



Alone Against Tomorrow: Stories of Alienation in Speculative Fiction

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How famous is this most famous of all Harlan Ellison's books? Well known enough that an English film company was stopped in its attempt to make a movie called " *I Have No Mouth & I Must Scream*." It's Ellison's title, the company was told.

For more than sixteen years this work has been considered a classic of imaginative fiction.

Isn't it about time you found out why? Discover why no one who has read this story has ever been able to forget it!

Contents:

- The Song of the Soul · in
- I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream · ss If Mar '67
- The Discarded ["The Abnormals"] · ss Fantastic Apr '59
- Deeper Than the Darkness · nv Infinity Science Fiction Apr '57
- Blind Lightning · ss Fantastic Universe Jun '56
- All the Sounds of Fear · ss The Saint Detective Magazine (UK) Jul '62
- The Silver Corridor · ss Infinity Science Fiction Oct '56
- "Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman · ss Galaxy Dec '65
- Bright Eyes · ss Fantastic Apr '65
- Are You Listening? · ss Amazing Dec '58
- Try a Dull Knife · ss F&SF Oct '68
- In Lonely Lands · ss Fantastic Universe Jan '59
- Eyes of Dust · ss Rogue Dec '59
- Nothing for My Noon Meal · ss Nebula #30 '58
- O Ye of Little Faith · ss Knight Sep '68
- The Time of the Eye · ss The Saint Detective Magazine May '59
- Life Hutch [Kyben] · ss If Apr '56
- The Very Last Day of a Good Woman ["The Last Day"] · ss Rogue Nov '58
- Night Vigil ["Yellow Streak Hero"] · ss Amazing May '57
- Lonelyache · ss Knight Jul '64
- Pennies, Off a Dead Man's Eyes · ss Galaxy Nov '69

Alone Against Tomorrow: Stories of Alienation in Speculative Fiction Details

Date : Published October 1st 1972 by Collier Books (first published 1971)

ISBN : 9780020197805

Author : Harlan Ellison

Format : Mass Market Paperback 312 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Short Stories, Fantasy, Speculative Fiction, Anthologies, Horror, Science Fiction Fantasy, Dystopia, Literature

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From Reader Review Alone Against Tomorrow: Stories of Alienation in Speculative Fiction for online ebook

Phil Overeem says

I wavered between 4 and 5 stars on this one, but the sheer consistent level of intensity, commitment to vision, and imagination swayed me in its favor. I can't say I dislike any of the stories here, and MANY I will never forget. I have the urge to read one out loud to my students every month, but I am not teaching science fiction or American lit. A highlight of the year, readingwise.

Dmitry Pirozhkov says

"I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" - 5

"The Discarded" - 5

Powerful, but a bit too straightforward.

"Deeper Than the Darkness" - 1

A person with unique abilities decides not to use them for destruction despite being forced to. He also conveniently turns out to be immune to the popular (in that world) ways to be forced. Sounds just like a mediocre teen fantasy. Seriously, even if the story was truly original in the moment of publication, now it is not interesting. And to make it worse I have a strong personal distaste for stories involving MENTAL POWAHS.

"Blind Lightning" - 3

I didn't like the story, but it's quite good.

"All the Sounds of Fear" - 5 (6?)

Wow. Breathtaking. Almost a work of poetry, masterfully recited to captivate the audience. Reminds me a lot of Ray Bradbury's stories.

"The Silver Corridor" - 1

The story is just extraordinarily bad. However, the setting is remarkable. The world where the problems of planetary importance could be resolved by personal duels is already unreasonable. Here the condition is aggravated by the fact that the dispute is scientific (or at least claims to be) and the winner is determined based on the stubbornness (i.e. who believes stronger). This is just insane. Formulating the "Political Theorem" based on nothing but *personal* "views of the universe" feels wicked. Empirical data? Evidence? Proofs? The very core of scientific method is alien to the depicted world, making it a really despicable place to live in. Fortunately, the scenario is totally unrealistic, since the paranoids and schizophrenics would quickly learn to use Silver Corridor to dictate their will to everyone else.

