



Oath of Fealty

Larry Niven , Jerry Pournelle

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In the near future, Los Angeles is an all but uninhabitable war zone, racked by crime, violence, pollution and poverty. But above the blighted city, a Utopia has arisen: Todos Santos, a thousand-foot high single-structured city, designed to used state-of-the-art technology to create a completely human-friendly environment, offering its dwellers everything they could want in exchange for their oath of allegiance and their constant surveillance . But there are those who want to see the utopia destroyed, whose answer to tomorrow's best and brightest hope is mindless violence. And they have just entered Todos Santos. . . .

Oath of Fealty Details

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From Reader Review Oath of Fealty for online ebook

Bob says

Excellent book that I think many people may not have found. I found it 30 years ago in a marked down pile!

Craig says

Oath of Fealty is one of the more interesting collaborations of Niven and Pournelle. It's speculative fiction, but the science is more sociological and political than physical. It's a very thoughtful and though-provoking novel, and though it may be a little dated now I still think it's relevant. The philosophy seemed to be a little too right-wing for sf fans of the day to feel comfortable with it, but the authors always made well-reasoned, convincing arguments. The catch-phrase of the book is: "Think of it as evolution in action," which I've often quoted in one situation or another over the years.

Kent Ellis says

After two-thirds of this book, I had to quit it. The conflict was clear but there wasn't enough action to hold my interest. Quite enjoyed "Lucifer's Hammer," "Ringworld," and "Peacemakers." OoF didn't come up to that standard.

Rob Markley says

Pretty standards stuff. Sometimes Niven and Pournelle soar when together but this is middling

Kirk says

A utterly fantastic book when written, some of the technology is dated now. Niven and Pournelle didn't anticipate cordless phones--the guy with a 20-foot cord on his phone will ring true with my generation but baffle younger readers. It originated my favorite quote on people who kill themselves doing dumb things--I won't include it here, spoilers.

June says

not in the same arena as Ringworld

Darth says

I was borderline between 2 and 3 stars on this title, in the end I went 3 because I have so thoroughly loved the previous Niven books I have read...

This was vaguely interesting at times, but mostly it was a long drawn out boring telling of a only slightly better premise.

I didnt like the lack of consistency in terms of the their little society. It was too idealized in many ways, and I think to bring that level of idealism home, they should have made it more sealed off from the rest of LA. The level of detachment present in the characters in this book was inconsistent with the lack of true isolation from the rest of LA.

I know people who live more isolated from their city in the real world, than the folks in this book. I guess, for me, it just didnt ring true, or leave me with a feeling of awe. I think to like a sci-fi book, one or both of those need to happen for me.

Jerry says

I have read a lot of science fiction about massive housing complexes, and all of them present them as dystopias, or at least an unpleasant thing that be borne due to other circumstances. Niven and Pournelle present a uniquely pleasant view of their arcology, Todos Santos in the Los Angeles area.

Some people like living in managed communities, some people don't, and most people don't care what choice others make.

The story, of course, is in the minority who do want to force other people's choices, an eco-terrorist group called FROMATE, "Friends of Man and the Earth", who don't like that people in Todos Santos live outside a state of nature; and local politicians who don't like that people in Todos Santos are mostly independent of local politicians.

The book was clearly written in the late seventies/early eighties; when they want to delay a police investigation, Todos Santos executives provide the information the police requested "at 300 baud".

Some of the characters have near-24-hour network connections, and can thus access global information whenever they want. This, unsurprisingly to those of us in the era of iPhones and the Internet, completely changes how they communicate and interact with people around them.

This is probably the most interesting massive housing complex science fiction story I've read so far.

_ says

Oath of Fealty is a dated, but not outdated, science fiction story of what might happen to a group of

individuals if they were to live inside a self-contained (mostly) arcology in the midst of modern society. Modern society being one guessed at by the authors from the perspective of 1980. Keep that in mind. I must preface this review with a rant to anyone who judges or reviews older books based solely on their own modern perceptions of society. If it is twenty or more years older than you, the author's mind-set will not have existed in the same world you do. Adjust your pre-suppositions before reading. Think of the era 'in which it was written' along with the story itself.

IT IS NOW ON A DIFFERENT TIMELINE THAN YOU.

