



Questionable Practices: Stories

Eileen Gunn

Download now

Read Online ➔

Questionable Practices: Stories

Eileen Gunn

Questionable Practices: Stories Eileen Gunn

Good intentions aren't everything. Sometimes things don't quite go the way you planned. And sometimes you don't plan. . . . This collection of sixteen stories (and one lonely poem) chart the many ways trouble can ensue. No actual human beings were harmed in the creation of this book.

Stories from Eileen Gunn are always a cause for celebration. Where will she lead us? "Up the Fire Road" to a slightly alternate world. Four stories into steampunk's heart. Into a very strange family gathering as they celebrate Christmas. Into the golem's heart. Never where we might expect.

Questionable Practices: Stories Details

Date : Published March 11th 2014 by Small Beer Press (first published February 17th 2014)

ISBN : 9781618730756

Author : Eileen Gunn

Format : Paperback 276 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Short Stories, Fantasy

 [Download Questionable Practices: Stories ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Questionable Practices: Stories ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Questionable Practices: Stories Eileen Gunn

From Reader Review Questionable Practices: Stories for online ebook

s says

Mixed bag -- the writing feels a bit amateurish and clunky, but the ideas often sparkle. My favorites were "The Trains That Climb the Winter Tree" and "The Armies of Elfland", followed by the two opening stories.

Shandra says

I'm not really a short story fan. I prefer to sink into the world of a novel, and generally only read short stories if I really, really love the author, or if it's an author I know in person. True confession, I have met Eileen Gunn in passing, but I don't really know her. I was asked to read this book for an award, and took too long about it and missed the deadline. For that, I feel really bad, as this collection was, if I had to pick one word, amazing. If I didn't have a very bad habit of putting down short story collections after nearly each story and reading a novel or two, I would've been very happy to give this work very high marks for said award!

Eileen Gunn's writing is so intelligent, and so complex, and her mind seems to work in really strange ways. At first, that made the going a little difficult. I've gotten lazy - I tend to read more for fun than for exercise, as it were. The stories made me scratch my head a bit, ponder things, or just sometimes stop and say "Whoa!" This also made me more likely to put the collection down, just because I needed a moment to breath and think after I finished a story! But the more I read, the more I enjoyed the challenge, and the stories.

I especially enjoyed "Speak, Geek", "Hive Man Mind", "Thought Experiment" (an interesting twist on time travel), "The Armies of Elfland", "Zeppelin City" and "Phantom Pain". Tiny spoiler - if you don't want to end the collection with a tissue, read "Phantom Pain" out of order. *sniff*

There is a quartet of stories that are, from what I can tell, written in the style of other authors. I myself didn't get the references, so I think I need to add those authors to my list (one, China Mieville, has been on my list for ages already - I really need to get reading his stuff)! I've read a few reviews that say the stories Eileen wrote alone are better, and I've seen reviews that say the stories she collaborated on are better. I don't think either is 100% true. I really enjoyed almost all of the stories, and even the few I didn't care for as much were still well crafted. (Those did come near the beginning - I'm glad her writing style kept me reading past them!) Altogether, a weird, very well-written, thought provoking collection of sci-fi stories (and one poem)! I recommend it, and I'll be seeking out more of her writing!

Jack Skillingstead says

One of our best short story writers. There is not one missed beat in this collection. Amazing.

Adom says

The best stories (well, the ones I liked most) seem to be the one's on which Eileen Gunn collaborated, which comprise 4 of the 6 longer stories in the collection. Of the stories for which Gunn is the sole author, "Up the Fire Road", (a story about a Sasquatch I guess, and a lot of sex) and "No Place to Raise Kids" (a KirkxSpock mpreg fic... um... yeah) were the most distinctive. Both bring about a sort of mental reorientation as one tries to create a image of what exactly is going on. The former sustains this consistently but fairly over the course of 30-ish pages and the latter is short enough that it ends before totally solidifying, leaving the reader confused but in a good way. "Chop Wood, Carry Water" is less whimsical but has a very interesting premise. My favorite stories though were, in no particular order, "The Trains that Climb the Winter Tree," "The Armies of Elfland," and "Zeppelin City", all of which were written with collaborators. "The Trains..." and "The Armies..." were somewhat similar, both involving precocious children in a desperate struggle against really extremely evil fairy-tail elves. "The Trains..." reminded me a lot of Spirited Away, and Miyazaki in general. The penultimate story, "Zeppelin City," was great as well. Like the two stories above, the characters were interesting and diverse, and for a 45 page story the cast is impressively large and well developed. The setting is rich and the story is extremely satisfying. Though I didn't love it as much as those three stories, "Hive Mind Man" was imaginative and well executed. Overall, I really enjoyed this book, and though I didn't love every single story, it may be the best collection I've read (though perhaps that title belongs to El Aleph or Ficciones).

