



In the Mean Time

Paul Tremblay

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This collection by Paul G. Tremblay (author of *The Little Sleep* and *No Sleep Till Wonderland*) features fifteen stories of fear and paranoia, stories of apocalypses both societal and personal, and stories of longing and coping.

In the Mean Time Details

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Author : Paul Tremblay

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From Reader Review In the Mean Time for online ebook

Jessica says

<http://www.hipsterbookclub.com/review...>

Paul Tremblay blends fantasy, horror, and realism in his new short story collection *In the Mean Time*. In 15 stories of personal and social catastrophes, Tremblay confronts the loneliness, fear, paranoia, and endurance of humankind.

The book collects a handful of Tremblay's published stories from the past decade with a few original to the collection. The author plays with elements of different genres, ranging from realism to dark fantasy and science fiction. The disquieting opening story, "The Teacher," sets the tone for the collection. A high school teacher challenges his students' perceptions of inevitability with an unorthodox lesson plan, while one of his students copes with her dissolving home life. With subtlety, Tremblay confronts the strain of everyday life and the personal traumas we endure. That theme carries through the book to varying degrees, pitting personal catastrophes against end-of-the-world incidents. Whether coping with an emotional or literal apocalypse, Tremblay's characters share the same sense of devastation and desire for survival.

Some more explicitly rely on science fiction or horror, like "Figure 5," in which a plague transforms its victims into gruesome creatures. In the final story in the collection, "We Will Never Live in the Castle," characters seek refuge up in an abandoned amusement park after the apocalypse. The most successful stories, however, fall somewhere in between realism and fantasy. By adding just a hint of the fantastic or absurd, Tremblay amplifies the mood and tension without detracting from a story's honesty. For example, in "The Two-Headed Girl," a teenage girl copes with the pressures of isolation, a strained relationship with her single mother, and a longing to locate the father she never knew. She also happens to have an extra head that takes on the shape and persona of historical and fictional characters. An element of the absurd or fantastic in Tremblay's stories only highlights the strangeness of our everyday lives. Like a surrealist painting, Tremblay challenges readers to question rationality and zero in on the natural and sometimes uncomfortable emotions at the heart of a story. The fantasy or sci-fi elements may first appear to take the reader outside of reality, but as each story progresses, readers find themselves relating to the characters more and more.

Notably, Tremblay writes a variety of characters convincingly. Whether it's a pregnant woman struggling with an unusual eating disorder, a paranoid blogger chronicling the impending apocalypse, or a sweet-tempered five-year-old boy, Tremblay writes each with equal authenticity.

"It's Against the Law to Feed the Ducks," one of the more affecting stories, demonstrates Tremblay's strengths in subtlety and characterization. Five-year-old Danny accompanies his parents and baby sister on vacation to Lake Winnipesaukee. An unspoken catastrophe strikes that, in his naivety, Danny cannot comprehend. Through Danny's perspective, readers get mere glimpses into the situation – people deserting the town, his parents speaking in whispers, the electricity shutting off. The child's innocence is heartbreakingly.

Danny tries to send his ears out again and this time he hears his parents in the hallway. They speak with one voice. He hears words that he doesn't understand. They might be arguing and they might be laughing and they might be crying but it doesn't matter, because Danny knows tonight was the best night of their vacation.

Despite the stories' short lengths—there is even a flash fiction piece—Tremblay gives his characters distinct voices and relatability. His ability to write fully developed and genuine characters helps keep even the more absurd stories relevant.

Even with the often dark subject matter, Tremblay scatters hints of absurdity and dark humor throughout the stories. In “The Strange Case of Nicholas Thomas: An Excerpt from A History of The Longesian Library,” citizens of an ancient city dread the spontaneous and mysterious appearance of balloons that return every 19 years. Some shrink in fear, others believe they are a gift from God. “The Blog at the End of the World,” formatted in a series of reverse-chronological blog entries, comes complete with typos and reader comments. One blog comment states, “sorry about your friend its so scarey that were all gonna die.” Another reads, “Hi remember me? Come check out my new gambling site for all the best poker and sports action. It’s awesome. <http://www.gambler234.net>.” Not even an apocalypse will keep the spammers down. The comic relief not only offers momentary reprieve from heavy plots, but again amplifies the surreal nature of the stories.

