



We're All in This Together: A Novella and Stories

Owen King

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"An exceptional debut...Funny and poignant, these stories are textured gems."--*People* (four-star critic's pick)

The stories in this collection, along with Owen King's brilliant title novella set in Maine after the 2000 election, carry the weight of real emotion and revelation and showcase the impressive versatility of a rising talent.

An adolescent encounters a giant reptile in the unlikeliest of places, a rundown shopping mall; a baseball player in a fantastic 1930s Coney Island is assailed by the guilt of an illicit romance; a nineteenth-century itinerant dentist finds himself snowed in with a group of trappers for a long evening of primitive surgery and laughing gas reveries.

We're All in This Together: A Novella and Stories Details

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Marie says

Another King shoved at me to 'check out and see if he's readable.' I usually hate to compare author's that are related to each other but it is sheer impossible not to put Own next to his father and brother.

I picked this book up for above mentioned reason, no other, I'm sorry. I probably wouldn't have read it if it wasn't for the name, not for the blurb at the back in any case. Still, two pages in I really liked the story. It reminded me of Arto Paasilinna's quirky characters and it had the same feel to it. It was funny in that completely crazy over the top kind of way and I would have loved it if it wasn't for the ending. After reading the 4 (super strange and not my cup of tea) short stories attached to the main novella, I think Owen has a problem with endings. They're...not good, not satisfying for the reader, somewhat off or non-existent. That's a huge turn-off. Apart from that, however, I liked it. I liked the style in the novella, not so much in the short stories but you can't have everything.

I hope and pray that Owen King finds his way in the literary world, that he finds his niche and doesn't follow footsteps that may be too big for him but that he'll make his own on paths untrodden. He definitely has all the good preconditions one can have.

Arthur Gibson says

I forgot to write a review of this before, so I'll just do that now and put today as the finished date - though I actually read it more than a year ago. My review: Go read this book! Owen King has a knack for creating life within his words. More than the stories themselves, these are gripping characters. They have personality, depth, and you can see yourself bumping into them as you go down the street. This was the first thing by this author that I read, but it will not be the last. Based on the strength of these tales I will read anything he decides to commit to paper. Period. Worth your time.

Carol says

The novella was an excellent coming of age story. The short stories were a mix for me, some disturbing and some leaving me wanting more. I read the novella last as I was trying to read through the short stories before seeing Owen live and in person. The book talk on Sleeping Beauties was fantastic. He is an intelligent and humorous writer and speaker. I'll be reading more in the near future!

Tobin Elliott says

Having read Double Feature and enjoying it, I thought it would be interesting to go back to his first release.

I didn't love it, but I didn't hate it. I enjoy King's characters a lot, and I love the stories themselves. However,

there's only one thing I can point to that I really don't enjoy and that's the fact that all the stories seem to end without any wrap up. It's as if they ended about three paragraphs too soon.

His wife, author Kelly Braffet writes similarly, but I prefer her writing over King's, at least for this collection. As I said, Double Feature was a much better book.

I must say though, the last story in this collection, My Second Wife, was a standout. Really enjoyed it.

Nicolas Bateman says

Owen King's first book is not actually a novel but, as clearly pointed out by the title, a collection of four short stories and a novella.

If Joe has followed faithfully in the steps of Daddy, Owen couldn't be farther away from his family's recipe for books.

With a style that reminded me in turns of Paul Auster and Chad Harbach, We're All In This Together is an intelligent and effective piece of fiction writing that clearly reflects the love of its author for politics, cinema and literature, as well as for a bygone era somewhere between the second world war and the 60's.

Owen King seizes the everyday life of small town America and turns it upside down with wit and a healthy dose of weirdness.

Far from anything fantastic in the way it runs through his family, what is definitely intense and disturbing here is the thought process of characters lost in situations that they accept as overcoming.

It might make you uncomfortable, but it will certainly please you as a reader.

Owen's style is rich and dense, sometimes confusing, but always precise in its reflection of people's unease when staring at life itself.

A beautiful book that will undoubtedly get its fair share of followers.

~ Cheryl ~ says

The author is Stephen King's OTHER writer son. But Owen has a style all his own, and it's quite good.