(Also using words like "Theorem" where they are clearly inapplicable is Evil by itself, too)

"Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman" - 2

I don't really understand why this story is so popular. The idea is somewhat unusual, but the realization doesn't look interesting enough.

"Bright Eyes" - 2

Cryptic and strange. Usually I like such stories, but not this one. The humanity is dead, the last living of a mysterious race is out to the world again to perform the long-promised ritual and cry for both now-extinct races. The circumstances of this mission and abilities of the race are quite exotic - exotic enough to ruin the solemn sensation of the dying Earth by distracting the reader from it. It's hard to relate properly to the world in which only weird things happen, even when you know that the history of it is tragic. I think many readers will be less susceptible to distraction than me and thus able to enjoy the story more.

"Are You Listening?" - 4

Just a good fiction. Somewhy I think that the audio version of the story, performed in a highly emotional way, would be really awesome. The text actually reads more like a nervous monologue than like an ordinary SF story.

"Try a Dull Knife" - 5

Emotional vampires taken literally. Imaginative and meaningful.

"In Lonely Lands" - 1

Doesn't resonate with me absolutely. The story looks contrived and the plot is not interesting.

"Eyes of Dust" - 3

Once again, a good story but I didn't like it. Maybe if I'd read it in a different mood, it would be 5/5. Though unlikely.

"Nothing for My Noon Meal" - 5 (6?)

This is easily a second best story in a compilation after "All the Sounds of Fear". Just read this paragraph: *My world is a small one. Not large enough to hold an atmosphere any normal Earthman could breathe, not small enough to have none and be totally airless. My world is the sole planet of a red sun, and it has two moons, each one of which serves to eclipse my world's sun for six of the eighteen months. I have light for six months, dark for twelve. I call my world Hell.*

Impressive, isn't it? An amazing plot, beautiful (in its own way) scenery, and realistic descriptions. If the ending were more explicit and/or dark, the story would definitely be in my personal top-5 SF stories list.

"O Ye of Little Faith" - 1

Too much fluff and incoherent details, too few ideas. The story looks like an attempt to distend the sentence "as he had believed in no god, no god believed in him" as much as possible.

"The Time of the Eye" - 5

Another story close to the style of Ray Bradbury. A short but important fragment of life.

"Life Hutch" - 5

A great generic SF story. Highly enjoyable, but it could have been written by, like, any author. I don't think it's necessarily bad, but this is not what I expected from the story in this compilation.

"The Very Last Day of a Good Woman" - 2

One more potentially good story which didn't cause me to feel anything. Perhaps it's my (already mentioned) distaste for characters with unique mental abilities.

"Night Vigil" - 5

Very atmospheric and dramatic. It's like "Bright Eyes" done right (to my taste). More attention paid to important issues, better detailed history.

"Lonelyache" - 3

Perhaps I just didn't get it. Too many points to focus at.

"Pennies, Off a Dead Man's Eyes" - 4

Unusual and fascinating. Not a particularly deep story, but intricate details compensate for this a lot.

Neal Umphred says

All of Harlan Ellison's collections are worth reading but each may have a story or two that will leave you cold.

Dale Jones says

The stories I enjoyed were I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream, Deeper Than the Darkness, "Repent, Harlequin" Said the Ticktockman, Life Hutch, and Pennies, Off a Dead Man's Eyes.

David Allen says

One of the prolific, and variable, Ellison's most consistent collections, a retrospective (circa 1971) that focuses on alienation and loneliness. Has several of his most renowned stories up to that point. Must have had a decent print run because even 40 years later, it's the Ellison book you're likeliest to find in a used bookstore.

Marc Goldstein says

6 "I Have no Mouth and I Must Scream"

A powerful AI has killed all of humanity (Skynet from Terminator?). It continues to vent its hatred of mankind by torturing a small group of survivors.

7 "'Repent Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman"

Future dystopia where any deviance from the orderly scheduling of events results in an equal amount of time shaved off of the offender's lifespan. Into this the Harlequin appears, spreading mischief as a form of civil disobedience.

