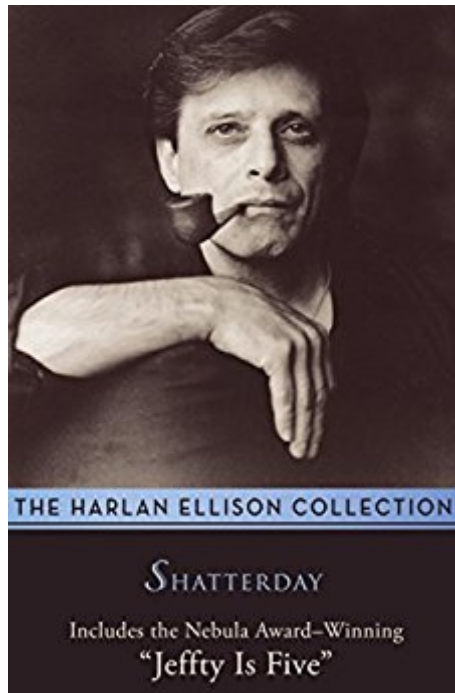




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Shatterday: Stories



Synopsis

“One of the great living American short story writers” exposes the darkness of the human heart in these speculative tales of terror and tragedy (The Washington Post Book World). A five-year-old boy never ages, living as an immortal in a past that no longer exists while the world encroaches upon his innocence, in the Hugo and Nebula Award-winning “Jeffty is Five.” An alien attack leaves Earth on the brink of Armageddon, as humans find themselves unable to resist the sexual allure of their invaders in “How’s the Night Life on Cissalda?” In the Nebula Award-nominated “Shatterday” (subsequently adapted into the pilot episode of the second Twilight Zone series), a man fights for his life against a relentless enemy who knows his darkest secrets—his own doppelganger. In these and other thought-provoking stories, legendary author Harlan Ellison dissects the primal fears and inherent frailties common to all people and gives voice to the thoughts and feelings human beings bury deep within their souls. Unflinching and unapologetic, Ellison depicts men and women in all their ugliness and beauty, and humanity in all its fury and glory. Stories include “Introduction: Mortal Dreads,” “Jeffty Is Five,” “How’s the Night Life on Cissalda?,” “Flop Sweat,” “Would You Do it For a Penny?” (written in collaboration with Haskell Barkin), “The Man Who Was Heavily Into Revenge,” “Shoppe Keeper,” “All the Lies That Are My Life,” “Django,” “Count the Clock That Tells the Time,” “Alive and Well on a Friendless Voyage,” “All the Birds Come Home to Roost,” “Opium,” “The Other Eye of Polyphemus,” “The Executioner of the Malformed Children,” and “Shatterday.”

Book Information

File Size: 3131 KB

Print Length: 300 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media; 3rd edition (April 1, 2014)

Publication Date: April 1, 2014

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00J90EMEW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #213,111 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #235

in Kindle Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Short Stories #264 in Kindle Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Horror > Anthologies #292 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Horror > Short Stories

Customer Reviews

Harlan Ellison collections are often hit or miss with me, and this one was no different. It contains a few of his best works, and then some that just did not work. On the whole, though, this reflects a mature author operating at the peak of his popularity and talent spanning several genres. Jeffty is Five of the Five - Winner of the 1978 Hugo and Nebula awards. This is my favorite Harlan Ellison story. Jeffty is a boy who never ages and can connect with the past in a special way. This subtle sophisticated tale manages to be an elegy to pop culture of the 1940s, rumination on the loss of innocence caused by Growing Up, and an examination of whether technical progress costs us our humanity. Ironically, the "Now" of the story is the late 1960s juxtaposed to the "Then" of the story which was the 1940s. Now that the 1960s themselves have faded into the history books, this story may have new layers of resonance for readers. How does the Night Life on Cissalda? A comedic take on alien sex that veers into social satire. A lot of the pop culture references are dated (I had to google Anita Bryant, whom I never heard of.) Kij Johnson recently covered much the same territory in her much better story "Spar". Flop Sweat A very effective horror story about the Hillside Strangler, a radio call-in talk show host, and the advent of the Apocalypse. It was probably these kinds of stories that influenced a young Stephen King, who has written at length about his admiration for HE. Would You Do It for a Penny? (with Haskell Barkin) -- My 2nd favorite story in the book. Sure, it might be a tad sexist and misogynistic, but it is funny, and let's face it, truthful. We have all known guys like Great White Hunter Aldo who would endure any humiliation,

