



Witches on the Road Tonight

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By the best-selling author of *The Dress Lodger*, Sheri Holman's new and most ambitious novel to date, *Witches on the Road Tonight*, uncovers the secrets and lies that echo through three generations of one Appalachian family. It is a deeply human, urgent exploration of America's doomed love affair with fear.

Witches on the Road Tonight Details

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Author : Sheri Holman

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From Reader Review Witches on the Road Tonight for online ebook

Kat Warren says

Finally, the first drop-my-jaw-in-awe book of 2011.

Some writers are a "brand" which is to say you know exactly what you're going to get when you pick up one of their books. So not so with Holman; you don't even know what time frame you might be inhabiting: the 15th century of "A Stolen Tongue," the 19th century of "The Dress Lodger" or the 20th century of "The Mammoth Cheese." Another Holman hallmark: her books invariably disport unusual titles.

I cannot fathom why there has been little buzz around this new novel. So far. Maybe I'm too eager and missed the opening reviews. The PW and Booklist reviews here on Amazon don't reflect the book I read and they're good reviews overall but lack the excitement of readerly greed satisfied so richly and rarely.

"Witches on the Road Tonight" is hallelujah-finest-kind. I had to rise early on a Saturday morning expressly to read the last 50 pages.

Why was I mesmerized (eponym alert)? Holman specializes in story telling and in this book she exceeds the bar. At the same time, the writing, language, depictions, evocations, great heart put flesh on her story and I don't mean it to sound muscular because the result delivers distilled but non-fussy elegance uncommon in a very good story. The WPA element doesn't hurt, either. {Yes, we're in the 20th century again but roaming about some.) Tired Appalachia here is fulsomely rendered -- luscious, gorgeous and time-out-of-mind dangerous.

I expect I've found the book I'll be pushing (ok, I'll be nice, evangelizing) on all and sundry this year. Stay tuned and stand by your mailboxes y'all who call me friend.

...more

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Jan 03, 2012 Lyndz rated it liked it · review of another edition

Shelves: first-reads, witches-wizards, own, reviewed

Ok so I will cut to the chase, since that is what I do best. I liked this book but I also had some problems with it too. Shocking, - yes I know.

I love witchlore, I don't know what it is about it that is so fascinating, ok, maybe I do, but either way, I am yet to read a book about witches that I thought was a total waste of time. That being said let me get to what I thought.

Sheri Holman has a distinct writing style in this book, which I quite enjoyed. You are never at a loss for physical descri

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Jun 01, 2011 Virginia rated it liked it

I would have liked a whole book just about the Appalachian witch, Cora, but instead it jumps all around-- from the mountains to NYC; from WWII to 1967 to 1980 to the present and back; from one person's view to another person's view to the writer's narration. In one chapter Ann is referred to as Mom, her mother, and Ann--I thought another character that I had missed was telling this part of the story. The book is leading up to two murders, but neither are convincingly pulled off. One murder is unr ...more

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May 21, 2012 Adam rated it it was ok

Witches on the Road Tonight is much like the monster in the Frankenstein film referenced throughout the book. It is an amalgam of different parts stitched together in such a way that the product is displeasing to those who encounter it. The portion of the story set in 1940s Appalachia was well-written and mysterious. Holman's description of place was rich and her usage of carefree WPA workers in an unfamiliar territory was a clever take on a classic horror movie plot scenario. The portion of th

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Jan 15, 2013 Elaine rated it liked it

Shelves: 2013

This book started off wonderfully, with an intriguing setting full of menace (a sophisticated couple -- a writer and a photographer traveling for the WPA in 1940 -- get themselves stranded in a remote Appalachian cabin, with a woman who just might be a witch). Holman's prose is lush, and she creates some heartpounding scenes of dread -- there is never a problem believing in Holman's version of witchery. The problem is that the book becomes meandering -- we lose track (literally) of Tucker and So ...more

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Jun 13, 2012 Cassi aka Snow White Haggard rated it did not like it

Shelves: audio-books, read-in-2012

1/5 stars

This is a review that I knew I should write. However, this is a book that I wish I could wipe from my memory. Yes it was that bad. Sitting down to write this review has been a bit of a struggle. However I am going to try. There will be spoilers. I tried to avoid character names and specifics, but the spoilers are necessary to understand why I feel so strongly about this book.

