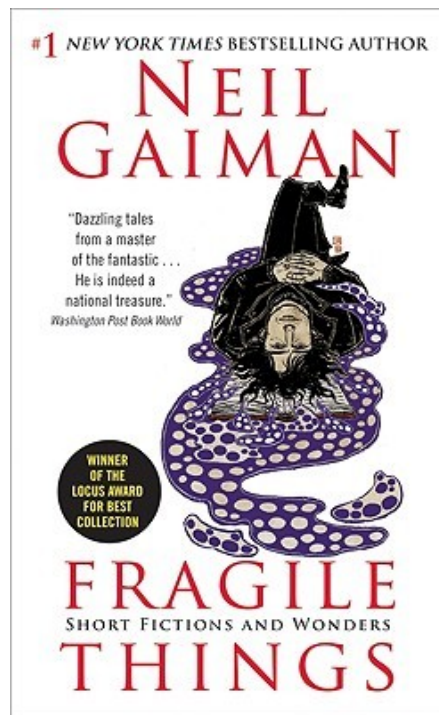




Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders

Neil Gaiman

Download now

Read Online ➔

Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders

Neil Gaiman

Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders Neil Gaiman

A mysterious circus terrifies an audience for one extraordinary performance before disappearing into the night . . .

Two teenage boys crash a party and meet the girls of their dreams--and nightmares . . .

In a Hugo Award-winning story, a great detective must solve a most unsettling royal murder in a strangely altered Victorian England . . .

These marvelous creations and more showcase the unparalleled invention and storytelling brilliance--and the terrifyingly dark and entertaining wit--of the incomparable Neil Gaiman. By turns delightful, disturbing, and diverting, "Fragile Things" is a gift of literary enchantment from one of the most original writers of our time.

Contents:

- vi • ?From 'Little Nemo in Slumberland' • (1907) • interior artwork by Winsor McCay
- xiii • Introduction (Fragile Things) • (2006) • essay by Neil Gaiman
- 1 • A Study in Emerald • (2003) • novelette by Neil Gaiman
- 27 • The Fairy Reel • (2004) • poem by Neil Gaiman (variant of The Faery Reel)
- 29 • October in the Chair • (2002) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 45 • The Hidden Chamber • (2005) • poem by Neil Gaiman
- 49 • Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire • (2004) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman (variant of Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Nameless House of the Night of Dread Desire)
- 65 • The Flints of Memory Lane • (1997) • essay by Neil Gaiman
- 69 • Closing Time • (2003) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 83 • Going Wodwo • (2002) • poem by Neil Gaiman
- 85 • Bitter Grounds • (2003) • novelette by Neil Gaiman
- 109 • Other People • (2001) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 113 • Keepsakes and Treasures: A Love Story • (1999) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 133 • Good Boys Deserve Favours • (1995) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 139 • The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch • (1998) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 159 • Strange Little Girls • (2001) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 165 • Harlequin Valentine • (1999) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 177 • Locks • (1999) • poem by Neil Gaiman
- 181 • The Problem of Susan • (2004) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 191 • Instructions • (2000) • poem by Neil Gaiman
- 195 • How Do You Think It Feels? • (1998) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 205 • My Life • (2002) • poem by Neil Gaiman
- 209 • Fifteen Painted Cards from a Vampire Tarot • (1998) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 219 • Feeders and Eaters • (2002) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 229 • Diseasemaker's Croup • (2003) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 233 • In the End • (1996) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 235 • Goliath • (1998) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 249 • Pages from a Journal Found in a Shoebox Left in a Greyhound Bus Somewhere Between Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Louisville, Kentucky • (2002) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman
- 255 • How to Talk to Girls at Parties • (2006) • shortstory by Neil Gaiman

271 • The Day the Saucers Came • (2006) • poem by Neil Gaiman
273 • Sunbird • (2005) • novelette by Neil Gaiman
297 • Inventing Aladdin • (2003) • poem by Neil Gaiman
301 • The Monarch of the Glen • [American Gods] • (2003) • novelette by Neil Gaiman
357 • Credits (Fragile Things) • (2006) • essay by uncredited

Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders Details

Date : Published February 9th 2010 by Harper (first published September 25th 2006)

ISBN : 9780060515232

Author : Neil Gaiman

Format : Paperback 396 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Short Stories, Fiction, Horror

 [Download Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders Neil Gaiman

From Reader Review Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders for online ebook

Florencia says

“You can't do this to me, Neil. The boy went inside the farmhouse and... AND? What the hell, May? For god's sake, what kind of answer is that? Leave the Month finish the story, you...”

That's how much I liked this book. It made me a bit violent. I found myself speaking to the characters (talking alone to some pages, from a sane person's point of view). I didn't like all the short stories, for example, “How do you think it feels?”, “Keepsakes and Treasures”, “The problem with Susan”—(view spoiler)—; but the entire collection has a unique Gaiman style. A funny, weird, original, heartbreaking, twisted, magical, dark and insightful style that leaves you wanting more. He seems to be the kind of writer that can save an average story with just an amazing line that describes the way you might be feeling at that time. And that line starts repeating itself in your head.

