



Web of the City

Harlan Ellison

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Harlan Ellison was awarded an honorary degree from UCLA for the excellence of his imaginative writings. Some smartass might even call him "Dr." Ellison. But only once. Because even though Ellison has come a long way since he started writing in the Fifties, he's still the street fighter who assumed a phony name and joined The Barons, the toughest gang of juvenile delinquents in Brooklyn's Red Hook area, just so he could write a novel about life in the slums. The real-life story of those ten weeks in hell was published as Memos From Purgatory. But the actual novel that came out of that period has been out of print for quite some time. Now, with its original title restored, e-reads is pleased to re-issue Web of the City, the book by a streetwise "Dr." who risked his tail and talent to write about the dark underbelly of city life.

Web of the City Details

Date : Published February 1st 1983 by Ace (first published 1958)

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Author : Harlan Ellison

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From Reader Review Web of the City for online ebook

Stacy says

I loved it. It gets huge insight to what makes Harlan the person he is. He was very young when he wrote this and it used to be named something else I'm just glad I came across it because Harlan has always been such an enigma as a person, an unbelievably sarcastic comic & a writer. I used to wonder how anyone could put up with him this makes me see that he overcame so much to become one of the greats in SF. Harlan's infamous adventures; from getting thrown out of the Disney offices for his irreverent comments on The Mouse, as he calls Micky, to his rowdy adventures fighting in elevators over his cheeky comments & all of the TV series he's contributed his peculiar genius to, he is one of the most colorful science fiction authors who ever lived. Gotta love 'im.

Neil McCrea says

It's a tough thing to give Harlan Ellison two stars. I can hear him mocking me across time and space, and I have no doubt that his takedown of me is spectacular. I did enjoy *Web of the City*, it's just that I only enjoyed it as a novelty, a time capsule, a bit of trivia to add to my stock of Ellison lore. On its own merits, it's a grimmer than usual bit of juvenile delinquent exploitation little better than dozens of others in the sub-sub-genre, of course it is certainly no worse.

Harlan Ellison spent a year or so undercover in a NY greaser gang as research for a bit of journalism on the juvenile gang menace that was the hot topic of the moment in the late 50s. I don't believe the journalistic piece was ever published, but Harlan turned his research into this novel, originally published as *Rumble*, and a handful of short stories also included in this volume. It's good to see a Puerto Rican protagonist, but the other characters and most of the situations are pretty much stock for a JD pulp. If Ellison adds anything to the JD pulp it is the knowledge that the more serious crimes that the street gangs are accused of inevitably have the backing of some more complicated form of organized crime, and of course Harlan provides a greater sense of just how rough these gangs can be.

Rusty Santoro had a good run as the president of the Cougars street gang, but an understanding shop teacher convinced him that ganglife was a dead end. Now Rusty wants out, and the gang doesn't approve. Worse, Rusty's little sister has been getting in deeper with the distaff side of the gang and shows no signs of slowing down. Can Rusty save his sister or himself from his past?

Web of the City is a good ride. We get the drugs, the sex, the switchblade duel, and the rumble. The thing moves and no one is going to get bored. Sadly, the adventure is only a rollercoaster, the train never leaves the tracks and the destination is in sight the entire way.

Chris says

What a treat: Science Fiction/Speculative Fiction author Harlan Ellison's first novel, first published in 1958. Ellison spent time in his teens with a Brooklyn gang, and this is a novelization of his experiences. Ellison is known for his short stories and novellas, so a full 202 page book is really something unique from the Ellison

shelf. I always had a problem with Ellison never working on big novels, I always wished he would write one big novel to serve as the cornerstone of his work, but this novel, (along with a few other novels from early in his career, before he went into science fiction) will have to suffice. He's still alive, of course, but I don't think he's working on any longer works, not do I think he's gotten any stored away to be published posthumously.

