



The Best American Noir of the Century

James Ellroy (Editor) , Otto Penzler (Editor)

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In his introduction to the *The Best American Noir of the Century*, James Ellroy writes, “noir is the most scrutinized offshoot of the hard-boiled school of fiction. It’s the long drop off the short pier and the wrong man and the wrong woman in perfect misalliance. It’s the nightmare of flawed souls with big dreams and the precise how and why of the all-time sure thing that goes bad.” Offering the best examples of literary sure things gone bad, this collection ensures that nowhere else can readers find a darker, more thorough distillation of American noir fiction.

James Ellroy and Otto Penzler, series editor of the annual *The Best American Mystery Stories*, mined one hundred years of writing—1910–2010—to find this treasure trove of thirty-nine stories. From noir’s twenties-era infancy come gems like James M. Cain’s “Pastorale,” and its post-war heyday boasts giants like Mickey Spillane and Evan Hunter. Packing an undeniable punch, diverse contemporary incarnations include Elmore Leonard, Patricia Highsmith, Joyce Carol Oates, Dennis Lehane, and William Gay, with many page-turners appearing in the last decade.

The Best American Noir of the Century Details

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Download and Read Free Online The Best American Noir of the Century James Ellroy (Editor) , Otto Penzler (Editor)

From Reader Review The Best American Noir of the Century for online ebook

Warren Stalley says

The Best American Noir of the Century collects together a wide range of crime authors from the U.S. and is a great way to find interesting writers who you may not have come across before. Each story is preceded by a brief yet informative introduction to the author. All the pieces were interesting in one way or another but some of my personal favourites were as follows:

Nothing To Worry About – Day Keene

A teenage boy thinks he's got away with murder but his homicidal tendencies may yet give him away. A slice of crime fiction from the Nineteen Forties era.

Man In The Dark – Howard Browne

A distraught husband tries to piece together the mystery of his wife's disappearance and find out just who is the dead body in his wife's burnt out car wreck? An engrossing mystery story from an author who was new to me.

The Lady Says Die! – Mickey Spillane

A wall street dealer tells the story of his friends' demise to a police detective in a short but powerful piece of work from the legendary Mr Spillane. This is no Mike Hammer but still a solid enticing story.

Professional Man – David Goodis

Freddy Lamb is a lift attendant by day and hitman by night. He works for the owner of The Yellow Cat nightclub Herman Charn but his boss has eyes for Freddy's girlfriend Pearl. This can only lead to trouble for the professional man. A riveting and emotional story plus a stand out piece in this collection from one of the truly great noir writers David Goodis.

The Last Spin – Evan Hunter

Two rival gang members try to settle a dispute over a tense game of Russian roulette in this powerful and harrowing tale that really delivers a punch. A true American classic.

Slowly, Slowly In The Wind – Patricia Highsmith

A retired businessman moves to the country for the sake of his health but ends up fighting with a local land owner in this impressive and chilling tale from a superb author.

Iris – Stephen Greenleaf

A travelling businessman thinks he's picking up a quirky hitchhiker called Iris but ends up holding the baby and a whole lot more in this engrossing and hypnotic piece with a killer ending. Bleak just like good noir should be.

A Ticket Out – Brendan Dubois

Brad and Monroe two teenage boys dream of going to college and escaping/leaving their small town of Boston Falls. But the need for money and a dangerous robbery leave one of the boys scarred for life in this moving, evocative story.

Since I Don't Have You – James Ellroy

A fixer who works for both Howard Hughes and gangster Mickey Cohen is tasked with tracking down a mysterious girl who both his bosses want back. But who is smarter the dame with the brains or the fixer in the mix? Written in a highly stylised way this is a tough talking and gripping crime piece from a well known author.

Texas City, 1947 - James Lee Burke

A young boy and his siblings suffer poverty and cruelty from their father's girlfriend in this evocative and moving story that squeezes the heart and stays with you long after finishing. Truly memorable.

Mefisto In Onyx – Harlan Ellison

A man with psychic powers finds himself face to face with a death row serial killer but did the prisoner really commit the hideous crimes? A lengthy mystery story but worth sticking with for the killer payoff.

Out There in the Darkness - Ed Gorman

Four friends who have a regular poker night capture an intruder and suffer the consequences of rough justice in this gripping, involving story from the modern age of crime.

Hot Springs - James Crumley

Benbow and Mona Sue, a couple on the run hide out in a mountain lodge at Hidden Springs Canyon. Even with a familiar noir plot the talented writer James Crumley creates a rich and colourful tale that heads to a dark and graphic conclusion.

