



MIAMI, FL
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D. 416,512—S. 502,093
MIAMI METROPOLITAN AREA

OCT 21 1984

Fiction in Brief / Reviewed by
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THE VESTAL VIRGIN ROOM.

By C.W. Smith. Atheneum. 248
pages. \$13.95.

Don and Dottie Baxter are an act; she plays the piano and sings; he plays drums and tells fairly funny stories. For years they have eked out a modest living playing in seedy nightclubs and motels. Now they think they have a chance at the big time in Las Vegas. For one night, they have been booked into a hotel lounge there, not as headliners but as an intermission filler. Still, for them it's a major break.

The Vestal Virgin Room is an account of the tour that culminates in Las Vegas, a chronicle of dingy hotel rooms, fast-food meals, automobile breakdowns, and drunken, noisy audiences, interspersed with offstage episodes that disclose the comedy and tragedy of the Baxters' lives together. C.W. Smith has a wonderful ear for dialogue, and his re-creation of Don and Dottie's act is brilliant in its authentic mediocrity. They will never be stars, yet they remain optimistic and loving through small triumphs and major setbacks. This very funny yet essentially serious novel is a genuine pleasure.