I picked up Witches on the Road Tonight because I always find myself looking for books with Appalachian roots. We

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Oct 26, 2013 Jamie rated it it was ok

Shelves: historical, fantasy

This was one of the more weird and anti-climatic books I've ever read. It left me still wondering what happened to a certain character in the end, maybe even more than one character. It was actually very well written with great thoughts about human nature. The parts I didn't like were about ALL the characters behaviors. They were all well developed, but heartless and I didn't like any of their morals. NONE of them. It is about a family of poor Appalachia decent, that has legends and stories in t

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flag 3 likes · Like · see review

Feb 13, 2011 Teresa Calhoun rated it it was amazing

There's a primal need in all of us to live between opposites --as if we can only appreciate one end of the physical or emotional spectrum in proximity to the other. We come inside from a bone-chilling day and revel in the warmth. Comfort and fear are among the earliest opposites we experience; we cry because we do not yet have words, and someone comes and holds us close and attends to our needs.

One suspects that Sheri Holman had a childhood that included sitting around campfires--experiencing th

...more

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Mar 31, 2011 Corinna rated it it was ok

I picked this up at the last minute when checking out at the library... read the back and thought... hmmm ... interesting and so I checked it out.

In my opinion... interesting would be a good word to describe this read. It is a book I will remember... but I glad to be done with it.

At times it was frustrating to me due to the time warp back and forth... I found it hard to follow.

At about half way through I read the synopsis again... to get a better idea of where the story might be going. I was

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Apr 01, 2011 Lauren added it

Shelves: one-hot-mess

Like the Frankenstein monster, the book is assembled from several plot lines that don't mesh very well. Her writing is fantastic, but it doesn't make up for what a mess this is.

Later note - I 'unstarred'. Cathleen Schine's review in the NYRB and several days of thinking about the book has altered my opinion some. It seems more of an ambitious failure now. But I don't want my low review to put off anyone else wanting to read it.

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Oct 19, 2011 Alanahurley rated it liked it

So, to quote a certain failed Congressional wannabe, I am not a witch, nor have I ever been one. Right?

Because they're all, we're going to meet over here at midnight, and I'm eh, no, I go to bed at 9:30. The supernatural life is not good for morning people like me.

And anyway, I'm not sure what exactly is useful about being a witch. Flying around would be fun, I suppose, if you're not prone to motion sickness, but the traditional witchy things - withering crops, spoiling milk, generally being a

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Nov 16, 2011 Lori rated it liked it

Shelves: bizzarro, fiction

Witches on the Road Tonight is a complicated book. I think it is quite original although "uneven". I always try to read a book carefully and I admit to being a bit confused by this one. I am not exactly levelling this as a criticism. Gray areas are generally fine with me in fiction.

Other reviewers have pointed out that the characters are not exactly likeable people and I agree. However, I found an affinity with Eddie, who I interpreted as the lynch pin who tied the many other personalities in th

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Apr 01, 2011 Terence rated it really liked it

Recommended to Terence by: NYRB review

Witches on the Road Tonight has proven to be as enjoyable a read as Holman's earlier efforts (*The Dress Lodger* and *The Mammoth Cheese*), and I am looking forward to the day when I move up to #1 on my library's hold list for her first novel, *A Stolen Tongue*.

Holman's novels, so far, have reminded me in some ways of Sylvia Townsend Warner's (which would explain why I like them so much). On the surface, the three novels I've read could have been written by three different authors – *The Dress Lodger* t

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Jul 15, 2011 Virginia rated it liked it

Shelves: what-i-m-reading-in-2011

Just finished 'Witches on the Road Tonight' by Sheri Holman. It was interesting. Not exactly what I thought it would be. The story jumps from the past to the present and sometimes in between. It is the tale of a dying weather man, Eddie, who also hosts a weekly horror movie night on a local television station. He grew up in the Appalachians in a place called Panther Gap. It's the 40's and his mother is a reputed witch. He is ostracized by the local kids and while running away from a beating runs

...more

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Aug 23, 2011 Bondama rated it liked it · review of another edition

If I had not just finished reading "Once Upon a River" by Bonnie Jo Campbell, I probably would have rated this book more highly, particularly as they seem to be aimed at the same reading audience.

