

## Godforsaken Idaho



By Shawn Vestal

Reviewed by Esther J. Hildahl

*Godforsaken Idaho* is a book of nine very different stories with unique characters. The first story is the author's creation of Heaven, a place where the age at your death becomes your age forever and ever. Imagine you die in your forties and your spouse, who you look forward to reuniting with, dies in their nineties. See the problem?

These stories tell of a young man taught to be a criminal by his father; a man who tells lies to make his life seem better than it is and his interaction with a little neglected boy; an alcoholic who has a brief relationship with a pocket dog, which he calls a rat dog, and its owner, and his disappointed rich grandma who tries to have an intervention to sober him up.

More stories tell of a man down on his luck who can't afford his apartment and his encounter with his strange, creepy landlord; a man who is constantly pestered by two missionaries from the church he had left many years ago, until it comes to a deadly end; a spirit who enters a young man's body, living there until eventually the two of them rise and enter Heaven; a young Mormon woman, a marriage proposal, and how gulls help her decide what to do. And one of my favorite stories was about

a young woman, her father, a “buried treasure,” and a diviner who promised to find that treasure.

I’ve always thought that writing a book of stories is like writing several little books and putting them together in a satisfying way, which is what local writer Shawn Vestal has done. He was raised in the Mormon faith and some of its teachings come through in his stories. These stories don’t have “Hallmark” endings. They are true to life about people who have real problems and live their lives the best they can. It’s an interesting book that keeps the reader engaged and wanting to read the next story.



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