I admire a person who can say so many things, that can share complex thoughts and mixed emotions with simple words:

I may be grim, perhaps, but only just as grim
as any man who suffered such affairs. Misfortune,
carelessness or pain, what matters is the loss. You'll see
the heartbreak linger in my eyes, and dream
of making me forget what came before you walked
into the hallway of this house.

*

In every way that counted, I was dead. Inside somewhere maybe I was screaming and weeping and howling like an animal, but that was another person deep inside, another person who had no access to the lips and face and mouth and head, so on the surface I just shrugged and smile and kept moving. If I could have physically passed away, just let it all go, like that, without doing anything, stepped out of life as easily as walking through a door I would have done. But I was going to sleep at night and waking in the morning, disappointed to be there and resigned to existence.

I may not like the whole poem or story, but I take some beautiful lines with me, and that's all I seem to need. Unless we are talking about stories/poems like "A Study in Emerald", "October in the Chair", "The Flints of Memory Lane", "Instructions" or "Other People". Those are really good.

I have to say I don't enjoy horror stories. But his “horror” is like, um, like a delicate, philosophical horror. Almost sweet. I don't know if that even exists, but that is how I see it. Some stories gave me the chills, sure, but at the same time, I felt a wave of sorrow and a feeling of understanding, empathy. Loneliness moves the world, for better or for worse.

So, whatever. I don't know why the hell I'm reviewing this because I can't find the right words.

I like things to be story-shaped.
Reality, however, is not story-shaped, and the eruptions of the odd into our lives are not story-shaped either. They do not end in entirely satisfactory ways. Recounting the strange is like telling one's dreams: one can communicate the events of a dream but not the emotional content,

the way that a dream can color one's entire day.

Like this book.

I'm not used to the contemporary writing style. The newest thing I read was written sixty years ago. I don't know why, honestly. (Okay, I know but I don't want to say it). So, it is a big change for me. I don't usually connect with living writers. Gaiman is a nice exception (most of the times).

Feb 09, 14

* Also on my blog.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Look at the surprise that just landed on my doorstep! :D :D Apparently this is a new "movie tie-in" edition for *How to Talk to Girls at Parties*. It also includes some 30 other short stories and poems by Neil Gaiman.

From Gaiman's Introduction:

"I think ... that I would rather recollect a life mis-spent on fragile things than spent avoiding moral debt." The words turned up in a dream and I wrote them down upon waking, uncertain what they meant or to whom they applied. ... It seemed like a fine title for a book of short stories. There are so many fragile things, after all. People break so easily, and so do dreams and hearts.

Sandi says

I finished "Fragile Things" by Neil Gaiman while I was waiting for the anesthesiologist at UCLA Medical Center. Two days later, while visiting me in the hospital, my daughter announced that she "stole" the book from me. So, I don't have it to refer back to while doing this review.

For me, the highlight of this collection of short stories and poems was the novella "Monarch of the Glen" that featured Shadow from "American Gods" re-interpreting the Beowulf legend. It was extremely good. I thought the poetry throughout the collection was very good too. The stories were kind of hit or miss. Right now, I really can't remember any except "How to Talk to Girls at Parties" which is about a socially inept young man from a boys' school who gets dragged to a party by his best friend and they end up at the wrong party. Let's just say that he learns to talk to girls, but they're the wrong kind of girls.

All in all, I think "Fragile Things" is a good choice if you don't really have the attention span to devote to a novel at a given time and you just want some light reading that can be read in short spurts.

Cyndi says

A group of short stories by the brilliant Neil Gaiman. Some are very short some are longer but all of them are

wonderful!

Helen says

Neil Gaiman is amazing and this collection is proof. There are some stories in here that are so good, that I wanted to immediately go back and read them again as soon as I finished. For example:

"A Study in Emerald"

"October in the Chair"

"Other People"

"Bitter Grounds"

"Keepsakes and Treasures"

"Harlequin Valentine"

"Sunbird" and

"Monarch of the Glen."

The rest of the stories all have something interesting to say as well, and each is written in Gaiman's unique style. I even liked some of the poems included, though this was the weakest part of the collection.

I guess you could say I loved this.

Nariman says

I really want to see what's inside Neil Gaiman head !! It must be a very strange place , a place where I doubt would want to be !!

These stories are creepy, horrifying , disturbing, shocking and freaked me out , and I loved them , if it wouldn't for a story or two which were way more creepy for my liking - like the one with the man who likes young girls , this particular story was very disturbing to me - I would've gave this collection five stars.

Stephen says

6.0 stars. On my list of All Time Favorite books. Chilling, funny, scary, sad, imaginative, original, disturbing AND ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT!!!!

Carol. says

Unfortunately, I picked up The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making in the middle of reading this collection, and it threw Gaiman's shortcomings and my reactions into sharp relief. Gaiman's clever, no doubt. But this is a mostly almost-horror collection of short story ideas rendered in a not particularly clever way, and I often had the feeling I was reading bits and pieces of autobiography tucked

into larger tales. Luckily, a pleasant side effect was a coveted spot on Richard's RaR-TaG's list (<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>).

