



McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales

Michael Chabon (Editor) , Jim Shepard , Glen David Gold , Dan Chaon , Kelly Link , Elmore Leonard , Carol Emshwiller , Neil Gaiman , more... Nick Hornby , Stephen King , Michael Crichton , Laurie R. King , Chris Offutt , Dave Eggers , Michael Moorcock , Aimee Bender , Sherman Alexie , Harlan Ellison , Karen Joy Fowler , Rick Moody , Howard Chaykin (Illustrator) , McSweeney's Publishing ...less

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From Reader Review McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales for online ebook

Sam Quixote says

Like the cover and the way the stories are presented, the title "Thrilling Tales" is an ironic smirk at the content. Big name writers try to write genre pulp fiction from the '30s and '40s and the results are dire.

Jim Shepard opens with a story called "Tedford and the Megalodon", a snoozer about a guy who goes looking for a prehistoric fish (I think anyway, I was so bored I drifted in and out) and ultimately finds it only to have it swim away. Yup, that's the opening salvo that's supposed to have you clutching the book feverishly. I put the book down for several days out of boredom.

Going for a more well known writer I picked up with Stephen King's "The Tale of Gray Dick", a story set in his Dark Tower world. It's literally a story about a metal plate.

A week later, I picked another famous writer, Michael Crichton, and his story "Blood Doesn't Come Out" a story about a private detective who shoots his mother. Amazingly, this story wasn't hard boiled like the genre it sets out to represent and was utterly dreary.

I stopped at that point realising there were 400 pages left! 400 pages of potentially more soul crushing tedium. Michael Chabon and Rick Moody both supply 70 page stories and having read both writers' previous work I knew I wouldn't like them. The rest, including the other big name - Glen David Gold, Elmore Leonard, Harlan Ellison, Dave Eggers - didn't fill me with confidence given the output so far.

I'd read Neil Gaiman and Nick Hornby's contributions before and liked Hornby's so I felt like I'd read a good enough chunk of the book to get the gist of it. It was ironically thrilling in that it wasn't at all.

Nice one Chabon for editing the weakest issue of McSweeney's ever. Avoid.

Ross McLean says

If you judge this book by it's cover, you would probably be exactly correct: It's a collection of fun kitschy pulp from the cool kids of modern fiction. Each story opens with a charming illustration fit for the cheapest newsprint and an accompanying tagline such as "He went in search of a relic of earth's past, and came face-to-face with the mortal specter of his own." Although they don't all end in exclamations points, which I personally consider to be a mistake.

The quality is generally pretty high, so if that sounds appealing to you, you will probably like this book.. But if genre-y pastiche ain't your thing, you probably wont. However, there are two stories in here that are so good that you should track down and read no matter what your tastes are:

Kelly Link's "Catskin" creates an amazing surrealistic world which by the end unites all of the bizarre images into a coherent whole - something rarely achieved in short fiction. The images at first seem a tad random, like a witch giving birth to a dollhouse and then raising it into a home, but they are all make beautiful symbolic sense by the end. It left me with similar feelings to when I saw the film adaptation of Where the

Wild Things Are for the first time.

The other story that absolutely everyone should read is Nick Hornby's "Otherwise Pandemonium." It has a Catcher in The Rye-style second person kid narrator who uses simple language to access complex feelings without ever sounding too knowing or precocious for his age. It's also a story about a magical VCR. Analog nostalgia and YA teen relationship stories are both super not my thing, but Hornby completely transcends his material. It could be used as a model of how to write a perfect short story.

My other favourites in the order that they appeal were were Jim Shepard's "Tedford and the Megaldon," Glen David Gold's "The Tears of Squonk, and What Happened Thereafter," Elmore Leonard's "How Carlos Webster Changed His Name to Carl and Became a Famous Oklahoma Lawman", Neil Gaiman's "Closing Time," and Michael Moorcock's "The Case of the Nazi Canary."

In terms of total duds, I disliked Dan Chanon's "The Bees," Stephen King's "The Tale of Gray Dick," Michael Chrichton's "Blood Doesn't Come Out," Chris Offutt's "Chuck's Bucket," and Aimee Bender's "The Case of the Salt and Pepper Shakers."

The rest were mostly quite enjoyable but wont necessarily stick with me in a few months time.

It's a fun book!

Vilma says

My favorite stories were the one about the Nazis and the memory drug Albertine (even though I still have so many questions about it!)