The Weekender - Jeffery Deaver

On the run from a drugstore armed robbery two criminals Jack Prescott and Joe Roy Toth hideout in a remote town called Winchester. They have a hostage Randall Weller who tries to plea for his freedom and life in a compelling story with a true noir kick in the guts ending. Great work from a well known author.

Like a Bone in the Throat - Lawrence Block

William Croydon, a killer on death row strikes up an unlikely friendship with Paul Dandridge, the brother of a young woman Croydon murdered. But who is kidding who in this riveting slice of gritty crime drama with a twisted ending.

Crack - James W. Hall

A University teacher living near Bilbao, Spain discovers a crack in the wall between his home and his neighbours, so begins a downward spiral of voyeurism, obsession and doom as he spies on the young girl next door. A short yet hypnotic piece that stays long in the memory.

Running Out of Dog - Dennis Lehane

In the small Southern town of Eden a dangerous equation of people exists – Elgin, his partner Shelley Briggs, his girlfriend Jewel Lut, her husband Perkin Lut and Elgin's odd friend Blue. What follows is a mixture of friendship, love, lust and madness superbly told by Dennis Lehane. You can feel the dust at the back of your throat with this story, another stand out piece in this collection.

Midnight Emissions - F. X. Toole

A masculine story of promising heavyweight boxer Kenny Coyle and the trainers and business people around him. Full of sweat, grit and greed this is a lengthy developed story full of realistic details yet still noir at its core.

When the Women come Out to Dance - Elmore Leonard

Lourdes is hired as a personal maid to Mrs Mahmood, soon after they're talking about murder. Events lead to a dark conclusion in this classic smooth piece of storytelling from one of the masters of crime fiction.

Controlled Burn - Scott Wolven

Bill Allen is hiding out after an armed robbery that went wrong. While working at a remote woodlot he goes on a job to burn some fields then disappears on the run again in a poetic reflection of one man's troubled life on the run.

What She Offered - Thomas H. Cook

An author meets Victoria, a strange woman in a bar with an offer that's both unusual and enticing to him in this original story.

Her Lord and Master - Andrew Klavan

Susan and Jim are having a masochistic relationship that leads them to dark things in this original yet highly controversial and thought provoking story.

Stab - Chris Adrian

Someone is murdering small animals in the quiet neighbourhood of Severna Forest. Calvin, a young boy who mourns the loss of his identical twin discovers who is behind the stabbings but can he stop them? A truly haunting tale of the loss of childhood innocence and mortality.

The Hoarder - Bradford Morrow

In Bayside Park a young man gets a job at a rundown miniature golf course. As he begins spying on the players he becomes obsessed with Penny, his brother's girlfriend which leads to a heart of darkness in this hypnotic and poetic story of desire.

Missing the Morning Bus - Lorenzo Carcaterra

A husband uses his weekly poker evening to try to find out which of his card buddies is responsible for the death of his wife in this friendship story with a surprising twist in the tale.

To summarise you may not like all the stories contained within *The Best American Noir of the Century* but you're sure to find something that will spark your interest among the wide variety of authors featured in the book. Enjoy.

Mariana says

En esta antología conformada por diez relatos, encontramos las plumas de los autores estadounidenses más reconocidos dentro del género negro. Cada una de las historias contenidas en este libro, nos presentan personajes sórdidos, corrompidos, perseguidos por el pasado y dispuestos a matar con tal de obtener una venganza, dinero o incluso amor.

La calidad de todos los relatos es buena, sin embargo, para mi existieron tres que sobresalieron: "Lenta, lentamente al viento" de Patricia Highsmith, "Infiel" de Joyce Carol Oates y "Como un hueso en la garganta" de Lawrence Block.

Reseña completa: <https://vikingalectora.wordpress.com/...>

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

This book is wrongly named. It claims to contain the best American noir of the century - but which century is that? The collection covers the years 1923 to 2007, which is 84 years from two different centuries. Also, a lot of the best American noir is found in novel form. So this book should really have been called 'The Best American Noir Short Stories from an 84-year period' except that doesn't have the same ring, does it?

Ah well. This will be another of those story-by-story reviews that I keep updating until I finish the book in question. So here goes.

