

Timewall Speaks: A Novel

Kirk Ward Robinson

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Timewall Speaks is a fascinating novel about an ex-convict who's searching for a sense of purpose.

In his coming-of-age novel with dark undercurrents, *Timewall Speaks*, Kirk Ward Robinson portrays both human cruelty and the resiliency of the human spirit.

Recently released from prison with a bad tattoo on his neck, Timewall just wants another chance. It seems like life is out to get him: he grew up poor in a broken system, and it feels like there is nowhere to go but down. He has a date with a parole officer, but not much else, so he heads back to his hometown, Bilbo, which sits along the Appalachian Trail.

Upon reuniting with his mother, Blaize, Timewall learns that his youngest sister was murdered while he was in prison. Still reeling, Timewall is forced to take a job at a local car wash, which is managed by the town scumbag. Then, a discarded soda machine ignites his entrepreneurial spirit, allowing him to profit off of thirsty travelers.

At first, Timewall blames the world for his problems; he is unable to accept responsibility for the trajectory of his life. As he experiences the growing pains of becoming an adult—working; forming adult friendships; dealing with regret—he learns what it means to be culpable for your own actions. He is empowered to change his environment as a result, and the developments that follow are inviting.

Though on its surface it is a straightforward coming-of-age story, the novel has a thrilling edge and includes some unexpected developments. Questions arise for Timewall: where are Blaize and Aunt Joss going all of the sudden? Who killed Baby Rose? Who is Jayson Sharpe's accountant? Most of the characters have a secret to hide; just when one thread is getting familiar, another is introduced, adding intrigue.

The book's secondary characters are loveable, revealing much about themselves even when they're allotted limited space. These include an elderly couple arguing about Walmart, and Care Bear, a strange hiker of the Appalachian Trail; they are sources of comic relief in Timewall's life.

Balanced scenes that share just enough physical details to result in a sense of specificity contribute to the book's excitement and fast pace. The regional dialect is represented both in characters' conversations and in their internal monologues, grounding the story well. Its mysterious undertones drive this already satisfying tale of self-discovery toward a thrilling conclusion.

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GREGORY A. LOWE (August 31, 2020)

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