Tim Ganotis says

Some hits, some misses, as any compilation is likely to be. One story in particular was not only overly long (the definition of "short story" varies widely in this book) but just self-indulgent, drawn-out, and unreadable. Another story was oddly filled with dropped names of the other authors in the book, and the story read as a homework assignment hurriedly finished the morning it was due.

While most stories in the collection were engaging and well written (with a variety of styles and subjects) the misses were dire. Bought this second-hand and am certainly glad I didn't spend much on it, though worth the low price I paid.

Ciara says

do you like genre fiction? then read this book. tragically, i dislike genre fiction. i'm sure this is a great anthology for people who do like genre fiction. by which i mean, westerns, mysteries, fantasy, old-school pulp novels, & items that can be found in the gold room at powell's in portland, oregon. when i was in college, one of my several majors was popular culture, with an emphasis on the inter-relationship of cinema & literature. which seems weird to me now that i never watch movies, but okay. to this end, i took several

classes on genre fiction, in order to thoroughly understand the tropes of your average western novel or sci-fi book. even though i have never liked books like that & still don't. when i moved to portland & applied to be a bookseller at powell's, i was by chance interviewed by the woman who managed the gold room. she was looking for someone to handle romances, thrillers, nautical fiction ("horation hornblower," "jaws") & books on tape. i talked a good game thanks to my college learnin' & got hired. sadly, everyone else on the genre team was a super-nerd who actually really loved the "star trek" novelizations or the "dr. who" books & got psyched for every new sue grafton release. it was evelen months of pure unadulterated nerd-dom, & that is also how i felt reading this anthology, which i read because i was desperately ill with a sinus infection & couldn't concentrate on reading anything i would have actually liked.

John Pringle says

This is a very likeable collection with some very good stories. "The Tears of Squonk, and What Happened Thereafter" by Glen David Gold is maybe the pick of the collection. I wish Gold would write more short stories. In the time it took him to write Sunnyside, he could have written 20 more stories like this one.

Karenina González says

3.5

Unos cuentos me gustaron más que otros pero el libro sí está para no despegar los ojos de las páginas.

Audrey says

There's nothing better than an anthology of great short stories. What I love best is that this anthology doesn't succumb to the two most common pitfalls usually encountered in short story collections: 1) if the collection is done by just one author, then there tends to be more than a couple of duds in the collection; and 2) it doesn't fall prey to the literary pretentiousness so common in current fiction.

I had a fiction prof who argued that genre fiction could in no way be considered "literary fiction" which is what we were supposed to be writing in his class -- Chabon, as editor here, handles his refutation quite well. These stories are great examples of character-driven "literary" genre fiction. There were only one or two that I wasn't all that enamored with -- and I loved seeing some of my very favorite authors all in one place. Chabon has been a favorite of mine since *Kavalier & Clay*, and I love knowing that he obviously loves the same writers I do...it makes for great reading all around.

jordan says

One of the unanswered questions of modern culture is the reason for the decline of the short story form. As people complain about lacking the time to read it would seem that the short stories should prove the ideal solution; busy readers can read a story from a collection and then walk away until they next have a chance to read. Yet despite this short stories receive less and less of a readership, precipitously falling from the great popularity they enjoyed a few decades ago when readers could choose from dozens of short story

publications grouped by genre.

McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales attempts to push back this trend, a noble effort even if it is unlikely to succeed. Reaching back to the great pulp adventure and science fiction magazines of years passed, publications that in their heyday helped launch the careers of giants like Azimov, Heinlein, and Niven, Mcsweeney's presents here a enjoyable short story collection from the desks of many fine authors. Providing a bow for this finely wrapped collection, Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon edits it, includes a wonderful story, and a good introduction.

As is the case with any collection, some stories will appeal more to a given reader's taste than others. As mentioned, Michael Chabon's romp through an alternative history where the US rejoined the British Empire and North American rebellions seeking to refound the republic, proves both fun and makes the reader look forward to future visits to this world. Karren Fowler, an author who many may think odd to find here, also offers an engaging story reminiscent of stories from times passed. Likewise Stephen King's "Weaving the Dark" stands out for its excellence. Topping my favorites, Elmore Leonard's thoughtful "How Carlos Webster Changed His Name to Carl and Became a Famous Oklahoma Lawman" and Rick Moody's profound "Albertine" both of which stand out as singular works.

