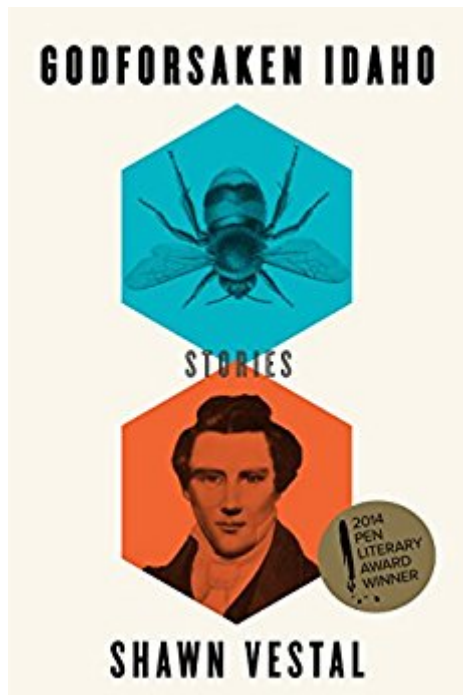


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Godforsaken Idaho



Synopsis

Winner of the 2014 PEN/Robert W. Bingham Prize for Debut Fiction >Shortlisted for the William Saroyan International Prize for Writing>Named "Outstanding 2013 Collection" by The Story Prize>Pushcart Prize Winner In this stunning debut, Shawn Vestal transports us to the afterlife, the rugged Northwest, and the early days of Mormonism. From "The First Several Hundred Years Following My Death," an absurd, profound vision of a hellish heaven, to "Winter Elders," in which missionaries calmly and relentlessly pursue a man who has left the fold, these nine stories illuminate the articles of faith that make us human. The concluding triptych tackles the legends and legacy of Mormonism head-on, culminating in "Diviner," a seriocomic portrait of the young Joseph Smith, back when he was not yet the founder of a religion but a man hired to find buried treasure. Godforsaken Idaho is an indelible collection by the writer you need to read next.

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Customer Reviews

"Gulls" and "Diviner" are the standouts in this collection. As in all collections, there are a few stories

that are excellent, a few that fall flat, and many more that span the range. Unfortunately, "Gulls" and "Diviner" are the last stories in this volume, following up several surprisingly bleak stories. The weak links here are "Godforsaken Idaho," "Pocket Dog," and "About as Fast as This Car Will Go," which unfortunately form a block in the beginning of the volume that considerably dampened my enthusiasm after "The First Several Hundred Years Following My Death," which has some traces of very dark religious humor. Based on the descriptions, I'd expected these stories to be amusing. Some are, but most are bleak. There's a sense of haunted futility hanging around some of these characters that stuck with me after I'd finished the stories.

I'm not a heavy reader in the past year or so I decided to re read some authors I read as a young man, I read Huxley, Orwell (you gotta read Down and out in Paris and London), Steinbeck, Jack London these were all very good. I then read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn because I wanted to try something more contemporary and am glad I did, then I looked for something real contemporary I'm fairly poor so I looked for a cheap kindle offering. I saw Godforsaken Idaho was highly rated so I tried it, it kept my attention from the beginning. Much of the story takes place in the afterlife which was something of a monotonous institutional place where people entertain themselves by reliving the favorite parts of their lives over and over. The most interesting parts of the book are (I think) directly from the authors life they describe the life of a boy who goes to live with his recently paroled father. Dad was having trouble getting work and after a while starts to disappear for a few days at a time(he's burglarizing homes), after a while dad decides to show his son the ropes and brings him along. The boy loves the excitement of it(reminds me of my youth)..

I've thought a lot about this book after reading it. It opened my mind that an eternal paradise, would indeed be boring to the point of being eternal hell. I knew there was something wrong with the concept of eternal bliss. This book convinced me of it. The creator would never put us through that. It made me rethink what the future most likely will be. Not anything like we imagine.

I actually liked this book, and he does write interesting stories. But I came away from reading this with the distinct impression that he doesn't know how to write an ending. Also, I felt his stories were all unnecessarily depressing. His writing style and vivid characterizations made up for the other shortcomings enough to merit the four stars. I come from much the same background as the author, which is why I bought this book. I am from Idaho, and I grew up Mormon. I was thrilled to read that he must of had the same landlord I had in Coeur d'Alene, with the witches living across the street.

These are really engaging stories! I can see in my mind the people and places in his stories, and he writes them about as real as possible. So I would recommend this book, while knowing that it won't suit everyone's tastes.

This collection of short stories are a debut effort by the author, who apparently is a disgruntled ex-Mormon. The writing is well done, although many of the situations and characters are similar across the various stories. The author pokes a lot of (not always gentle) fun at some of the more peculiar behaviors of individuals who belong to the Mormon subculture, but, unfortunately, one must almost already be conversant with that subculture in order to understand all the jibes. Without going into a spoiler, the last three stories at the end of book are based more on history than humor, and these three are the strongest group of stories in the book. If you enjoy the short story genre and are a Mormon, an ex-Mormon, or a person with a friend who can explain the Mormon culture and history, then you should really enjoy this book!

Shawn Vestal writes beautifully. Each story in this book grabbed my attention until read. The first book gives the reader a new twist on a timeless subject. In the next collection, the Idaho towns mentioned were those of my LDS ancestors and now cousins, the ancestors founders and pillars in the LDS church history, their bones buried near places he includes. Not an LDS person myself, I read the book with a different approach, more curious and actually entertained, than perhaps my LDS cousins would. I agree with one reviewer when he stated it would be good to know your LDS history to see Mr. Vestal's approach. Each story is quite different from the other, although on a similar thread. In fact, a couple of them are quite unsettling in a King-style way. A good, thought-provoking read.

Hey, Shawn Vestal knows his small-town Idaho. A great collection!

The stories in Godforsaken Idaho take place in specific settings inhabited by specific people, but the book's reach is much larger. Vestal's stories have tremendous range. You'll come away from this book knowing a little more about who you are.

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