

Oddities & Entities

Roland Allnach

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Author tells compelling stories of fantasy and human struggle in speculative collection.

For author Roland Allnach, the extraordinary aspects of the mind are always predominant. His new collection of short stories, *Oddities & Entities*, moves readers between fantasy and reality while dealing with the hardships of human existence. It's an enticing collection, one that aims to entertain, and one that delivers varied results.

Allnach's imaginative dream worlds kick off right away in *Oddities & Entities* with "Boneview," where a young girl of Creole origins accesses fantastic worlds through artwork in a tattoo parlor but is simultaneously terrorized by spirits. In "Gray," Allnach takes great effort in exposing the worlds of the young, the neurotic, and the rebellious while referencing modern issues like prescription drug usage and its affect on youth. He also isn't afraid to put in kinky, incestuous twists such as in "Elmer Phelps" or pulp fiction-type protagonists walking the line between propriety and madness in "My Other Me," where a loner college student finds he has a deadly dual personality. These complex characters provide entertaining detail along with the complex story lines that reveal worlds that are never what they seem to be.

But that's where Allnach's stories begin to suffer. Some of the pieces are overlong and dwell too much on philosophical jargon or psychology—Nietzsche quotes, long discussions of split personalities, etc.—which seem forced onto the reader, thus diminishing the greater entertainment impact of the stories themselves. The varied dialogue, while reflecting juvenile characters, seems old hat—i.e. "I love you, sis."—leaving the stories very unbelievable at times, despite their fantastic themes. In all, Allnach's narrative intentions are well present but his execution of them within the short narrative form is often a bit lackluster. The long paragraph upon paragraph structures of "Gray" and "Elmer Phelps" often leave the reader wanting more editing.

While *Oddities & Entities* lacks the technical aspects of stronger writing to make the stories totally believable, his stories are compelling as a whole. The collection's themes work well together and readers that like both fantasy and stories of human struggle, either mental or physical, would undoubtedly be satisfied with the book. One might suggest that with more compositional focused improvements to similar future stories, one would see Allnach really deliver the best new types of speculative story collections for readers of all stripes. Here's hoping for more.

JAMES BURT (May 21, 2013)

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