In the Mean Time is at once eerie, disturbing, challenging, and wonderful. Tremblay challenges readers' sense of security and may not leave any parting consolation—except perhaps to say that we're all in this together.

Randolph says

I'm a fan of full disclosure. I always struggle with the subjective-objective conundrum when trying to review something. Should I go with the gut or the more analytical approach? You get the idea.

Hence the problem here. I just wasn't much into where Tremblay was going in these stories. The second half of the collection grabbed me more than the first part. There seemed to be more character involved. However, these are really good stories. Really, really good stories that reminded me of Shirley and Ligotti.

So I gave it four stars. Definitely not just a three star collection but I held back from five because, like I said, I just wasn't that into it and it didn't grab me real hard and fast. I can understand where some people are going to give this five stars. Fair enough.

I always end up talking more about myself than the damned book. Gotta stop that.

Daniel Short says

Thoughtful stories and a different look from Paul Tremblay. Excellent!

Nicholas Kaufmann says

A collection of mini-masterpieces about the end of the world, both actually and personally. I hate Paul Tremblay for being such a talented writer. Or I would if he had a uvula. But he doesn't, so I take pity on him. You should, too.

Alan says

Nearly 5 stars. Superb stories: strange and weird (a girl with two heads, a man who fills his house with spiders), or post- or pre-apocalyptic (in one the world is overgrown with bamboo like plants, that eventually come up through the floorboards; in another there is a cerebral aneurysm epidemic). OK there are innumerable examples of strange and/or end-of-the-world stories but what sets Tremblay apart is the odd combination of humour and compassion. And the smooth, expert writing. It was possible to feel sympathy for the adolescent boy who lives inside the fibre-glass elephant in an amusement arcade (!-where else would you live post-apocalypse?) even though he may have bad intentions towards the new girl that arrives and persuades him to storm the Cinderella castle. The family in 'It is Against the Law to Feed the Ducks' will tear your heart to pieces. This latter story, from the pov of a small child is a masterpiece of suggestion and delicacy. The family are on holiday when some disaster strikes (war possibly) and the adults gather round the TV all the time to find out what's happening, but meanwhile try to reassure the boy there's nothing wrong. The boy plays 'let's pretend' games:

'Mommy, pretend you didn't know it's a beautiful day.'

'Ellen shuffles the cards. 'So it's really rainy and cold out, right?'

'No. There's no clouds. And the sun is out and super hot. It's a beautiful day.'

In context this banality makes you physically shudder. It takes a very good writer to do that.

Oh bollocks I'm changing this to 5 stars, even though there were a couple of stories that didn't quite hit those heights.

Caleb Ross says

Twitter Review: #ITMT In The Mean Time by Paul Tremblay @paulGtremblay <http://bit.ly/bfWKjw>

#ITMT story1: The ticking clock is a child's impending pain. Incredible suspense. I suffered an entire life during this story.

#ITMT story2: Does simple psychosis explain the girl's 2nd head? Her mother's unhealthy support of the condition tears me apart.

#ITMT story3: like a scary retelling of Barthleme's The Balloon through the meta lens of academic legacy. Starts simply clever but ends deep.

#ITMT story4: Procreation, like hunger, is instinctual and ultimately insatiable. One character grows a child. The other eats dirt.

#ITMT story5: Sketches map a metamorphosis plague. Evenson-esque imagery with all the Tremblay emotion I am coming to love.

#ITMT story6: Plant-like growths overtake the world. Two sisters watch it steal their parents. The life cycle through magical realism.

#ITMT story7: Secret-eating spiders wait patiently for food. A lighter story in terms of theme, but no less creepy than the rest.

#ITMT story8: the Jewish aspect feels forced but otherwise a truly haunting tale. Nothing sadder than a caste teased with hope.

#ITMT story9: One brother escapes a childhood he remembers by billboard advertisements. Too short of a story. I want more pages.

#ITMT story10: Blog comments document a recent string of aneurysm deaths. The juxtaposition of casual banter and the serious epidemic works.

