

unwelcome bodies



by Jennifer Pelland

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Pain. Pleasure. The sensation of touch. we feel everything through our skin, that delicate membrane separating "I" from "other," protecting the very essence of self. Until it breaks. Or changes. Or burns. What would you do if you were the one called on to save humanity, and the price you had to pay was becoming something other than human? Or if healing your body meant losing the only person you've ever loved? Wander through worlds where a woman craves even a poisonous touch. a man's deformities become a society's fashion. genetic regeneration keeps the fires of Hell away. and painted lovers risk everything to break the boundaries of their caste system down. Separate your mind from your flesh and come in. Welcome.

Unwelcome Bodies Details

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Author : Jennifer Pelland

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From Reader Review Unwelcome Bodies for online ebook

Viscious says

This one was an unexpected experience. Goodreads recommended it to me after Valente's "Silently and Very Fast", so I thought it to be a bit different. But it was good, really good.

I think this is exactly the kind of science-fiction where fantastic elements are only secondary (though there are so many beautiful worlds which I would like to see in a novel) and the first place belongs to questions and answers. There are many of them in these stories, and they are stated quite clearly, and they are so relevant. Relationship and all the twisted forms it sometimes take, and different personal issues with self-attitude.

It was a cool book, this one. Really thought-provoking.

The Grim Reader says

I don't read as much sci-fi as I used to. I had heard good things about this collection and decided to take the plunge. Jennifer Pelland has assembled a number of excellent shorts here. Some are short stories whilst a couple are a little longer-venturing into novella territory. The stories are varied and contain numerous themes such as acceptance, pain and religion. The first half of the book contained the real standout works for me, in particular the first story about the HIV virus and the sexy body horror of Big sister/Little sister which was an uncomfortable reading experience, but really well done. My favourite story was one of the longer ones in The Last Stand of the Elephant Man. A bizarre but brilliant story about Joseph Merrick's journey into the future where he has swapped bodies with someone who has a fascination with his appearance! Flood was also a highlight as was the shortest story in the collection Last Bus. One or two didn't quite work for me. Brushstrokes, whilst brilliantly conceived went on a little too long and the start was a little confusing.

All said, this is a great collection of stories. It's dark and sometimes challenging but I finished feeling that I'd read something unique, interesting and thoughtful. 4.5 stars from this reader and recommended to sci-fi fans and fans of dark fiction.

April says

Jennifer Pelland's short story collection has been number one on my wishlist for some time now, so of course I started reading it as soon as I picked it up at last weekends readercon. I was not disappointed either. Jenn deserves the rave reviews I first read on Amazon. Her stories cover a broad range of topics as varied as speculative fiction itself, ranging from dystopian societies to environmental issues to flat out abuse. The ability to write across such a wide range while keeping one's voice as a writer intact is the mark of a natural talent. And I admire her unflinching willingness to write about things that disturb her. Often these are the subjects others aren't willing to discuss, and beyond the tragedy or horror of the individual story is a warning or a philosophical musing. I cringed, I laughed, and at one point I had to take a deep breath and put the book down, I was so engrossed. Jenn is a voice for those of us who like our speculative fiction broiling over with grit and dark things that go bump in the night.

Ronel says

At this moment I am so in love with Jennifer Pelland's writing.

This is a collection of weird and wonderful short stories. Each one is beautifully crafted and it draws you into the fantastical worlds created by Pelland.

The stories are hard hitting and pulls no punches. It attacks, it captivates, it seduces.

The genre is probably sci-fi but as in her previous works, she uses different worlds, technologies and social systems to enhance rather than detract from the very human face of her stories.

Love it, love it, love it!

Empress says

I usually stay away from short story anthologies as I find often the stories I like don't outweigh the stories I don't enjoy. However seeing in this review the anthology being recommended for "*fans of strong feminine characters, dark science fiction, dark fiction and horror*", I decided it might just fit my taste.

And I loved this little book. Someone else mentioned in their review that the stories don't provide payoff. For me personally Jennifer's stories are about the journey and the motivation of the characters.

Some of her works are available online, you can check them out here. Look for the ([direct link](#))

1. For the Plague Thereof Was Exceeding Great - **5***

[for making me imagine how isolating, tedious and crippling life would be if ...]