KWinks says

I somehow found out about Harlan Ellison while looking up Margaret Atwood, don't ask. Long story short, I became obsessed with the idea of reading this man whose work so many love and hunted down this story collection which seems to feature many of his most well known stories. I won't review the stories one by one, but will agree that "Repent Harlequin" and "I Have No Mouth" are amazing pieces of work that stick with you long after the reading. Ellison's stories are less stories and more like windows into a strange world (most that you would never want to visit). He drops you in, unprepared, and you must muddle through with the character in sorting out what is happening, why, and how it will end. Sometimes the stories don't end, they just finish telling you about the bit they wanted to examine. What happens next is up to the reader (Life Hutch). I had particular love for "The Silver Corridor" and "Are You Listening?". Some were meh. I didn't feel the stories were dated, despite when they were written and the mostly futuristic settings. The ones that didn't work for me were the ones in modern settings. The longest story is only about 20-some pages, but they have a great many ideas in them, so I read about one a day. I couldn't imagine trying to plow through this in one sitting, there are too many ideas here. Overall, a great writer with great stories. Hideous cover ;)

Craig says

This is a retrospective collection of the best speculative stories from early in Ellison's career. They've all appeared in previous and prior collections, and all are interesting and entertaining. There are some well

acknowledged and award-winning classics along with earlier tales; it's a good sampling of his early genre work.

Malcolm Little says

Alone Against Tomorrow is a mixed bag of short stories from the classic writer Ellison. None of the stories contained within the collection are particularly bad, but in contrast very few are transcendently good. Instead, most fall in the middle, ranging from forgettable mediocrity – pretty decent tales. The result of that mixed bag was that I found few elements in each story worth the price of temporal admission. Unlike a truly bad movie, truly bad writing can never be “so bad it’s good”. The real question with this collection was: What is good and what is bad about the overall product?

The common thread of alienation was maintained with aplomb, so good on the editor who compiled the collection for realizing which of Ellison’s stories fit with the theme. Nevertheless, very few of Ellison’s writings struck at the heart of the subject of alienation. When it did strike, such as with “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” and “Big Eyes”, it floors the reader with the power of a lightning bolt. One strength I consistently noticed with the majority of the stories was Ellison’s effortless ability to create a situation drenched with emotion and grief. To me, Harlan comes off as a poet in disguise, wrapping his ideas in the cloth of science fiction, when his true talent lies far more towards the ‘fiction’ aspect than it does with the ‘science’ aspect.

Even though I tend to eschew quantified ratings for subjective mediums, a short story collection like Alone Against Tomorrow is actually better attuned to receiving a star rating. Three out of Five seems appropriate because, on average, three out of five stories within the bookends felt worthwhile. The other two amount to either throwaway ideas or poor narrative executions of a good idea.

David Dort says

One of the masters of the genre of dark speculative (science) fiction, Ellison's short stories are thoroughly disturbing at their best, and thought-provoking at their least. Perhaps quaintly experimental by today's standards, this book ranks with the best of Dick and LeGuin as groundbreaking works that brought sci-fi out of the dime novel and into serious literature. The stunning dystopic vision of a future hell "I have no mouth and I must scream" should be required reading for any fan of the genre.

J.G. Keely says

I wish Harlan Ellison's books were as good as his editorial work. Somehow, his cleverness and mastery of language gets left behind once he starts hashing out fiction. I know this is an earlier work of his, but comparing the stories here, even 'I have no mouth but I must scream' to something like his introduction to Gaiman's Sandman shows two very different styles. Unfortunately, the former failed to engage me.

Bev says

Harlan Ellison is a fantastic story-teller--even when every story in a collection is not up to his usual standard (as here), his less-than-best is miles ahead of others. So, let me just qualify my star rating on this collection upfront: the three stars represent a rating on the Ellison scale, not an Ellison versus others scale. I simply could not rate this collection as highly as *Shatterday* or *Slippage* because the overall quality on the Ellison scale is not equivalent.

These twenty stories focus on man's alienation--alienation from his time, from his fellow-man, and even from himself. He is numbed by future-shock; propelled by his noblest dreams but often prevented from fulfilling them by his inadequacies and the challenges of a universe determined to hold on to its secrets. Ellison takes us into the unknown, to a place full of conflict and awe to show us the grandeur and terror of men and women facing their deepest fears--alone and unaided.