Mills College Library says

Fiction G9763q 2014

Martin Fossum says

As first appeared at workadayreads.com

(Spoiler Alert!)

Reading Eileen Gunn's latest collection of short fiction, *Questionable Practices* (Small Beer Press, 2014), is like buying a grab bag full of fireworks, having a few beers and then lighting fuses...and with each fuse, you have no idea what to expect. Launch. Color. Bang! It's all here in an extraordinary display of virtuosity and craftsmanship. This collection is a perfect example of what contemporary speculative fiction should be, and Gunn is fearless as she leads us through the captivating landscape of her imagination.

The three strongest pieces in this collection are "Up the Fire Road," "Chop Wood, Carry Water," and "Phantom Pain." In "Up the Fire Road," Gunn speaks through the voices of Christy and Andrea: lovers and friends. The story begins during a cross-country skiing trip on Mt. Baker where the two find themselves tired and hungry and running out of daylight. They are befriended and given shelter by a sasquatch named Mickey, and after spending the night in the Mickey's cave, a love triangle develops with Mickey at its core. After several enjoyable days in the cave, Andrea becomes ill and thinks she may be pregnant. As Andrea and Christy prepare to leave, Mickey mentions that she may also be pregnant. (Yes, Mickey, the sasquatch, manifests itself in both genders.) Andrea believes that she's carrying Mickey's baby, and Mickey thinks she may be carrying Christy's baby. After Christy and Andrea leave the cave, Christy tries to generate some profitable press from the experience (as anyone could be expected to do), only to be embarrassed by the News of the World headline: "He fathered a bigfoot baby...and became a deadbeat dad." Mickey, Andrea and Christy reunite for an appearance on the "Maury show" where the audience is treated to tabloid talk spectacle at it finest. "I'm sure you've seen the clip on YouTube," says Christy at the end.

In “Chop Wood, Carry Water,” Gunn’s deep understanding of Jewish mysticism and tradition are on display. In this story, a golem is brought to life by a Rabbi on the muddy bank of the Vltava, “to the stench of burning metal and baking clay.” Once animated, the Rabbi tasks the golem with tending to the headstones in the graveyard and to defend the village. The golem, we find out, is intelligent. It learns through the act of moving books from shelf to shelf in the shule’s library, and it is here that the golem becomes aware of the history of people and it is astounded and horrified by the thoughts and acts of mankind. One day, the golem discovers that its strength is gone. It can no longer move the headstones, and after seeking the Rabbi’s counsel, it learns, finally, what it needs to do to redeem itself and to recover its sense of purpose.

On his hospital deathbed, a former soldier remembers what it’s like to die in “Phantom Pain.” In the beginning of the story are the descriptions of a distant war. On the jungle floor, he crawls through the mud: “His leg was broken, he knew it, and it was chewed all to hell. Bullets from their own gun captured by the Japs, in one leg, shrapnel from somebody’s mortar – Jap? Yank? who knew whose? – in the other.” There are memories of his being at home with his girlfriend, Katie. He recalls much, but in his final hour, many years removed from combat and those distant recollections, he must confront his inevitable passing. “At the very center of dying was wanting to let go, and eventually the wanting comes to you, whether you invite it or not. Easy and hard are not part of wanting.”

In this collection, Gunn flits expertly from time travel motifs, to Star Trek vignettes, to self-help guru lampoon, and solid steampunk, and in each piece she shows absolute control. In four of these works Gunn partnered with Michael Swanwick (Nebula winning author), while “Hive Mind” was done in collaboration with Rudy Rucker. She is in good company, for sure, but one must wonder if this collection had too much bang and too little cohesion.

Speculative fiction, by nature, is meant to disrupt our conventional sense of history and reason. In other words, when reading Gunn, we should expect the unexpected. But in this collection of disparate narratives, it seemed, at times, exhausting to move from one to the next. After being lost in the world of a seventeenth-century golem, it is jarring to jump backstage to a Star Trek set where Spock was giving birth to twins he was having with Captain Kirk.

Gunn’s fiction is alive. She is a hip-hop artist...someone who can glide between cultural references, from tabloid fluff to myth-building metaphors, with authority and cool. This is the stuff of real contemporary literature. This is innovative and hot writing. I’m excited to learn more about what she’s done in the past and I’m even more excited to see what she does next.

Gregory Frost says

A fine collection of stories and collaborations from an author we don’t see enough of and can’t read enough of. Tales full of humor (her “Steampunk Quartet” in response to works such as *The Difference Engine* and *Perdido Street Station* is a hoot); and of wonder and pathos (Try her great fantasy collaboration with Michael Swanwick, “The Trains that Climb the Winter Tree” for high weirdness).
A highly recommended collection.

