



Fugue State

Brian Evenson , Zak Sally (Illustrator)

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Illustrated by graphic novelist Zak Sally, Brian Evenson's hallucinatory and darkly comic stories of paranoia, pursuit, sensory deprivation, amnesia, and retribution rattle the cages of the psyche and peer into the gaping moral chasm that opens when we become estranged from ourselves. From sadistic bosses with secret fears to a woman trapped in a mime's imaginary box, and from a post-apocalyptic misidentified Messiah to unwitting portraitists of the dead, the mind-bending world of this modern-day Edgar Allan Poe exposes the horror contained within our daily lives.

Fugue State Details

Date : Published July 1st 2009 by Coffee House Press

ISBN : 9781566892254

Author : Brian Evenson , Zak Sally (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 205 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Horror, Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction, Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics

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From Reader Review Fugue State for online ebook

Aya says

Some stories are really great and haunting. But in some stories there was a lack of psychological depth. What i mean by this is that the psychology was just too simplified and not realistic to me. And also after reading some stories i detected a kind of gimmickry in his writing that bothered me. But overal i give it 4 stars as i did enjoyed the dark and surreal stories and some concepts even inspired me.

Adam says

Fugue State is another worthwhile collection of Evenson's brilliant, angular, and disconcerting takes on fiction. He uses short fiction in way very few contemporaries do, Ligotti definitely comes to mind though. Beckett's desolate spaces and comic narrators, Poe's diseased and obsessive minds, the suffocating traps of Kafka are Evenson's peers, but his collection of mutilations, plagues, amnesiacs, liminal spaces, and bizarre rituals are distinctly his own voice. Zak Sally the cartoonist and former bass player of the wonderful band Low provides some stark little illustrations and one full on collaboration with Evenson.

Jeff says

I've been a fan of Brian Evenson's fiction for several years now, and as much as I thoroughly enjoyed his earlier collections of short stories, *Fugue State* strikes me as being the single best assembly of his output to date. Evenson has always trafficked in themes dark, morbid, and surreal, and all of those elements are present in these new stories. But there is a softening in the contents of *Fugue State* that allows these stories to rely less on shock value and more on character development, albeit within the constraints of the short story form. There is a strong sense of isolation and self-reliance shared by these various narrators that allows the protagonists to take the spotlight away from the extreme, and sometimes a bit cliched, circumstances that they find themselves in. Being along for the ride as a writer as talented as Evenson breaks new ground in this way makes for a thrilling reading experience.

M.P. Johnson says

Thoughtful, Twisted Horror Stories

This collection winds through a truly unique and surprising bunch of short stories. It starts with the very subtle horror that kids face when a stranger appears at the door and there are no adults to answer it. It moves on to tales post-apocalyptic killer liquids and jerky, doll-fearing publishers. It culminates magnificently in an intense zombie story. This is how horror short fiction should be done.

Mike says

Evenson writes from an extreme distance, which works with the post-apocalyptic settings and the paranoia/schizophrenia mindset of some of the stories--it's compelling (while reading, but not terribly memorable) stuff, chilling, very well written. But that same distance results in a lack of vividness for me (all the stories merge into one another, into a sort of grey streak) and a complete lack of characterization. Not a fault really, as it's certainly intentional, but the result is that the stuff here reads more like puzzles or thought experiments, and not tremendously inventive ones--I've seen similar but less well written stuff from pulp horror writers and comic books. When he's at his best, though, he's good enough to make me want to read his other books.

M Griffin says

The first time I remember hearing the term "fugue state" was in association with the David Lynch film *Lost Highway*, in which a character detaches psychologically from life he knows, loses his very self. He drifts on through life, encountering strangers who are vaguely familiar, and tripping over circumstances which seem tenuously related to the life and self-hood he knew before.

I don't know how much Brian Evenson was inspired by Lynch's film, if at all. The characters in *Fugue State* encounter mysteries, and in most cases undergo some kind of shift or dislocation of personality. Sometimes the characters are lost, while the reader is allowed insight into the character's plight, and at other times the reader is equally mystified. This obliqueness is intentional, not a matter of poor craft, of stories lacking somehow. When an author gives the reader such a large helping of absurdity, of disconnection and illogic, the reader must determine whether the effects are in the service of a coherent artistic intention, or if the storyteller is himself lost, or just goofing around. Evenson's stories always convey not only willful intention, but consummate craft.