Todd Robbins - 'Spurs': Apparently this is the story that inspired the movie 'Freaks', which I haven't seen and would like too. Anyway, this is a dark little tale that is told in an initially whimsical style that, together with the French travelling-entertainers setting reminded me of Paul Gallico's *Love Of Seven Dolls* - but boy, did this story ever choose to travel down a much, much darker route. There's a great scene where all the freaks are at a party, and each of them is preening, thinking he or she is the superfreak, the one that draws the crowds in at their shows, and then someone gets mad at someone else and all their seething resentment of each other erupts in one big brawl. No community among freaks, then, and why should there be, they're all dependent upon what little income they can generate from the straights, so they're naturally pitted against each other. That's hellish. Even more hellish is the fate that awaits the character that you initially fancy will come out of this pretty well. Very dark and effective stuff.

James M. Cain - 'Pastorale': Very different from the urban noir he would become famous for, but this little rural sonata transforms quite rapidly into a funeral march that's as grim and bitter as anything he wrote later on. The tone of voice is a bit of a surprise - I've read Ring Lardner and I never really warmed up to that sort of hick-dialect storytelling - but for once it goes really well with the story of a backwoods loser who just doesn't know when to keep his mouth shut. It's a nice curiosity, but Cain would go on to do better stuff.

Steve Fisher - 'You'll Always Remember Me': This is a tale about a very young psychopath. It's effective, but that animal cruelty scene really got under my skin. Your mileage will vary of course, but I work with abandoned and injured kittens a lot and even as a piece of fiction that one particular scene just made me feel sick. Other than that, this story is nothing especially new and not exceptionally well-written. Jim Thompson could have really run with this material, if he didn't happen to run it into the ground.

Abhinav says

I read this compilation as part of the 387 Short Story Challenge - one story a day for the past month or so. There are about 30 out of these 35 stories I really liked, but only a handful of them make the amazing grade.

So after much thought, I'm not going to be tempted into rating it five stars. Given how dark & depressing these stories can be, I'm not gonna take this up even for selective reading anytime soon. That being said, this is not to be missed at any cost by fans of crime fiction & noir.

James Thane says

James Ellroy and Otto Penzler have collected in this volume a large number of very dark crime stories spanning the years from 1910 to 2010. Included are stories by a number of very familiar writers like Mickey Spillane, Gil Brewer, James M. Cain, Jim Thompson, James Ellroy, Lawrence Block, and Elmore Leonard. There are also works by a number of lesser-known writers, but the stories are uniformly good and most of them won awards of one kind or another.

My personal favorites are probably James Crumley's "Hot Springs;" Leonard's "When the Women Come Out to Dance;" and James Lee Burke's, "Texas City, 1947." But fans of noir fiction will find a lot of stories here that will keep them staying up late at night to read "just one more."

Jeanne says

Other reviews of this collection often debated if all the stories selected for this book can truly be called "noir". Since I struggle to even pronounce "noir" correctly, I will avoid that debate completely. These stories were dark and gritty and could I read no more than one or two a week often accompanied by a glass of wine for the nerves. Everyone will have their own favorites and their own dogs. I jumped around throughout the collection rather than reading in chronicle order but I found myself struggling through later selections (post 2000) with the exception of the final story, Lorenzo Carcaterra's "Missing the Morning Bus" which still has me a bit creeped out even as I write this review. I have walked away with a list of new authors and books added to my "to read" list. I ended with a four star overall rating but I highly recommend that anyone interested in this genre (however you define it) pick up this collection and find your own favorites.

Greg says

BOOK 103 - Mid-Century North American Crime Readathon - Round 3

"The Homecoming" is my focus from this collection, and it's an important work for many reasons.

First, it's post-war 1946. Second, Otto Penzler, editor of the entire collection, tells us that Dorothy Hughes is the first female "to fall squarely in the hard-boiled school." This story, Penzler goes on to say, first appeared in "Murder Calvacade", the first 'Writers of America' crime anthology. And third, the POV is not from a man returning from war (as expected), wounded in many ways, but the narrator is a man who stayed at home, never having a clue as to the torment of that conflict.

HOOK=2 stars: "It was a dark night, a small wind night, the night on which evil things could happen, might happen," opens the story. The cliched opening (of "it was a dark and stormy night" fame) was barely good enough to keep me reading.

PACE=3: Just right for this short story.

PLOT=4: One wonders how many times this plot played out post-WW2: A man is jealous his girl has left him for the home-town returning war hero and he walks to her house with a gun. (But as I said, this story has been told many times by the hero, but not by the man who stayed at home.) Who does he want to kill? Does he even understand killing, as does the war hero? Does he really care anything about the girl, or is it all about his own ego? The psychological complexity for readers is deep as we've known this story all our lives, many of us have even seen a 1960s film called "The Homecoming", similar in theme but I don't believe based on this short.

