

The Stranger and the Time Machine: Volume 1

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Classic time travel story motifs aid an alien stranger in his mission to save the future.

Dealing with time travel and personal transformation, *The Stranger and the Time Machine* is a collection of four adventures through time. Each of the four sections of the book features a different mission. This episodic structure makes it easy to pick up the volume for a quick read, with each section standing on its own roughly as well as an episode of a TV show.

Bequeathed a time machine and a series of missions by his brilliant but eccentric uncle, the Stranger travels back and forth through history to right wrongs and preserve the fate of humanity. Along the way, he meets aliens, gunslingers, and the love of his life. Eventually, he trades his humanity for the greater potential of a future super-species.

The stories exist in the tradition of *Doctor Who* and *Quantum Leap*, featuring a central time-traveling character in a wide variety of settings and circumstances. As part of his time travel adventures, the Stranger must relinquish a large portion of his humanity, undergoing a series of stressful recoveries from long journeys through time.

Telegraphing of plot points represents a major flaw in this book, often disrupting the story's illusion by stating what should instead be implied descriptively. The heavy-handed foreshadowing around the Stranger's love interest is a good example: she is tagged as such two chapters before she actually appears. The book tends to follow well-trodden sci-fi themes.

That said, *The Stranger and the Time Machine* is a safe bet for fans of the genre. Because the book rarely deviates from motifs such as aliens, time travel, military training, and quasi-holy missions, readers who simply can't get enough of this type of material may appreciate it, but those seeking original content or a higher level of storytelling sophistication may not be fully satisfied.

Exposition in the second half does much to humanize the Stranger, but by that point, he has been remade into an alien and has taken on an almost shamanic quality. However, his personal growth (with the encouragement of his alien sponsors) is appealing, and as the book continues, enjoying the character becomes increasingly easy. Side characters, including a generous sampling of interesting nonhumans, are developed well, not only as members of the Stranger's journey, but as independent beings.

The book ends without really wrapping up, indicating an ongoing progression into the presumed next volume. *The Stranger and the Time Machine*, due to solid characterization, is an enjoyable read, if not quite a classic.

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