There may be no more than a thin line between the pointlessly nonsensical and the profoundly obscure, or resonantly absurd. Storytellers like Kafka and Borges, not to mention David Lynch, manage to test the limits of what their audience may consider meaningful without every straying over that aforementioned line.

These stories vary dramatically in length, from 2-page snippets to the 30-page title novella. *Fugue State* straddles the boundary between experimental literary fiction and genres such as weird fantasy, horror and slipstream. The writing here has the flavor of edgy-yet-mainstream literature, but in these stories weird things occur as in Poe, Kafka and the like. Just as with the other authors I've mentioned by name, Brian Evenson's work is not for everyone. These mysterious and intelligent fictions don't always give answers, but rather stimulate some hidden, unknowable aspect of the subconscious. Those who like this kind of thing - Kafka, Borges, even David Lynch's *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive* - will love *Fugue State*.

Kathryn says

As my first taste of Brian Evenson's short stories, I am impressed and eager for more. I finished this days ago and did not have time to write any type of review. I returned to the book to snag some of the titles to be mentioned here and ended up reading over half of the book again, simply because it was too easy to become lost, even in stories I already knew the ending of. This is a book I will return to.

Fugue State includes a variety of stories, dabbling in different genres. There are, I think, four post-apocalyptic-dystopic type stories. A few of the stories are told from the viewpoints of young children. Every story deals with some type of fear but more than anything, this collection is about interpretation, perspective, and inner demons, whether natural or not. No one person sees the world the same as anyone else and this is taken to extremes herein.

Younger was interesting considering perspective and what I like to call 'selective memory'. The differences between the sisters, the roles they took upon themselves, felt familiar. As an opening story, it not blow me away but I related to it, was sucked in, and I thought it did a wonderful job of introducing the reader to the main theme of the book.

I loved *A Pursuit*, to include every little thing about the story. I was surprised by the ending and the paranoid atmosphere was palpable until the final word.

Mudder Tongue was another impressive entry. I felt great sympathy for the main character right from the start, largely due to the following description at the beginning of the story..."His sense of language had always been slightly fluid; it had always been easy for him, when distracted, to substitute one word for another based on sound or rhythm or association or analogy which was why people thought him absentminded."

Desire with Digressions was odd, a little predictable, and I'm still a little uncertain as to what it meant or even what happened.

Dread, a story told along with some rough pictures, was quite good, disturbing, and bothered me, since it reminded me of when I was in a car accident and was told by my doctor to not look at myself in a mirror. Guess what I did right after he left?

Girls in Tents was very, very sad. Evenson did an excellent job of getting across the feelings of the girls without coming straight out and explaining things.

Wander was a frightening and surreal story but I found it hard to believe that the narrator could write as he did and still have little knowledge of his surroundings or of history.

In the Greenhouse was tense. I was unsure what the ending meant but loved it anyways.

This book should be read if only for the story *Ninety Over Ninety*. What a sick and twisted little tale. I loved it!

Invisible Box began with "In retrospect, it was easy for her to see it had been a mistake to have sex with a mime". This is now one of my favorite opening lines ever and a perfect introduction to one of the best short stories I've ever read.

Life Without Father really bothered me. I possessed zero pity for the mother and was amazed at the ignorance of the adults in the story.

Alfons Kuylers was predictable but still eerie.

The title story, *Fugue State*, was an apocalyptic story, quite scary and easily imagined.

The Adjudicator, dedicated by Evenson to Peter Straub, was pure post-apocalyptic perfection.

I highly recommend this collection for lovers of literary horror and short stories. I will be reading more of Evenson as soon as I am able.

Heather Shaw says

Brian Evenson introduces his short story, "Girls in Tents":

"When I was a kid, one of my favorite things to do was to build blanket tents. My sister and I would take as many blankets as we could find, rearrange the furniture in the living room, and then start spreading blankets from piano to couch, couch to chair and chair to banister, holding everything precariously in place with volumes from our family encyclopedia. Then we would get inside and make up stories and enjoy the way the light lit each section differently. On a rainy day, we could spend hours in there, in our own separate world.