CHARACTERS=3: Benny, the jilted boyfriend, is overcome with jealousy. His ex-girl, Nan, is "such a little

thing" and is now paired with Jim, who is not only a war hero, but had been the most popular guy in high school (naturally, a second cliché comes into play).

ATMOSPHERE/PLACE = 5: The highlight of this short. "Brown leaves shriveled and fallen, blown in small worldpools by the small wind." Is Hughes referring to the global deaths, of fallen men perishing in unknown places? Does "Warped elm bows scraping together in lonely nakedness.." refer to the upcoming cataclysmic meeting of Benny and Jim? And Benny, on his walk to Nan's: "...she and Jim would be sitting on the couch, sitting close together so they'd both avoid the place where the couch sagged. Her (Nan's) brother, the one in the navy, had busted it when he was a kid." Jan is surrounded and impacted by 3 men: the brother still at war, Jim, and Benny. This atmosphere/perspective is coming from Dorothy Hughes as the unwilling, innocent girl caught up in a war that has returned home, and that's what makes this a stand out example of this story.

SUMMARY: 3.2 for great atmosphere of an oft-told story.

"In a Dark Place" - 1947 - 3.6

"The Homecoming" - 1946 - 3.2

Dorothy Hughes average rating - 3.4

Aaron Poorman says

I'm back from my blogging hiatus now that another semester has passed. How long this return will last before I'm pulled entirely back into my studies I can't be sure. Still, it is nice to have time for reading for fun again. The Best American Noir of the Century is a collection compiled by James Ellroy and Otto Penzler. It's a massive book with nearly forty stories, and stretches as far back as 1923 (Tom Robbins' "Spurs" and as recently as 2007 (Lorenzo Carcaterra's "Missing The Morning Bus") for it's material. When a collection claims to be the best of the year, I approach it with what can only be described as modest expectations. If the time period expands to larger proportions, such as decades or more my skepticism and hopes rise in rather unequal amounts. Usually in favor of the former, seeing as I am a bit cynical, even around the holidays. Luckily I was pleasantly surprised again and again while reading these stories.

Noir, in literary terms can seem at times to be simple and complex when it comes to classification. It started as a sub-genre within mystery fiction which has since broadened its scope and as such has grown to include a wider array of writing. Perhaps the easiest way to explain noir to those unfamiliar with it, might be to say the stories are well, black. From the settings to the plot lines and characters there is a ever present sense of darkness. Murder happens more often than not in noir fiction. There are ill-fated love affairs, of standard and triangle the variety. There are heists gone right, or wrong, and sometimes there are just psychopaths - who kill, just to kill. What makes almost any character interesting in any genre, is the depth and complexity of their flaws. That, for me, is what makes noir so fun to read. The protagonists aren't who you'd always expect. They are as flawed as anyone and might be called bad guys depending on how one chooses to look at it. Personally I've always been drawn to anti-heroes and so with this collection I found a lot to appreciate.

I've read countless collections and anthologies throughout the years - but never, and I mean never, have I been introduced to so many interesting authors as I have with this. Many of those authors are well-known and so I knew of them going in, but still hadn't read any of their work. This short list includes James Ellroy, who helped compile the volume and is regarded as one of America's finest crime writers. (L.A. Confidential, The Black Dalia) Patricia Highsmith (The Talented Mr. Ripley) is another prime example. I'd been intending to check her out ever since I read and reviewed Thieves of Manhattan - the story she wrote in this case was actually inspired by a Ronald Regan quote, scary right? "Slowly, Slowly in the Wind" is just so memorable and creepy that I had to reference it by name. (it is also the title to a short story collection by Highsmith) Lastly among these well known but, new to me writers was Dennis Lehane (Mystic River, Gone

Baby Gone, Shutter Island) You may have noticed by now that all the larger works I've mentioned were made into films, some with greater success than others. But that brings up another intriguing fact about this collection in that many of the stories included have been made into films themselves. Oftentimes re-branded with new names such as the aforementioned opener "Spurs" which was adapted way back in the black and white era into the film Freaks (1932). An example of one story that kept the original title when it was adapted would be MacKinly Kantor's Gun Crazy (1950). I plan on trying to track down a number of these movies sometime "Spurs" with it's midget, murder, anti-hero was one of my favorites from the lot. As for what was my absolute favorite story, right now, I am leaning toward Tom Franklin's "Poachers". I'll leave the details to those curious enough to actually check out the book, as it is one of the longer works included. But what I will say that setting, and the characters are just fantastic. I've always thought there was something extra unsettling about the south, this story and a few others selected only prove that point.