Psychophant says

I have always liked Ms. Gunn style, even stories that I dislike for other reasons (plot, setting, characters). Because she writes about all kinds of things, from Christmas terror to TV yellow press. I still hope to see a

full novel. Half the pages, if not the stories, are cowritten with Michael Swanwick, a big plus for me and a way to keep up to date with his full opus.

As in all compilations, quality is varied, but generally good, including a homage to several Sci-fi classics. The two long collaborations with Michael Swanwick, The train that climbs the Winter tree and Zeppelin city, are specially good.

Tony Clavelli says

I know it's really common in reviews of short story collections to describe them as hit or miss, because it's what would naturally happen in any gathered selection of stories. You'll like some, others you'll not like--but then for other readers they're swapped.

However with this collection it's different. A quick read over the Amazon reviews and others here and it's pretty much the same ones mentioned again and again: "Up the Fire Road," "Chop Wood, Carry Water," and "Phantom Pain"--maybe another will sneak into a personal list (lots mentioned "The Train that Climbs the Winter Tree," though not for me) but those are the heavyweights. And they really are quite awesome. Look at those three-stars up there! I found many of the collaborations either to be like unfinished thoughts, or just lazy, but still I just said I liked it. The three mentioned above are weird, beautiful, and funny, often all at once. It showed me that I would definitely like an Eileen Gunn collection if it were more like a best of.

What's with the collaborations. It seemed like more than half of these had either another name or a caveat attached to it, and they just fell flat. Even when she was riffing on other writers' styles, it didn't work at all. Granted, she did an eerily amazing job taking on the voices of famous steampunk books (I was in the middle of Perdido Street Station when i read her take on that, and the sentence structures were marvelously adapted), they weren't stories. No one wants to buy someone's vignettes. Vignettes aren't stories.

I will probably try Eileen Gunn again, but I will shop around for the best work, and be careful to find something with her name on all the pieces. That title--Questionable Practices--is it referring to the cobbled method with which this book was put together? The questionable practice of having half your stories in your collection as "collaborations" that meander all over the place and rely too heavily on tropes? The good ones are so good that it's clear I just got on the Eileen Gunn-ship late and need to do more research before I find the next one.

Jonbro says

The introduction story, involving a love triangle, sasquatch, and maury povich is the standout story in the collection. There are a few other highlights too, particularly the tube punk story about brains in jars, and the set of elf stories. The book slows down around the quartet of steampunk stories, and the final meditation on pain and death feels less imaginative than the rest of the book.

Alex says

A collection with one great story is usually worth the price of admission. This one starts with three in a row. "Up the Fire Road," "Chop Wood, Carry Water," and "The Trains that Climb the Winter Tree," are all

stunners, each one demonstrating Gunn's extraordinary range and imagination. These are dream-narratives that send the fantastic and the mundane crashing into each other at high speed, twisting things familiar from life and myth into strange, kinetic sculpture.

Few of the remaining stories gripped as they did, reading more like collages of literary allusions and inside jokes. It ends on a high note with "Phantom Pain," which brings the collection's themes of risk and (self-)destruction to a thoughtful and bittersweet conclusion.

John Defrog says

I've never read Eileen Gunn before, but she has a great reputation in the SF/F community as a writer and editor and has won some awards, so I thought I'd try this collection of short stories, which also includes some collaborations (three with Michael Swanwick, one with Rudy Rucker). It's an eclectic mix, and there's a lot of imaginative ideas flying around here – Sasquatch love triangles, golems, social-media cyberpunk, time travel, steampunk spoofs, alternate pulp realities, savage elves and a wonderful poem in which Alice Kramden gets Norton to build her a rocket ship. Gunn's writing is very accessible, and while the subject matter doesn't always work for me personally, when it works it works well.

Mark Flowers says

SLJ review:

<http://blogs.slj.com/adult4teen/2014/...>

GUNN, Eileen. *Questionable Practices*. 208p. Small Beer. Mar. 2014. Tr \$16. ISBN 9781618730756. LC 2013047730.

This quirky story collection begins with a love triangle between a man, a woman, and a Sasquatch—the man sees the Sasquatch as a beautiful woman; the woman sees the Sasquatch as a beautiful man; they all sleep together; and all three plus the woman's mother end up on Maury arguing over paternity. And it only gets stranger (though never funnier) from there. Later stories feature Kirk and Spock slash-fic, semi-parodical steampunk, several sets of evil elves, and an incredibly moving account of a veteran's failed attempts to reintegrate into society. Aside from the veteran's story (the last in the collection), the overwhelming mood is darkly comic science fiction—like a strange blend of Terry Gilliam and Margo Lanagan. Teen fans of either or both of those geniuses would do well to turn to Gunn for a similarly unique ride. Her prose is vividly off-kilter, her plots memorable and usually hilarious, and her characters recognizable even when they are tropes. And even though nothing is quite what it seems in these stories, the author's firm grip on dream logic makes everything feel meaningful, even when it doesn't quite make sense.—Mark Flowers, John F. Kennedy Library, Vallejo, CA

William Freedman says

If Connie Willis and Joe R. Lansdale shared an eccentric relative whose behavior at family functions was utterly unpredictable, it would be Eileen Gunn. She has Willis's true appreciation for the tropes she's skewering and Lansdale's economy of words bringing the reader into the funhouse world they both inhabit. If

you've never read Gunn before, start here.

