FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

The Shoes of Moses: Stories of Ponderable Wonder
Blaine C. Readler
Full Arc
978-0-9834973-2-5
(February 29, 2012)

In *The Shoes of Moses*, San Diego-based Blaine C. Readler treats readers to a vivid collection of short fiction, in which he takes gleeful pleasure in highlighting the absurdities of humanity's ideas about religion, God, country and selfhood. Half science-fiction, half parable, and all situation-comedy, these short tales take place everywhere from a spaceship to the farmstead.

Certain themes repeat throughout Readler's collection, yet each story is unique: One story, "Exposure," addresses the consequences of futuristic drone-based international conflict; another is a riff on God and the creation of earth ("God Takes Another Swing"); yet another shows the prophet himself contemplating his next miracle in light of how it will be remembered centuries later ("The Shoes of Moses").

Indeed, Readler takes delight in skewering any leader of note, whether it is Moses, the president, or "The Smartest Man on Earth." Readler suffuses his leaders with unexpected motives and off-color personalities. In "Mao's Head," the very-Republican US president rethinks a top-secret brief he had half read about Roswell, New Mexico: "When they wrote about aliens, he'd thought they meant Mexicans." Later the same man compares a mummified alien head to the face of Tip O'Neill.

Leaders don't have to be human to earn Readler's irreverent treatment: In "God Takes Another Swing," it turns out that God (who possesses a flowing white beard) created the earth as a "show" planet to be entered in a universe-wide competition much like a dog show. Having found the orb's fauna wanting in pedigree, he plans to blow it up and start again so that he can win. In "The Shoes of Moses" the prophet contemplates the limitations of Yahweh's miracles: "Although he managed to bring a plague of locusts on Pharoah's head, and turn the Nile to blood … he wasn't able to get rid of the eczema on his ankles."

If Readler likes to cast an ironic eye on leaders and religion, he also takes a hard look at ordinary people. In the cold little shocker, "The Iceman Goeth," one man's intelligence and

ingenuity may save his life, but another's simple greed might undo everything. Readler offers no comment on this: he simply tells his tale and abandons his reader to simmer in a sense of uneasiness about his fellow man.

Through Readler's quick-reading, amusing prose and humorous dialogue, the reader gets a window: through it she can take a new look at religion, myths, and widely held beliefs. She can also take clearer a look at herself.

Leia Menlove