

Animal Vista

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A compassionate aging veterinarian his entrepreneurial-minded son and a potentially threatening epidemic of horse sleeping sickness give this first novel the ingredients for a lively tale. As in the beloved *All Creatures Great and Small* series by James Herriot writing about a small rural veterinary practice offers great opportunities for developing memorable characters human and otherwise whose flaws and comical eccentricities can delight the reader.

In this treatment the widowed vet "Doc" tries to manage a lively and diverse practice although his values are often at odds with those of his son Bill a vet new to the clinic who derides his father's old-fashioned ways. As the clinic deals with the daily challenges of birth and death financial stress touchy employees and prickly pet owners a greater concern looms: a horse virus has spread from Venezuela into the U.S. and begins to threaten Doc's community.

The story unfortunately lacks the narrative structure necessary to really build a coherent drama from these elements. The author relies too heavily on dialogue (and occasional shifts to the main characters' inner monologues) to advance the plot. Moreover while the dialogue itself clearly shows effort and some promise it still fails to be consistently natural and interesting. Limited sense of place (somewhere in the Southwest is all we can gather) and very limited narrative description and character development hamper the reader's ability to really get inside the story. When we do get a glimpse of personality the spunky and emotional vet assistant Juanita for instance the potential emerges for a more engrossing tale. But characters are not allowed to develop fully and a choppy narrative moves the story rapidly from one situation to the next.

The most enjoyable way to read this work may be as a series of anecdotes about the daily dramas making up a vet's working life. The author is at his best when sharing these stories likely based on his own experiences. There is a wealth of realistic detail here enlivening stories that feature a bird with face mites a Persian cat with a pot roast string wrapped around her tongue and a client who insists that if her dog has fleas it can only be because he caught them in the waiting room. But as a novel the work suffers from awkward writing and structural weakness including an abrupt resolution; this hinders it from becoming a cohesive work of fiction. Perhaps a nonfiction version would allow this writer to better play to his strengths and give animal lovers a good inside view of the veterinary life.

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