You cannot write a book about the future and get everything right. Also, you cannot read a book written thirty-six years ago and expect it to be a match for your current social setup anymore. When you choose to read a book this old, you must adjust your expectations and try to wrap your mind around the world as it was when it was written. If you cannot do that, then don't bother picking up any book older than 15 years. And, for that matter, skip science fiction altogether because it requires you to use your imagination, and sometimes (God forbid!) willingly suspend your disbelief and repress your 'triggers'. History happened whether you like it or not. You can't read Shakespeare and judge his work to be crap because he comes across a misogynist to you. The same must (not optional) be applied to reading any work that was published some time ago.

This is one of those books.

Now I can get back to the review. I picked up 'Oath of Fealty' after a re-release of the e-book went on sale, and I realized it was a Niven/Pournelle that I had not yet read. If you have not read these two authors (collaboratively &/or individually) I feel both excited and sorry for you. You have some superb reading that you could tackle, but at the same time, a lot of it will be dated, like this book is, simply due to the passage of time. Go read them anyway!

This novel is of a near future (that spun off of the year 1980/81 when it was written). The setting is the city of Los Angeles. A riot destroyed a large portion of the city which consequently allowed the development of a corporately sponsored arcology. Todos Santos is a huge walled edifice, a skyscraper the size of a city, that stockholders may buy a share in and live their lives there. It is a place that is under nearly constant surveillance - including in apartments if needed for emergencies - that affords the occupants a premium on safety at the expense of privacy. Over time, this trade-off has become a non-issue for them. They have become used to it. Also, the corporate nature of the complex means that a distinct strata of individual privilege is present. This too is accepted by the residents as perfectly fine. Why do they think it's fine? Because, simply put, the guards and the higher-ups technically work for them. People who have domestic servants don't care if they know their comings and goings, right? The book's title originates from a reporter character who does a documentary on the arcology and compares it to a feudal society. The residents have sworn an Oath of Fealty to the leader, granting him high privileges in exchange for protection.

Outside the walls of this community is the city of Los Angeles with its high crime-rates, poverty, and very jealous individuals in politics that resent the success of Todos Santos (and its independence, and their lack of influence on it, etc.) The arcology does not pay taxes to L.A. which was part of the deal at the start of its development, so this is really irksome for the politicians. The All Saints in the middle of the City of Angels is only for those who accept its constraints on the inside, and those on the outside mostly despise it, even though the symbiotic relationship that has developed also keeps industry and development flowing to them. The regular residents of Los Angeles feel this way too, but also want to be part of it at the same time. They want the benefits, but without the necessity of conformance.

Also, a militant faction of Eco Terrorists is seeking to disrupt - and destroy, if possible - the arcology. Despite the good the arcology has done for the environment, and how green it is (it is almost self-contained and recycles everything) they believe it (and other concept arcologies) to be a crime against humanity. Their socialist ideal is that the arcology takes from the poor and concentrates the riches of society in the hands of the privileged few. A very socialist dogma for the bad guys, certainly, which is to be expected from a book written at the tipping point of the cold war era from two authors with a conservative bent. So, that's the setup of the novel. The characters are not deep. The novel was written to showcase the concept of this arcology idea. The plot was created to give the reader a way to learn about it. The characters were written around this plot to bring the story to life. Even so, it works. The story is entertaining. You do have to read about eighty percent of it before it becomes a page turner, but still, I like some good world-building.

Probably the neatest thing I found in this novel was that some concepts of the science were spot on and didn't even click as 'futuristic' until I stopped and thought about what existed when it was written. Let me give some examples of things that happened in 1980/81, but were still futuristic to this book:

- Ronald Reagan was first elected as President of the United States.
- MS-DOS was released and used in IBM's new Personal Computer (PC)

Today, most of us have cell phones that are more powerful. The book mentions at one point using a data printout of a whopping 25 megabytes (staggering!) to delay the local police.

- NASA launched Columbia, the first Space Shuttle put into orbit.

Some of the residents of Todos Santos work from home with tele-operated devices that run machines in greater Los Angeles, and one even operates a bulldozer in a construction project on the moon.

- Rhodesia gained its independence and became the state of Zimbabwe.

Used as a plot device in the later book. Zimbabwe today is a collapsed failed society.

- Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back was released in theatres.