2. Big Sister/Little Sister - **5***

[I think I can compare this to Harlan's I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream. It's scary how well I understood Big sister's motivation]

3. Immortal Sin - **5***

[Well Jennifer certainly knows about paranoia. Another story that was scary relatable. I really like the story-related epilogues for each story. It seems I had a very similar reaction as a kid to her, even though the circumstances were different.

And regarding the ending. This was not a story that is meant to have an ending. It is about the journey down the rabbit hole and how deep someone can fall. Another "what if" story. For me the ending was not a sign He was in (view spoiler), it was just a point that we cannot control everything, that his undoing is just starting.]

4. Flood - **3*** [Dystopia, PA]

5. The Call - **5***

6. Captive Girl - **5***

7. Last Bus - **4***

8. The Last Stand of the Elephant Man - **4***

9. Songs of Lament - **4***

10. Firebird - **3***

11. Brushstrokes- **5*** [Dystopian]

Barbara Gordon says

I discovered that after reading each story I needed recovery time, the same way I did when I first read Harlan Ellison (his stories from the 60s, before he disappeared up his own enfant-terrible legend), because however fantastic or futuristic the settings, the people and emotions are true and the stories cut deep. I read "Big Sister/Little Sister" in the evening, and it seriously interfered with my sleep, so consider yourself warned. On the other hand, there are pieces like "When Science Fiction Cliches Go Bad" which are just plain fun, almost guaranteed to leave you unscarred.

Arachne8x says

The stories in this book are top-notch. So many are creepy enough that I have a hard time recommending it, unless you are prepared to be made very uncomfortable.

The only reason this book isn't getting a 4, is that the stories are all so different that I felt no flow from story to story. Should all short story books have such a flow? I'm not sure. But I'm not very good about continuing to read short story books unless they do. I lose momentum and would rather be reading a novel at that point.

All that being said, I like the author and find her ideas fascinating. I can't wait to read more of hers.

Tamahome says

Checking out the first story, but I have no idea what's going on. I don't like that. Not ideal for car listening. Of course the short stories aren't listed in the description. Naked people on covers is cool.

From the author's site:

The collection contains the following stories:

(Titles in bold are available to read online.)

"For the Plague Thereof Was Exceeding Great"

"Big Sister/Little Sister"

"Immortal Sin"

"Flood"

"The Call"

"Captive Girl" (2008 Nebula nominee)

"Last Bus"

"The Last Stand of the Elephant Man"

"Songs of Lament" (previously unpublished)

"Firebird" (previously unpublished)

"Brushstrokes" (previously unpublished)

Captive Girl was 'interesting'. :) I linked to the online text version.

Pretty good podcast interview <http://blog.outeralliance.org/archive...>

I'm going to listen to big sister/little sister in the car. I hear it's pretty freaky. -- Yup, it is.

Shara says

When I heard Pelland was releasing a short story collection, I was very excited. Granted, I've only read two of her short stories, but the one really stuck with me. Pelland has a smooth, clean writing style and her story ideas can really knock a person on their ass. [return][return]Unwelcome Bodies is a collection that focuses on a variety of issues: the environment, religion, and terrorism, and the one thing that unites these stories is the character's body image and how they fit into the world/society around them. Each of the stories are different and unique, and most all of the stories balance a wonderful blend of science fiction and horror. This collection is an easy one to recommend.[return][return]For the full story-by-story review, which does include spoilers in some cases, just click here: <http://calico-reaction.livejournal.co...>

Brainycat says

Jennifer Pelland's first short story anthology *Unwelcome Bodies* from Apex Publishing contains only eleven stories, but they are all winners and would be considered among the highlights of any anthology they're a part of. Jennifer's style is at once both intimate and removed, she focuses on her main characters with a detail that betrays how much she cares for each of them (especially their flaws), while the world around the characters tends to disappear into a vague "otherness". This is the strength of her stories, the faceted characters that are engaging and unique and the relationships between them. Her stories tend to focus on the conflicted desires and obsessions within her protagonists and even the secondary characters, clearly sock puppets for the conflicted feelings of her heroes and heroines, are drawn with more depth and affinity than many other authors can achieve for their protagonists in a novel.