In the spirit of mild self-immolation, I plowed my way through in bits and pieces over perhaps two weeks--okay, now it's more like four--never able to take more than a story or two at a time. Here's what I think: Gaiman is successful because he is popular and slightly pushes boundaries in a currently fashionable, ie. noir way. Occasionally he does lovely things with words and had fabulous ideas, and I hear he's a very nice guy. However, for me, his writing is very uneven, and feels like it would benefit from longer incubation, and perhaps closer affinity with whatever genre he prefers. I'm not a horror fan, but so many of his short stories seem to delight in *twists*, and I'm not just referring to the surprise ending.

'A Study in Emerald' is perhaps one of the most enjoyable stories, a riff on Sherlock Holmes solving a crime for the alien royalty, told in traditional Doyle style. 'October in the Chair' has an interesting concept at it's base and ends up being a story within a story, the source of *The Graveyard Book*. The inner story was enjoyable, but the outer felt unfinished, although I enjoyed the personification of the months. 'The Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves...' was a little bit amusing, but seems a tad *overwrought* and overthought. It has a facetious angle that benefits from a reader's knowledge of literature. 'The Flints of Memory Lane' is a germ of an idea that would benefit from grafting into a larger tale. I do like the line, "I like things to be story-shaped." Perhaps it should have been merged into 'Closing Time,' another story embedded within a story as patrons at a private club share ghost stories.

'Bitter Grounds' is a traveler looking for another life, and finds one as an anthropologist who studies zombies. It was a kind of 'meh' story, and felt like it was trying hard to be portentous and scary, but wasn't. I like the first paragraph and the phrase, "In every way that counted, I was dead"--a fantastic opening line. 'Other People' is a short-short I'm sure I've read before, perhaps in a mythology book; the idea feels like a chance to explore the concept of pain and hell more than anything else. 'Keepsakes and Treasures' has nothing worth keeping, and is twisted and unpleasant on a number of levels. The plot surrounds the development of a murderer as he finds employment under an obscenely wealthy man, Mr. Alice. It's one of the stories where none of the characters are likeable or redeemable. 'Good Boys Deserve Favors' (title taken from a mnemonic for learning music) is an ode to a bass that I presume the author played as a young boy, and is a little too short to feel quite as mystical as it wants to be.

'The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch' reminds me far too much of *The Night Circus*, and not in a way that benefits the short story. Unfortunately, it is a dark and twisted circus, and even the dreams have sharp edges. 'Strange Little Girls' would benefit from being read while listening to Tori Amos, but frankly, I'd rather not. I happen to own more than one Tori album, but she can get haunting and mournful quite fast, and I'd rather not spend the rest of the day depressed. 'Harlequin Valentine' was one of the few I rather enjoyed, an unexpected metamorphosis coming to a stalking puppet. 'The Problem of Susan' is better left unread if one wants to have any positive re-reads of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; although I found the Susan story an interesting idea, Gaiman manages to twist it up with a kinky sexual element that benefits no one.

'How Do You Think it Feels?' is a modern adultery tale. Very little seems special to me about it, and the angle of haunting is... meh. Not scary, not really thought provoking, not really interesting. 'Fifteen Painted Cards...from a Tarot' remains me in a painful way of a story idea I once had in college. Thankfully, it never escaped past my best friend; if only the same had happened here. 'Feeders and Eaters' was actually horrific, in a 'Tell-Tale Heart' kind of way. 'Diseasemaker's Croup' was mildly interesting, but not a fitting read for a hypochondriac, and 'Goliath' just missed me entirely. 'Pages from a Journal' was a bit of a yawn. 'How to Talk to Girls' had an interesting kernel of an idea, and a nice turn of phrase or three, especially when the narrator meets a girl who introduces herself as a poem. 'Sunbird' was an interesting twist on the firebird and the Epicurean adventurers, but I thought it dragged on a little too long. Again, I had the oddest feeling I had read the characters' dialogue before. It felt a little Zelazny, spare and self-consciously oblique.

For me, by far the most enjoyable was 'Monarch of the Glen,' in which the American Gods's character, Shadow, is visiting Scotland. Two characters from an earlier short make an appearance here, and it is Mr. Alice and Mr. Smith. I enjoyed the way local mythology got weaved in on a number of different levels.

Scattered through the book are a number of poems, all of which I am completely not qualified to give an opinion on, and none of which really spoke to me.

Mission of browsing a Gaiman body of work accomplished, and self-flagellation accomplished for the week. Hurrah!

Monique says

I love Neil Gaiman. He is brilliant, imaginative, and abso-*friggin*-lutely weird, and I love him for it. And this book of short stories and prose, **Fragile Things**, is by far my most favorite compendium of his.

Fragile Things is a collection of oddities, retellings, poetry, spin-offs, and queer creations of Neil Gaiman's colorful imagination. Some of the stories have been published elsewhere, like *Sunbird* and *October In The Chair*, which were included in his *M Is For Magic* compilation, and some were published in other authors' works, written specially by Neil Gaiman, upon their request. A series of very short stories was inspired by an album of one of my favorite female indie artists, Tori Amos, who is good friends with Gaiman. There were award-winning stories here, too, such as *A Study In Emerald* which won the Hugo Award for Best Short Story and *Sunbird*, which received for its author the Locus Award.

