ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Gnome Chronicles
Herbert J. Thornn
978-1-4343-0482-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

Here's a tall tale of forest-dwelling creatures who groove on kitchen gardens embrace routine and eschew change. "It's not that they didn't enjoy the occasional adventure just as long as they didn't make a habit of it." Then *Gnome Chronicles'* accidental hero Wentwise falls in the river and rides a log far from home territory before he is able to climb out a mud bank. That he even returns surprises the villagers of Cheed considering the hazards of vengeful blackbirds and the vicious tactics of gnomes' traditional enemy the wily squirrels. The latter are such a menace as to be beyond polite conversation: "…nobody talked about squirrels if they didn't have to." Wentwise draws the wrath of naysayers and those invested in the status quo by announcing upon return that he's seen the dwellings and gorged in an Edenic vegetable patch of giants.

Determined to clear his sullied name and present indisputable proof that giants are real Wentwise enlists the help of his loyal bartender friend Renodd a Samwise type but with little endurance. The opposition is directed by a curmudgeon named Bin. Like a socially unconscious relative of television icon Papa Smurf Bin heads a family of merchants securely ensconced in the top strata of gnome life partly by their unexplained access to a supply of rare and coveted vegetables. Strangely enough Bin's nephew Gremilin is a ringer for a plastic yard gnome found by the giants' birdbath whom Wentwise tries to speak with: "…it wasn't a real gnome turned to stone; it was just a fake! A strange life-sized statue!"

Straight-faced reclassification of animals humans don't fear as homicidal marauders is a nice touch (even bunnies make the watch-list) as is the gnomes' natural lack of curiosity about the wider world. They're not simply protectionists they thrive on a lack of outside information. Speech patterns are mildly peculiar an American English with intermittent hints of London cockney and some phonetic spellings. The volume of phonetics especially early on can be diversionary.

Gnome Chronicles is a lighthearted escape to the shielded naiveté that petered out of reality along with the 1950s. Its down-to-earth presentation of life from a knee-height perspective will entertain middle readers about fourth through seventh grade. Rural

Midwesterner and first-time author Herbert J. Thornn employs wit to show that the perception of truth is manipulated and subverted when a competitive advantage is at stake.