I got the book from the library, having heard some good things about it, but quite honestly, the writing style simply drove me crazy. There are far too many main characters:: Cora, a mountain witch of whom it was said that she could shed her skin at night and "ride" any man. Eddie, her son who grows up

...more

flag 2 likes · Like · see review

View 1 comment

Mar 22, 2011 Marcie Crandall rated it really liked it

I am so torn by this book! I loved it and I hated it. It gave me hope in humanity and made me feel like all hope is lost. Even as I type, I'm not sure how many stars it deserves...

I will start with the good. Holman's writing is absolutely beautiful. Her metaphors are flawless. I found myself bookmarking page after page on my Kindle. Here are a few of my favorites.

"We need only for life to teach us the humility with which to give thanks."

"There is always farther to go and places you've yet to

...more

flag 2 likes · Like · see review

Mar 06, 2011 Kristin rated it liked it

Shelves: virginia, witches, reviewed, read-in-2011

Here's another one I was torn on. I LOVED the Virginia setting. She captured the mountain forests so well that I could feel myself standing among the trees, hunting for ginseng, listening for a panther. (There's even a character who's working for the CCC building Skyline Drive - awesome!) Holman effectively bounced around in time - 1940, 2011, 1980, 1967. The witch part was creepy, not like the bubbly witches you find in paranormal romances these days. The 1940 and 1980 storylines paralleled eac ...more

flag 2 likes · Like · see review

May 24, 2016 aPriL does feral sometimes rated it liked it

Shelves: awesomely-silly-but-i-loved-it, don-t-judge-me, fantasy, its-not-what-i-was-expecting, mysteries-potboilers-thrillers, soap-opera

'Witches on the Road Tonight' by Sheri Holman is majestic. It is stunning. I was so surprised at its page-turning drama and beautiful writing! Even more amazing it is only 263 pages long!

This novel is pure Grand Opera, folks!

The novel won The Shirley Jackson Award in 2011. It will not suit some readers, but omg, it suited me just fine as an entertaining mystery. For me, it is a jewel of a book - a well-written, dark fantasy story and a family drama with heart and soul. However, the story seems

...more

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Dec 07, 2017 Mir rated it it was ok · review of another edition

Not a fan of any of these characters and as a result not particularly interested in hearing of the messed up lives they create through bad communication, selfishness and destructive behavior.

Also, I found the male narrator's voice pretty annoying- like he was constantly running out of breath and talking painfully slow. It was somewhat appropriate for his characters, I'll admit, but ultimately was a distraction for me. Also difficult to listen to in the car, as he frequently drops his voice lower

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Feb 16, 2017 Chris Qualls rated it it was amazing

Loved it and told her so. She's a great author and respond to readers.

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Apr 18, 2011 Lora King rated it really liked it · review of another edition

Shelves: fiction

This is not about witches. It's more a ghost story. A 1940 backwoods mother tells her son ghost stories instead of bedtime stories...and how much is real and how much made up it never told. This boy will grow up to be a "male" Elvira, hosting horror movies late night. He marries, has a daughter, and present day in the book, he is dying of cancer, is on chemo, and is committing suicide. Written from several characters point of view, this is a very good story, hard to put down. It moves from prese ...more

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Jul 30, 2012 sarah rated it it was amazing

Shelves: scifi-fantasy, grownupbooks

This book was enthralling from the first page. Holman presents a mix of viewpoints: Eddie, a former star of a local cheesy horror show, on his deathbed; writer Tucker Hayes, who gets mixed up with witchy backwoods woman Cora, when he hits a young Eddie with his car; Eddie's daughter Wallis as a young girl experiencing her first kiss with a pyromaniac foster brother and as a cut-throat war reporter trying to escape her own demons.

So good!