"'Girls in Tents' really began with that experience, with remembering what being inside blanket tents had been like for me. Then I started thinking about what sort of circumstances might make that experience different—more intense and, in a way, more directly formative—than it had been for me. For me, it's a story about what it's like to be the oldest child facing changing family circumstances, trying to understand how your life is changing and, despite difficulty and pain, learning to take control of that life. It's a hard lesson the main character is learning but one which, I think, many relate to, and one which I hope shows the solid stuff she's made of: she's learning that, in spite of everything, she'll be okay. I hope you enjoy the story."

Download and read the complete short story "Girls in Tents" from Fugue State at ForeWord's Book Club.. We recommend the PDF for reading on a computer screen, the RTF for reading on a portable device such as an iPhone or other handheld. The download is available for one week only.

Andy says

I was blown away when read Evenson's collection "Windeye" a little over a year ago. That collection was published about three years after this one and I think the stories in "Windeye" are more accomplished and show a more matured style.

That said there's still a lot of great work here. "Alfons Kuylers," "The Adjudicator," "Girls in Tents," "Fugue State," and "Ninety Over Ninety" are all excellent stories. "The Third Factor," "In the Greenhouse," "Bauer in the Tyrol," and "Younger" are quite good too. In fact everything here is enjoyable and worth reading, but I'd still put this collection below "Windeye." I would also say the stories here are milder, while those in "Windeye" are more horrific, and often darker in tone.

Another difference -- the stories in "Windeye" are far shorter, rarely exceeding 2,000-3,000 words. "Economical" is the word perhaps. Both of these collections are about the same length (80k~ words), but "Windeye" has 25 stories while this one has 19.

A big perk of Evenson's writing is the variety. We get tender stories like "Girls in Tents," then violent,

obsessive Poe-esque stories like "A Pursuit" and "Desire with Digressions." There's quite a few post-apocalyptic stories, some stories with noir touches, weird fiction and a few monsters. Some see Kafka as an influence here, I guess so...but I don't sense it too much. In one interview (<http://www.raintaxi.com/fugue-states-...>) Evenson cites Thomas Bernhard as an influence, which I found interesting, and didn't pick up on at first.

Younger - I enjoyed this one a lot, it's subtle and yet profoundly sad in a way. There's a hint of something very outre going on here too, but we can't be sure if it's real or if it's just the distorted memories of childhood. A sensitive younger sister talks to her stronger, older sister often about a strange incident from their childhood that still haunts her.

A Pursuit - This one wasn't among my favorites, although it does have a certain, increasingly disturbing mood to it. What happens at the end makes one see the whole paranoid story in a far more twisted way. A man continues to drive his car for days, convinced that one (or more) of his ex-wives are following him for some nefarious purpose.

Mudder Tongue - This story is both tragic, nightmarish and yet quite funny too. It's a little like a later story of his in his collection Windeye titled "Discrepancy" about the five senses getting screwed up. A man finds that he is increasingly unable to communicate when his mouth refuses to utter the words his brain is thinking, leading to some tragicomic situations.

An Accounting - Another bizarre story, post-apocalyptic and like many others here, not without some black humor. A man explains how he accidentally became a cult leader to a group of men who had regressed to primitivism.

Desire with Digressions - This one is a bit like "A Pursuit," except this one is better I thought. It maintains a weird, expectant feel throughout, although I'm not sure the sum is more than its parts. A man leaves his wife for no reason, unsure he can recall her face.

Dread - A strange little story told in black and white comic book style. A man is haunted by the thought that he will no longer recognize himself, to the point that it destroys his life.

Girls in Tents - A weird advantage to getting behind in writing reviews on here is you can put the book in perspective of what is most memorable. This is certainly the story that stuck with me. Not a lot happens, but it's so effective. It generates some great suspense without trying too hard and is a bit like the first story "Younger." After their parents separate, two young sisters retreat into a world of their own, under blanket fort.

Wander - This is a short and effective dark fantasy story that reminded me a bit of some of Clark Ashton Smith's tales. When a wandering tribe discovers an abandoned village they think their troubles are at an end, but they get far worse.

