

The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santeria

Carlos Hernandez

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Hernandez's quantum-magical realist style strikes upon a potent literary vein.

Carlos Hernandez combines the strong Latin tradition of magical realism with a dose of science fiction to create *The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santeria*, an outstanding collection of short stories.

Hernandez, an author, teacher, and game designer, offers stories populated by Latin characters and grounded in Latin traditions, including the title story, about a young boy's exploration into "Quantum Santeria." As that title indicates, there's also a consistent element of science fiction in these stories that unshackles Hernandez's imagination and eliminates any trace of predictability.

Hernandez's writing is refreshingly simple and direct, yet full of unique descriptions and beautiful metaphors and similes. Corn is "swaying like the crowd at a revival." A man "was starting to slacken and fatten; he was starting to melt into his wheelchair." Hernandez is as capable of pithy epigrams like "Vocations don't grant vacations" as he is of a detailed description that perfectly portrays a professorial type: "the kind of man who has to bite down on a pipe (or in his case, a puro) to remind himself that he has a body as well as a mind."

The strong Latino characterization gives a unique slant to the stories, but Hernandez's imagination is the real attraction. There are tales of quantum physics, unicorns, and panda mating practices, among others, but all are so masterfully realized that there's barely an air of science fiction tropes to be found. In "The International Studbook of the Giant Panda," Hernandez convincingly describes the robot pandas and the interface that allows the human operator—reporter Gabrielle Real, a character featured in multiple stories—to "feel like a panda." Soon after, he paints a picture of panda perceptions so vivid that the book becomes analogous to the fictional interface, putting the reader into the panda's world, and that of the character experiencing it.

Through the eyes of Gabi Real or other characters, Hernandez's quantum-magical realist style has struck upon a potent vein, appealing to the literary minded and science fiction fans alike.

PETER DABBENE (Spring 2016)

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