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Grant Tracey. *Parallel Lines and the Hockey Universe*. Clifton, Va.: Pocol Press, 2003. 198 pp. \$12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-929763-13-9.

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There is a dictum about short stories: a gun that appears in the opening paragraph should always be fired before the story ends. In other words, make best use of the space and waste no words. I'm afraid Tracey falls down in this aspect. Not that the book has no merit for it does possess some good to excellent passages. Tracey's detailed descriptions of hockey's arcane convolutions bespeak a familiarity with the sport—trouble is there is too much of it. In his tales of the semi-pro hockey team the cast of characters overwhelms the reader. There are Sully and Chats and Deaner and Scottie and Chris and others crowding out our perception of the scenes. Playing throughout the character-crowded stories is the constant reference to rock or similar music that like real life seems endless and overbearing. I'm not sure what the purpose is.

The fact that the leading theme throughout the stories is the Macedonian family named Traicheff (complete with several words of Macedonian) lends an aura of reality to the tales but also, I suspect, means the bases of the accounts are childhood or teen-age incidents that did actually happen. This leads one to the notion that these thinly disguised incidents mean more to the author than to the reader. Take, for example, the story entitled "Break and Enter" wherein a drunk tradesman breaks into the small mom-and-pop store of the Traicheff's and

he is found there with his tool belt, semi-conscious on the floor. The police are called but the elder Traicheff, after exchanging hockey small talk about the Leafs, refuses to press charges. That's the story. If there is a moral or a hidden meaning it remains obscure.

Tracey is obviously a hockey buff and his knowledge of the game is considerably wider than that of an average fan—anyone who realizes how a goalie can set up his defensive angles to minimize the shooter's target by employing sight lines in his home arena knows the game well. Is this enough to hold the reader? It could well be for some, but I suspect it won't be enough for most.

Having said all the above, I think this book of short stories is not without merit. There is a grittiness about the stories that as unsophisticated and simple as they are, creates an appeal, a harkening to a simpler time and a simpler life. And certainly the teen-aged angst is well presented in several of the tales. If I were grading this book it would get a 6/10.

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