

The Adventures of Deacon Coombs: The Case of the Vanishing Vesper

Ambit Welder

iUniverse (Nov 5, 2013)

Softcover \$25.95 (480pp)

978-1-4917-0560-5

Twists, turns, and drama drive this sci-fi detective novel.

Ambit Welder's captivating novel, *The Adventures of Deacon Coombs: The Case of the Vanishing Vesper*, combines the future world of science fiction with the mystery of a detective novel.

In the year 3533, the Alliance (the governmental overseers of a coalition of planets) asks noted yet reclusive detective Deacon Coombs to investigate the suspicious deaths of some of its most prominent members. Some previously unknown evil, beyond what anyone can imagine, may be on the loose. It's up to Deacon to solve the crimes—if he can sort through the lies, corruption, and treachery that cloud his investigation at every turn. His search for truth leads him on a chase from planet to planet. It takes him, his robot companions, and their team into unspeakable danger and horror, and they must go deeper in to find its source. Deacon must solve the mystery and stop the evil before the entire universe falls under its spell or is destroyed.

Weaver spins a tale with a captivating plot that has plenty of twists and drama. Clues toward the solution are revealed at key intervals, allowing the mystery to keep the pages turning as much as the ever-encroaching danger does. Additionally Weaver's concept for the future world and the risks involved in connecting with other beings allows for a creative premise and mystery to solve. Technically, the writing is skillful, though in places some minor editorial touches could straighten out jumps in point of view.

A well-developed lead character heads the adventure. Deacon has a powerful mind and reputation for solving crimes, yet he is no idealized hero. He isn't afraid to admit when he doesn't know something. Though he's courageous, fear still grips him at times. Also, despite finding a beautiful love interest, he is a little overweight and doesn't look like the typical hero. He's both realistic and interesting. His enemy is equally fascinating and is gradually revealed to possess ever more unexpected traits.

In fact, all significant characters are carefully created, with even their planetary races nicely defined, (highly trustworthy or having little empathy; lizard-like or bony-legged). Such description also extends to the planets visited, which, in itself, adds interest to the story.

With the blend of a detective novel, science fiction fans are offered a fresh spin on their genre, while devotees of spy novels can try a sci-fi version of their favorite style. They'll just need to suspend disbelief a little more than usual as they enter the imagined future. As Deacon says in the story, "The six of us are about to embark on the journey of a lifetime." And it's worth tagging along.

DIANE GARDNER (July 3, 2014)

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