The book mentions Star War Episode VIII where a character mocks Han Solo's science. We all know what really happened to Han in Episode VII!

Those are just a few things that jumped out at me.

Now, in this novel, Todos Santos is managed by several executives who are very good at their jobs. Part of their success stems from their ability to link with the central computer system via implant technology in their brains. This is a huge futuristic tech item, even for today. However, one of the benefits of this tech that was given was the ability of this computer system to keep track of everyone within the complex. It let the guards be able to track down and deliver messages to and from residents if needed. This was 'amazing' in regards to the book at the time it was published, but we all know that today we would not need guards to do that... we'd use our cell phones! Another advantage of the implants was the ability to mentally talk to other implant users via the computer. That's pretty awesome, and still 'advanced tech' for today, but we can also send e-mail and text messages, so we are not that far off the mark.

Another idea in the book that has never taken root in today's world was making use of icebergs as a source of fresh drinking water. I don't know the feasibility of that particular idea is today, but I think the environmentalist would probably throw a fit about shrinking the ice shelf or stealing habitat from the polar bears or something. It would sure help with that drought in Cali though!

The mega city slide-walk moving from walking speed up to fifty MPH in graded strips would be a nightmare to implement as well. OSHA would have puppies and kittens at the mere thought of something like that being used by people. And the lawsuits when someone got hurt... I shudder to think.

The self-sufficient and self-contained arcology has also never been tried on this scale (to my knowledge), but I can say that I personally would not want to live in one. Then again, I wouldn't want to be an Angelino in a

crowded crime ridden cityscape either. I'll stick to the backwoods, thanks!

One last concept in the book (which is oddly coincidental to what is in the news at the time I write this review), touches on race relations of the time, but more specifically on the US versus THEM mentality. In this case Angelinos versus Saints. What is justice from the perspective of one group is often seen as the opposite of justice from the perspective of another. We have this same issue ongoing in America today. That seems not to have changed much in thirty-six years. That is sad, but also could be seen as a lesson that speaks to the failure of the more liberal ideas of crime and punishment in our society. A lack of respect for authority and the rights of others, along with a refusal to enforce effective punishment leads to tragedy and discontent for all. The book depicts a situation in which people committing a criminal act are killed, but those with tighter ties to them are convinced that they were the victims of the out-of-control authorities of the arcology. The arcology is just as adamant that they were defending themselves from harm. This is an eerie coincidence to what I have witnessed in the news recently. Thirty-six years is a long time to fail in the same way without trying something different. The differences of opinion continue, though, because those who support the liberal side believe we just need more of the same because we haven't tried hard enough. Conversely, those on the other side of the spectrum have gotten to the point that they just don't care. As in this novel, the only end result is a sharp divide in societies that cannot be effectively healed. Again, a sad thought.

Anyway, the science and social concepts explored in this book, including the idea of a separate culture developing inside the arcology itself, are very interesting. I don't know if all of it would go the way presented, but some of it undoubtedly would. I found the novel to be entertaining and mentally engaging, even if it is somewhat dated by its cold war era origins. I give it 3 stars and call it a Good Ole Read.

Fatman says

The novel has a very interesting premise. A centrally controlled, almost police-state mega-gated-community created exclusively for a wealthy elite. Other than the interesting premise, the book has little to offer. It was first published in 1982 and suffers from many of the ailments of older-generation science fiction. The story is delivered mostly through dialogue in which characters with opposing views unnecessarily argue about something (or characters with similar views unnecessarily agree about something). Office romances which seem to have been cribbed straight out of a daytime soap. The tone hovers on the verge of didactic without openly crossing it. Evil poor people keep trying to break in and cause damage to the gated community because... well, because poor people are violent, savage and evil. The protagonists are self-sufficient, wealthy geniuses, misunderstood and demonized by a decaying society and opposed by a bureaucratic government (one of them is actually named Rand - yes, seriously). At the same time, token characters try to provide something of an opposing view: poor people are human too. And there's an African-American character in a high management position, (view spoiler).

Two and one-quarter stars, but I have to make allowances for the dates of writing and publication, so rounded up to 3.

Andrea says

One of the more vile and viciously right wing novels I've read, though to be fair I haven't read many of them

at all. But this is something like Ayn Rand – wig askew and on her 13th pink gin fizz – going off on a paranoid scree about the muggers and rapists who are all out to kill her. Because she’s so rich and talented and beautiful and they just can’t handle that so she’s bought 10 attack dogs and built a concrete bunker.