And if you've never read Michael Swanwick before, "Questionable Practices" will serve as your gateway drug. Two of my favorites in the collection, the Gaiman-esque "The Trains that Climb the Winter Tree" and the bleakly stirring "The Armies of Elfland" were co-authored with Swanwick. Another of the better works was "Hive Mind Man," another collaboration, this time with Rudy Rucker. She does great on her own reconstructing the Golem stories in "Chop Wood, Carry Water" (actually getting the Jew-y stuff right) and reconstructing time travel with "Thought Experiment".

She gives winks to Steampunk and New Weird, as well as a warning to writers who employ disjointed timelines call-response narration that maybe these narrative flourishes are becoming hackneyed.

Patrick DiJusto says

Wonderful collection of very imaginative short stories. I so want to live in the world of Zeppelin City!

Ashley Booth says

Absolutely worth a read--some stories I ended up skipping, but others were so interesting and inventive.

Sam says

I bought this book at a feminist bookstore (yes, they allowed a guy to enter). It was in the small science fiction/fantasy section, and looked like a fairly ordinary book that just happens to be by a woman author. It did not disappoint: this is a great collection of short stories, without any particular feminist slant. (Unless having a good blend of female and male protagonists is enough to make it count feminist.)

Many of the stories are just outstanding, nearly all are mind bending. The feeling one gets is "Wham! -- What just happened?" As the quote on the book cover says "Plenty of science fiction and fantasy authors do 'thought experiments', but few of them disregard experimental safety protocols with quite as much gleeful abandon as Eileen Gunn" [Charlie Jane Andrews].

The "Wham" category includes:

- Up the Fire Road : Sasquatch love child, the real thing. Reality TV?
- Chop Wood, Carry Water. The Prague Golem. His personal tale. A vital reimagination of the Golem.
- Phantom Pain. A wounded soldier faces death and struggles to regain his unit. Confronts mortality and the rest of his life head on.

Coming close to the "Wham Category"

- Hive Mind Man (joint with Rudy Rucker). The internet on steroids, meets Gaia.
- Zeppelin City. - Zeppelin fighter pilots, and public dueling and competitions, serve as the opiate of the masses.

Somewhat miss the mark (but I see that a lot of other reviews really liked these, so go figure...)

- The Steampunk quartet. Riffs on Steampunk novels. I guess you need to know the novels. Fortunately

these are very short and do not detract from the book.

- The Trains that Climb the Christmas Tree. Think of Polar Express, but with evil (very evil) elves.
- Armies of Elfland. Really very, very evil elves. Unfortunately, the elves are two dimensional, both literally and literarily. Human children versus elves. The only human who is sympathetic is Peter, but he is decidedly not the hero.

Fun but too short:

- Speak Geek. A very smart dog. Joins the cats.
- To the Moon with Alice. Alice and Trixie launch away from Ralph and Ed
- No Place to Raise Kids: A Tale of Forbidden Love. Star Trek, forbidden love.

Jeff Raymond says

Those who have been keeping up with my reviews for a good length of time know I struggle with short stories, and I can honestly say that *Questionable Practices* was mostly a lot of fun. Some solid, memorable stuff mixed in with some weird (and Weird) exercises in short literature, it's something I'm very glad I got my hands on. A decidedly different collection, but one with a lot going for it.

Definitely recommended for those who are into the whole "New Weird" thing and for those who like short fiction in general.

tyto says

I wanted to like this way more.

Baal Of says

A couple years ago at Armadillo Con, I made a friend of mine pick out some books for me to buy, my specific request being that she choose only female authors that I was unfamiliar with. This was one of the books I walked away with, and what a pleasant discovery. Gunn delivers some imaginative weird fiction, backed up with good story-telling chops, interesting characters, and an precision economy of words. *Up The Fire Road* was a great lead for this collection, with it's awesomely bizarre rendition of a Sasquatch tale mixing in sex and gender bending, and making a far better tale than any of the so-called "real" Bigfoot lore. Other stand-outs were *Chop Wood*, *Carry Water* and *Phantom Pain*. I didn't particularly like the Steampunk Quartet, probably because I wasn't getting the inside jokes, even on the Mieville story - it's been a very long time since I read Perdido Street Station. All told, a solid collection from an author I had not previously read.