In the Greenhouse - I didn't entirely understand the ending of this one, but it was still one of my favorite stories here. It's subtle, has a nice, individual atmosphere, almost Gothic, compared with many other stories here, along with a sense of place and building tension. After a man fails to complete a study of a novelist he comes to see as uninspiring, he is invited to come to the man's secluded estate. He begins to experience events that resemble scenes from the author's works.

Ninety Over Ninety - I read most of this story aloud, it's such a thoroughly entertaining, hilarious read.

There's a bit of corporate horror running through it, and something unsettling that's never entirely explained, but mostly it's just a very well-written short story. A literary editor is told by his boss to publish a "blockbuster." This compromises his literary integrity, but he fears the cruelty of his boss, and yet the man has a strange weakness.

Invisible Box - This is a funny story with a really creative idea, even if it seems a bit absurd. A woman has sex with a mime for kicks, and afterwards is plagued by a very strange unease.

The Third Factor - This is a fun story of paranoia and absurd corporate horror. This is a milder story than many here, but it's another I recalled long after reading it because it's so effectively mind-twisting and bizarre. We get a hint at a cannibalistic sort of organization, but really it's left fairly open-ended. A man paid by a mysterious organization to stalk and observe people finds himself given stranger and stranger tasks.

Bauer in the Tyrol - I suppose this is a minor story in the collection as a whole, very little happens, it's claustrophobic, but I liked it a lot. For some reason the work of Bruno Schulz came to mind. Vacationing in the Alps a sculptor shares a room with his dying wife and becomes obsessed with her changing appearance.

Helpful - A quirky, very short story, neat concept and I didn't see what was coming until the end. A man contending with being blind is most bothered by his wife always trying to help him.

Life Without Father - This almost has the feel of a conte cruel, perhaps a bit noir. It's quite suspenseful, almost like a case of "The Bad Seed"/innocence-gone-wrong. A young girl deals with the self-destructive insanity of her father, and the legal aftermath.

Alfons Kuylers - This is one of the best in the collection, a genuinely eerie story of weirdness on the high seas. I could partially see where things were headed toward the end, but it didn't affect the story for me because I was absorbed by the great mood. After a man murders his mentor he flees the city on a ship that turns out to be a very strange vessel indeed.

Fugue State - This is a great story, the longest in the book and certainly one of the best. It's written in a convincingly hallucinogenic style with some creative uses of bending perspectives, yet it's also written clearly; none of the overly vague surrealism in a lot of weird fiction. It has a certain bleak/absurd humor that I enjoyed too. A contagious fugue state plagues society, written from the point of view of those enduring it.

Traub in the City - This very brief vignette brought the work of Ligotti to mind. It's also pretty similar to an earlier tale "Bauer in the Tyrol." An artist who draws a dying person and observes the quick changes in his appearance has an existential revelation.

The Adjudicator - Another post-apocalyptic story, and maybe the best story in the collection. This one is really horrific and has some memorable moments of creepiness. After a devastating nuclear war a farmer is given a horrific task to complete by the remaining members of the nearby community.

Benjamin says

I liked this book/really liked a few of the stories in this book. I liked how the book would go from something like "Girls in Tents" (a story about two girls who make blanket tents and wait for their father ultimately

learning a little something about life) to "Wander" (a story set in a post-apocalyptic world about an eyeball monster who melts flesh). Brian Evenson is a legitimately versatile writer who is able to morph his style to fit the plethora of moods and vibes in this bitch. My favorite stories were "Younger", "An Accounting", "Desire with Digressions", "Girls in Tents", "Wander", "The Third Factor", "Helpful", "Alfons Kuylers", "Fugue State", and "The Adjudicator". I liked most if not all of the stories in this book.

Randolph says

Kafkaesque assembly of stories covering the usual categories of the horror genre but generally done from so unique a perspective that you almost don't realize exactly that a particular story belongs to a sub-genre. You end up saying: "I guess that was a ghost story, or I guess this is a zombie story.". It doesn't really matter because each story is so fresh and unique that categories and genres don't apply.

Evenson's prose is spare in a way that reminds me of Ligotti or sometimes Hemingway. The little title illustrations by Zak Sally are a nice complement to each story.

