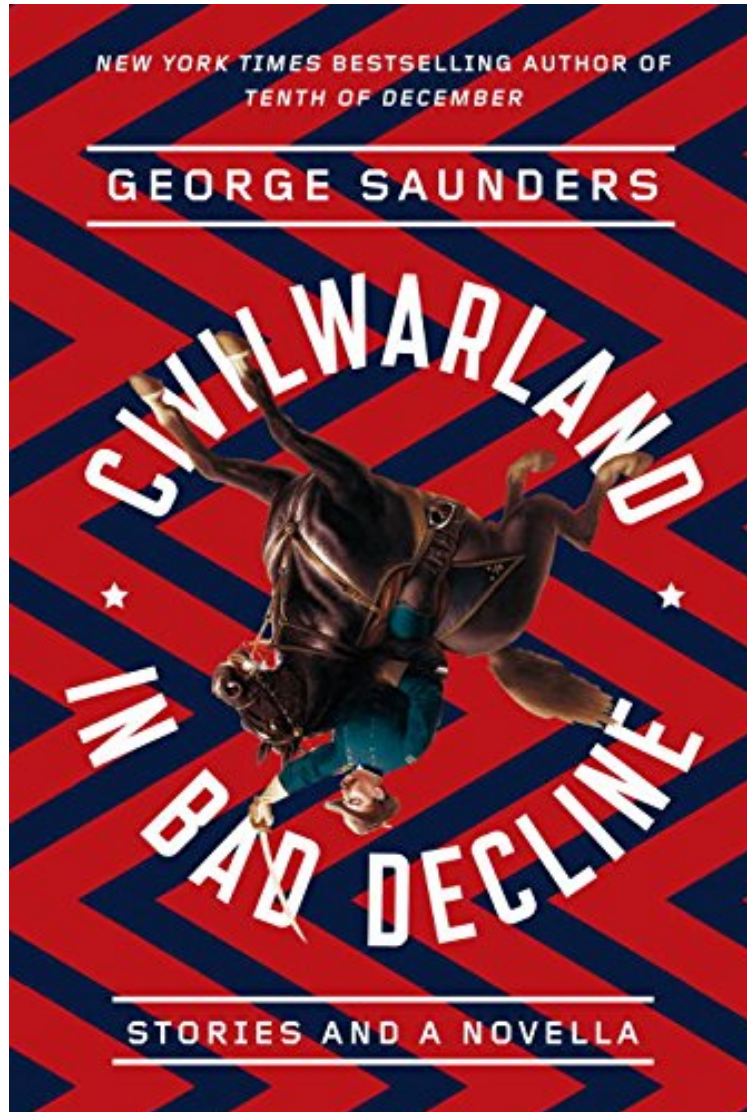


[Pdf free] CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella

CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella

George Saunders

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George Saunders : CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Funny and touchingBy GL Davis(4.5 stars)This being the first George Saunders collection I've read, while I've been aware he has received great critical praise, I had no idea he was so funny. CivilWarLand in Bad Decline is his first published volume, containing six short stories and a novella. In many, a key setting is a rather dystopian and dysfunctional historical theme park--though it's unclear from story to

story whether it's the same historical theme park. Each is something of an exploration of class, in that those who enjoy the park's amusements are rich, while those running it behind-the-scenes definitely are not. Saunders says in an afterward that the question that has motivated his writing is, "Why is the world so harsh to those who are losing?" Within the collection, the two outliers are "Isabelle," a short story that is very different stylistically from the others--both in that it is neither funny/satirical, and it takes place in a recognizable "real world"--and "Bounty," which follows the style of the other stories, but is a novella. And these two outliers set the two ends of the spectrum for me of the entry I liked best and the one I liked least. "Isabelle," I felt, was a little masterpiece, a spare but touching story. "Bounty," on the other hand, took the whimsical approach of the other stories, but as a novella went on just too long. I understand Saunders will next be publishing a novel. I will look forward to seeing how he handles that long form. As I will look forward to reading other Saunders stories. I'll recommend him to those who still have not heard of him. The praise he has gained is well-deserved.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Not quite as ambitious or great as *Tenth of December*, but it's still fantastic, sharp, funny, and beautiful. By Josh Mauthe. A little over a year ago, I picked up *Tenth of December*, the much-acclaimed short story collection by George Saunders, and was blown away. What I expected was stories about "upper class white people problems"; what I got was a collection of funny, sharp, satirical looks at America, with stories ranging from Renaissance Fairs to futuristic nightmares to corporate torture memos. I was floored and thrilled; here, I thought, was a short story writer who got away from tales of ennui and angst, telling stories that had a point but entertained, made you laugh, and still worked as rich, well-written works. I didn't realize when I chose *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* as my follow-up that it was Saunders' earliest collection; I knew it was acclaimed, like most of his work, and had a lot of love, and had a pretty great title. What I didn't realize, though, is that it represented a point where Saunders was still finding his voice, to some degree. In the author's note that follows the book, Saunders comments that there's a reason that just about every story here revolves around amusement parks (even if they're all dystopian nightmare amusement parks) - it was a way to force himself out of emulating Hemingway and Carver, and into his own more unique voice. The downside, then, with *CivilWarLand* is that it doesn't quite show as much range as the masterful *Tenth of December*. As mentioned, almost all of the stories revolve around bizarre Westworld-type amusement parks, and the few that don't still revolve around escapist entertainment, by and large. As a result, the stories blend together a little more; while each has its own unique story and plot (the title story features the Civil War park forced to recruit mercenaries from Vietnam World to help clear out a gang problem, with predictably nightmarish results), the settings tend to blur together a bit more than you'd hope. And yet, even so, that doesn't keep the collection from being wildly successful, very funny, and even profoundly moving. Saunders has a taste for black comedy, and it pays off superbly here, with the tragicomedy "The 400-Pound CEO" being a real standout, as it tells the story of a morbidly obese man mocked by his co-workers who only wants to be loved. It's both painful and hysterically funny, as Saunders contrasts his passive, lonely hero with the absurd cruelty of his co-workers and the bizarre actions of his employer. Meanwhile, stories like "Offloading for Mrs. Schwartz" show that Saunders is capable of profound emotion, as a man in control of virtual reality experiences searches for a way to escape his own painful life. And, of course, there's that title story, that mixes world-building, violence, and satire into a potent and effective combination. Yes, in some ways, these stories blend together, and sometimes hit a bit too hard on the same themes and tropes. But even so, it's clearly the voice of an author that's finding himself, and the fact that he brings such variation, even in similar tales, speaks well of the author that Saunders would become. And even here, where he's taking his first steps, he's still writing stories unlike much else out there, and creating worlds, characters, and prose that really demand to be experienced. It's not as good as *Tenth of December*, but that doesn't mean it's not superb stuff indeed.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. What To Say About *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*? By Bruce R Macpherson. Recently George Saunders has received a lot of good press what with the critical success of his most recent collection, *Tenth of December*, and the award of a "genius" grant by the MacArthur Foundation in 2006. Saunders is sometimes referred to (or refers to himself) as the "best known unknown writer" in America. This reference is false. For my money, this title should be bestowed on Peter Taylor, although Saunders may be the "best known unknown writer" alive. But no. With his recent success Saunders has become practically a household name. *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* is one of Saunders's earliest efforts, appearing in 1996. It's a slim volume-179 pages containing six stories and a novella. The stories follow a predictable formula-a vaguely post-apocryphal future dominated by hapless narrators pulled between their sense of morality and the practical necessities of survival in a mean world. Bosses are ruthless, the innocent suffer, and business jargon dressed up as the ethics du jour rules the roost. Many of the send ups are hilarious, that is until one of the main characters gets a rusty knife plunged into his ribs. Even the ghosts in the stories are troubled, doomed to relive the tragedies of their earthly lives over and over again. Saunders' vision is bleak, which allows the small glimmers of hope in his fiction to shine. Although I laughed at the funny parts, ultimately I found his satire to be formulaic and depressing. His work recalls the songstress Peggy Lee's melody "Is That All There Is?". Given Saunders's recent literary success, apparently not.