#ITMT story11: An isolated neighborhood feels like an unreal limbo. Residential expansion means personal implosion.

#ITMT story12: 2 people literally trapped between the floors of a multi-storied building. Are the floors meant to be heaven and hell?

#ITMT story13: A border patrol agent confiscates a child's tooth. The stolen sentiment tears him apart. Meant to be a novel, @paulGtremblay

#ITMT story14: A comparatively traditional story. A family trying to hide its poverty from the kids. Probably better if I wasn't drunk.

#ITMT story15: surviving an apocalypse in an amusement park. Like trying to end the collection on a happy note, but still fitting blood in.

#ITMT review: At times Aimee Bender minus the domesticity, add humor, mix with welcomed introspection. I'll be reading more @paulGtremblay

Jody says

IN THE MEAN TIME by Paul Tremblay

IN THE MEAN TIME by Paul Tremblay is a collection of weird short fiction that lives up to its title, offering readers fifteen sociopolitical tales that inform us of inner conflict as well as interpersonal conflicts, world-ending plagues, psychological horror, and inconsolable loss as they lead us down dangerous avenues where adaptability and resiliency are the only means of defense and survival. IN THE MEAN TIME unfolds in a merciless world not unlike our own, and yet distinctly different from ours – as different and distinct as the writing style and literary voice employed in the telling of these tales.

The first story-offering is titled “The Teacher” in which a high school teacher employs unorthodox methodology to instruct his students on the subject of violence. This story is one of my favorites. The rest of the stories in order of TOC are as follows: “The Two-Headed Girl” – in which a young child compensates

for loss in a most unusual manner; “The Strange Case of Nicholas Thomas: An Excerpt from A History of the Longesian Library” – where readers of Tremblay’s novella CITY PIER: ABOVE AND BELOW revisit City in a tale about the mysterious balloons of Annote that appear every nineteen years and wreak havoc on the residents; “Feeding the Machine” – a cautionary tale about denial and sublimating suicidal urges; “Figure 5” – a visually stunning, other-worldly story about the merging of art and plague, bringing to mind the *Garten der Luste* triptych painted by Hieronymus Bosch, another favorite of mine; “Growing Things” – in which two young sisters battle urban botany gone terribly wrong; “Harold the Spider Man” – gives us a recluse who keeps some unusual eight legged pets with odd appetites; “Rhymes with Jew” – a sociopolitical tale about class distinction; “The Marlborough Man Meets the End” – three brothers wage war on advertising and the destruction of habitat; “The Blog at the End of the World” – an online blogger who details mysterious deaths occurring in and around her city; “The People Who Live Near Me” – psychological horror utilizing the unreliable narrator in a tale about projective identification and decompensation, my third favorite in this collection; “There’s No Light Between the Floors” – a nuanced tale with a nod to Lovecraft about the survivors of an apocalyptic event; “Headstones in Your Pocket” – a USA border patrol agent will stop at nothing to quell his haunted past; “It’s Against the Law to Feed the Ducks” – a riff on Shirley Jackson’s “The Summer People” about a family on vacation trying to cope with the disappearance of fellow vacationers; “We Will Never Live in the Castle” – another riff on a Shirley Jackson story, her famous and last novel WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE, in which a disenfranchised teenage boy sets up housekeeping in an abandoned amusement park after an end-of-the-world disaster has occurred, and lays siege to “Cinderella’s Castle”.

Paul Tremblay is the author of COMPOSITIONS FOR THE YOUNG AND OLD, his first collection of short fiction; two novellas titled CITY PIER: ABOVE AND BELOW and THE HARLEQUIN AND THE TRAIN; THE LITTLE SLEEP and its sequel NO SLEEP TILL WONDERLAND, two Chandleresque crime noir novels featuring protagonist Mark Genevich, the narcoleptic detective.

Wahiaronkwas David says

So much to say...but I'm not coherent yet.

Jasmine says

I already reviewed this once and goodreads ate it, and I'm sleepy so highlights:

1. I liked paul tremblay when I talked to him about crime novels so I started his book a year ago.
2. I picked it back up and finished it this week.
3. It is very well written, but I don't answer followups about short story plots.
4. I'd like to read a novel by him.

