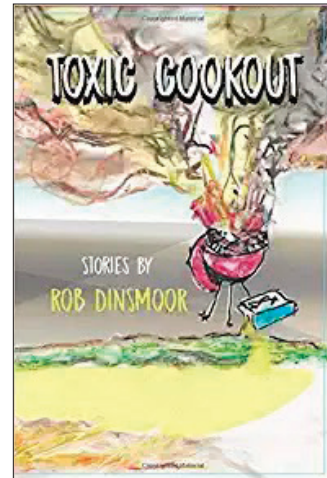


Wilderness House Literary Review 15/2

Toxic Cookout
Rob Dinsmoor
Big Table Publishing
San Francisco, CA
Copyright © 2020 by Rob Dinsmoor
Softcover, 150 Pages, price n/a

Review By Zvi A. Sesling



I have rarely been a fan of big novels because I usually found the books too long and I could not even finish one on a transcontinental flight. Short stories, on the other hand, have allowed me to read and absorb a few stories on the same flight. The stories from old masters such as Malamud, Fitzgerald, Nabokov, and Porter can be quite lengthy. Short story authors tend toward a shorter story running from three or four pages to seventeen to twenty pages.

One writer of this shorter form who spins wonderful tales that encompass a broad range of issues is Rob Dinsmoor, a writer readers will enjoy and enthusiastically recommend to others. Dinsmoor's *Toxic Cookout* falls into the shorter category and makes reading his stories enjoyable. While science fiction is Dinsmoor's forte, the breadth of his writing is both visual and easy to comprehend. The back cover says, "[Rob Dinsmoor] has written dozens of scripts for Nickelodeon and MTV. He has published stories in many literary magazines, two of which were nominated for Pushcart Prizes."

In *Toxic Cookout* Dinsmoor, in addition to specializing in science fiction, displays knowledge of astronomy, the environment, yoga, chemistry, psychology, GPS systems, life in New York city, pyramid schemes, animals and so many more aspects of everyday life we may never think about.

What makes Dinsmoor so interesting is the often subtle, sometimes it is the dark humor which pervades his work. For example, in the opening story "Selfies" two young girls are in a swimming pool taking selfies. They go to the bathroom for more photos of each other and one of them reveals the truth about herself.

In another story, "Kundalini Yoga at the Arkham YMCA" the narrator teaches yoga at the local YMCA and discovers a room unused for years. He takes his class in there and what happens to them is what follows.

A story for lovers of science fiction and horror is "Howard at Ravenswood" about a rather odd young boy who grows up in his self-made world to become a writer many readers will recognize. Is the story true or another creation from Dinsmoor's fertile imagination?

In "The World In Gunnar's Barn" a tinkerer becomes the creator. A whole world inside a bell jar with an ending that leaves the creator's friend with more than worries.

"Times Are Different In Port St. Joe" is a time travel story of a different kind of trip that Dinsmoor creates, a mystery at the beginning with an ending that reminds you to always answer your cellphone.

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/2

And there is the truck stop in the middle of the desert where a purple streak lands and a mysterious encounter ensures the finale readers do not expect.

The title story is a tale that can take place in anyone's back yard as the following excerpt will show:

"Hope dumped a big pile of generic-brand charcoal briquettes, which look like they'd been reconstituted out of old tires, into the large charcoal grill. Then she squirted the coals with charcoal starter, maintaining such a long stream that it reminded me of a big, drunken sailor taking a leak. Then she shup the can down next to the grill, open. It tipped over, draining charcoal started into the grass. She produced a long-barreled grill igniter, pulled the trigger, and set the pile of reconstituted tires ablaze with a "whoosh!" and a wave of heat that I felt on my eyelashes. The flames shot up about six feet, calling to mind of bonfire, and sent up a plume of black smoke reminiscent of oil fields burning in Kuwait, which may have caused countless health problems."

The story contains many references to the environment without being didactic. In fact Dinsmoor is such a writer. However, for those who prefer the realism of life and love, Dinsmoor has included two stories, "Falling in Love While Clinically Depressed" and "On the Brink of Total Immersion."

Reading Rob Dinsmoor's Toxic Cookout I became determined to read more of his work and I wait impatiently for the next volume of stories. In the meantime, I enjoyed this book so much that I will probably reread it very soon.