I'm tempted to give more plot specifics to certain stories, but I think that to any serious reader there is something terribly exciting about not being told everything. There is something special in discovering these kinds of stories, and writers on your own so I will leave that reward for you. To readers looking for something new I strongly recommend giving this a try. Nearly every story is a gem. Maybe not emeralds or sapphires but surely obsidian - black, flawed and still beautiful. Stories of covetous, murderous dreamers who aim for stars because anything less would be inhuman ; or perhaps un-American. The genre, and American talent, could scarcely be better represented than they are in The Best American Noir of the Century.

* Complete version w/ song can be read and heard on my blog

<http://subliminalmaybe.blogspot.com/>

Lou says

Spurs by Tod Robbins

A circus story from 1930s a tale of a small man, part of the freak show side the circus, with a big heart for a beautiful horseback rider. A match not possibly made in heaven as the bride to be has other plans for her new husband. Her heart is cold for him but warm for wealth, she plots and advises of her plans to a different person she wishes to be married to in the future also a performer in their circus. The small man turns out to be harder to crack than she thought and she finds the tables have turned.

You can only think that she is to blame in the end due to her own evil plan.

Very good story filled with wonderful characters and setting with a noir theme. I loved how he twisted the story with the bizarre.

This story was the basis for a classic noir film Freaks in 1932.

Pastorale by James M. Cain

Traditional noir story in the style of which the author James Cain is known for.

Most of his stories involve a man and woman in love and deceit.

In this story, his first published story, he has a woman who wants out of a marriage and plots with her lover a deadly end to her husband's life. They get help from an ex-con her lover knows, which was not a good idea. The secret must not get out on who is the killer.

Misfits, affairs and murder written by one of the master writers of noir literature James M. Cain.

Gun crazy by Mackinlay Kantor

Story of Young boys and fascination with guns at young ages of six upwards. One boy grows up to be a gun crazy gunslinger and bank robber Nelson Tare.

He also becomes a stunt shooter and teams up with a female counterpart and together in love they rob from banks and arson the run a wanted duo.

One lesson they learn is that their love of the gun went too far and left them with a grim ending.

Nice noir story that tells how a group of friends are on one occasion children and then another adults changed, some law abiding citizens and one other a ruthless wanted man.

A good read of the collection.

This was the basis for a movie of the same name and the screenplay was written by this author also.

Nothing To Worry About by Day Keene

Noir killing off the wife story. A assistant attorney sees his heavy drinking wife as an obstacle for him making to the top as a senator.

This short story walks you through the killing of her in pitch darkness of a room. There's only one thing there is something to worry about. A good one to read.

"The art of killing, the three Ms, means, method, motive had changed little in the known history of man. To take a life, one still had to shoot, knife, drown, strike, strangle, or poison the party of the unwanted part. And, as with the most basic refinements to the art of living, the first known method of murder used- that of striking the party to be removed with whatever object came first to hand-was still the most difficult of detection, providing of course that the party who did the striking could maintain a reasonable plea of being elsewhere at the time."

The Homecoming by Dorothy B. Hughes

This author was the first female to fall squarely in the hard-boiled school.

This is a short tight psychological and visceral story.

Jealousy, love and murder.

One man Benny finds a friend Jim, since college days, a threat he is noticed and Benny is not. He went off to war and received medals where our murderer did his service on the home ground. While the Jim the top man was away in war he and Nan got on well and he loved her. Jim returns and enters the welcoming arms of Nan. Benny hates Jim for taking his woman and everything about him, murder is running in his veins. The story takes you through Benny's removal of Jim but accidents do happen in the cause of things.

Nice little treat it opens with a great sentence.

"It was a dark night, a small-wind night, the night on which evil things could happen, might happen."

Also in the story..

"He no longer feared the sound and shadow behind him.

There was no terror as bad as the hurt in his head and his heart.

As he moved on without direction he saw through the mist the pinprick of green in the night. He knew then where he was going, where he must go. The tears ran down his cheeks into his mouth. They tasted like blood."

The Lady Says Die! By Mike Spillane

Two rival businessmen friends. One guy who wants everything the other has his eyes on ends up died, suicide. The living one becomes suspected but he's far from plunging the man to his death. He only guilty of playing with the dead mans ego.

Another good little noir story from an author who is more known for penning novels than short stories.

The Gesture by Gil Brewer

A husband and wife live in a remote location. They have a guest staying over and the husband becomes extremely jealous of this younger man to the extent that he plans to kill him. He stumbles upon letter written by the guest that addresses their married life that reflection from a third party changes his whole intentions.