The book also included, at the very last part, a *novella* published two years after **American Gods** came out, entitled *Monarch of the Glen*. In the *novella*, the main character from *American Gods*, **Shadow**, finds himself lured into a game with monsters. I had my doubts at first on whether I should read it, considering I have yet to read *American Gods* and might inadvertently run into spoilers, but threw caution into the wind, anyway. The *novella*, as it would turn out, would have an entirely separate and distinct plot from *American Gods*. (I asked my husband, who has read it, okay.)

I had a difficult time picking a favorite story from **Fragile Things**, because I loved everything! But I finally whittled it down to five: *Harlequin Valentine*, a short story based on the Harlequinade pantomime; *The Flints of Memory Lane*, which gave me the creeps; *Other People*, because it gave me more of the creeps and some goosebumps, too; *Feeders and Eaters*, for the sheer weirdness and horror of it, and; *The Problem of Susan*, which retells, if you will, the story of Susan Pevensie of The Chronicles of Narnia after the series had concluded. If you've read the series, you'll remember that Susan was no longer included in the last books, as she had taken to fancy things and such, and was no longer "fit" to return to Narnia.

On the other hand, I couldn't think of any short story or poem that I didn't like. The short story written specially for **The Matrix**, which Neil completed prior to the screening of the very first Matrix film, was, of course, a bit predictable, as it was made to cater to the plot of the film. Apart from that, however, it was still an interesting read, and I enjoyed that one nonetheless.

If I were to use the word "*unputdownable*" to describe a book, this is the one. No one in the world, I think, has a more vivid and odd imagination like Neil does. Plus, he writes just beautifully: simple words, straightforward language, languid construction. He is the best storyteller there is, period. And I am just itching to read more of his works!

Thanks, TINTIN, for my copy! :)

Review also posted here.

Whitaker says

The two stars was a compromise. This book is a mixed bag of short stories and poems. In the Harry Potter books, there is a kind of sweet called Bertie Potts Every Flavour Jelly Beans. Sometimes you get something yummy like Raspberry Cream Chocolate or Honey Lemon Lime with a hint of Ginger or Vodka Tonic with Mentholated Cigarette Chaser. Other times you get Snot or Cat's Vomit. This book was like that. Unfortunately, this assortment contained more of the Warthog's Spyhillated Rectum or Seal Poop flavours than the Strawberry Champagne or Saffron and Sabayon Ice Cream types. Mr Gaiman, please stick to prose and avoid the poetry. And I do think it's unnecessarily mercenary to lump us with jottings of your drafts that didn't quite work. There are some gems here, but far far too few to justify a collection. Next time, could you wait till you have decent set before putting a collection out?

Jason Koivu says

It seems wrong and somewhat sad that my favorite Gaiman book is not one of his many heralded novels, but a collection of short stories. Mind you, *Fragile Things* is a great collection of short stories!

Some of the content herein is much more "adult" than a good deal of his other work, which can tend towards the childlike and fanciful. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy the fantastical stuff with its focus on the magic of youth and mystery of the unknown. But I think I prefer his short story work because it seems more well-crafted and honed to a higher perfection than some of his full length novels, which feel a bit loose at times.

In summation, here is my newspaper book review title for this: "Gaiman's *Fragile Things* Is Strong Stuff"*shakes head*....horrible...horrible.

s.penkevich says

'We owe it to each other to tell stories'

For years I've heard the name Neil Gaiman passed about, weighted with heavy praise, and have always promised myself to read him. Earlier this fall, after hearing him speak on NPR, I sat down with a copy of *Coraline*, and hungrily read it in one sitting. Despite the novel being intended for an audience much greener than I, I couldn't help but be hypnotized by the charismatic voice and magical delivery and I renewed my promise to return to this author as soon as possible. More recently, although I was happily buried in a pile of Christmas reading, I purchased his second collection of short fictions, *Fragile Things*, to revisit this infectious voice and break away from heavier reading into his eerie landscapes. Simply put, this collection was some of the most fun I've had in a long time. Filled with many of his Locus award winners, and his Hugo winner, this collection brings many of Gaiman's works, most of them scattered about in various anthologies, together in one binding. All of the signature excellence with which Gaiman has rightly built his widespread fan-base is present to prove that he is equally wonderful with his short game as he is in novel form and to tell stories which will send shivers down the spines of readers of all ages.

There is a vigorous charm about the writing. He lures the reader with lush, simple sentences, which are easy on the eyes, but commanding none-the-less. Once he has drawn you in, cozying up with the reader with a bit of background, the efficacious flow of his phrasing pulls the reader along through the lucid visions of his spectral creations at high speeds in an experience more akin to a thrill ride than just typeface on a page. While Gaiman's writing isn't extravagant, the sleek simplicity of it makes it effective to captivate the minds of both the young and old alike. I especially enjoyed Gaiman's way of affecting a sense of a 'story within a story' where he puts near equal emphasis in the context in which the story is told as in the actual tale much like Henry James does in *The Turn of the Screw*, or Nikolai Gogol does to exemplify the oral tradition of storytelling. This technique is most uniquely present in *October in the Chair*, which earned the 2003 Locus award for Best Short Story, where the 12 months, each personified in a comical fashion, are seated around a campfire and listen to October tell a chilling tale about a young runaway and his nighttime engagements with the ghost of a dead boy. This helps highlight Gaiman's pervasive idea of the power stories hold while also allowing him to bring the reader into the story at a safe distance before shocking them. This also allows the author to add a touch of autobiography, as is the case in *Closing Time*, where he admits that more of the story is ripped from reality than he would like to admit.