Of course a few pieces did not read for me as well, including Harlan Ellison's and Michael Morcock's, both authors I love and the former whom I consider one of the great short story writers of all time. Others doubtless will find other of the works standing out as their favorites. Either way, readers with only intermittent time to read would surely enjoy this journey through a myriad multiverse of fantastic worlds. Whether traveling on short hops or grabbing moments when your infant is napping, readers will not regret any moment they can steal with this fine collection.

Donald says

Good collection with lots of amazing authors! "Closing Time" by Neil Gaiman is pretty creepy, and I very much enjoyed "How Carlos Webster Changed His Name To Carl And Became A Famous Oklahoma Lawman" by Elmore Leonard, even if the title is too long! Stephen King's "The Tale of Gray Dick" was cool to read as it reappears later as part of his Dark Tower series, plus I love the throwing plates action! Nice group of stories here!

DoodlePanda says

As with most short story collection, this has a few good stories, some not so good and a lot of average. Still worth a read if you enjoy short stories, I personally have to be in the right mood. Which is why it has taken me over a year to finish...

I do like the way it has been presented in the book with an old "newspaper look" (ads and everything), as well as the cover.

Colleen says

Deliciously evil.

There were some short stories here that were superb and some I could have skipped. The Albertine Notes started out sort of interesting and developed into an incredibly powerful shocking story that will haunt me forever. The major writers I've heard of didn't write the best stories, although Steven King's tale was better than most of his books. It was an odd collection tied together only because they had 'surprise' endings - like elaborate jokes. The idea was to have them be plotless, but some of them had elaborate plots that underlay the relative inaction of the story. There's time travel and ghosts and Hitler and a circus. Now I want to read the other 9 collections this editor put together.

Jackie says

This collection was preceded with an explanation/lament on the dying genre/pulp short story. I gathered that short stories are hard, pulp has little in the way of plot (I'm not sure I've ever read a true pulp story, as this was a phenomenon that occurred before I could read), and started in. Pulp was dying. Whatever. I was just pumped that I'd found a "collection" book on the shelf of the man who would later become my boyfriend (didn't want to start something longer as the "book at his place" in case things didn't work out. That would be an awkward borrow). And the contributing author list was impressive enough to make me consider reading stories out of order--to get the recognizable authors done first, juuuuuuust in case.

So, the thing about short stories is they're short. It's hard to tell a WHOLE lot in just a few pages, and the best of the stories left me wanting more. As for the bad ones, well, they're over quickly and you can move on to the next. This wasn't a grand slam collection, but there's enough good in here to warrant a recommendation, and some of which I think you should find a way to read regardless of method. I've marked my favorite 7 with **[top]**, and since most of these clustered at the top or above average range for me, I gotta say "I really liked" most of the stuff I read, hence the 4 stars.

Jim Shepard's "Tedford and the Megalodon" -- Excellent, although I must admit I've had a strong recent Antarctic focus (H.P. Lovecraft, Werner Herzog's Encounters at the End of the World), wonderfully atmospheric. Man hunts giant fish in a teeny canoe. Good luck.

Glen David Gold's "The Tears of Squonk, and What Happened Thereafter" -- Very good. Quicker and arguably better than the flashback half of Water for Elephants. An elephant in hanged.

Dan Chaon's "The Bees" -- Man cultivates superior bee pollen and feeds it to his malnourished and dying baby, with ill effects. The heightening anxiety and tension is well done, although the ending is predictable a little ways out.

Kelly Link's "Catskin" -- very intriguingly written, like a lyrical adult fairy tale, hard to describe, but interesting and eerie. A witch's son carries out her dying wishes. **[top]**

Elmore Leonard's "How Carlos Webster Changed His Name to Carl and Became a Famous Oklahoma Lawman" -- understated but a solid short. Boy grows up bent on revenge against a bank robber/murderer who kills a man in front of him--and steals his ice cream cone.

Carol Emshwiller's "The General" -- semi-standard captured-child-fights-people-who-killed-his-family-but-must-play-by-their-rules-until-s/he-can-escape-and-use-their-knowledge-against-them with a usually unexamined amount of doubt. Enjoyable (which is between decent and good, these are short-term investments we're talking here).