Surprising twist to this noir short.

The Last Spin by Evan Hunter

A shocking little noir short of two young gang members round a table settling a score with a smith and wesson .38 police special.

The modus operandi is Russian Roulette.

A good story i was hoping they quit the spinning and made friends. Who will it bulket fall on? Tigo or Danny?

"Danny slapped the cylinder with his left hand. The cylinder whirled, whirled, and then stopped. Slowly, Danny put the gun to his head. He wanted to close his eyes, but he didnt dare. Tigo, the enemy, was watching him. He returned Tigo's stare, and then over the roar of his blood he heard the empty click. Hastily, he put the gun down on the table."

Forever After by Jim Thompson

Another wife in an affair and killing off the husband story. This one about double indemnity. Jim Thompson characters and writing, similar story to that of James m cain's works.

Poor woman he does add his own turn of events to the tale.

Great little Thompson noir treat.

The Dripping by David Morrell

Before he published First Blood and Creepers he published this. This was his first published story, a story of suspense and horror.

A man returns home to find dire circumstances, blood and more blood. Something tells you he is treading

familiar ground *deja vu*.

A real good short story, a pleasant surprise of macabre of the most twisted kind.

"Perhaps he is still in the house, waiting for me.

To the hollow sickness in my stomach now comes fear, hot, pulsing, and i am frantic before i realize what i am doing- grabbing the spare cane my mother always keeps by her bed, flicking on the light in her room, throwing open the closet door and striking in with the cane. Viciously, sounds coming from my throat, the can flailing among the faded dresses.

No one. Under the bed. No one. Behind the door. No one."

Michael says

It is hard to review a collection of short stories (do you rate based on the average ratings of all the stories or how you felt of the book as a whole?). This collection of Noir short stories, is well worth reading for all Noir and Hard-Boiled fans. Full of grittiness, vengeance, murder and macabre; I loved every minute of this book.

Individual Breakdown of the Short Stories

Spurs by Tod Robbins (1923) -- 3/5

Pastorale by James M. Cain (1928) -- 4/5

You'll Always Remember Me by Steve Fisher (1938) -- 5/5

Gun Crazy by Mackinlay Kantor (1940) -- 4/5

Nothing to Worry About by Day Keene (1945) -- 5/5

The Homecoming by Dorothy B. Hughes (1946) -- 3/5

Man in the Dark by Howard Browne (1952) -- 5/5

The Lady Says Die! by Mickey Spillane (1953) -- 4/5

Professional Man by David Goodis (1953) -- 5/5

The Gesture by Gil Brewer (1956) -- 3/5

The Last Spin by Evan Hunter (1956) -- 4/5

Forever After by Jim Thompson (1960) -- 3/5

For the Rest of Her Life by Cornell Woulrich (1968) -- 4/5

The Dripping by David Morrell (1972) -- 4/5

Slowly, Slowly in the Wind by Patricia Highsmith (1979) -- 5/5

Iris by Stephen Greenleaf (1984) -- 4/5

A Ticket Out by Brendan Dubois (1987) -- 4/5

Since I Don't Have You by James Ellroy (1988) -- 4/5

Texas City, 1947 by James Lee Burke (1991) -- 3/5

Mefisto in Onyx by Harlan Ellison (1993) -- 4/5

Out There in the Darkness by Ed Gorman (1995) -- 4/5

Hot Springs by James Crumley (1996) -- 4/5

The Weekend by Jeffery Deaver (1996) -- 4/5

Like a Bone in the Throat by Lawrence Block (1998) -- 5/5

Crack by James W. Hall (1999) -- 4/5

Running Out of Dog by Dennis Lehane (1999) -- 3/5

The Paperhanger by William Gay (2000) -- 3/5

Midnight Emissions by F. X. Toole (2001) -- 4/5

When the Women come Out to Dance by Elmore Leonard (2002) -- 4/5

Controlled Burn by Scott Wolven (2002) -- 3/5

What She Offered by Thomas H. Cook (2005) -- 4/5
Her Lord and Master by Andrew Klavan (2005) -- 4/5
Stab by Chris Adrian (2006) -- 3/5
The Hoarder by Bradford Morrow (2006) -- 3/5
Missing the Morning Bus by Lorenzo Carcaterra (2007) --3/5

Ed says

Some short stories are better than others in this collection but James Lee Burke's "Texas City, 1947" is by itself, worth the price of the book. Billy Bob is a young Cajun boy growing up in very tough family circumstances in 1947 South Texas. His teacher is a wonderfully drawn Catholic Nun who becomes a kind of surrogate mother. The boy's name is Billy Bob but it could just as well be Dave, as in Dave Robicheaux. All the characters gut wrenching emotions jump off the pages like a punch in the throat and leave you with tears in your eyes! This unforgettable short story reminds you why you love reading fiction.