I'd classify the genres represented as dark sci-fi, horror and a touch of "regular" dark fiction. Make no

mistake, Jennifer has no trouble leading the reader into darkness using the noblest of human intentions as a guide - the phrase "the path to hell is paved with good intentions" is clearly a common factor in her stories. As I was reading the book, watching her explore different styles and points of view while growing her craft, I felt I was watching a formidable writer take shape and hone her craft. Jennifer is definitely a writer to keep an eye on, she clearly is destined to bring an understanding of the human condition back into dark fiction that, at least in my recent reading, seems to be sorely lacking.

The first story "For the Plague Thereof Was Exceeding Great", the first story Jennifer sold, tells of a grim future where the human race is on the verge of extinction, but still trying to maintain twentieth century lifestyles. Two characters set up on a collision course, both of them dealing with the loss of their friends and family and the constant fear of airborne and contact based lethal viruses, find that while they're reacting to the plague differently, their feelings are coming from the same place inside them. Finally, they are able to absolve each other in a last moment of kindness before the lights go out on humanity.

"Big Sister/Little Sister" was also in the collection *Apexology: Horror*, and I wrote this about it after reading that book:

Sibling rivalry goes to places it probably never should, but thanks to Jennifer Pelland's excellent treatment of the subject *Big Sister/Little Sister*, this utterly twisted tale of jealousy and anger is a joy to read, even while people are doing hellishly horrible things to each other. It's the best kind of horror, in my opinion, the kind that makes me ask myself what I would do in that situation and would I be any kinder or humane. Ultimately, I'm not sure I would.

Another quality I enjoyed about this book is the sense of the author's involvement in the story. Some readers don't like to feel they're sharing with the author, they enjoy a disconnected relationship and want to consume the book without any give or take. Both because of the notes included at the end of each story, and the nature of the stories themselves, this is almost like a conversation by email with the author - slightly disjointed, and wild tangents in every direction, but ultimately rewarding. The story "Immortal Sin" certainly resonates for me, as this was clearly written as a catharsis of her catholic upbringing.

"Flood" engages a device Jennifer uses often, the young woman as protagonist. Undine is a pop star, obsessed with the mysteriously disappeared oceans and rivers of a dried up and barely inhabitable earth. Her obsession drives her and is grist for her fame and fortune... but is it driving her towards something, or away from a part of herself she doesn't want to admit? While there's no doubt this story ended at the right time, I would desperately like to see a sequel about Undine's life after [the things that I'm not going to spoil for you].

The most experimental piece in the collection, "The Call" is best described by the author herself: "And now that I've written my second person, all-question story, I never have to do either of those tricks again." The theme, like the rest of the collection, deals with loss, loneliness, absolution and the value of sacrifice. Unfortunately, the stylistic tricks really do take her away from what she's best at, and this was my least favorite piece.

After that mercifully short story, the 2008 Nebula nominee "Captive Girl", another especially strong piece, tells the story of a love that can only happen between unequals - and the depths - and heights - people will go for love. A haunting piece, I believe most people will relate deeply to the metaphor of needing broken things - and intentionally breaking oneself to be needed.

Sometimes good things happen to people, and I would categorize "The Last Bus" as dark fiction, certainly not horror. Absolution is writ large across every paragraph of this story. Another not so strong piece, but the characters are so richly drawn that even though the plot treads well worn ground, reading it is a pleasure.

One of the longest, and in my opinion the real standout in the collection, is "The Last Stand of the Elephant Man". Jennifer transports Joseph Merrick (the infamous "Elephant Man" of Victorian England) into a post-cyberpunk future where bodies are worn like sleeves, and often heavily modified in increasingly garish ways to shock the jaded rich and bored. Jennifer's skill at getting inside the conflicted emotions of Joseph, who suddenly wakes up centuries ahead of his time and with a gorgeous body - simultaneously confused and grateful, she uses his deformed body almost like an albatross around the antagonist Jean-Pierre's neck, allowing both Joseph and Jean-Pierre to emerge at the end of the story more wholly human - and imperfect - than ever.