Among the most powerful stories found here are the classic "I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream," the haunting "All the Sounds of Fear," and the disturbing "The Discarded" and "Eyes of Dust," as well as two versions of Ellison's take on Orwell's 1984: "Repent Harlequin Said the TicktockMan" and "Are You Listening?" Nearly as good are "Blind Lightning" and "The Time of the Eye," but unfortunately the remainder (12 stories) are all just good Ellison stories or even not-so-good. But don't forget "just good" Ellison, is pretty darn good. ★★★

First posted on my blog *My Reader's Block*. Please request permission before reposting. Thanks.

Derek Nason says

For the record, if I read a book of short stories, and even one of them is a 5-Star story, I'm rating the book 5 stars. But, this book is full of 5 star stories.

I found out about Harlan Ellison from Neil Gaiman's essay. I had also been aware of I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM and some tv episodes as being canonical, but I had no real awareness of what reading him was like. Well, now I know. It's one of those moments where I find out how deprived I am; like there's a giant beating heart of a world right next to my face, and I'm 34 and have never bothered to just turn my head and acknowledge it.

He is a maser of describing the corporeal, not as a means for an external body-horror scene, but an internal, psychological horror. In Ellison's stories, we are all—first and foremost—trapped in fleshy ships. It's like a Dali painting inside an Egon Schiele.

After reading *DEEPER THAN THE DARKNESS* I fantasized about turning it into a film. After reading more about the man, and how litigious he is, I guess that'll stay a fantasy forever. That's okay. In the meantime, I'll rush to read every other thing he's ever written.

Kent says

Another solid collection of Ellison short stories. For the most part they are quite good and engaging and as the title suggests they are indeed stories about alienation. A few of the standout stories here are "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream", "Repent Harlequin, Says the Ticktockman", and "The Silver Corridor". Some of these are very sci-fi types and actually set in space or the future. Some are more of a trip into the deep consciousness of the troubled individuals. It's a good mix.

Dang Ole' Dan Can Dangle says

I will rate each short story individually as I read them, though the final overall score is not necessarily an aggregated average.

I Have No Mouth & I Must Scream: 5/5

Perhaps my favorite Ellison story. I've read it about a dozen times and I'm still not completely sure why I like it so much. Just very enjoyable to read.

The Discarded: 4/5

Deeper than the Darkness: 4/5

Blind Lightning: 3/5

A good story, I just didn't care for it too much.

All the Sounds of Fear: 2.5/5

I may have to re-read this one because I've heard many say that they loved this one. I will admit this would make an awesome Twilight Zone episode.

The Silver Corridor: 3/5

Not bad. A little idiotic but enjoyable.

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktockman: 5/5

Another Ellison classic. Very much enjoyed, plus the main character shares my first name. I also wonder if Vonnegut got his "So it goes" line which he uses in Slaughterhouse-five from here. This was published years before and it uses the repeating phrase "and so it goes" just like Vonnegut did. Very curious.

Bright Eyes: 5/5

Holy shit, the imagery in this one is amazing and grotesque, Great atmosphere.

Are You Listening?: 5/5

An eerie, Twilight Zone-esque story. In fact, I think an episode may have been based on this.

Try a Dull Knife: 3/5

In Lonely Lands: 1/5

This story completely left my mind about 10 seconds after I finished it.

Eyes of Dust: 4/5

To me, this is Ellison's most poetic and beautiful story.

Nothing for My Noon Meal: 3/5

O Ye of Little Faith: 2/5

The Time of the Eye: 4.5/5

Life Hutch: 4/5

He he, this one is such typical sci-fi but it's awesome.

The Very Last Day of a Good Woman: 3.5/5

An odd story.

Night Vigil: 3.5/5

A great atmospheric story but still somewhat unsatisfying. It's kind of funny that the guy set to watch was relieved and fulfilled only by the enemy's arrival, just so he can warn Earth.

Lonelyache:

Pennies, Off a Dead Man's Eyes: 4/5

In conclusion Ellison is one of my favorites. Though he can sometimes be a mixed batched. I like that this collection has a theme of loneliness and alienation and every story deals with that subject. It's a subject I'm quite fond of. Yeah, thumbs up.