Karen Heuler says

The first story in this book, "The Teacher," is extraordinary. A charismatic teacher shows a very disturbing video, frame by frame, as students and teacher alike are changed by the experience. One of the best stories I've read recently.

Mairi says

Almost every time I pick up another Tremblay work, just a few pages in, two things happen: (1) I am reminded of what an incredibly talented author he is. (2) I kick myself for not having read whatever it is sooner. *In the Mean Time* was no exception.

Reading through: I found myself physically leaning forward as if it will help me unfold the story sooner, but not actually wanting to read any faster. I read to the end of stories and realized I'd been holding my breath or grinding my teeth or both. I was left stupidly blinking at the page after a sucker punch to the gut. I sat slack-jawed and wide-eyed at a beautifully crafted, perfectly ordinary horror.

His work does all of these things and more; I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Simon says

It pains me a great deal to admit this, but this book is wonderful. Slightly bent, funny, bizarre, and awesome, often at the same time, Tremblay's series of tales are remarkable, and it's no wonder his star is rising as fast as it is. Scratch that: it's a mystery why it isn't rising faster. Definitely one of my favourite books this year. (And I'm still angry about it.)

Richard Thomas says

Review originally published at The Nervous Breakdown:

<http://www.thenervousbreakdown.com/rt...>

When you enter the world of Paul Tremblay most anything can happen, and usually does. His recent collection, *In The Mean Time* (ChiZine Publications) defies expectations, the cover art a soft purple hue all filled with glittery type. It shows the faces of two sweet girls, which at first glance (pay attention, readers, the show starts here) could be two sisters sitting very close together, twins maybe. But no, it's a two-headed girl, the first of many things that are not what then seem to be, the first of many times where Tremblay takes you by the hand and whispers sweet nothings in your ear, all the while the world falling apart around you, infrastructures crumbling, supplies running out, strange diseases wiping out the populace. But beyond all of that is the emotion, the humanity of what it must be like to exist in such end days, and it is here that he ratchets up the stories to more than just post-apocalyptic terror, dwelling in the individuals and families that are struggling to survive, to connect, to have a normal conversation, a memory that doesn't send it all

fracturing into shards of a former existence. It's here between the floors where there's no light, and yet, a sprinkling of hope.

The first story in this collection pulls no punches, and certainly Tremblay started off with this unnerving tale for this reason. One of my favorite stories of the collection, "The Teacher" takes a normal group of high school overachievers, and turns their AP History class upside down (What's the saying? Those who ignore history are bound to repeat it?), showing them that the world out there isn't all puppies and Facebook and Algebra. Sometimes in the most banal of settings life is horrific, and the responsibility of it all starts with the individual:

"We loved him before we walked into the room. We loved him when we saw his name on our schedules. Mr. Sorent says, 'All right, this is going to be a special class.' We love him because of the music and movie posters on his walls, the black stud earring in his left ear, his shoulder-length hair. We love him because of those black horn-rimmed glasses; the same glasses we see people wearing on TV and in movies. We love him because he looks like us."

The key to this passage is in the final sentence, "We love him because he looks like us." But no, he is not like them, he has witnessed atrocities, and they have shaped him. The students have no idea what is coming next, they have not experienced life, felt the pain or seen the horror that he has, that most adults have, out in the "real world".

So, he shows it to them. He shows them car accidents and war and autopsies, but the very first video is the one that sticks with them, destroys them, so they can be rebuilt (most of them, anyway), pausing the tape, advancing the video a single frame per day, slowly revealing the inevitable:

"The teacher is a young woman. She wears white, unflattering khakis and a collared shirt with the school's logo above the breast. Her hair is tied up tight behind her head, a fistful of piano wire. She breaks up the fight on the chairs, and then another child runs into her leg and falls to the ground. She picks up the squirming child, grabbing one arm and leg. She spins, giving a brief airplane ride, but then she lets go. Mr. Sorent pauses the video, and we know the teacher did not simply let go.