These stories are just a flat out good time. From aliens to ghost and vampires, Sherlock Holmes and even into the Matrix, these stories will delight and frighten, which brought to mind my childhood of hiding beneath the sheets reading Steven King's short stories far past bedtime. There is a compelling wit and humor to these tales, many of which reside just on the outskirts of any sense of conclusion, using the classic horror device of allowing the imagination to run wild and fill in the cracks. In stories such as *Feeders and Eaters*, we never learn the grisly details of exactly why the man has fallen in on himself, but there is enough horrific background to allow for creativity to connect the last few dots. Sometimes the 'unsaid' can be mightier than the 'said', and the emotion of fear overrides the physical object of terror. Gaiman is also a master at the twist, such as the Hugo winning *A Study in Emerald*, his Sherlock Holmes A Study in Scarlet inspired tale, which he mixed with a shot of H.P. Lovecraft. As the reader reaches the conclusion they will notice, if they are versed in Holmes lore a bit, an alternate reality that goes beyond the sci-fi elements. The most staggering twist is contained in the very short yet very disturbing *Other People*, which I would label one of the 'must reads' of this collection. A few other points of interest are the short pieces written to accompany a Tori Amos tour book that each reflect a personality from various songs, and a novella dealing with Shadow, the lead character from Gaiman's *American Gods*.

While many of these stories are first rate, this collection does fall into a few pitfalls that comes with the territory of simply rounding up anthologized stories, as there is a sense of unevenness and a fair share of filler. Some of the prose poems also seem to be placed in here just because and do not have the same impact as many of his stories, however Gaiman admits in the introduction that he originally did not intend for any of the poetry to be included. That said, *Instructions*, a poem that illustrates the clichés of fairytales in the manner of laying out ground-rules for what to do should one find themselves in a fairytale, is highly creative and one of my favorite pieces here. There are a few others that bring about a smile, although the stories are the real meat of the collection. A few of the stories can be shrugged off as well, but do not be discouraged as there is an abundance of juicy tales. The introduction itself is just as enjoyable as the rest of the stories; the readers get a glimpse into the author's creative process as he describes some behind the scenes tidbits of each story. It is always fascinating for me to experience the author beyond the romanticized perception of an author, and here you can see Gaiman as the human being, writing stories in hotels rooms, airports, or in his living room as his children run about. He puts the stories into the context of his own life, which makes them seem all the more personal.

Storytelling is of major importance to Neil Gaiman. In a recent NPR interview with Gaiman, he stated that his enjoyment in writing children's fiction stems from a belief that it is the most influential. This is apparent in *The Problem of Susan* when Greta says that her interest in children's fiction is because 'they seemed the books that were most important to me. The ones that mattered.'. Gaiman stated that the books we read in our childhood always reside in our hearts and help shape who we are, and also enjoying fiction at a young age

helps ensure we continue to pursue literature throughout our lives. He said that *Coraline* is one of his favorites since many people come to him with stories of how when they were younger and faced with problems, they would remember how brave *Coraline* was and attempt to emulate this. He said that he began writing children's fiction after a visit to the library in search of scary stories aimed at 5 year olds, his daughters age at the time, brought only concerned looks and no books. He set out to rectify this, and the world of books is a better place for it. *The Problem of Susan* briefly discusses a history of children's fiction, moving from books where children were just miniature adults to ones that are more 'pure' and 'sanctimonious', and dealt with issues that befall children in the way they perceive and react to them. He shows how that pure, innocent period of growth is essential before they reach the pornography and violence that befalls adulthood. His method of doing so envisions a very different view of the Lion and White Witch from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, one that won't soon be forgotten. The poem *Locks* is another place where Gaiman stresses the beauty of childhood innocence in stories, and the function of storytelling being passed through generations. The importance of storytelling is also a major theme in *The Invention of Aladdin*, where stories can be a tool in protecting ones own life.

Fragile Things is an excellent choice for all readers. It will shock, terrify and even make you laugh across a broad range of stories and poems. I am very glad I picked this up and I will certainly be returning to the twisted mind of Neil Gaiman very soon, I suggest you do as well. He seems to be always eager to tell a story and this is probably the closest thing to climbing up on his knee and hearing him recite one of his magical tales. I hope he has a big enough knee for all of us.

4/5

Bookdragon Sean says

Here's what the introduction says about *Fragile Things*:

"It seemed like a fine title for a book of short stories. There are so many fragile things, after all. People break so easily, and so do dreams and hearts."

It all feels like a desperate attempt to release a collection of unrelated stories into the world. They are all very unique and individual with a title that could be applied to a number of different short story books instead of this one.