"Songs of Lament" is what Walter Jon Williams' *Surfacing* would be like, if WJW was filled with a particularly sinister sense of humor and woke up in a bad mood for a couple weeks. From the notes, "One day I thought, 'What if whales are singing about terrible, violent things?' The thought of all those hippies and new agers blissing out to whales screaming in anger was just too delicious an idea not to play with". And I'm glad she did; I've often *thought the exact same thing*.

Going back to young heroines again, "Firebird" covers a lot of the same emotional ground that "Captive Girl" does, but from a very different angle. Frankly, "Captive Girl" is the better implementation, though stylistically "Firebird" is written in a journal format that makes the story come alive.

"Brushstrokes" is a very pretty story, but left me feeling a little empty at the end. If it were a happy ending, though, it wouldn't be dark fiction. Again, it deals with love and the lengths people will go to for it in a dark future where humans are basically pets of some undescribed races that control nearly every facet of their lives. Shades of "1984" were clearly visible, but the entire concept of humans as domesticated animals in servitude to vastly more capable alien races has been a thought experiment of mine for years, so it was

fantastic to read a story set in such a world.

Without a doubt, Jennifer Pelland is someone to keep an eye on, and her engaging and intimate characters in dark and horrific scenarios makes for some good reading, even if some of the plots and themes feel a little derivative. I highly recommend this book in the strongest terms possible; it's a very quick read and well worth the effort.

Ryandake says

i can't make myself finish.

i've read the first 4 or 5 stories, and while they are good-enough stories (as some mothers are good-enough mothers), there just isn't any payoff. the prose is ok. the images are ok. the characters are ok, and the plot notions are... ok.

but a book of short stories should have at least one in the first 4 or 5 that leaves one reeling, even just a little bit. short stories are supposed to *abuse* a reader a little--they have to have punch. not plot-level punch, either; they have to show you something that you had never considered before.

these stories just don't have that, for me.

Megan says

This is a great collection of horror and speculative fiction short stories. I stared this book on the plane as we left WisCon and by the time I finished the second story, I turned to my partner and gave her a stunned look while all I could say was "Wow." Then I turned back to the book to devour more of the stories. Almost every story left me thinking and slightly unsettled - the horror is more speculative than gory, which is what I prefer in this genre. Slasher stories, serial killers and tentacle monsters have their place, but the stuff that stays with me are the stories that unnerve me or make me think.

Some of the standout stories (they were all good ... these are the ones that stuck with me):

For the Plague Thereof was Exceeding Great – A fantastic story to start the collection with. The story takes place in the near future where an epidemic is ravaging the world. The story resonates with me, not just because we were escaping a convention that had a noro-virus breakout, but because it takes very little imagination to believe that it could happen. A disturbingly believable plot, some wonderfully crafted scenes and a bittersweet ending makes this a very memorable story.

Big Sister/Little Sister – Okay, this was sick and twisted and I absolutely loved this one. I think this is the only one that really made me cringe and had a high ick factor. But I couldn't stop reading it and had a grin on my face when I turned the last page. It is about sisters – and that's all I'm gonna say.

Captive Girl – This one I was kind of on the fence when I read it. It is an intriguing story and an uncomfortable one. The author’s note at the end of it put some things into perspective and upon a bit of reflection I find that I liked the story a lot.

Songs of Lament – Although it was short, this one worked well. This is one of the more ecologically oriented horror stories about a woman who hears the whale songs.

Brushstrokes – This was not what I was expecting and I was very pleasantly surprised. Jennifer Pelland jokingly described it as pretty boys in pretty make up having sex up against a wall. That is a very minimal part of the story. This is probably the most “sf” of the stories and deals with the ideas of society, castes and the beginning of revolution. I enjoyed it.

Nicole Fuschetti says

Spoiler Free

After reading Glitter and Mayhem and reading Jennifer Pelland’s short story, “Star Dancer”, I was eager to read more by this author. Her collection, Unwelcome Bodies did not disappoint. I had sat down with the intention of reading one a day until I finished it, but I honestly couldn’t stop once I started. This is an amazing, enthralling collection of short stories. I have love fantasy and science fiction so much more for putting ideas like these into the head of such a fantastic writer.

