



The Curse of Tecumseh and Other Stories

by Ryan Robinson

Word Art Publishing

book review by Mari Carlson

"This just goes to show you that one man's story is another's fairy's tail."

These ten short stories transport readers around the universe and through time. The first and last ones—which deal with political figures' deaths, war scenes, and a murder mystery—are set in real-time. Others, featuring aliens, a dragon, and vampires (as well as a pair of stories with a clothes hamper as the main character), employ the fantastical. Together, they entertain in a diverse array of genres.

The tales capitalize on the suspense and irony surrounding pivotal moments. For instance, a politician weighs the veracity of an ancient curse on an upcoming election, and an investigator brings a murderer to confession. Villagers decide how to defend themselves against invaders. Meanwhile, a space traveler escapes muggers. Action drives each plot and keeps the pace churning toward resolution. Sometimes the dialogue is extraneous and slows down the narrative speed, but the conversational tone makes the stories' imaginative elements believable. The brief setting descriptions, particularly of the Southwest's landscape, stand out with vivid images in which the action emerges. Wordplay delights, while the surprise endings sustain interest. The pared-down writing style brings out the dynamic points in time that the stories capture.

The selections may be short, but they open up mysteries worth thinking about for long after. For instance, how much stock does one put in a pattern of coincidences throughout history? For that matter, to what extent do innocuous household items contribute to one's life trajectory? Are the small decisions in life, like what snacks to consume, programmed rather than exercises of free will? Do the stars predict humans' fate? The stories suggest answers with whimsy and a grain of salt, inviting speculation and comic relief in equal parts. At the end of each story, the author's comments give helpful background information without spoiling the readers' own engagement with the tales.