Mr. Sorent doesn't say anything until we're all looking at him. He says, 'I don't want to say too much about this.' He edges the video ahead by one frame. The airborne child is a boy with straight blond hair. We can't see his face, and he's horizontal, trapped in the black-and-white ether three feet above the carpeted floor. 'Your individual reactions will be your guide, your teacher.' The video goes ahead another frame. The boy's classmates haven't had time to react. The teacher still has her arms extended out. If someone were to walk in now and see this, I imagine they'd want to believe she was readying to catch the child. Not the opposite, not what really happened. Mr. Sorent moves the video ahead another frame and a wall comes into view, stage right. Class ends, and none of us will go see Mr. Sorent after school."

Every day, this class has to digest this information, left to come to their own conclusions. It is a horrible thing to watch, the way that they deal with this new information, the way that they now hate their teacher for bursting their bubble, for making them pay attention. And yet, there is a sense of epiphany, of something changing, hopefully for the better. There is something that cannot be forgotten in this lesson, this history, something that hopefully won't be repeated.

There are several tales of the apocalypse in this collection, and each story deals with it in a different way. For some, it is "The Blog at the End of the World," complete with a forum of responses, riddled with typos, trolls

and bigotry, but accurate nonetheless. For others, in “We Will Never Live in the Castle” it is about youth, and second chances, and territory. But the most powerful tale, in my opinion, is the quietly devastating “It’s Against the Law to Feed the Ducks”.

A small family heads off to the woods to go camping. A father and mother watch over their son Danny, and their infant Beth. It’s just like any other family vacation, any other story where you pile in the old station wagon, or SUV, and head off into nature to bond with the elements, finding a sanctity and peace that is often missed in the monotonous daily grind.

A chorus that repeats throughout this story, Danny’s constant request to pretend, it deals with illusion and hope, shifting over time from sweetness to devastation:

“Dotted lines and bleached pavement give way to a dirt path that roughly invades the woods. Danny watches his infant sister Beth sleep, all tucked into herself and looking like a new punctuation mark. Danny strains against his twisted shoulder harness. He needs to go pee but he holds it, remembering how Daddy didn’t say any mad words but sighed and breathed all heavy the last time he asked to stop for a pee break.

Danny says, ‘Mommy, pretend you didn’t know I was going to be five in September.’

Ellen holds a finger to her chin and looks at the car’s ceiling for answers. ‘Are you going to be ten years old tomorrow?’

‘No. I will be five in September.’

‘Oh, wow. I didn’t know that, honey.’”

Pretend that you’re older. Pretend we still have rules. Pretend that the truth has been revealed. Pretend it’s a beautiful day. Pretend we’re in a spaceship. None of it matters, and yet, all of it matters.

Over time, we see the world around them change. There is one evening around the television set where the parents go quiet, sending Danny to the other room, his mother staring at the screen, hand over her mouth, quiet. The beaches become empty, that much more room for them to go and play, the children still unaware of what has happened. Danny’s father gets supplies, negotiating with the girl at the grocery story, unsure if credit cards still work, allowing themselves a moment of laughter as they ride across the parking lot on a shopping cart, wind in their hair, the deserted pavement a constant reminder.

As we reach the end of the story, the parents still carrying the weight of their knowledge, their secret, we are back at the beach, looking to feed the ducks:

“The ducks waddle over. They don’t know the law. Tom pulls out a bag of Cheerios, Beth’s snack, and tosses a few on the sand. The ducks converge and are greedy.

Ellen pushes the stroller deeper into the shade away from the ducks and says, ‘Are you sure we can spare those, Mr. Keeper-of-the-Supplies?’ It walks like a joke and talks like a joke but it isn’t a joke.

Danny says, ‘Daddy! Don’t you remember the sign? It’s against the law to feed the ducks.’ Danny looks around, making sure the people who aren’t there still aren’t there.

‘It’s okay now, buddy. I don’t think anyone will care anymore. Here, kiddo.’

He takes the Cheero bag from Daddy. Daddy pats his head. Danny digs a hand deep into the bag, pulls it out, and throws Cheerios onto the sand. The ducks flinch and scatter toward the water, but they come back and feed."

It's so touching, and so sad. The way that the parents keep their dignity, and allow their children to enjoy what is left of this world, for as long as they can. The strength it must have taken, the quiet pain they must have swallowed.