You know when you're in a group of people, and one person is telling a story, and the topic isn't one you're necessarily interested in? But you find yourself in rapt attention because this person just knows how to tell a story well? That's what this novella was like.

A story well told, is worth the reading.

The Novella:

A teenage boy and his aging grandfather spend the summer planning an act of revenge on the paper boy they suspect of defacing a political sign in the grandfather's front yard. (Published in 2005, it is eerily prophetic in its description of the current-day political climate.) We learn early on that, in his heyday, the grandfather was an organizer for a local labor union. This shapes his outlook not just on politics, but on life. Meanwhile, the boy is coming to grips with his mother's budding romance with a new fiancé. The story is certainly

interesting enough, and does come together nicely. And thinking over it, I can say I did appreciate the quirks of the mother-son relationship.

But more than the story content, I was impressed by Owen King's writing style:

Emma nodded. Her face wore the peaceful expression of a cemetery angel – mournful, but carved with the assurance that no further harm can come.

And this:

It was from my grandfather that I came by my new height and gangly frame, but while he still maintained a couple of inches on me his spine had developed a pronounced hook, which locked him into the permanent stoop of a man who has been kicked in the shin. Papa hung over me with his rheumy brown eyes, batting them against the late light in a way that was almost girlish. My mother believed that losing Nana had broken his heart and scooped him out.

Oh reading happiness! This was definitely my cup of tea. And perhaps I was doubly impressed because I had been expecting something entirely different from Stephen King's son.

The Short Stories:

Frozen Animals:

Um, ew. Didn't like this one. Two gritty fur trappers bring an itinerant dentist up a snowy mountainside, to have him treat the rotting teeth of one trapper's wife. No indication given as to time or place, but I think Canada, and I'm guessing not modern-day. The ending is unclear and simply weird.

Wonders:

An engaging story about a Coney Island baseball player suffering a slump, due to a crisis with his sort-of girlfriend. Set in about mid-20th century. Exactly what a good short story should be... the sights, the sounds. Even with the economy of words inherent in a short story, it managed not only to travel a full story arc; but to leave you realizing you know more about the characters than it seems possible to glean without the length of a novel.

Snake:

Maybe not as good as the last story, but good. A teenage boy, who is meant to be visiting with his divorced dad for the weekend, is dumped at a local shopping mall for the day. Cool ending.

My Second Wife:

An amusing romp of a short story. More jocular than the others. A cuckolded man agrees to accompany his ne'er-do-well brother on a road trip to Florida, to buy a car being sold by a woman whose husband is on death row. A bit vulgar in spots, but well-conceived, and the ending is like a punch in the gut.

Unlike his brother Joe Hill, Owen seems NOT to be influenced by the Creepshow-type fiction that his father built a best-selling career out of. If stories were amusement park rides, Stephen and Joe write roller coasters: Big, loud, thrilling. But, Owen crafts a more subtle kind of story, like a SkyRide: a pleasant trip where you have time to view things from a very good angle. SK veers into the supernatural, the chilling; OK explores the natural world, realistic relationships. SK's characters are basically stock and show up in almost every book; but here, in just a handful of stories, Owen created a smattering of believable and varied characters, with depth and personality.

Yes. Owen King is doing his own thing, and I think he's got a good thing going.

Bandit says

I like to think of myself as an objective reviewer or at least a fair one. I also am not averse to giving writers second chances to insure that my impressions and opinions of their work are accurate. And so, despite the disappointing Double Feature I've read recently, I decided to give Owen King another go and checked out his debut book. This one I liked even less. I am seriously amazed, actually incredulous at all the praise he receives on his book covers. Could be his writing is just really not my thing, could be. It's just so boring, it's boring and slow and utterly unengaging, with slim to none sympathetic characters or flights of fancy or whims of imagination. The occasional sparks of genuinely good turn of phrase or original description are so few and far in between that they barely register. The title novella may have worked a bit better, but it was so weighted by a political agenda. Somehow, despite the famous name and the uberawesome writing DNA, Owen King's books are just not enjoyable. Wherein his brother's books are impossible to put down, his are a chore to finish. I'm a completist, I finished them both, I think I've given this author a fair try and I now know not to waste any more of my time.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

If you're still ticked off about the way Dubya was allowed to steal the election in 2000, you need to read the novella, "We're All In This Together." I had some serious laugh-out-loud moments while reading it. Unfortunately, it falls apart at the end, which reduced my rating from four stars to three.

