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Surveyor: A Novel

G.W. Hawkes
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Spectacular sunsets, secret lights from outer space, a mysterious and probably conspiratorial organization, and subterranean journeys appear like highway water mirages in G.W. Hawkes' quirky short novel about two old hermits and their changing desert landscape. These are strange days in the desert indeed. Sexy, young women and paleontologists come hither to disturb the old men's fossilized libidos and their shared but already broken sense of place. There is much going on beneath the surface as the characters cross and crisscross the landscape, hold cryptic conversations, and drink the occasional beer together. "What are we but the sum of our relationships, the interstices of our triangulation points?" the narrator, Paul, thinks.

Given to three-pointed imagery, he ponders also a universe that "runs not on physical laws but by coincidence: glittering triangles of happenstance that fall jumbled across each other like broken glass panes in a kaleidoscope." The image aptly describes the novella. Like some of Richard Brautigan's stuff, the story sometimes charms but seldom satisfies, and the strings it tugs at are disturbingly random. It seems weirdly remote from what most of us care deeply about. Except sex, of course, which Hawkes treats with nonchalance and aplomb. Hawkes' companion novel, Semaphore, is to be released in August.

RICH WERTZ (May / June 1998)

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