

St. Louis

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Post-Dispatch

Pitfalls And Triumphs Of Married Love

THE VESTAL VIRGIN ROOM

A novel by C. W. Smith
256 pages, Atheneum, \$13.95

Reviewed by Colleen Kelly Warren

New Year's Eve at the Vestal Virgin Room in the Las Vegas Tropicana Hotel is a cut above the Holiday Inn circuit or the redneck weddings where Don and Dottie Baxter usually peddle their performing talents. They're only booked to play the intermissions, but as Don says, "Vegas is Vegas, it's where you go if you're professional . . . There's a ladder, and the Vestal Virgin Room is like skipping up a half-dozen rungs at once."

Don and Dottie are a husband-wife musical comedy duo hoping to crack

the big time. C. W. Smith has endowed his characters with such warmth and humor one cannot help liking them as much as the author obviously does. Married love — the pitfalls and triumphs of a long-term relationship — seldom has been portrayed with such fine balance. "The Vestal Virgin Room" is both heartbreaking and hilarious; Smith has achieved that most difficult of genres, the tragi-comic novel.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that the author lived in Missouri for several years, and part of the story unfolds in and around St. Louis. But the "local color" aspect is peripheral to enjoyment of the book.

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