Brad Hodges says

The first thing we usually talk about when we talk about noir is what is it? I belong to a Facebook group on film noir and much of the discussion is whether a particular film is noir or not. Most of the time I have a "I know it when I see it" attitude about it, but film noir should concern both a crime and a protagonist of dubious morality, who is destroyed by his greed, a woman, or both. They should not have happy endings.

The term was coined by a French critic in 1946 to characterize Hollywood crime dramas that were influenced by German expressionism, especially the use of shadows and chiaroscuro. The makers of these films had no idea that they were making anything called "noir."

Noir has, by extension, become a category of literature, and again, there were noir stories before there was a word for it. James Ellroy, a crackerjack noir writer himself, and Otto Penzler, who owns the Mysterious Bookshop in New York City, teamed up to compile a huge book called The Best American Noir of the Century. This title is a little misleading, as it covers 84 years, from 1923 to 2007. The stories are in chronological order, but are heavily weighted to the present.

So what do Ellroy and Penzler consider noir? Penzler divorces the private eye story from noir: "Noir works...are existential, pessimistic tales about people...who are seriously flawed and morally questionable. The tone is generally bleak and nihilistic, with characters whose greed, lust, jealousy, and alienation lead them into a downward spiral as their plans and schemes inevitably go awry.

"The private detective story is a different matter entirely. Raymond Chandler famously likened the private eye to a knight, a man who could walk mean streets but not himself be mean, and this is true of the overwhelming majority of those heroic figures." Thus, this collection has no Chandler, no Dashiell Hammet, or Ross McDonald. Instead they are stories that make you rethink your love the humanity. As Penzler closes his foreword, "If you find light and hilarity in these pages, I strongly recommend a visit to a mental health professional."

I honestly didn't dislike any of the stories in this collection, though some are much better than others. The

collection kicks off with "Spurs," by Tod Robbins, which was the basis for Tod Browning's film Freaks. Other early stories are by James M. Cain, McKinlay Kantor ("Gun Crazy," the basis for the groundbreaking film), Mickey Spillane, David Goodis, Evan Hunter, and Jim Thompson. Giddis' story, "Professional Man," is one of my favorites, about a cold-blooded hit man who is ordered to whack his own girlfriend. Another favorite is "Texas City, 1947," by James Lee Burke, about some boys, an errant father, and a mean stepmother.

Harlan Ellison contributes "sci-fi noir" with "Mefisto in Onyx," about a man who can jump into other's people's minds, and James Crumley writes a particularly nasty story called "Hot Springs," in which a man runs off with the very young wife of a hillbilly crime boss. I also especially liked "Poachers," by Tom Franklin, about a couple of brothers who live in the swamp and the game warden who tries to catch them.

Among the later stories are pieces by Lawrence Sanders, Elmore Leonard, Joyce Carol Oates, and Jeffrey Deaver. Andrew Klavan writes a story redolent with S&M that his own agent wouldn't try to sell ("Her Lord and Master") and Chris Adrian has "Stab," a disturbing story about a young boy who tags along with a girl who has a passion for killing neighborhood pets. Thomas H. Cook writes a story ("What She Offered") about perhaps the ultimate femme fatale, a woman who offers a suicide pact to the man she picks up in a bar. It contains some quintessential noir prose:

"To black, she offered one concession. A string of small white pearls. Everything else, the hat, the dress, the stockings, the shoes, the little purse...everything else was black. And so, what she offered at that first glimpse was just the old B movie stereotype of the dangerous woman, the broad-billed that discreetly covers one eye, high heels tapping on rain-slicked streets, foreign currency in the small black purse. She offered the spy, the murderess, the lure of a secret past, and, of course, that little hint of erotic peril."

Noir is easily parodied, as Garrison Keillor has done for years, but when it is done right, it escapes the bounds of parody and shakes the heart. For any fan of the genre, this volume is a must.