Anyway, this is a gang novel re-published by the Hard Case Crime series with a new pulp cover. It's very pulpy and vivid. There are definite signs of Ellison's great use of language, but even without that, it's a very good novel - An impressive first effort, anybody would admit. Rusty Santoro wants out of the gang life, but it keeps... pulling him back in! He sees through the pettiness and pointlessness of violence and grimy 1950s Lower East Side, but he's stuck there. There is no way out.

As far as pulp gang novels, this has it all: teenage rebellion, hoodlums and floozies, a knife fight between gang leaders at the garbage dump, an all-out brawl between gangs in the middle of the lanes of a bowling alley, jailhouse scenes, surly standoffs with cops, domestic drama, malt shops and nervous waiters, cats fighting in back alleys at the beginning of a chapter, the Cougars versus the Cherokees, tough guys shaking down oily weasels for information ("L-Like I don't know a thing. I just work here. I ain't inna Cherks..."). An unrelated short story at the end even featured a drag race. This is classic pulp 50s mayhem.

A big theme of this novel is innocence. Innocence in the face of overwhelming evil and squalor and degradation. Despite the violence, the novel has a heart. Rusty has a love for family and respect for life, and a yearning to live a safe, decent life. The short stories ("Stand Still and Die!" and "No Game for Children") also included at the end of the book (two of which were first printed in "Guilty Detective Story Magazine"(!) in 1956) were also very entertaining.

Jeff says

Gritty first novel by Harlan Ellison, originally entitled Rumble! Some aspects of this novel would have seemed shocking to a late 1950s readership. True, it was surely a bit sensationalized, but, besides being entertaining, it had the secondary effect of calling attention to the problem of juvenile delinquency.

Heather *Awkward Queen and Unicorn Twin* says

[Between this book and *Spider Kiss*, Ellison really seems to have a predilection for spider metaphors. (hide spoiler)]

Mike says

Read this a long, long, long time ago. I have it packed a way along with many other books from when stone carvings and papyrus were the popular formats.

Harlan Ellison has always been a distinctive and attention-getting voice in any genre, medium, and non-fiction. His personal story is both brilliant and difficult for the more mundane to comprehend. Isaac Asimov used to complain (in writing) that Ellison had a stack of Hugos that were taller than Harlan himself. (Could

well be true!)

This is a novel that came out of his true-life experiences as a reporter in a gang in NYC. Long before anyone perverted the use of "embedded", Ellison was exactly that. He went undercover in a way that only reporters and police do and put his life in jeopardy doing so.

Early Ellison is both graphic and disturbing. Wait: come to think of it, ALL Ellison is disturbing. There's no Speculative Fiction here but his writings are not so limited nor should your reading be so.

Jeff Raymond says

Before Harlan Ellison was an award-winning science fiction writer, he made some attempts at crime fiction. Titan Books has released the first novel he ever wrote, *Web of the City*, for its first printing in decades. As a historical document of the type of crime fiction that was popular in the 1950s United States, it is a great relic of a time long, long gone. As a work of fiction, it's definitely a pulpy piece of work that feels *extremely* dated and doesn't show much of any hints of what Ellison would become.

The book is pretty much a story of gang violence in New York - Rusty is in a gang and wants out, and you simply don't get out of a gang that easily. It's apparently based on real events in Ellison's life, which is a redeeming part of the story, but the overall plot is pretty simple and straightforward. Reading it, I just felt like I could get a better version of this by watching *Rebel Without a Cause* or something similar, given the setting and characters.

I shouldn't 100% condemn this. Titan's been releasing a lot of this old true crime under a discount banner, and we're all better off for it. I just can't see someone who doesn't already have an interest (or is looking to try something *very* different) reaching for this.

Bill says

Reissue of Ellison's first published novel, about a high school kid trying to quit gang life and go straight. There's a bit of mystery thrown in as well, as he tries to solve a murder. I think it holds up fairly well. Some of the lingo is overdone, but Rusty's struggles to escape the web are compelling. If you only know Ellison for his SF, this makes for an interesting addition to his oeuvre.