The short stories are well written, if not particularly memorable. I think Owen King has some writing chops. He just needs more practice and better material. So even though I'm only giving this book three stars, I'm looking forward to giving him another chance when his novel, *Double Feature*, comes out in March 2013.

Debra says

Stephen King's son is a pretty darned good writer. He and his brother are definitely making their dad proud in that department. I enjoyed the novella in this book the best; loved the little twist thrown in for good measure. Liked the surprise. The characters were well-developed and quirky. It was a kind of coming-of-age

story, too.

The rest of the stories were also very well-written, although some good have been longer.

Overall, I'd recommend this collection.

Chris says

This is a brilliant little collection of one novella and four short stories. When you consider that it's the author's first book, it really says something. This is no amateur storyteller here. These stories work, and they work well.

You might recognize the name of the author if you're a Stephen King fan; it's his second son. It might be unfair to compare Owen's one book to the 40-year legacy of his father, but it's probably nigh on impossible not to at least consider it. I mean, it's his son. King has been scaring and entralling the world for nearly 40 years. So when his sons start publishing, one can't help but wonder if they will carry on his legacy.

Owen's older brother sure has. Joe Hill is hugely successful in his own right and a brilliant author to boot. So not only does Owen have the biggest name in the history of the horror genre setting the bar, but his older brother as well. His mother is also an author, and so is his wife. Owen pretty much *has* to be good, right?

But all that aside, Owen is not a horror writer. Though the heart of his stories (especially the title novella of this book) resemble some of the better emotional character developments of his father's career, they stand out on their own as well. In fact, I found myself thinking of *Empire Falls*, the novel by Richard Russo more often than I did King's work. That's one hell of a comparison, as not only did Russo win a Pulitzer, but it was *good, really good*. A side-note here might be that *Empire Falls* is set in a small Maine town, as is "We're All In This Together". Another side note is that Russo is a friend of Stephen King.

"We're All In This Together" (novella):

-5 stars. The setting and texture of the novella do remind me of *Empire Falls*, though this is of course a much shorter work. It doesn't have the intricate structure of Russo's novel, but on a smaller scale I think Owen does manage to capture the heart of the characters, especially the narrator, George Claiborne.

The characters are wonderfully developed in a relatively short space. George is a bit of a troubled kid, but he's not a bad sort. I'd certainly be curious to see how he turns out as an adult. The eccentric grandfather and his equally (or even more-so) eccentric best friend certainly earned their share of laughs. The potential stepfather, Dr. Vic was another well-drawn character. He's kind of a jackass, but sympathetic in his own way. And then there is Emma, George's mother. I admit I had a bit of a book crush on her. She's a struggling single mom that's trying to raise her son right yet wants a little happiness of her own. Who doesn't? It's a difficult balance at times and she handles it as best she can. She just felt real to me.

This novella is fabulous. If this is any indication of Owen King's talent, we could be looking at a fantastic body of work in the future. It doesn't even need the accompanying short stories for me to recommend buying and reading this book.

Since it really can't be avoided, I'll go ahead and jump into it. There are definitely some moments that made me think of Stephen King's work. These probably aren't spoilers, and might not even be Easter eggs, but I

found them to be cool. I have to wonder if they're there by coincidence or design.
(view spoiler)

“Frozen Animals”:

That was a strange little story, but I can't say I didn't find it compelling. While I wouldn't classify it as horror, the dental work scenes had me writhing and shivering more than I care to think about.

“Wonders”:

Another oddity, and it shouldn't be surprising that we have a story where baseball is important. After all, Owen King himself was a character in a baseball story written by his father: “Head Down”.

That aside, this is a weird little story. It's very good and held my interest. But the relationship between a baseball team and a carnival of freaks was pretty unique. A book wouldn't truly come from the King family without a really good WTF-moment or two, and this certainly provides.

“Snake”

This is my favorite of the short stories. A little haunting, a little creepy, it left the feeling that there should be more, much more to tell. The guy from “Due Date” should play the snake keeper, and I have to love the name of the snake: Julius Squeezer.