Nicolas says

Favourite Stories:

Tod Robbins "Spurs" - Dark and funny
Steve Fisher "You'll Always Remember Me" - Salinger-esque
Day Keene "Nothing to Worry About" - Dark and funny
Howard Browne "Man in the Dark" - Classic Noir
David Goodis "Professional Man" - Good ending
Charles Beaumont "The Hunger" - Creepy
Evan Hunter "The Last Spin" - Cute
Cornell Woolrich "For the Rest of Her Life" - Really dark
David Morell "The Dripping" - Really creepy
Patricia Highsmith "Slowly, Slowly in the Wind" - Dark and funny
James Lee Burke "Texas City, 1947" - Good ending
Ed Gorman "Out There in the Darkness" - Scary and suspenseful
Jeffery Deaver "The Weekender" - Good ending
Tom Franklin "Poachers" - Great imagery
Christopher Coake "All Through the House" - Cool reverse chronological story
Andrew Klavan "Her Lord and Master" - Dark, funny, and kinky

"See, when the police find a corpse in Texas, their first question ain't who done it, it's what did the dead do to deserve it."

- 'Midnight Emissions' by F.X. Toole

Joe Murray says

When a book boasts the monumental declaration, *The Best American Noir of the Century*, it damn well better stand up to scrutiny—all prodigious 752 pages of it. And so it was with relish that I tucked into this meaty and bloody feast from arguably the finest literary writers of noir America has ever produced, hoping for some tasty morsels. *The Best American Noir of the Century* is a colossal collection of 39 short stories dating from as far back as 1923, right up to 2007, and selected by James Ellroy and Otto Penzler, neither of whom need an introduction to any noir/crime aficionado. They are all there in this anthology, the greats synonymous with noir: James M. Cain to James Lee Burke, alongside Dorothy B. Hughes and Joyce Carol Oates—each giving us their different web-like spin on the dark worlds they weave so proficiently. In his introduction, Ellroy writes: “Noir is the most scrutinized offshoot of the hard-boiled school of fiction. It’s the long drop off the short pier and the wrong man and the wrong woman in perfect misalliance. It’s the nightmare of flawed souls with big dreams and the precise how and why of the all-time sure thing that goes bad.” And that’s noir in a nutshell: flawed souls and sure things going bad, usually in the shape of a PI spinning too many plates for his own good, or a hard-working detective keeping his cards too close to his chest and ending up bad. Surprisingly though, *The Best American Noir of the Century* has few if any PIs and detectives gracing the pages. Penzler gives reasoning, of sorts, behind this salient omission by drawing a clear line in his definition of noir, explaining in the foreword that he considers private detective fiction and noir fiction to have “mutually exclusive philosophical premises.” Not every noir fan will agree with that premise. No doubt that was the argument for excluding such greats as Dashiell Hammett, the father of hardboiled noir, as well as Raymond Chandler, the king of gunshots in dark and smoky rooms. To their credit, however, Penzler and Ellroy have included stories and writers not normally associated with noir—or at least noir in its purest form. David Morrell’s “The Dripping” is an intense horror story, and the proficient Harlan Ellison gives us the terrifically titled, “Mefisto in Onyx,” a science fiction tale, which, in fact is more a novella than a short story. Most of the 39 tales in this collection appeared originally in magazines and pulps such as *Manhunt* and *Black Mask*, but also in the more literary *American Mercury*, *Southern Review*, and *Omni*. This compilation intelligently provides brief bios about each author before delving into their contributions. It is interesting to see how the genre has evolved over the long dark years of noir, and *The Best American Noir of the Century* acts as a de facto stepping-stone in explaining its evolution. Spoilt for choice is an understatement when trying to pick a favorite story from all the gems on offer. The selection is uniformly impressive. Brendan DuBois’ brilliant “A Ticket Out,” James W. Hall’s “Crack,” Stephen Greenleaf’s, “Iris,” Evan Hunter’s totally absorbing “The Last Spin,” F. X. Toole (Jerry Boyd) delivers another knockout punch with “Midnight Emissions,” and Ed Gorman’s, “Out There in the Darkness”—all top my own list for originality and terrific writing. But each reader will have their own and for entirely different reasons. These are gritty, dark stories with leading characters full of flaws with little redemption waiting for them in their future. Everything about *The Best American Noir of the Century* oozes class, and not just from the authors and editors. The publisher, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, is to be commended for pulling out all the stops and not skimping on the costs on this edition, giving us a beautifully designed book with a translucent cover. Once the cover is removed, it reveals a classic noir scene of bloody interrogation being noted by an observing scribe. Well worth its impressive weight in gold, it would be a crime not to have this seminal masterpiece in your collection.

Abel says

will read this book off and on for some time to come. a good cross section of the genre. of particular interest is the James M. Cain story which is one of the more perfect stories I've read, tailor made for my aesthetics