So the book that has been sold to us feels like a very different thing to the one I read. I enjoyed it, but I don't think it quite embodies the model awkwardly proposed. I had very similar feelings when I read Gaiman's more recent collection *Trigger Warning*. The stories were quite good, but very few had anything to do with the idea of a "trigger" that sets the story in motion and reveals the horror lurking in wait. They were just stories.

And Gaiman's stories are full of possibilities. They are all so random and based upon chance encounters, and that's what drives them forward: I just didn't know what to expect from story to story. A man can walk into a diner and bump into a man he hasn't seen for ten years who has a very dark and twisted tale to share. A boy can walk down the street and see a ghost in the lamplight or another can wake up and find himself in hell. There's just no filter to the possibilities. They can go anywhere and be anything

So in terms of entertainment value (and the ability to keep things fresh and interesting across pieces) this scores very highly. No two stories are the same and none really follow a particular pattern or system. The idea of grouping them under a title seems a little absurd. A few of them, though, did feel like they belonged in the same world as *American Gods*. I wouldn't be entirely surprised if he wrote some of them at the same

time as working on his magnum-opus; there are certainly parallels.

As with all short story collections (especially inconsistent ones) there are good stories and then there are bad stories often involved. With this some stories remain open and then there are some that are weird to the point of being nonsensical. This is very much a mixed bag. I really enjoyed a few then there were others that just left me feeling confused as the story didn't seem to do anything.

I think Gaiman is a much better novel (and graphic novel) writer than he is a short story writer. This is worth reading if you're already a big fan of his, but if you're looking for really a decent collection of short stories I can think of much better places to look.

Jonathan Terrington says

Stories, Neil Gaiman informs in the introduction, are fragile things made up of 26 letters (more if you want to use phonetic symbols), ink and paper. They are illusions created by things that cannot last, but the best stories survive and transform. The stories within this volume are perhaps some of those best stories.

This collection contained many of Gaiman's most famous short stories. I want to write three quick reviews of some of the short stories. Including one which I previously read online and reviewed separately.

A Study in Emerald

A re-read of A Study in Emerald proved highly enlightening as I was able to observe and analyse the technique used by Gaiman in creating the story. As previously mentioned his first paragraph verges close to plagiarism in how it replicates the feel of another Sherlock Holmes story A Study in Scarlet. Yet only a foolish person would dare call this a work of plagiarism, rather it is a story which clearly references both Lovecraft and Doyle in a unique manner. (view spoiler) It is a work of genius and a very clever short story in all its technical proficiency.

Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire

This was a story which I didn't quite understand but I have an idea of what Gaiman was aiming at. (view spoiler) If what I think is correct then it was a very clever story, speaking about the writer's art and about the connection between horror and reality. It was also a creepy story in the proper way a horror story should be!

The Problem of Susan

This is one of Neil Gaiman's more famous stories and also a very controversial one. I liked some elements of it, for instance the technical aspect of the writing (view spoiler) However what did not work where the sexual undertones and the analysis that Susan was left behind because of her growing sexuality which is what many people have criticised Lewis for. However I think that section of The last Battle personally is meant to be focused around the fact that Susan became focused on other things than Narnia. I think that Lewis merely phrased this concept awkwardly, in a way that makes it easy to see it as a sexist dig at Susan not being able to go to Narnia because she discovered boys and lipstick. Yet if you do a true analysis I think you'll notice that the grown up Lucy does go to Narnia in the end. Surely she would have discovered some kind of adult sexuality? Yet she remained true to Narnia. I also disliked the metaphor with the lion and the witch very much. I think Neil Gaiman's own personal ideology causes him to spite the religious message in the Narnia books and that it was rather apparent in his (I thought it was vulgar) portrayal of the witch and lion.

Conclusion

On the whole most of the stories worked and the poems additionally added an extra level to this collection. It is certainly something every short story enthusiast and fantasy fan, let alone Neil Gaiman fan will want to read. Gaiman is one of the more versatile modern authors and his work is both bizarre, fascinating, reflective and full of literary reference. His humour shines through in subtle ways, making his work that little bit more charming. On the whole an easy four star rating and a collection to enjoy on any kind of day.

Ana Rînceanu says

The Mapmaker – originally written for *American Gods*, this short story is a cautionary tale about disregarding the needs of others while chasing ones desires and chasing immortality by keeping records a.k.a that map (3 stars)

A Study in Emerald – [goodreads.com/review/show/1321098517](https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1321098517) (3 stars)

The Fairy Reel – a short lyric poem about the foolishness of not risking your heart (3 stars)

October in the Chair – runaway boy finds a ghost (4 stars)

The Hidden Chamber – gothic poem about Bluebeard (3 stars)

Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire – Gaiman makes fun of the kind of reader I was at 14. I don't take offense, it's a good story (4 stars)

The Flints of Memory Lane – a real life ghost story has no resolution (view spoiler) (3 stars)

Closing Time– ghost stories shared by friends in a pub (3 stars)

Going Wodwo – a poem about a wild man in the woods; I need to read Ted Hughes (3 stars)

Bitter Grounds – odd story about loss, love, carelessness, voodoo, sex, ghosts, and more (4 stars)