spare no expense, and leave no lie untold in the pursuit of getting laid. *The Man Who Was Heavily Into Revenge* -- A paper-thin but still entertaining concept story that imagines all of humanity's pain and frustration acts like a giant electric current that can flare up and strike, uncontrolled, anywhere in the world, at any time. The consequences are not always to our liking. *Shopper Keeper* -- Ellison has written several magic shop stories. This one is brimming with ideas, but it struggles under the weight of too many subplots. The shop owner is revealed to be a man from the future with God-like powers of creation; he travels through time to create significant changes in history in order to siphon the entropic energy created by those events. Along the way, he argues with his superiors about what constitutes creation of art, and, oh yes, there is a convoluted plan to free his girlfriend from cryogenic sleep. *It's Better Than a Djinn, No Chaser* -- but Ellison's real magic shop masterpiece is *Incognita, Inc.* *All the Lies That Are My Life* -- Nominated for the 1981 Hugo Award-Best Novella. Ellison is clearly writing about himself in the character of Jimmy Crowstairs, and this narrative focuses on the aftermath of his death and the reading of his last will and testament. Ellison seems to be having some fun at his own expense, describing the very important people who will attend his funeral and recounting various affairs with beautiful women. He is also trying to make some important statements about the ability of art to outlast its creator and the potentially damaging effects of trying to manipulate close personal friendships after one's death. The core of the story is this question: What is the single great lie at the center of Jimmy's life that defines his entire existence? We are never given a straight-up answer, but several possibilities are openly hinted at. *Django* -- Another overwrought dark fable about art. (There's at least one in every Ellison book!) This one seems to imply Great Art is more important than people's lives, and that any behavior no matter how selfish is justified in pursuit of it. *Count the Clock That Tells the Time* -- Another concept tale: Imagine the laws of entropy act to conserve wasted time to balance out diffused matter. People who waste their whole lives can get stuck in a sort of gray Limbo world wandering through the afterimages of great historical events. *In the Fourth Year of the War* -- A nasty little psychological suspense story that asks if anyone ever really moves past the angers of their childhood. *Alive and Well and on a Friendless Voyage* -- Experimental writing that reminded me of what Ellison had been writing in the mid-1960s. At first I did not understand it, but on a second pass I realized it could be read as an allegory of Jesus. The main character Moth goes from person to person on a space shift assuming their pain and bad deeds upon himself. Once the other passengers disembark, he takes their sins into oblivion with him. *All the Birds Come Home to Roost*

• A man finds that all the women he's ever slept with begin to drift back into his life, one by one in reverse order, so that he is somehow working his way backwards towards the first sour romantic relationship that has haunted him his whole life. It ended it too soon, right before the expected clash. Ellison provides an introduction about the origins of the story that is better than the story itself. • A fanciful piece of absurdist fiction. Modern man is so used to tuning out reality with television, fast food, cheap sex, etc., so the Real World fights back by transforming itself into a fantasy land to make it itself more appealing. • A badly written piece of melodrama about a man who believes he always gives to others and never takes care of his own needs. Ellison tackled this exact same theme years before in "Like A Dull Knife" • The Executioner of the Malformed Children- Again, Ellison tackles a theme from his early stories • people with special telepathic gifts are shunned and mistreated by those in power. The title is the best thing about this attempt. • A quirky science fiction tale that was later adapted for Twilight Zone. One of the better stories in this collection.

"Jeffty is Five" - made me feel stupid because I didn't understand why everyone thinks it's awesome. I was a bit bored by it. "How's the Night Life on Cissalda?" is shallowly brilliant. And not nearly as implausible as it should be. On the other hand, I'd rather die happy than in a nuclear winter... "Flop Sweat" Brilliant. Creepy, awful, and just bloody brilliant. I enjoy it even more picturing Howard Stern as the host. "Would You Do It For A Penny" - I'm starting to think that I don't get Harlan Ellison (this is the first of his writings I've read) because I hated this story. I didn't find it even a little funny; the characters were reprehensible and the overall tone was desperate and sad. "The Man Who Was Heavily Into Revenge" - reminiscent of Thurber and/or O'Henry, without the charm. "Shoppe Keeper" I liked the idea that inspired the story, and the story wasn't bad til the end. I keep hoping these will get better, but I'm starting to lose hope... "All the Lies That Are My Life" - What a depressing rumination on the nature of friendship and career rivalry. "Django" - fantasy tribute that could have been clearer... "Count the Clock That Tells the Time" - It was rough going at first, but I ended up liking it without knowing quite why I liked it... "In the Fourth Year of the War" - short, simple, brilliant tale about our past coming back to haunt us (and some scary insight on how the mild-mannered guy next door becomes a Nancy Grace episode) "Alive and Well and On a Friendless Voyage" - catharsis at the end of life - heavy handed and not that interesting (and plots from it are either recycled from other stories in the collection or into other stories in the collection). "All the Birds Come Home to Roost" - a vanity tale for the author. Might have been better

without Ellison's intro? Of course, the same can be said of pretty much the whole book. "Opium" - meh. Shallow, pointless, and utterly nonsensical at the end. "The Other Eye of Polyphemus" - A morality tale on the perils of being too selfless. "The Executioner of the Malformed Children" - easy to comprehend if you've read even one X-Men story arc. "Shatterday" - By far the best story in the book, dark and hopeful all at the same time.

Shatterday as of writing this review is my one and only trip into world of Harlan Ellison. This collection is worth the money for Shatterday and Jefty is Five alone. Everything else in this collection is great too, with Ellison offering up surreal, damn near ethereal scenarios and wording that leaves you feeling stranger than before you first stepped in. Some of the stories are bitter sweet and comical, while others (Shatterday) have such a great, dark pacing that keeps you turning the pages as fast as you can. The most memorable moment for me personally was the ending to Jefty is Five. It wasn't just the fact that it leaves you breathless but it still sticks with me even now as I write this. Wondering myself, can someone please tell me? Those final words echoing through my head at different moments of the day. I want to give this 5 stars and after a dive into some more of Ellison's writing I may bump the rating up. Bottom line, Harlan Ellison isn't just a great science fiction writer, he's a great writer period and a good bit of the selection within Shatterday showcases his talent.

Excellent stories although a little dated. I read this book thirty three years ago, and because of personal issues wanted to re-read it. These are good, well written stories about the human psyche. How we are not the only ones suffering the frailties of life. Which is true, however we are the only ones experiencing our problems so in that aspect we are very alone. Harlan Ellison is a great writer, I highly recommend him.

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