



All We Need of Hell

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Duffy Deeter is a violent, all-American jock, a Florida lawyer obsessed with fitness and death. His wife is having an affair with his law partner. Add to this scenario Duffy's girlfriend, his son, an overweight blob, and Tump Walker, a black pro athlete, and one has the makings of a "belligerent but ultimately touching" (Chicago Tribune) novel.

All We Need of Hell Details

Date : Published April 1st 1988 by HarperCollins Publishers (first published 1987)

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Author : Harry Crews

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From Reader Review All We Need of Hell for online ebook

Shelley says

I swear this same book has been written before, with different names and different settings, but this whole "man with man problems is put in bizarre situations that test his masculinity" and these tropes, conversations and inner monologues have been written countless times before and I'm constantly shocked to see this same story has been published so many times.

I liked a feast for snakes so I know Harry Crews is better than this.

I am a fan of the Emily Dickinson title reference tho

Rachel says

Great Crews book. Veers wildly around as the characters are really unpredictable - it's hard to determine how it's all going to end. Duffy Deeter is an unstable health fanatic whose life is getting out of control, no matter how hard he tries to control it. I love the character Tump, and how Duffy's son is transformed. Another funny, awesomely messed-up tale from Crews.

Mike Merrill says

This tough guy prose is pretty cool. Florida guy through and through

Beth Wheeler says

Fantastic book. I have read nearly all of Crews' books, and this one is his most poignant, socially that is. He seems to critique several aspects of American life, especially the breakdown of the family unit. If you like Crews for his capacity to spin a yarn through the grotesque, you won't be disappointed.

Ned Andrew Solomon says

To my pleasant surprise, this is one of the tightest and most enjoyable Harry Crews books I've read. You never quite know what you're getting with a Crews novel, because he never seemed like the kind of author who listened to an editor. His plots can meander, and his endings can come from left field, as if he got tired of writing the book and wished it done, somehow. But this one was truly funny, with fascinating characters and spot-on dialogue.

Cody says

Crews reemerged with this, proving he'd lost nothing in the 11-years since his last fictional novel. Thus begins the New Era of Harry: darkness cannot exist if light does not. Lookatme, gettin' all Zen an' shit!

James says

This book came along right when I needed it. Even though I am miles away from Duffy, I recognized myself in him and I learned a few things. Also, I've never laughed so hard as I did while reading the paddling scene. So good.

Thing Two says

My grandmother ran an unlicensed daycare in her home in Gainesville Florida in the late 60s/early 70s, and evidently took care of Harry Crews' son during that time. I have vivid memories about the children in her charge, but can't say I remember one named Crews. When my father passed away last year, I found a number of Harry Crews' books on his shelves. Reading this took me back to the rough and redneck town Gainesville was in my childhood memories. The characters are tough and southern, just as I remember them.

Matt says

My favorite novel of all time.

Picked it up off the shelf in DH Hill Library and read 2/3 of it before I even sat down.

Duffy Deeter isn't someone I'd like to be (or even know) ... far from it. But anti-hero seems cliché. He is a character that feels real. Not a stand-in for a philosophy, just a guy with some serious problems who works through them in strange ways.

I'd recommend to anyone who isn't my mom.

Sarah says

Really, I can't believe I liked this book as much as I did. The characters are not likable for the first 100 pages (out of 160), and the situations are bizarre. But, with that being said, Crews takes the characterizations to the extreme and makes the situations so over the top that hilarity just has to ensue from there.

Duffy Deeter is the main character of the novel. He is a forty-something lawyer, obsessed with his body and working out. He has a wife who is obsessed with her looks and an 8-year-old son who is a mama's boy and eats all the junk food he wants. Duffy also has a mistress, who I couldn't tell if his wife knew about and didn't care or if she just didn't know about the other one.

The opening scene has Duffy showing up to play a game of handball against a professional football player named Tump. What should have been a friendly game turns into a fist fight wherein Duffy gets one tooth knocked out and one broken. I kept returning to this image throughout the book because while that tooth is only mentioned by his wife upon first seeing him, but that broken tooth remains through all the other crazy things that happen.