Since its publication in 1996, George Saunders's debut collection has grown in esteem from a cherished cult classic to a masterpiece of the form, inspiring an entire generation of writers along the way. In six stories and a novella,

Saunders hatches an unforgettable cast of characters, each struggling to survive in an increasingly haywire world. With a new introduction by Joshua Ferris and a new author's note by Saunders himself, this edition is essential reading for those seeking to discover or revisit a virtuosic, disturbingly prescient voice. Praise for George Saunders and *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* "It's no exaggeration to say that short story master George Saunders helped change the trajectory of American fiction."—The Wall Street Journal "Saunders's satiric vision of America is dark and demented; it's also ferocious and very funny."—Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times "George Saunders is a writer of arresting brilliance and originality, with a sure sense of his material and apparently inexhaustible resources of voice. [*CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*] is scary, hilarious, and unforgettable."—Tobias Wolff "Saunders makes the all-but-impossible look effortless."—Jonathan Franzen "Not since Twain has America produced a satirist this funny."—Zadie Smith "An astoundingly tuned voice—graceful, dark, authentic, and funny—telling just the kinds of stories we need to get us through these times."—Thomas Pynchon

.com Funny, sad, bleak, weird, toxic - the future of America as the Free Market runs rampant, the environment skids into disarray, and civilization dissolves into surreal chaos. These wacky, brilliant, hilarious and entirely original stories cue us in on George Saunderson's skewed vision of the legacy we are creating. Against the backdrop of our devolution, our own worst tendencies and greatest virtues are weirdly illuminated. From Publishers Weekly In this debut collection of seven dystopian fantasies, some of which have appeared in the New Yorker and Harper's, America in the near future is a toxic wasteland overrun by vicious thugs and venal opportunists who prey on the weak and misshapen. Saunders's feverish imagination conjures up images as horrific as any from a Hieronymus Bosch painting: a field full of braying mules toppled over from bone marrow disease; a tourist attraction featuring pickled stillborn babies; and cows with Plexiglas windows in their sides. The black humor and vision of American enterprise and evangelism gone haywire are reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut's early works. In the novella "Bounty," for example, the clawed-foot narrator, who flees slavery under the "Normals" to find his sister, sees a McDonald's that is the headquarters of the Church of Appropriate Humility, aka "the Guilters." "In Guilter epistemology," he observes, "the arches represent the twin human frailties of arrogance and mediocrity." Despite the richness of the vision and the occasionally heart-melting prose, however, there is little difference in voice to distinguish one story from another. Read in one sitting, they blur into a bleak and unsettling vision of the world to come. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal This group of stories focuses on characters who work in a theme park called *CivilWarLand* in the future United States. Environmental pollution and genetic mutation have taken their toll, dividing the population into Normals and Flaweds. America's farmland lies fallow. All scramble to feed themselves and their families. Cars are hauled by horses, barges are hauled by humans, and technology continues its amazing feats, such as "off-loading" human memories, which are then sold as virtual-reality experiences. People continue to struggle for recognition, for wealth, and for the American Dream in the face of grinding poverty and limited opportunities. Saunders's surreal depiction of a bleak future for the country is both startling and believable. Here's hoping he is not a prophet. The author is a teacher and consultant for Raytheon. This is his first work of fiction. Recommended for public libraries. Joanna M. Burkhardt, Univ. of Rhode Island Continuing Education Lib. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.