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Apr 27, 2011 David Abrams rated it really liked it

Sheri Holman's fourth novel, *Witches on the Road Tonight*, begins at the end of Eddie Alley's life as the has-been host of a campy TV horror show writes what appears to be a suicide letter to his grown daughter Wallis. In this opening paragraph of Holman's book, we find a good illustration of how the author of *The Dress Lodger* and *The Mammoth Cheese* uses detail to bring her sentences to life:

Of all the props I saved, only the coffin remains. Packed in boxes or tossed in the closet were the skulls

Just as *The Mammoth Cheese* embraced everything from dairy farming to Jeffersonian politics, *Witches on the Road Tonight* is a novel which takes a wide-angle view of mid-century American life. Holman touches on matriarchy, Appalachian witchcraft, silent movies, FDR's Works Project Administration programs,

homosexuality, traumatic childhoods, and the fleeting nature of fame—but especially the latter. Imagine Captain Kangaroo in a blue funk after the television studio cameras have blinked off for the last time and you'll have some sense of the malaise which settles over Eddie Alley after he's hung up his Captain Casket cape.

Witches on the Road roams across the 70-year timeline of Eddie's life, from his childhood in Panther Gap, Virginia to his campy popularity in small-market television in the 1960s to the twilight of his life in a Manhattan penthouse at midnight. While Holman is good at capturing the spirit of each era, the one which crackles to life most vividly is the 1940s section, which opens with a WPA writer and photographer--Tucker Hayes and his lover Sonia--driving through the Blue Ridge region on a government project to document rural American life. In a moment of distraction, they hit eight-year-old Eddie when he runs into the road. They take the boy home to the ramshackle cabin he shares with his mother, a woman who has, to Eddie's embarrassment, earned a local reputation as a sorceress:

He hears the boys and girls whisper. When Cora Alley is mad, milk sours in the pail. Storms blow in from the east. And they don't even know what Eddie knows. The men she keeps buried in the woods. Or how she slips out of her skin from time to time, leaving it hanging on a peg in her bedroom while she disappears through the keyhole. Still, is it proof enough? A boy never wants to believe ill of his own mother.

Holman never comes out and says Eddie's mother is a shape-shifter, but there is one jaw-dropping scene where Tucker, who stays the night at the cabin with Sonia, imagines he's ridden through the woods by a very naked Cora—"a vision of blood and sinew, standing raw against the moon." He hears his feet on the forest path and they sound like hooves. The ride is sexual and terrifying and, for the reader, completely enthralling.

Holman never quite matches that mystical fever pitch in the rest of the book and I found myself wishing there was more cavorting by moonlight and less of a long subplot involving a homeless teenage boy named Jasper who works at Eddie's TV station and worms his way into the family, a move which twelve-year-old Wallis finds both repulsive and thrilling. The Jasper sections are important to the outcome of Eddie's life, but they don't vibrate with as much visceral narration as the chapters set in the 1940s.

One of Holman's greatest strengths is her ability to transport readers back to other eras through the carefully-placed details she slips onto the page. For instance, take this paragraph where Sonia, the WPA photographer is wandering through Eddie's Appalachian home, clicking her documentary shutter at all she sees:

On her dresser, Mrs. Alley has grouped her personal possessions so as to hide old water rings on the dark wood. A butterscotch Bakelite vessel for loose powder and a furry, store-bought puff for applying it. A man's comb with a spine of white, compressed dandruff. Her leather-bound Bible with gilt edging, bloated from humid weather. A chipped bubble-ware dish holding four black bobby pins and a long curling hair.

In these flashbacks which dot the novel, Holman turns every page into a Dorothea Lange photograph.

The early scenes of the novel are the most crucial (and the most satisfying to read) because they document the turning point in Eddie's life when, at eight years old, he sees Thomas Edison's Frankenstein for the first time. By way of apology to the boy he's injured, Tucker fetches his hand-cranked movie projector from his car, promising him a special treat. There, on the rough chestnut planks of Eddie's bedroom wall, the two of

them watch the flickering images of the 1910 film. “The first horror movie ever made,” Tucker tells him.

Rising from the cauldron is a hint of creature. As Eddie watches, charred flesh attracts more charred flesh, it’s like his daddy at butchering time, tossing chops and ribs into a pail, rebuilding a hog in section slices. Suddenly an arm jerks up in salute and a misshapen head appears through the fog.