“My Second Wife”

Wow. This one was a road trip story of sorts. I could definitely see it work as a movie too. Lots of little twists and turns and unexpectedness. Very enjoyable.

That's what I get out of all of these stories. You don't know where they're going to go. There's really no way to predict it, and that's refreshing. You might even find yourself scratching your head at the end of some of them, going “did he just...” and not being entirely sure just what might have happened next. But that's alright too, because these stories will keep your attention front to back, and they will stir your imagination, your funny-bone, and probably some emotions here and there.

I'm seriously looking forward to reading more from Owen King someday.

Jennifer says

My library branch has a sad bookcase with a few books turned face out on each shelf. There's a sign that says something like, "These books are in danger of being permanently removed from the shelves due to not being taken out very much. Please do a good deed and take one home with you to read today!"

So, being a Good Deed Do-er, I took this book and checked it out, literally and figuratively. Largely because it was by Owen King, son of Stephen and brother of Joe Hill. I'd never read anything by Owen King, and was curious to see how he'd stack up against his famous kin.

The answer: he is a distant third. His eye doesn't seem as sharp. A lot of the stories meander around and seem to be lacking both plot and point. I think all of them involve pot in some way. (Perhaps the reason for the meandering? Who knows.) There are some good moments, and reading this one book was fine, but I do not think I will seek out any other work by this particular King.

Kit★ says

I found this book at Dollar General, when I saw it, I was like, "no way, I've always wanted to check out Owen's writing!" I've been a Stephen King fan for years and years, and I've since come to love the few things I've gotten to read by the other members of his family. So, yea, I was a tad excited to find this book, and for a good price. Plus it's a collection of short stories, which I have a soft spot for... bonus points if you will :) I'll say right off the bat that I was not disappointed in this book at all, the writing was as good as I'd expected it to be, maybe better. The King family has some kind of writing gene I guess. I would have liked more of it though, maybe longer stories or more stories... I'm a lil greedy like that sometimes when I find writing I like. The title novella was my favorite in the collection. The characters were quirky, but nicely developed, and I wanted to know more about them. The old men made me laugh out loud, they seemed like people I might know. Even the scenarios seemed strange but normal, watching strange travel shows on tv, talking politics, and the punkish attitude of George, and also of Sugar and Tolson were exactly like kids I've known. The ending came as a surprise to me, the mystery of the old man's newspaper, and who was spray-painting his sign, I sort of had to laugh at who it was. It wasn't altogether happy though, but it was still a good ending. "Frozen Animals" caught my attention from the beginning. I liked that it was set in the past, and I wanted to know more of the characters, where they were going, what was going to happen. Like the dentist, I thought this story had a strange, surreal sort of quality. Almost like a weird trip. It ended abruptly though, when I wanted to know what else was going to happen.

"Wonders" was also strange, and it was probably the one I liked the least. It started out good, I liked the characters, and how it was also set in the past. I didn't really like the sideshow freaks, but they weren't awful, at least until Eckstein and Lillian went there on their late-night mission. Then I think I got lost, maybe a little confused, because I'm still not sure exactly what happened (bit of a pretty nasty spoiler here) (view spoiler). The next story, "Snake", was pretty good. The teenage character was easy for me to understand, and the setting of the deserted, crappy mall was totally familiar. The ending was the best part though. To me it was a neat little sort of adventure.

"My Second Wife" was fascinating. The idea of just taking an anything-goes road trip has always been cool. Strange drunken things happen, and it also had the feeling of a weird trip, mostly due to the odd things that went on, the brother and the whole situation with the car they went to get, and the episode with Jesse and especially the end, when he was watching tv and seen her. I did kind of want to know what happened to Wayne after he went to Haiti, but that's just a mystery left up to my own imagination.

All in all, a good collection, and I would really, really love to see more of Owen King's work, I hope he keeps writing, and getting published! I'd love to see a full length novel, or more shorties... either way'd be good with me.

Shawn Leslie Dixon says

I enjoyed this book a lot...

The first story and the one I enjoyed the most, the title novella, We're All in This Together, was laugh out loud funny on several occasions. It was smart and characters served perfectly, all plausible, all identifiable in

some way. I couldn't help, but enjoy the stance of the grandfather and George (I've spent enough time on the wrong side of the tracks to shake my fist at rich folks) to a point. The strange forgiveness between the author's characters always offer an inner chuckle, mostly at the peculiarity and honesty of the situation.

