

Tales From Finnegan's Wake: An Assortment of Suspenseful, Fantastical, Tragic, Romantic, Humorous, and Provocative Stories Originally Published by Literary Journals and Zines in the US and Overseas

Bill Finnegan

Raven OKeefe, Illustrator

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Unexpected plot twists elevate this enjoyable collection of unique and varied sci-fi tales.

Bill Finnegan collects eleven strange and enjoyable short stories in *Tales From Finnegan's Wake: An Assortment of Suspenseful, Fantastical, Tragic, Romantic, Humorous, and Provocative Stories Originally Published by Literary Journals and Zines in the US and Overseas*. It's a long subtitle, but it's also a truthful guide to the varied collection of pieces inside.

Finnegan makes clear from the very first story, "Programming Is Everything," that readers should abandon their expectations. In this science-fiction tale, a family is forced to use a replacement robot nanny to watch their children for a night. When all signs indicate the story will go the way of the expected, Finnegan surprises with a satisfying ending that goes in another direction entirely.

Finnegan, a former attorney, has published another long-titled volume, 2008's *Saving Frank Casey: A Semi-Comic Novel of Love, Religion, Politics, and Corporate Life* (Finnegan is nothing if not thorough in disclosing the contents of his books). The stories in *Tales From Finnegan's Wake* were originally published in a variety of literary journals and magazines, and their subjects range from science fiction to horror, with more than a few that don't fall neatly into those categories.

While grounded in the sci-fi genre, Finnegan isn't beholden to its trappings. Humor is ever present, the writing is clear and concise, and the characters' voices are authentic. There is a tendency for the author to shoehorn long passages about myths and legends into characters' mouths at times, but this seems something of a necessary evil, since it's usually information the reader needs to know to fully enjoy the story.

The book contains a few editing errors: "exits" instead of "exists," "painstaking" instead of "painstakingly," "omitting" instead of "emitting." But these are minor, and the presentation is first rate throughout. Of particular note are the outstanding illustrations by Raven OKeefe. Finnegan has made the most of OKeefe's abilities by placing her illustrations at the beginning of each piece with a caption that features a tantalizing quotation from the story that follows. This combination of image and text effectively piques reader interest in the tale to come.

As with any collection, especially one that treads in several genres and often blurs the lines between them, some of the stories succeed more than others. With eleven pieces in a little more than 150 pages, the plots move quickly, sometimes crowding character development. But the fast pace usually works, and the book doesn't take itself too seriously, even though some of the stories are extremely thought-provoking.

With *Tales From Finnegan's Wake*, Finnegan is the captain, heading in whatever direction he pleases. Readers who

don't mind a course that sometimes veers unexpectedly should enjoy the trip.

PETER DABBENE (December 12, 2013)

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