoiler) whipped up some mystical mojo to save them in the end, but still awesome - very character-driven.

[Name Redacted] says

I didn't enjoy this book as much as *The Old Gods Waken*, but it was still wonderful. It took a bit longer to get through, but once it hit its stride, I couldn't put it down. Manly Wade Wellman knows how to write Appalachian Weird Fiction.

I was also struck by how much he loves to subvert the reader's expectations. Part of this story involves a man defeating a witch -- "MISOGYNY!", you cry. But wait! That witch was serving an ALL-MALE race of supernatural beings who seek to subjugate women. And those supernatural beings? They're some of the original inhabitants of the Americas, who were conquered and overthrown by the Native Americans' ancestors! That's right -- the Native Americans were themselves conquerors and colonizers and imperialists, who oppressed and subjugated and nearly wiped out the original inhabitants of the Americas. But, as it turns out, they were right to do so. The original inhabitants were twisted monsters, and the only thing keeping them at bay was the knowledge and power of the Native Americans. Now the white man has taken over the continents and the supernatural horrors are stirring, taking advantage of the ignorance of the white men and the Native Americans' weakened state. It's all handled so deftly, so subtly that you might not pick up on it unless someone else points it out to you. Fortunately, I was prepared by the previous book.