The second story, a short titled *Frozen Animals*, had me at the outright absurdity of the characters, yet they all seemed plausible and vaguely familiar to someone I've encountered. It was also very funny at times and the looming question is always a fun way to end things.

The final story and amid my favorites of the collection was titled *My Second Wife*, I laughed a tone at this story. Growing up in a rural community I recall a farm I used to visit having a couple emus. I can easily coax, vivid, close up memories of the mean bird-beasts spitting mad and chasing me in a pen, so I had a ridiculous mental victory imagining the monster that chased me dead in the bathtub, circled by flies.

There were two other stories, both were well-written, but *Wonders* called a bit too much uncertainty as I've never been and know little about the history of the location (although I do love some comeuppance) and *Snake* didn't have much tug at my strings. I did, however, find myself relating with Frank about a certain type of story; I have read a mystery/crime novel about chess and thought it sucked the big as well.

In the end, absolutely worth a read.

Eric says

Stephen King's other son...after reading *HEART SHAPED BOX* by Joe Hill (Stephen King's other other son) I was amazed by the protege of the family. Although Tabitha doesn't really do it for me, she keeps Stephen in check, I had to check out the other son's work. It's not horror at all.

Although there are some thought provoking and disturbing sequences, Owen seems to write literary works. His tales wound you into a surprising thought provoking atmosphere. I respect his talent. The first book is a collection and seemingly one novella. My favorite of the foray was "*Frozen Animals*" which was awe inspiring and I love the idea of a dentist trapped in a cabin with trappers.

Owen and Joe seem to be the future of literary geniuses. Alongside Ellis, Palahniuk and Welsh.

DJ says

Taking the average of my rating for each story - 2.5 stars.

Sorta bummed. Maybe I went into this with higher hopes than I should have. Maybe I let thoughts of Stephen King (which, poor Owen, must always be compared to) influence my take on these stories. Or maybe I just didn't get it. I will say, though, with the few typos in the Kindle edition, it was very well written. Owen King can write. The subjects though...

We're All in This Together - The longest of the stories in this collection. Three Stars. George is growing up in Maine with a single activist mom and union organizing grandfather. This was a political complaint about George Bush getting the white house in 2000 meets coming of age tale. Politics...bleh. I have a difficult time with anything political in reading. The coming of age part was really good. There were moments when you weren't really sure of the timeline, where part of it felt so 1980s and other parts felt 2000...and even parts where it felt more 1950s than any other time period.

Frozen Animals - Two stars. Two poor trappers take a dentist up a mountain to care for the one's pregnant wife. I understood where the story ended. I completely understood what went on...but overall, to me, it felt like there was no real point to the story. I kept waiting for the "twist"...are the trappers going to eat the dentist? Will the dentist do something out of character for himself? And in the end it was...meh. Where is the twist?

Wonders - Four Stars! The best of the bunch! The story of a baseball player for a minor league on Coney Island...where some of the sideshow attractions are part of the game. For some reason, this one was a win. The strains and stresses of an unexpected pregnancy meets handling stupidity of racism meets crazy characters...A pure win.

Snake - UGH! Two stars. Frank, a John Cusak from Say Anything seeming youth, deals with his divorced parents and visitations with his drunken father. Loves reading. This one had me...It was so good...of all the avenues it could have taken...and in the end, it fell flat. It just...stopped. I'm left with wonder and confusion, and maybe that was the point, but I like at least a somewhat ending to a story...not just a handful of possibilities and the seeming end in the middle of a paragraph.

My Second Wife - Two stars at the most. The most confusing, rambling thing that I actually finished reading. A man laments the loss of his wife and "marries" another "woman" while on a trip with his brother to purchase a car owned by a mass murderer on death row. Um...I think the only thing I understood was the part where the MC watched a Jerry Springer type show and saw "the new wife(?)". . . and...um...not that I'm against it, but in this story it felt like it was there to shock and be sensational rather than a fact.

I don't know. Again, well written and not overly showy, which is bonus points...but sort of let down. I guess it's just not for me.

A SHORTY FEBRUARY READ - Heavy sigh. Joe Hill next.
