

The Blue Hole and Other Stories

Jan D. Hendrix

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Targeted details, evocative phrases, and vivid descriptive passages enhance the quality of Hendrix's prose.

Life-changing moments revealed in retrospect lend a contemplative tone to this outstanding short story collection. Jan D. Hendrix offers fourteen eclectic snapshots of life in *The Blue Hole and Other Stories*.

Sometimes obvious, yet often oblique, every situation depicted in this collection leads to a turning point, propelling a protagonist in a specific direction. As Hendrix suggests, these catalysts are not always apparent at the time they occur.

In the title story, "The Blue Hole," an ordinary boy rescues another child from a secret water-filled rock quarry, while his companions seem inclined to let the floundering victim drown. Though discovering one's identity under these circumstances may be a bit odd, the young hero in this coming-of-age scenario shows a maturity beyond his years.

In other pieces, such as "Wind," the message is not quite as dramatic, seeming to imply simply that the process of traveling through the desert, studying Aztec culture, and visiting Indian villages triggers greater self-awareness. "Patty" is a powerful story that showcases an adolescent girl's attempt to derive a sense of self-worth by attracting the attention of boys, while striving to get her preoccupied father to notice her. "The Swan Dive," devastating and skillfully written, will linger in the memory long after closing the book.

In "Life along the Mississippi," a desperate man implements a dangerous plan, attempting insurance fraud to save his family from financial ruin: "When the barge was almost on him and Jake could see white foaming swells and hear the swishing sound of water being forced aside by the bow of the barge, he stood up and leaped far out into the blackness."

Later, he wakes up on a sandbar, disoriented: "Slowly the starlit sky focused in his mind, and full consciousness returned to him. He brought himself to a sitting position and looked around at the moon-brightened sand and the black, shadow-cast waters." Every carefully selected word demonstrates Hendrix's gift for imagery.

The vignettes in this compilation deliver a punch—sometimes soft, sometimes hard. Conclusions require active interpretation rather than mere comprehension. Hendrix's writing reaches beyond basic commercial genre standards, delving into symbolism and word play typical of literary fiction. In this work, the simplest scene demands scrutiny and every description holds possible meaning, though not everyone will agree on what each story is intended to convey. This is a potential weakness, at least from the perspective of a general reader. Those outside the academic realm could regard this collection with confusion, despite its award-winning elements.

Jan D. Hendrix holds a BA and MA in literature, giving his work a slick professionalism often lacking in self-taught writers. Targeted details, evocative phrases, and vivid descriptive passages enhance the quality of Hendrix's prose. This meticulous book would be well-received by serious connoisseurs of thought-provoking fiction or subscribers of literary journals, and would also be enjoyed on a college campus.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (August 28, 2014)

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