Edison’s Frankenstein will haunt and obsess Eddie for the rest of his days. He becomes a flamboyant provocateur of the macabre, an Ahab always on the harpoon-hunt for Death, a guilt-dogged man with as many failures as triumphs. In the end, Eddie believes he’s just another misshapen creature rising from the cauldron.

Horror has permeated Eddie’s entire life. Having a witch for a mother will do that to a kid, I suppose. Years after he leaves Panther Gap, Eddie reveals little to his wife and daughter of his upbringing by a woman who allegedly took off her skin at night and rode men like horses. When a teenage Wallis asks him to describe the grandmother she never knew, Eddie replies: “She believed in telling ghost stories at bedtime. I never knew until I met your mother that parents were supposed to comfort their children to sleep. I thought they were supposed to scare them into staying in bed.”

Cora is also the kind of mother who gives her young son advice that’s as mystical as it is inscrutable for someone at that age:

Eddie, you will meet people who mean something and you know there is meaning but you don’t know yet whether they are your ruin or salvation and they go underground and live inside you until they reappear maybe years, maybe decades later, but by then you have grown so much of your own skin around them, layer upon layer, you don’t even recognize them anymore, and that’s how you become your own ruin or salvation, that’s the power of not knowing what’s growing inside you, what you’ve lost for so long.

It’s moonshine wisdom Eddie will carry for years, whether he understands it or not. He grows to be an unsettled man, a vampire who belongs to neither this world nor the next, a person who wrestles against a longing he cannot name. And that, Holman seems to be saying, is the destiny of us all: the struggle to save ourselves from our own ruin.

This review originally appeared at *The Quivering Pen* blog. ...more
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Sep 10, 2017 Sarah Langan rated it it was amazing

A very ambitious and mostly successful story. It gets five stars for its genre-bending, its wise, adult tackling of sexuality and identity, its settings-- all far-flung and utterly believable. The opening, in which a couple working for the WPA strike a child in the Appalachians with their car, is pretty great, as are all the Appalachian scenes. In the story, we follow the couple and young Eddie, who grows up to become a campy horror personality. The story is told in hindsight by Eddie's daughter

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Nov 11, 2018 Thea Swanson rated it it was amazing

I bought this book five years ago and wasn't moved to continue reading past a chapter or so at the time; I don't remember the reason, but it was probably impatience. This time around, I saw what I couldn't see then: sumptuous and wise prose. When Holman describes something, she doesn't just paint a vivid picture; her descriptions are purposeful and carry meaning. Holman writes from places of surprising and vast experience.

The point-of-view shifting that occurs within paragraphs and time are sea

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Dec 22, 2018 Hope Smash rated it it was ok

I don't know what this book was, but it was certainly not what I expected. When I read the synopsis I figured it would be an interesting history of three generations of witches. A little bit fantasy and little bit creepy. Instead I had to push my way through the most confusing, flip flopping story because I am stubborn and needed to finish it. I found it hard to get into the book at first and keep track of who was who. There also really wasn't much of a storyline outside of the parts with Cora. ...more

flag Like · see review

Dec 26, 2018 karen rated it really liked it · review of another edition

This one is very well-written, but simultaneously suspenseful and not very plot-y. I never got 100% sucked in, but I highlighted a ton of passages & that's not terribly common for me.

Sometimes you read a book by a man & it's painfully obvious he has no idea what it's actually like to be a woman. He probably doesn't even have a tiny bit of interest in what that's like. This book is one of the flip sides of that, specifically a book you just know was written by a woman. Even if she's descr

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flag Like · see review

Dec 24, 2018 Anji rated it liked it

This book had a lot of potential and a very unique plot. I wish it had been bound up a little tighter. A few less threads and a bit more editing and it could be fantastic.

flag Like · see review

Nov 06, 2017 Karen rated it liked it

Shelves: 2017-reads

Sad story, more about trying to find love and acceptance than about witches.

flag Like · see review

Jun 15, 2018 Christine Davis Mantai rated it liked it · review of another edition

Part of the novel was really intriguing, and would be a four star for me. But the other part was flat and unimpressive. I loved Dress Lodger.

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