If I haven't sold you on Paul Tremblay yet, just take a quick gander at the people willing to blurb this collection, a list of extremely talented authors, many of whom deal with the same dark, layered stories: Kevin Brockmeier, Laird Barron, Brian Evenson, Stephen Graham Jones, Ann Vandermeer, and Kevin Wilson. They speak of the beauty, the emotion, and the wisdom in the same breath that they call these tales disquieting, traumatic and shocking. One word we all seem to agree on is unforgettable. Paul Tremblay has put together an original, haunting, and timeless collection, the echoes of which still reverberate between my heart and my head, unwilling to let me go.

Sonatajessica says

Tremblay writes unreliable characters like it's nobody's business (for more on that check out his phenomenal novel "A Head Full of Ghosts"). And apparently apocalypses, too, for that matter. Overall, Tremblay's stories and his writing are just spectacular. Admittedly, this collection is not perfect, there were a couple of duds for me, yet the ones that scored scored really high. REALLY high. And to clarify, the majority scored.

I just love what great writers can do with the short story format, a good short story is not just a shorter version of a story. A good short story does not feel like it should be extended, like you want to read more of that, a good short story knows when to shut up. Tremblay knows when to shut up.

The easiest to categorize these is post-apocalyptic, then again not all of them are. They are on the outskirts of the Horror field, they are more unsettling than scary, more melancholic than creepy, more thoughtful than action-packed. I personally really like this spot on the edge of Horror, not quite there but still cannot be dismissed as not horrifying.

My top 6 (since it was impossible to simply narrow it to a top 5):

- 6) It's Against the Law to Feed the Ducks
- 5) The Two-Headed Girl
- 4) We Will Never Live in the Castle
- 3) There's No Light Between Floors
- 2) Growing Things
- 1) The People who Live Near Me

The I'd skip: The Blog at the End of the World

karen says

a float for paul tremblay!!!

holy freaking crap!!

i am giving this five stars, even though there were one or two stories there that i didn't think were the best, because the ones that were great were GREAT as in "i want you guys to all read this book-great."

first - a word. barnes and noble has this publisher shelved in sci-fi/fantasy which is so frustrating to me because the world being the way it is, fewer people browse genre-sections than browse general fiction-literature because the assumption is that sci-fi/fantasy is going to be all planets and wizards and shit. but none of the CZP books are like that, really. they are like canada-does-bizarro, but with more delicacy and fewer ass-raping goblins. they are more dark magical realism than fantasy, and it irritates me that the two i have read from this publisher have both been excellent (view spoiler) and really make me want to read the other 7-10 of their books that i have already bought, but would probably never have come across if i wasn't in the trenches and responsible for all-things-fiction.i just doubt a fan of mercedes lackey or kim stanley robinson would find what they are looking for in these books. bad match, barnes and noble!

these stories are everything i love and hate about short stories. the best of them are like my favorite morrissey song:

evocative without giving every detail of the story so you are left with those shivers of "more, please." these stories are haunting in the best possible way, especially *growing things*, *the blog at the end of the world* and *it's against the law to feed the ducks* - so gentle of a touch, so much restraint and it kills me because i need to know more!!i hated leaving these characters behind!! SHORT STORIES, WHY ARE YOU SO SHORT???

for example: *headstones in your pocket*?? fuck you, awesome writing! why are you over?? i was just getting attached to you!

and do you see the blurbs?? kevin brockmeier, helen oyeyemi, and brian evenson!! i have read all three of these authors and they are all crazy-good. the back of this book says there are more books by this author, and you had better believe i am going to get mr. bill thompson on this for me because i may have a new favorite author.

do you see the purple eighties sweatshirt glitter on the cover?? it is just glorious!

even the stories i didn't really latch onto were never bad, just not my thing. this man is a gift, and you need to read him.

(i love how my dad, who is the best dad ever and loves me unconditionally and so has an inflated sense of my "talent", thinks i should review for the new york times. i would seriously love to see what they would do with a review like this: "fuck, fuck, fuck, enthusiasm, glee, invoking the name of someone you may or may not know, fuck, glitter, shit.")

TAKE THAT, KAKUTANI!!! MY DADDY SAYS I REVIEW GOOD!!!

come to my blog!