The story "Ninety Over Ninety" about a literary editor forced to abandon literature for blockbusters in order to keep his job. It is one of the funniest stories I've read for awhile but probably all too true.

Zak says

Wow! This author's writing caught me from the first paragraph. Naturally, some stories were better than others, but the strong writing always carried me along. The earlier stories were better than the later ones but the book managed to maintain an utterly compelling atmosphere throughout, with some surprisingly dark humour thrown in.

My favourite ones were, in no particular order: 1) A Pursuit 2) An Accounting 3) Mudder Tongue 4) Ninety Over Ninety. Will definitely be reading more of Brian Evenson's work.

Sentimental Surrealist says

Brian Evenson is great in small doses. Take the short story "Altmann's Tongue." It might seem like I'm damning him with faint praise by declaring his best piece a paragraph-long microstory, but that paragraph has beguiled me since 17. If the nonetheless-true "quality over quantity" cliche isn't enough to placate you, this collection's title story is magnificent in its creepiness, and there are a number of other good ones around here, too, from "Pursuit's" implied comeuppance to the eerie displays of devotion found in "Wander." We're in pretty good shape so far, right?

Ah, but not so fast, because there is such a thing as too much Evenson. It's a shame it had to be that way, because I'd meant to get to the guy since I fell in love with "Altmann's Tongue," but it kept not happening until just now because you know how these kinds of things work. It wasn't until I had him assigned to me that I finally read him, and I was looking forward to it and at first into it, but after a certain point, Evenson's blend of horror, psychological freakout, philosophy and black comedy come off as schtick. If he'd balanced it out with any other type of story, I'd have probably liked this more, probably would've concluded Evenson

just liked flexing the scary-and-smart muscle every so often. As it stands, it looks like that's the only muscle he's got.

See, based on this collection, I've decided that Evenson wants to be seen as the macho-man of the literary world. And by the end of this collection, I just grew tired of that. Every story seemed to end with him getting all up in your face and saying "See? I went THERE!!!!!!" just to prove that he was not one of those "soft" writers, no sir, not him. Which means the visceral impact each story was probably meant to have becomes diluted as it diffuses across too many stories, all of which are probably fine and visceral taken on their own (I don't think the guy got any worse so much as wore on me) but dammit, you have to balance these things or else it becomes "oh, so they're going to die or descend into paranoia or otherwise have their lives ruined, okay, terrific." Maybe this is why the great Maggie Nelson derided Evenson's fiction as cruel without a purpose, constant travels to the dark place without any intention of bringing anything worthwhile out, and she's got a good point: the lesser stories here, like the stupid, stupid mime-sex one, come off as nasty more than anything else. A lot of the time it's more "ponder the intellectual horror of this hypothetical situation I'm nonetheless distanced from," which is a style I usually dig, but again, Evenson does it one way and he'll be damned if he does it any other.

Either way, I'm not sure how much more Evenson I'll read. I'm curious about Altmann's Tongue: Stories and a Novella (Banned at Bingham Young University! Which is actually a neat and frightening story, look it up sometime) despite this mixed run-in with his work, but I'm less gonna run out and get it and more gonna keep it in the back of my mind. And while I have to assume the Brian Evenson who mows the lawn on Sunday mornings is a different guy than the Brian Evenson who came up with these stories, the Brian Evenson who came up with these stories strikes me as the kind of guy who likes to hold his hand over an open flame in public just to prove that he can. Or worse, the kind of guy who wants you to *think* he can hold his hand over an open flame in public just because he can.

Panagiotis says

?σο προχωρ? στην βιβλιογραφ?α του ?βενσον πιστε?ω πως πρ?κειται για μια πραγματικ? σπ?νια περ?πτωση συγγραφ?α. Δεν εντ?σσεται ε?κολα κ?που σ?μφωνα με τις σημεριν?ς τ?σεις, πρ?μα για το οπ?ο δεν φα?νεται να σκοτ?ζεται ιδια?τερα ο ?διος. Ωστ?σο του στοιχ?ζει μια μεγαλ?τερη αποδοχ? που θα μπορο?σε να βρει και θα του ?ξιζε.