Includes three short stories that are all decent pulp crime (one is a chapter from the novel but with a different ending).

Erik Carl son says

But listen boys and girls
You need not be blue
And life is what you make of it
It all depends on you"

- Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers

"They said all teenagers scare the living shit out of me
They could care less as long as someone'll bleed
So darken your clothes or strike a violent pose
Maybe they'll leave you alone, but not me."

- My Chemical Romance

Rusty Santoro, ex-president of the Cougars, is having it rough. Real rough.

His shop teacher has been helping him break free of his gang. He is one strike from prison. His sister has joined the Cougars as a female auxiliary member. He is friendless. His father is a drunk and his mother desperately trying to keep it together. Of course all of this is nothing when compared to the fact that the new president of the Cougars wants him gutted.

Web of the City, originally published in 1958, outlives its slightly dated version of New York delivering one of the most frightening depictions of post-war teenage life ever recorded. Of course it should. First, it is written by Harlan Ellison; A man who pulls no punches and for whom literacy mercy doesn't exist. Second, it is culled from the ten weeks he spent as 'Cheech' Beldone in New York's Barons. The prose is gritty, remorseless, and yanks the stints from the heart of darkness.

For those whose knowledge of 1950's youth culture is Happy Days, Web of the City will rip your eyelids open and force you to see why and how teenagers were America's biggest fear in the years following World War II. But there is also an honest feeling of frustration and angst as we watch Santoro fight to stay on the right side of law. Like watching someone dig on the beach, every time Santoro makes headway the walls cave in trapping him with no way out.

Hard Case has done an amazing job repackaging Web of the City with three additional tales of violence and dread. These alone are worth Ellisonphiles adding another copy to their collection as the men's magazines they came from are either impossible to find or secured by collectors in steel strongboxes.

Jeff says

Web of the City is Harlan Ellison's first novel. Ellison is, of course, a Science Fiction Grand Master. This book, originally published in 1958 is not science fiction at all. It's a story of a teenager and his involvement in the Cougar gang in the city. Rusty is trying to leave the Cougars. The only problem is, *nobody* leaves the Cougars. There are drastic consequences when he tries, and the "Web of the City" draws him in more and more as the story progresses.

One of the *Hard Case Crime* series, I did enjoy the book. It kept me interested to the very end, but I wouldn't have read it if it hadn't had Ellison's name on it. There are three short stories of similar subject matter at the end, one of which may have been the one that evolved into the novel. At first I thought "No Way Out" was just a reiteration of part of the novel, but it took a sudden turn at the end. "No Game for Children" was very a entertaining of what happens when you mess with someone more resourceful than you. "Stand Still and Die" was a good story about a relentless cab driver, determined to find out who was trying to kill him and why.

Not a bad first novel. Nothing like *Dangerous Visions*, though.

Josh says

A coming of age story bullet riddled by adolescent gang life and marred by personal tragedy. Rusty wants out of the gang he led for a number of years only to be on the end of bloody and brutal resistance. If that wasn't enough a close family member of his is murdered forging the divide between friends and enemies making each as indistinguishable from the other. I wish Harlan Ellison wrote more crime novels. WEB OF THE CITY was a violent, fast paced and, at times, jaw dropping depiction of adolescent gang life that holds up remarkably well.

Craig Childs says

I am a big fan of the Hard Case Crime imprint (having read 47 of their books) and Harlan Ellison (having read 11 of his books), so I was very excited last year when HCC announced they were going to reprint his long out-of-print first novel Web of the City.

Harlan rather famously infiltrated a real-life Brooklyn street gang at the age of 21 to do research for several short stories and this novel. The result was perhaps some of the most authentic examples of juvenile delinquent pulp fiction ever written. (This was a short-lived sub-genre of the pulps, intended to excite younger readers and shock adults with lurid depictions of teenage violence.)