Duffy gets into a falling out with his law partner, as he set up Duffy for the showdown with Tump, and it doesn't end there because the partner starts sleeping with Duffy's wife - and they are not very discreet about it either. So, Duffy's wife then wants a divorce and his law partner wants Duffy out of the firm. Duffy's bank account is wiped out, the locks on his house are changed and he is left with the winnebago he was about to go on vacation with his wife and son. Duffy is down, but he will not stay down. He vows revenge against his law partner and wife.

He then makes a strange alliance with Tump, the man who knocked out his tooth. They become friends in these circumstances and Tump bonds with Duffy's son in a way Duffy never had before. This friendship causes Duffy to look at his son in a different light. The ending is somewhat heartwarming for such a bizarre plot with cartoonish characters.

Ross says

Harry Crews is clearly a funny bastard, one who writes in lean, contemptuous prose, but the narrative of this short novel is not very strong. Rather, it's more focused on being a character study about a man's realisation that he's living in something like an echo-chamber, and that his entire construction of reality is a fake thing, separated long ago from real happiness and connection.

It's all Duffy Deeter stripping away the artifice he's unwittingly framed his life within.

I look forward to reading more of this author's ever more difficult to find, more accomplished novels.

Michael Lloyd-Billington says

Not a huge fan of Crews' writing, but this is not only an exception, it is one of my all-time favorite books, especially when struggling. The start will likely jar you, unless you're used to Crews, but don't let it daunt you -- this portrayal of a long weekend in the mid-life crisis of Duffy Deeter is one of the most honest, funny & touching renderings I've ever read of a man coming to terms with his contradictions & conflicts and finding the good underneath, while at the same time learning to open to the people around him. Hilarious, sharp, and definitely filled with moments & lines that you will recall again & again -- perhaps you, too, will find it one you return to when some of your "unshakable" beliefs start to waiver....

Eric Roy says

I am going to read all of Harry Crews because I like that kinda thing. He's the kinda author you know you like or not after one page. It doesn't change too much (at least regarding his fiction), but that's a good thing. Strong on oddball characters and even odder premises, this book is no different. Duffy Deeter is a lawyer that tries hard to remain human through infidelity, intoxication, working-out, and honest violence. I'm not

even going to try and track the plot for you--in EVERYTHING I've read by Mr. Crews so far, there are many things that happen in his books that are hard to believe ever happened. And don't expect any perfect endings either. With Crews, it is not the end of Journey but THE RIDE. And if you think you'd like drunk driving with Barry Hannah, James Crumley, and Flannery O'Connor-on-mushrooms, then this ride is for you. "In the nation of the heart, there is enough war for everybody." Would give this 3 1/2 stars. Pretty short on pages (162) and, well, how DO you end a novel like this???

James Castle says

All We Need of Hell is the frantic, feverish story of a few days in the life of Duffy Deeter, a high-strung, borderline-insane lawyer who's cheating on his wife and whose wife is cheating on him. The novel has a picaresque feel to it - there's not really a plot, there are just a series of chaotic events tied together with a series of implausible characters (especially Tump, who is such a magical person that it almost borders on reverse racism). The book is mainly about Duffy realizing he doesn't really know his family after all, and the book, for all its twisted humor, (view spoiler).

The comedy of the book wasn't always as uproariously funny as, perhaps, Crews intended it be - Duffy's assault on Jert, for instance, is obviously supposed to be hilarious, and yet to me it came off as just mean. At the same time, much of the satire is de-fanged by the book's ending, where Crews' chummy affection for his characters shines through. Overall, the book is a quick read, amusing at times, but ultimately not terribly effective either as a satire or as a novel.

wally says

i was at the university of florida in the 80s when harry was working on this one (as well as the knockout artist) and he read a bit from both stories (in manuscript form). he read the scene where the old man and the boy are flying that imaginary fighter, sitting side by side, and then the woman comes by and tells the old man it's time to put it in the hangar. been...23? years since i read this one. all of harry's stories are worth a read.