This collection features eleven brilliant short stories. There are no words to do this collection justice (you really do just have to go buy it and read it), but I will try:

“For the Plague Thereof Was Exceeding Great”- This story is about a version of Earth in the future plagued by a new strain of HIV that is wiping out the planet and the struggle between those who wish to outlast it and those who wish to be ‘saved.’ Also, I have to really thank the author for including the news clippings at the end of this. They were wonderful to read.

“Big Sister/Little Sister”- I will be haunted for the rest of my life by this story, much like I am by Ray Bradbury’s “Small Assassin.” I don’t know why this made me think of that, but it does. It is amazing, but incredibly creepy and disturbing. I loved it.

“Immortal Sin” -Another wonderfully disturbing story about a man who commits murder but tries to escape judgment day by scientifically experimenting on himself to achieve immortality.

“Flood”- I can’t get over how beautiful this story was. An Earth in which water is scarce and fading, and the pop singer who laments over the lack of water and oceans.

“The Call”- A very short story written in all question format. Short, but effective and brilliant.

“Captive Girl”- This story was bittersweet to me. I’m not going to say much on this other than it really is a love story, albeit a strange one. Love is so much more than a pretty face; it is how that person makes you feel that is important.

“Last Bus”- A very sweet story about the journey after death.

“The Last Stand of the Elephant Man”- This might have been one of my favorite in the collection, though if really pushed to pinpoint my favorite I imagine I’d say they all were. This is the story of the Elephant Man, Joseph Merrick, yet transposed onto a future timeline in which Earth finds ‘normal’ people weird and the odd and strange fantastic. This story will linger on your mind long after you have finished it.

“Songs of Lament”- I loved this story also. It’s about a world in which whales are also an intelligent race and can finally be understood.

“Firebird”- Written in a journal-style format about a college freshman and her obsession with a pop star who lit herself on fire to send a message about global warming and ultimately ends up being her roommate. Really fantastic story.

“Brushstrokes”- I honestly wish this had been a full-length novel because I would have devoured the entire thing. This world is so incredible and also believable as strange as it is. It is one of the longest stories in the collections, but it is also a perfect final story of this collection.

This is one of the best collections of short fiction I have ever read.

Rachel says

I read this because I met the author at a convention, and really enjoyed what she had to say on the panels that she was a part of. The stories in this book were all fascinating and creepy, and while they aren't my kind of stories, I don't regret having read them. In the earlier stories especially, however, the characters felt too extreme to me, like they were caricatures to serve the idea of the story rather than fully fleshed-out people. The latter stories did not suffer from this problem, however. This collection definitely gets better as one gets further into it.

Donna Brown says

Unwelcome Bodies is a collection of, well, frankly, utterly unnerving tales. It’s rare for me to review SFF and rare for me to review short stories, so a combination of both is practically unheard of. However, Jennifer Pelland’s collection looked to be full of intriguing ideas and I wanted to try something new.

Pelland presents a range of scenarios that range from slightly eerie to full blown frightening. From the story about the woman whose sister has been sewn into her body to the man on a quest to find the key to eternal life, these are thought provoking stories of what life in the future could be like. I found myself flitting from repulsion to fear to awe as I worked my way through the volume.

Each story is a relatively short length and easily digestible. All are followed by notes from the author, divulging ‘the story behind the story’. The volume is well narrated by Linette Geisel, who applies a steady pace and clear enunciation, making this a relatively easy listen for such a disturbing volume. If it lacks in one thing, it’s quite possibly in the editorial of the narration. There were times when the end of a story and the

beginning of the ‘notes’ ran so closely together it took me a moment to realise that the story had finished. However, this is a minor complaint and only occurred a small number of times across the seven hour volume.

As a fan of John Wyndham and Isaac Asimov I often wonder why I don’t really consider myself a science-fiction fan these days. Reading/listening to a volume such as this makes me realise that this isn’t a genre I should close myself off to. This was one of the most intriguing volumes of short stories I’ve encountered. Pelland is an excellent storyteller with a vivid imagination. I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend her writing or to look out for future volumes.

Note: I received this audiobook from Audiobook Jukebox in exchange for a fair and honest review. I did not receive any further compensation. All views are my own.