Other People – the terror of purgatory is within himself (3 stars)

Keepsakes and Treasures: A Love Story – the second in command of a criminal boss is tasked with finding a lover for his boss (4 stars)

Good Boys Deserve Favors – inspired by a statue by Lisa Snellings-Clark of a man holding a double bass (3 stars)

The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch – inspired by a painting by Frank Frazetta of a savage woman flanked by tigers. I like how it started by telling us the ending in which three writers try to decide what to do with a logically unexplainable situation and worrying that no one would believe them because of their profession. A circus story. (4 stars)

Strange Little Girls– twelve very short stories to accompany Tori Amos's CD *Strange Little Girls* (3 stars)

Harlequin Valentine– trickster Harlequin woos an unusual Columbine... or maybe not (4 stars)

Locks – a conversational poem editing the tale of Goldilocks (3 stars)

The Problem of Susan– this story was written in response to the character Susan in Narnia and also how children's fiction came to be. I like how human professor Hastings is when she talks about tragedy and how it clashes with Brenda's insistence in believing that the author has moral authority in the world he created. I loved how Mary Poppins was introduced into the story. (4 stars)

Instructions – a poem giving instructions about what to do when you find yourself in a fairy tale (3 stars)

How Do You Think It Feels? – story inspired by gargoyles and heartbreak (4 stars)

My Life – monologue about an odd life (3 stars)

Fifteen Painted Cards from a Vampire Tarot – vampire story (3 stars)

Feeders and Eaters – two old acquaintances are reunited and one of them is so dramatically altered. This is the story about what happened to him. Scary, very scary! (3 stars)

Diseasemaker's Croup – an interesting take on hypochondriacs (3 stars)

In the End – imagined as the very last book of the Bible; the last phrase of this story really stuck with me (4 stars)

Goliath – set in the Matrix universe and included with The Matrix Comics Vol. 1 (4 stars)

Pages from a Journal Found in a Shoebox Left in a Greyhound Bus Somewhere Between Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Louisville, Kentucky – written for the album *Scarlet's Walk*, by Tori Amos (3 stars)

How to Talk to Girls at Parties - [goodreads.com/review/show/907208644?b...](https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/907208644?b...) (3 stars)

The Day the Saucers Came - poem describing me waiting for the phone to ring (4 stars)

Sunbird – a club of Epicureans are trying to find a new culinary challenge by going to Cairo to eat a phoenix (3 stars)

Inventing Aladdin – a poem depicting the invention of stories, in this case, Aladdin by Scheherazade (3 stars)

The Monarch of the Glen – a novella-length sequel to Gaiman's novel *American Gods* inspired by Beowulf and set in remote areas of Scotland (3 stars)

Randy says

Collection of Gaiman's short stories and poem, including the following:

- Introduction - 3/5 - story notes and anecdotes includes short story *The Mapmaker* (also 3/5)
- *A Study in Emerald* - 5/5 - Sherlock Cthulhu
- *The Fairy Reel* - 3/5 - poem
- *October in the Chair* - 3/5 - test run for Gaiman's *Graveyard Book*
- *The Hidden Chamber* - 3/5 - poem
- *Forbidden Brides of the Faceless Slaves in the Secret House of the Night of Dread Desire* - 3/5 - one of

Gaiman's earliest tales, reworked for an anthology

- The Flints of Memory Lane - 3/5 - short, allegedly true ghost story
 - Closing Time - 3/5 - simple but effective ghost story
 - Going Wodwo - 3/5 - poem
 - Bitter Grounds - 3/5 - quirky southern gothic tale
 - Other People - 4/5 - hell with a moebius twist ending
 - Keepsakes and Treasures - 4/5 - very different feel for Gaiman
 - Good Boys Deserve Favors - 3/5 - young man with a big bass
 - The Facts in the Case of the Departure of Miss Finch - 3/5 - quirky little story to accompany a Frazetta painting
 - Strange Little Girls - 2/5 - it's as exciting as Tori Amos liner notes...wait a minute, it IS Tori Amos liner notes
 - Harlequin Valentine - 2/5 - based on a sculpture, seems indulgent
 - Locks - 4/5 - poem about Gaiman reading Goldilocks to his 2 year old daughter
 - The Problem of Susan - 3/5 - whatever happened to Susan from the Narnia books (WARNING: explicit, not for children)
 - Instructions - 4/5 - poem
 - How Do You Think It Feels? - 3/5 - breaking up is hard to do
 - My Life - 4/5 - poem
 - Fifteen Painted Cards From A Vampire Tarot - 2/5 - brief vignettes made to accompany a book of vampire tarot cards (?)
 - Feeders and Eaters - 3/5 - well that was gruesome, and the ending was kind of obvious...
 - Diseasemaker's Croup - 1/5 - not too clever, and basically unreadable
 - In The End - 3/5 - what the last book of the Bible should have said
 - Goliath - 4/5 - should have taken the blue pill?
 - Pages from a Journal Found in a Shoebox Left in a Greyhound Bus Somewhere Between Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Louisville, Kentucky - 2/5 - Tori Amos tour book notes, based on one of her songs
 - How to Talk to Girls at Parties - 4/5 - this explains some of my youthful experiences at parties
 - The Day The Saucers Came - 4/5 - poem
 - Sunbird - 4/5 - tribute to R.A. Lafferty; what do you feed people who have eaten everything?
 - Inventing Aladdin - 3/5 - poem about maybe how the myth of Aladdin began
 - The Monarch of the Glen - 4/5 - Shadow Moon story set in Northern Ireland
-

Robert says

As with previous collections of short pieces by Gaiman, I found this extremely variable in quality: Anything referred to as "poetry" is execrable, as are all the "stories" that are extremely short and fail to follow any normal narrative structure. On the other hand, the pieces that follow some kind of conventional method are all at least OK and in some cases delightful.

