FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ SHORT STORIES

Stories to Enjoy

Tom Mach
Hill Song Press (September 2010)
Softcover $14.95 (208pp)
978-0-9745159-1-5

In *Stories to Enjoy*, Tom Mach delivers an eclectic collection of simple short stories that aim to surprise and entertain. The collection boasts a wide range of genres, from sci-fi and fantasy to crime thrillers and historical fiction, catering to the interests of a wide and varied audience.

This variety in subject matter creates an upbeat energy and reader expectations are challenged, each of his tales a new world of drama and imaginative possibilities. Government secrets and sordid murder schemes lace the collection with a gritty feel. Stories like “The Assassin,” “The Crossword Puzzle Murders,” or “Passport to Murder” gesture to Mach’s penchant for crime thrillers. “Frozen History” and “Doll House” take readers through a world rife with robots and apocalyptic endings where characters straddle the line between reality and possibility. In “The Plot to Kill Lincoln (Again),” Mach creates a unique blend of historical fiction and sci-fi where time travel intersperses with tidbits from American history. This melting pot of genres creates a frenetic energy that is both appealing and disconcerting.

The ambiguous title points to the collection’s lack of focus—this is not a cohesive collection of short stories that work harmoniously under an overarching theme. It functions much more like a grab bag of stories written throughout the course of Mach’s career—with some stories wedged uncomfortably into a collection where they clearly do not belong. “Pricilla’s New Word” for example, is a touching tale about a schoolgirl learning an evocative life lesson. Although perfectly suited for young readers, when read alongside stories of secret government assassinations and philandering men, its placement seems rather awkward. However, Mach’s stories do offer frequent ruminations on themes of regret, revenge, and possibility. These recurring themes combine with jarring endings that stay with the reader—like the haunting image of psychic Laura Wilson trapped in the etchings of a stamp in “Stamp Prisoner”—resulting in a captivating read.

The sixteen short stories in this collection have entertaining plots, but in some instances the reader can easily foresee the endings of mysteries when obvious clues are planted early in the story. This combined with rudimentary, sometimes weakly drawn characters whose motivations are shaped to fit the plot of the story, who lack multifaceted interiors, and whose emotions are often cliché, makes this a collection wanting in complexity. Mach’s style is tight and dry, refreshingly unadorned—this suits the subject matter of many of the stories well, but the simplistic prose may inhibit the overall success of the collection.

Stories to Enjoy, Mach’s fourth book, is a highly imaginative collection of fun stories, only somewhat lacking in the development of character and style. Ultimately, it will delight readers looking for a light, but engrossing read.
SHOILEE KHAN (October 6, 2010)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.