

This Side of the Divide: New Lore of the American West

Baobab Press, Editor

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The twenty-three fabulist and fantasy stories collected in *This Side of the Divide* involve cowboys, the desert, coyotes, and arroyos; they remake old legends through uncommon lore in a gesture that counters cultural erasure.

In the opening story, Washington disability policy expert Day Al-Mohamed weaves a Middle Eastern fable into the Sonoran Desert. Famed science fiction writer and translator Ken Liu inserts Chinese exclusion history into the gold-mining landscape of the American West. Stylistic prose marks such tales. Others dip into horror, as with Tessa Fontaine's dark feminist take on matricide and a matriarchal beast, "Crepuscular." And surreal happenings abound: crows talk in Alyson Hagy's "Broken Crow," and humans turn into rats in a Kafkaesque manner in Mexican dystopian writer Yuri Herrera's "The Objects." In Karen An-hwei Lee's "Kafka-san and the Happiness Machine," there's a psychedelic exchange between a Japanese interpreter and Kafka in Los Angeles; they discuss the making of a movie.

The anthology's stand-out stories pack the emotional punch of a novel. Kathleen McNamara's prizewinning "Pyrosome" blends teenage love and family dysfunction into a story with witches, a mythological sea creature, and climate disaster that's set in small-town Arizona. Elsewhere, Benjamin Percy explores the blooming bromance between an Iraqi veteran and a lonely man whose job is to flush out fire hydrants. But the anthology's spirit is most captured by the idea of ghosts and luck. Dominique Dickey's "There Are Ghosts Here" concerns the disappearance of a brother, a tragedy that haunts the living, while in Willy Vlautin's "Run," a young man gambles on his run of luck while starting a new life.

Seeding new ideas into the legendary American West, the atmospheric short story anthology *This Side of the Divide* is a breath of fresh air.

ELAINE CHIEW (January / February 2023)

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