It’s all about taking the gated community to the next level, making it a maze of about a cubic square mile with about a quarter of a million people. It towers like a monstrous black cube in an area essentially burned down by its own residents – I would think Watts or Compton. It’s powered by hydrogen, fed through pipes from ‘a complex of nuclear breeder plants in Mexico’. Ah, the outsourcing of risk and contaminants. It calls itself Todos Santos – All Saints – why do white people in the Southwest always call their high-end real estate developments nice things in Spanish? A patronising nod to the people they stole the land from? Easier to pronounce than indigenous phrases for ‘Pretty View’ and ‘Mountain Hills’? But the authors aren’t being entirely metaphorical in calling the residents saints. Apparently you can pick them out of a crowd of poor old Angelinos, they are the shiny beautiful people who move in a certain way, speak in a certain way. They are a new kind of person.

THINK OF IT AS EVOLUTION IN ACTION. I thought at first this rather chilling slightly fascist slogan must be ironic or a nod to the dangers this kind of project could raise. But no. These really are a better kind of people, helped by those who commit suicide or get themselves killed. They like this slogan, paint it on walls, put it on stickers and huge banners like a big F-you to L.A.

The Utopia? ‘We’re running a civilization, something new in this world, and don’t bother to tell me how small it is. It’s a civilization. The first one in a long time where people can feel *safe*’ (18). Constantly watched, constantly surveilled and monitored. But the many guards are their friends. They don’t arrest people for being too drunk the way the terrible LAPD does, they walk you home. What is better than being safe after all? We know that the real danger is from criminal poor people who are all on the outside, hopped up to their eyeballs on drugs and trying to shoot down helicopters.

Todos Santos is of course trying to be completely separate from Los Angeles – the crime, the pollution, the drugs, the poor people. There’s a lot of anger in this book about how the government forces all of us to become accountants to pay our taxes, and the pain of collecting receipts and things. A whole lot of anger. Familiar tea party sort of anger. Taxes in Todos Santos don’t go to welfare and they are part of your mortgage payment to the company – kindly saving you from wasting any thought on them at all. It’s a bit feudal, yeah, but they had some good ideas back then. Oath of Fealty rendered, everything else taken care of. Awesome. Of course, I can’t quite understand how this fits with America, Land of the Free in their heads, or their hatred of big government...I mean, my opinion is that these fit together because the residents of Todos Santos don’t see poor people, particularly poor Black and Brown people, as real Americans or as any kind of people they can cooperate in a democracy or a community with, sad facts that have forced them to succede and build something new. Something they may one day conquer and colonise outer space with. But I don’t think they think that.

Instead the book tries to show it’s not racist by trying to admit that some discrimination exists but it’s less than you think, and making one of the high executives Black. Well. Teak colored in the book’s own words. He’s a bit estranged from other African-Americans and admits there are only maybe a hundred among a quarter million, but his homies break him out of the L.A. prison he gets sent to after he kills a couple of kids pretending to be terrorists and becomes a hero to the population. That’s a long story I won’t go into, who’d want to give away such a sparkling plot?

The kids are sent in by activists to test the defences, because that’s what environmental activists do, right? Use kids without remorse. Make unreasonable demands. The civil rights movement made some unreasonable

demands too, which is how they lost the support of the white community

We did care once. A lot of us did. But something happened. Maybe it was the sheer size of the problem. Or watching while everybody who could afford it ran to the suburbs and left the cities to drift, and complained about taxes going to the cities, and—Or maybe it was having to listen to my police explain why they'll only go into Watts in pairs with cocked shotguns and if the Mayor doesn't like it he can damn well police that precinct himself. People think they've done enough. (126)

Note the use of the words 'us' and 'people' to mean white by default. Thinking you've done enough when you've done worse than nothing is an interesting contradiction noted by many. But let's get back to the activists. They call people pigs even when they're not cops – which is silly, cops have really earned that name. Activists are also almost always rapists apparently. Unless they're women, in which case they are just sadistic and probably Lesbians. 'She's probably a Lesbian' is a direct quote actually, as the 'heroine' imagines shutting her in a room full of rats to mentally survive the indignities of being kidnapped. The men probably couldn't help raping her of course, they're brutes and she is a stunning model-turned-business-woman who is powerful and talented and successful and rich and they obviously can't handle all of that.