Neil Gaiman's "Closing Time" -- wonderfully chilling, achieved a level of suspense/quiet grimness that I wished American Horror Story would have. Unnervingly told tale about a haunted house. **[top]**

Nick Hornby's "Otherwise Pandemonium" -- one of the best in the collection, with equal parts chilling foreboding and honest human reactions (if a bit awkwardly written but hey, the teenage years are awkward). Boy finds a VCR that "predicts" the end of the world. **[top]**

Stephen King's "The Tale of Gray Dick" -- if I was still in the shadow of King's Dark Tower series, I would've liked it more, but a well-written piece anyway. A farmer and his wife ask an experienced fighter to stay and help them defend their town against their longtime oppressors.

Michael Crichton's "Blood Doesn't Come Out" -- ... I actually can't remember this one, and the short shrift other reviewers give it online doesn't call up anything. I remember being disappointed, and I'm sure that's what it was.

Laurie King's "Weaving the Dark" --maybe I just couldn't relate because I'm not yet contemplating morality and being saddled with someone I once loved as a burden, but mostly boring. A woman going blind wonders about her life and limits now that her lover is terminally ill.

Chris Offutt's "Chuck's Bucket" -- pretty self-referential and 4th-wall-breaking, in ways that's sometimes irritating and sometimes amusing; decent. The author uses a scientist friend's experiment to view his lives in alternate realities.

Dave Eggers's "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly" -- Sorry Dave, hated this one. A tourist climbs a mountain and doesn't particularly like it, until the end.

Michael Moorcock's "The Case of the Nazi Canary" -- just plain fun, a Hercule Poirot-type whodunit set in zeppelined Nazi Germany. **[top]**

Aimee Bender's "The Case of the Salt and Pepper Shakers" -- quite enjoyable. A police detective ruminates on the breakdown of a marriage that results in a double murder. **[top]**

Harlan Ellison's "Goodbye to All That" -- had high hopes for this one, given Ellison's reputation, and maybe that's just what he was counting on. It also made me want to look up the mose words. Anyway, man climbs to the top of the mountains seeking the be-all end-all to life, the universe, and everything and--! We get a burger.

Seriously.

But how could you ever answer that question anyway?

Karen Joy Fowler's "Private Grave 9" -- thinking dark thoughts at an archaeological site; I was intrigued but ultimately felt unsatisfied...pulp stories aren't necessarily supposed to have a plot, but I guess I wanted a little more action.

Rick Moody's "The Albertine Notes" -- fantastic; clever, creepy, I kind of want someone to make a movie of

this. Drug that allows users to experience memory in enhanced detail causes NYC epidemic, recent memory loss, interference in temporal events, and possibly a nuclear explosion. **[top]**

Michael Chabon's "The Martian Agent, a Planetary Romance" -- LOVED this, hopefully Chabon gets around to writing the rest of it; he describes things so well (as I've said elsewhere) and here inhabits the mind of a child with ease. How the children of Francis Drake ('member him?) become orphans in the Louisiana Territory in an alt-history world of airships and "landships." **[top]**

Sherman Alexie's "Ghost Dance" -- liked it, nothing shockingly new. Zombie Indians avenge their slaughter by Custer/people's ill-treatment in the 21st century.

...gee, I hope Joel never finds this. That first part makes me sound so damn cynical. Anyway, definitely worth a borrow and a read, but I'm hesitant about spending money on books these days. Short story collections unfortunately don't have much replay value, except when it comes to loaning out to friends.

Emily says

Perhaps it's my recent immersion in the world of SF, but this treasury was less thrilling for me than advertised. It's a good thing I didn't read Michael Chabon's intro before beginning the stories; otherwise I never would have continued. In it he complains about a particular type of literary story being all that literary venues have to offer. To which I say, *perhaps you should read more widely*. "Thrilling" tales are being published in all sorts of places. Perhaps not in *McSweeney's*, to their stuffy and pretentious loss. But for the most part the stories in this collection read like poor attempts at genre writing by literary authors. Which is strange, since so many of the authors are first-rate genre writers.

So, we all know that short story collections are hard sells. As a reader I prefer to immerse myself in a long narrative, something that I can't put down. With an anthology, there are as many places to put the book down as there are stories. Even after a great story—and there are a few of these in the collection (notably "The Bees," by Dan Chaon; "Otherwise Pandemonium," by Nick Hornby, and "The Albertine Notes," by Rick Moody)—the reader feels like taking a break to cleanse the palate. So this collection took me a loong time to get through.

In the end, I didn't quite make it. I almost gave up during the first story, Jim Shepard's "Tedford and the Megalodon." I just kept waiting for the story to begin, and then it was over. By the time I got to Chabon's story, the last in the book, I just gave up. It seems to be set in an alternate history steampunk world, but the writing is fairly impenetrable. I just couldn't do it.

