

Relationships

Reviewed by Dianne Gray

Perhaps best known for his humor fantasy series, *Xanth*, Piers Anthony shows us a more serious facet of his writing with *Relationships*, an anthology of stories paying tribute to...well, relationships. Though the author shows no restraint on graphic scenes, *Relationships* is not what I would categorize as hot and steamy fiction. Nor is it meant to be. Rather, it is an introspective look at various types of relationships, typical or not.

The collection starts with “Commitment”, a tale of two destined souls who meet unexpectedly at a bridge from which they have both chosen to jump. A more unlikely pairing most wouldn’t conceive of, and yet Anthony plays with characters and typical roles, switching them about to fit the pieces of a love story.

From “Commitment”, the tone is set; any preconceived notions about traditional relationship stories should go right out the window.

“Hot Game” might be considered the most erotic in the anthology, as well as one of the more lengthy stories. More of a hypothetical piece, it explores a prison which unofficially governs itself according to a merit system driven by sexual games. Hypothetical, I say, because I was reminded of B.F. Skinner’s novel, *Walden Two*, in which a utopian culture was depicted. Though no prison may be considered utopia, Anthony presents us with a creative idea; release our inhibitions, pander to our sexual natures, and create a better system of morality that seems to work for all who participate.

My favorite piece was “Scenarios”, another unconventional romantic pairing in which the key players meet once a week for a car ride, trading ever more outrageous scenarios between the two of them. The scenarios, of course, outline what will happen next in the course of the car ride, and are all that define the relationship between the characters.

I thoroughly enjoyed every story in the collection, as well as the bonus notes by the author at the conclusion of each tale. I never cried, however I did laugh at points, reflect seriously at others, and was completely engrossed throughout. My only complaint was the lack of a dark and bitter tale, as this, alas, is a reality of relationships as well.

Not only does Piers Anthony explore the subject of human nature and companionship, but he also writes masterfully, capturing the reader from the get go, and not letting up until each tale is concluded. Some stories were as little as three pages, others easily surpassing ten. No matter the length, each was gripping in its own way, shining light on the meaningful interactions between human beings.

Rating: Freya's Award