Stand-out entries are A Study in Emerald and How to Talk to Girls at Parties.

Becky says

This is my second read-through of this book, and it was just as great, and oddly, just as surprising this time around as the last.

I don't know why it is, but I just have this image in my mind of Neil Gaiman as a proper author. I don't mean 'proper' to mean that he is officially an author (though he is), or that he does it correctly (though he does), but 'proper' in terms of vocabulary and ideas being more on the... non-vulgar side of things. I have this picture in my head, despite reading his books and stories and blog posts and comics, and having seen him live with his wife Amanda Palmer, who seems to revel in vulgarity at times... and none of these things support this idea I have of him. But still it persists.

And so when I read the stories in this book, they give me a little thrill, because I don't expect the vulgar and the so-very-adult-ness of some of these stories. Even though, by all accounts, I SHOULD.

I'm not easily shocked or offended, but I like that sometimes Neil's writing can cause that little thrill in me. It keeps me on my toes. Doesn't let me get too comfortable in Neil's work, because there's such a huge range of it that you never know which way he'll go next. And I like that. A lot.

I don't know if I want to talk about the stories individually, except to say that I don't think there's any that I actively dislike, though I'd have to say that Harlequin Valentine is probably my least favorite. But I do want to say that one thing I love about almost the entire collection is the interpretability of the stories. They all have layers that just work so beautifully together, and you can see them in the way that makes sense to you.

The stories aren't surprisingly good, because I expect everything Neil writes to be good, but they are surprising AND good. So many of these stories gave me an interesting perspective on something, and made me a part of the story for a little while. Really excellent short fiction pulls you into the story and doesn't want to let you go. You want to think about it, and examine it, and expand on it... and that's what this collection achieved.

This is a fantastic collection, and if you can get this on audio, I highly recommend it. Of course, Neil Gaiman could read a Chinese take-out menu and I'll fall all over myself gushing about how brilliantly he read it. So, you know, listen to it. You won't be sorry.

Kerfe says

I have not read Neil Gaiman's novels but I've heard good things about them. This collection is obviously not a good place to start reading his work. First off, the intro was irritating. The self-satisfied aren't-I-wonderful? name dropping tone was kind of overbearing, and probably put me in an extra-critical mood.

The short story is unforgiving; you don't have time for slow bits, or parts that sound like you've read them already somewhere before. And paying homage is tricky too--it can't be merely a lesser or different version of the original concept. It needs to have its own substance, its own reason for being. Gaiman seems to admire science fiction, horror, and fantasy, but his attempts to emulate them failed to engage me.

Maybe the real world has made me too cynical or jaded, but what is meant to be scary or sinister seems here to be instead pathetic and old. What should be mysterious is merely another plot for a reality TV show. The writing itself is not that good, and uses an awful lot of cliches, in a kind of casual, isn't this amusing? way. If Gaiman is trying to parody pop culture, it falls flat for me. It's just not different or new or clever enough.

Despite my overall disappointment, there were some things I liked, especially the science fictiony "Goliath" (inspired by the Matrix movies) and "How to Talk to Girls at Parties". The American Gods novella, "Monarch of the Glen", also had some good parts, which leads me to believe that the novels really must be far better. The poetry did not appeal to me, except for "Instructions".

I know publishers like to cash in on popular authors, but if, like me, this is the first Gaiman you pick up, it's doubtful it would make you want to read more.

Erica says

Wow, I am crabby.

I'm in a punching kittens/kicking puppies place right now, have been for awhile.

I think this current state of being is blocking my ability to find enjoyment in things I typically find delightful. This book of collected Gaiman stories, for example.

I pressed "Play", he started reading, I went, "Ahhhhhhh. Bliss," and then I got bored.

I made it all the way to the last disc and then kind of fast-forwarded to the end, skipping giant parts, leaving huge swaths of un-listened-to prose behind me.

It just didn't scratch the itch I'd expected to have relieved, which is tragic (for me)

Don't worry, I'm not losing the 1/4 soul I own (my mother told me my siblings and I share one soul between us because there aren't enough souls to go around anymore, due to our living too long and the lower infant mortality rate, etc. Damn you, medical technology, messing with the supply and demand of souls), it's just bruised right now and I need a breather.

I may try this again another day. Maybe not, though; I'd already read/heard/seen about half the stories anyhow so I'm not sure that I really need to go through it all again.

Man. I am so sad for myself.