In arranging an anthology it's important to choose the first and last stories carefully. In the immortal words of Mitch Hedberg, "You can't be like pancakes, all exciting at first, but by the end you're fuckin' sick of 'em." This was not exciting at first, or at the end. Boo.

I think I'll go back to novels for a while.

Mattia Ravasi says

#16 in my Top 20 Books I Read in 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIWkw...>

An all-star team of super dope writers comes together to try and bring back from the dead that slender beast that is the American Genre Short Story.

Some people in here did not really get what they were supposed to be writing, some were clearly unable to stop being all intellectualish and just put a plot in what they wrote, but most wrote stuff that's purely brilliant. Also because, well - Chabon, Leonard, King, Moorcock... some of the world's best writers are here.

Were such things still published on a monthly basis, I would read every single number. This is exactly the stuff I adore.

Just look at the motherfucking cover and tell me you can resist this book.

Best stories? My main man Chabon's of course (Michael, seriously, write a full novel about it, no, a motherfucking saga), Moorcock's, Nick Hornby's, Elmore Leonard's.

John says

Not the best anthology I've read but there are some interesting gems. I picked this up for Michael Crichton's short story but sampled the others as well. So many of my favorite authors are in here. Unfortunately many of these stories have been republished elsewhere or are just plain forgettable.

Stuart says

A good collection of ripping yarns, despite any (staggering) misgivings you may have about the imprint. I especially enjoyed "The Nazi Canary" by Michael Moorcock (alt-30's Conan-Doyle-style whodunnit concerning the suspicious death of Hitler's niece); "Ghost Dance," a cowboys-and-Indians ghost story by Sherman Alexie; plus a Depression-era gangster shoot-em-up by Elmore Leonard, a couple of good time-travel stories by Nick Hornby and Chris Offutt, and an in-search-of-prehistoric-sharks science-adventure yarn by Jim Shepherd. In fact, the only weak stories in this collection are a head-scratcher novel-excerpt from Steven King and a long-winded who-cares from Mr. Eggers.

Paul says

I took my time and enjoyed this collection throughout the year. Some of the stories worked better than others despite an incredible lineup of authors. My favorites should come as no surprise ("Ghost Story" by Sherman Alexie, "Up the Mountain..." by Dave Eggers, "Closing Time," Neil Gaiman, "How Carlos Webster ..." by Elmore Leonard). Only two really missed the mark for me: "Albertine Notes" by Rick Moody and Michael Moorcock's "The Case of the Nazi Canary" (the only one I didn't read entirely). Overall, this is like a mini-masters class in writing modern short stories without succumbing to literary pretension.

Jacob says

I wanted to read this collection for the exposure to a number of authors who have intrigued me for a while (namely Rick Moody, Sherman Alexie, Dave Eggers, Elmore Leonard, Nick Hornby and Neil Gaiman). Frequently, though, I got the sense from these stories that these novelists were outside their element, struggling against the short story format. Mainly because the stories they wrote were written nicely with interesting characters, but often I felt the conclusions were rushed and/or unfulfilling (rather than just ambiguous in an interesting way).

Kelly Link's "Catskin" is probably the most imaginative of the bunch. Her story is especially stimulating, set among a collection of what are supposed to be "genre fiction" stories, "Catskin" reads like a fantasy, stream of conscious prose poem. Just really unabashedly unmoored from reality, but the writing never gets in the way of the tale or her strange universe in which she sets it.

Sherman Alexie's "Ghost Dance," a ghost story written from a decidedly native perspective is another highlight. Eggers's "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly" could be considered an adventure tale, but it really reads more like an examination of the privileged first-world psyche set at a tourist destination for thrill seekers in Africa. Dan Chaon's "The Bees" is nicely crafted through and through (it actually *does* end ambiguously in an interesting, rather than confusing or phoned-in way). Reading it felt like watching a Jeff Nichols film.

McSweeney's Mammoth Treasury of Thrilling Tales is essentially a summer reading-type book (most of the stories are either adventure or mystery) with marquee value from the likes of Stephen King, Michael Chrichton, Michael Chabon and some of the others I mentioned earlier. It's a nice book, but, collectively it is nothing like an O'Henry collection. So the book is worth it if you just want some interesting tales written nicely, without consistently high literary-type aspirations.

Stephanie says

Meehhh...some of the stories were fantastic, but in general they were just okay.