Anyway, I haven't even cracked the surface, just released some of my bile. This is a story where you are supposed to cheer on the beleaguered community of alcoholic rich people who can only drink coffee if it's Irish, creating their Utopia safely insulated from the nuclear power plants and the poor people who pick their lettuces and sweatshop workers who make their clothes and carrying out their own vigilante justice – which is ok, because they don't kill people unless it's absolutely necessary, they just paint them and tattoo them. There's nothing about how the place stays clean or who makes the food etc, and it's not the kind of fantasy story where house elves are a possibility though it is one in which things science fiction writers dream up are considered really cool and often become true.

The happy ending is the Black dude gets sent to Zimbabwe.

Sarah Sammis says

In the first chapter of *Oath of Fealty*, one of the characters makes an off-handed reference to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and from that point on I couldn't help but compare the two books. Both books share similar flaws in the strengths of their stories as they sacrifice political agenda for narrative.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was written with an urgency and is a blatant call to end slavery. *Oath of Fealty's* message while politically motivated isn't as important or significant and therefore the book fails both in being an interesting story and in inspiring action on the part of the reader.

The only truly interesting piece of the book is its set-up. Imagine a city with a population around 250,000 jammed into a massive skyscraper that serves as a controlled environment where the citizens willingly sacrifice privacy for safety. The city (or arcology) is called Todos Santos and it's somehow located in the San Fernando Valley. What happened to the cities all ready there? By choosing to set the story in such a crowded area it is hard to believe that such a huge building could be built (it's also the same major flaw of *The Truman Show*).

Like Stowe's story of Eliza and Tom the story unfolds as a comparison of free life and slave life (or life off and on the plantation). Niven and Pournelle need a big chaotic city to compare to their controlled environment. Unfortunately there are so many flaws in the idea that a building of such a size could be built near a well established urban area that the story flounders. So much of the book is devoted to justifying their choice of location for this social commentary that the actual story is neglected.

Olethros says

-Querer y no poder, mientras se juega con lo polémico.-

Género. Ciencia ficción.

Lo que nos cuenta. El libro Juramento de fidelidad (publicación original: Oath of Fealty, 1981) nos lleva hasta Todos Santos, una gigantesca construcción en la costa oeste de los Estados Unidos, a muy poca distancia de Los Ángeles, una moderna ciudad-estado próspera y avanzada, protegida por fuerzas de seguridad y cámaras que intentan evitar las amenazas de grupos terroristas y, también, la desconfianza envidiosa de otras estructuras sociales y políticas. Un incidente mortal generado por una amenaza que se demuestra falsa termina por tensar las cosas.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Jason Pettus says

For those too young to remember, Niven and Pournelle (both accomplished hard-science-fiction writers themselves) teamed up throughout the 1970s and '80s to produce a series of novels that crossed over into mainstream Michael-Crichton-style success. Although *Hammer of the Gods* is their most popular (concerning an asteroid hitting the earth, and what these two scientist-authors imagine would *really* happen in such a case), my favorite is *Oath of Fealty*, which imagines a private corporation building an entire enclosed utopian city next-door to Los Angeles, like Disney's actual Celebration, Florida but expanded to an insane degree, and with a roof and walls covering the entire thing. What would such a society be like? What problems would arise from such a situation? And how would the LA municipal government take to such a thing? Niven and Pournelle contemplate some fascinating answers here, as well as painting a vivid "world of tomorrow" where people are connected to the web via biological implants, among other modern wonders. Out of all their books, this is the one I recommend the most.

Mick Kelly says

Is this Science Fiction? The (kindle) edition I bought shows some kind of rocket driven aircraft circling a futuristic landscape and it is in the Science Fiction section. But when I gave up reading (28%) it just seemed to be about the running of a monster office block. Ok it's really a monster but the comings and goings of the big cast of characters seemed to be mostly about office politics and city politics (Los Angeles to be precise). Not my sort of thing. I wouldn't give it a negative review - many people seem to like it, but the characters

seem to be drawn from a management training manual and the attitudes of the authors to race and gender politics are from the 1950s (maybe a bit later).