In addition to this novel, Ellison's street gang short stories were collected in The Deadly Streets (1958), Children of the Streets (1961), Gentleman Junkie and Other Stories of the Hung-Up Generation (1961). He also published a nonfiction autobiographical account of this time in his life, Memos from Purgatory (1961).

This book deserves recognition for jumpstarting the career of a writer who would later go on to revolutionize the field of science fiction, but the truth is it's not very good on its own merit. Ellison has always had a verbose, bombastic, and sometimes almost lyrical quality to his voice. It works great in high concept stories like "Repent, Harlequin, Said the Ticktockman" and "I Have Mouth & I Must Scream", but it fits neither the tone nor pacing of a suspense novel. The detective/mystery elements of the plot were handled amateurishly. While Ellison may have nailed the social aspects of 1950's street gangs, he clearly did not understand drug culture--the effects of narcotics, the economics of the trade, etc.

I would recommend this book only to hardcore Ellison fans who want to see how his career started.

Michael says

WEB OF THE CITY ist Harlan Ellisons erster Roman und rückblickend auf seine späteren Bücher eher als Jugendsünde zu verbuchen. Ellison selbst war, bevor er das Buch schrieb, einige Monate in einer Jugendgang in Brooklyn und hat seine dort gemachten Beobachtungen während der darauffolgenden Militärzeit (nachts auf der Latrine, wie er selbst behauptet) aufgeschrieben.

Das Buch ist im Stile der Pulps geschrieben und lässt kein allzu großes literarisches Engagement erkennen. Die Figuren sind klischeehaft und holzschnittartig beschrieben, der Inhalt trieft vor juvenilem Pathos. Rusty, der Held des Romans, der in den 50er Jahren in der Bronx angesiedelt ist, möchte aus einer

kriminellen Jugendgang, den Cougars, aussteigen. Wie schwierig sich dieses gestaltet, ist aus zeitgenössischen Filmen bekannt und das Motiv ist bis heute beliebt, wenn sich auch Lokalkolorit und Moden geändert haben. Ellison beschreibt das Gangleben sicherlich recht authentisch, allerdings ohne nennenswerten literarischen Gestaltungswillen.

Auch wenn es sich um einen recht harten Krimi handelt, habe ich als heutiger Leser immer wieder Bilder aus der „West Side Story“ vor Augen gehabt. Das Buch ist einfach in die Jahre gekommen und hat im Gegensatz zu manch anderem darunter arg gelitten.

Die Ausgabe in der Hard Case Crime-Reihe ist gleichwohl zu loben. Das Cover von Glen Orbik ist stilecht und für Pulp-Fans schon kaufentscheidend. Außerdem hat Titan Books dem Roman ein kurzes aber lesenswertes Vorwort des Autors vorangestellt und im Anhang noch drei Geschichten draufgegeben, die Harlan Ellison aus dem Material zu WEB OF THE CITY extrahiert und in verschiedenen Zeitschriften veröffentlicht hat.

Ryan says

Surprisingly lurid and violent, this book surprised me. I expected something relatively tame, considering the subject matter. In my mind, gang dramas from the fifties were mostly about being cool and hot rods. Of course, I understand that real life was not like Happy Days and Marlin Brando films. But this book goes a couple of steps further than I expected. There is blood, graphic violence, random sex, rape, and cocaine. This was Ellison's first novel, so it reads extremely heavy-handed and dramatic. He is aware of his shortcomings and allowed this to lapse out of print for years. But despite its flaws, this is good because there aren't any of books I have read quite like it.

Donald says

This book is tough man, "tough as banana peels"! "Web of the City" is the main story, taking up 203 of the 284 pages. There are also 3 short stories. "Web" is a gritty story, focused on a kid trying to get out of gang life. Really authentic sounding and lots of street language from that time period. The first short story is basically a piece of "Web" with a different ending. The second short story has a husband battling his neighbor's teenage boy. And the third short story features a tough ol' cab driver up against a gang. All the tales are definitely worth reading, though I skimmed the first short story, as it was pretty repetitive. Good writing throughout, and a good introduction to boot!