Οι ανησυχ?ες του εστι?ζουν στον τρ?μο: στο αλλ?κoto, στο εφιαλτικ? που εδρ?ζει π?σω απ? τις λοξ?ς γων?ες υπ? τις οπ?ες προβ?λει τις δι?φορες πραγματικ?τητες στις ιστορ?ες. Και παρ?λο που ?σως να μπορο?σε να ενταχθε? στον ευρ?τερο χ?ρο του φαντασικ?, με την ?δια ευκολ?α εγ? θα μπορο?σα να τον β?λω δ?πλα στον πειραματικ? και εξαιρετικ? ιδια?τερο Millhauser. Τον Millhauser τον εκθει?ζουν υψηλ?ς ποι?τητος περιοδικ?. Τον ?βενσον, π?λι, ?χι. ?πως δεν θα τον βρε?τε να αναφ?ρεται στους κ?κλους των δεξιοτεχν?ν του τρ?μου Burhlman, Langan, Barron και ΣΙΑ. Κ?πως μοναχικ?ς και παραγκωνισμ?νος αυτ?ς ο ?βενσον.

Προσεγγ?ζει την γραφη του μ?σα απ? ?να εντελ?ς δικ? του πρ?σμα και γρ?φει τρομακτικ? ?πως ?γραφε ο Π?ε: γιατ? ?χει ?να ορμ?μφυτο και ?χι επειδ? θ?λει να ενταχθε? σε ?να ε?δος. Οι φρ?σεις αποφε?γουν κ?θε λογ?ς κλισ?. ?πως κ?θε του φρ?ση αποφε?γει δεξιοτεχνικ? την επιτ?δευση και το αναμ?σημα, ?τσι και οι εικ?νες του ε?ναι σχεδ?ν αρχετυπικ?ς. Οι περιγραφ?ς σπαν?ζουν, τοπων?μια αναφ?ρονται σχεδ?ν σπ?νια, εν? και τα ον?ματα των ηρ?ων ?να δ?σκολο να ενταχθο?ν σε κ?ποια συγκεκριμ?νη φυλ?, ε?τε ιστορικ? περ?οδο. Η τεχνολογ?α αποδ?δεται με εντελ?ς

βασικ?ς, αδρ?ς αρχ?ς της επικοινων?ας και της μετακ?νσης: ?να ?χημα στο οπο?ο επιβιβ?ζεται ?νας χαρακτ?ρας, κ?ποιος σηκ?νει ?να τηλ?φωνο, μια συσκευ? μηνυμ?των αναβοσβ?νει, ?νας επιστ?μονας ελ?γχει μια οθ?νη τερματικο?. Θα μπορο?σε να ε?ναι με την ?δια ευκολ?α ?να κοντιν? παρελθ?ν, ?σο και ?να μακριν? μ?λλον.

Αυτ? η συλλογ? τον βρ?σκει σε εξαιρετικ? πειραματικ? δι?θεση. Μερικ?ς ιστορ?ες ε?ναι εξαιρετικ?ς, ?λλες π?λι νι?θω πως ε?ναι κρυπτογραφημ?νες σε μια γλ?σσα απ? το ιδια?τερο σ?μπαν που εδρ?ζει στο κεφ?λι του ?βενσον και τις οπο?ες δεν μπορ? να απολα?σω.

Ξ?ρω πως ο ?βενσον κ?νει ?,τι του καπν?σει. ?χει γρ?ψει δυο μυθιστορ?ματα για την αγορ? του video gaming (dead space), εκ των οπο?ων το ?να που δι?βασα ε?ναι εξαιρετικ?. ?να απ? τα ιδρ?ματα που χρηματοδοτε? τον εκδοτικ? ο?κο Coffee House Press που τον εκδ?δει ε?ναι το ?δρυμα Bush. Γενικ? μ?λλον δεν θα ε?ναι αρκετ? politically correct για τους Αμερικ?νους, ?σως δεν ε?ναι ε?κολο να χτιστε? μια αγορ? γ?ρω του, και ?τσι καταλ?γει αν?νταχτος. Ας ε?ναι καλ? ?κει στις σκι?ς του, να γρ?φει τα ?μορφα πρ?ματ? του. Εγ? δηλ?νω γοητευμ?νος.

Forrest says

Another incredible collection. Ranks up there with Wavering Knife.
