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Strange Weather: Four Short Novels



Synopsis

A collection of four chilling novels, ingeniously wrought gems of terror from the brilliantly imaginative, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Fireman*, Joe Hill. "One of America's finest horror writers" (Time magazine), Joe Hill has been hailed among legendary talents such as Peter Straub, Neil Gaiman, and Jonathan Lethem. In *Strange Weather*, this "compelling chronicler of human nature's continual war between good and evil," (Providence Journal-Bulletin) who "pushes genre conventions to new extremes" (New York Times Book Review) deftly expose the darkness that lies just beneath the surface of everyday life. "Snapshot" is the disturbing story of a Silicon Valley adolescent who finds himself threatened by "The Phoenician," a tattooed thug who possesses a Polaroid Instant Camera that erases memories, snap by snap. A young man takes to the skies to experience his first parachute jump. . . and winds up a castaway on an impossibly solid cloud, a Prospero's island of roiling vapor that seems animated by a mind of its own in "Aloft." On a seemingly ordinary day in Boulder, Colorado, the clouds open up in a downpour of nails—splinters of bright crystal that shred the skin of anyone not safely under cover. "Rain" explores this escalating apocalyptic event, as the deluge of nails spreads out across the country and around the world. In "Loaded," a mall security guard in a coastal Florida town courageously stops a mass shooting and becomes a hero to the modern gun rights movement. But under the glare of the spotlights, his story begins to unravel, taking his sanity with it. When an out-of-control summer blaze approaches the town, he will reach for the gun again and embark on one last day of reckoning. Masterfully exploring classic literary themes through the prism of the supernatural, *Strange Weather* is a stellar collection from an artist who is "quite simply the best horror writer of our generation" (Michael Koryta).

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Customer Reviews

“Hill is not only maturing as a writer of relevantly chilling tales but he is also emerging as a distinct voice for our complicated times.” (Booklist (starred review))
“A four-pack of mayhem in this sparkling collection of short novels. . . .Worth waiting in line for, if you’re a Hill fan. If you’re not, this is the book to turn you into one.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

Joe Hill is the author of the New York Times bestsellers *Horns*, *Heart-Shaped Box*, and *NOS4A2*. He is also the Eisner Award-winning writer of a six-volume comic book series, *Locke & Key*. He lives in New Hampshire.

Joe Hill, a.k.a. Stephen King’s doppelgänger son, has followed in his father’s footsteps as a seriously great writer, with a sincerely twisted perspective. Also like his dad, short stories are some of Hill’s best work. Three of the four are clear allegory tales, with supernatural elements standing in for modern day traumas and/or current events. *Aloft*, the story of a skydiver on a cloud, was the most fantastical and, for me, the hardest to enjoy, though I did like the ending. *Loaded*, which I thought was the bleakest and best of the bunch, eschews the paranormal for a very violent, but all-too-credible look at humanity’s darkest underbelly. Not something to read right before you go to bed. In general, Hill is even darker than his famously horror-centric father, which is really saying something. Where King is grim, Hill is pitch black and he tends to speed past brooding malevolence to straight out human evil in a way that almost, but not quite, is too much for me to take. After reading Hill’s work I often have to shake off the bleakness, so his work requires a certain resilience of mood; not something I’d dig into when feeling depressed, for sure. Still, he can definitely write • the entire King family is freakishly intelligent, enviably articulate and awesomely prolific • and Hill’s work is entertaining, as well as dark.

Joe Hill’s short novels are his best medium. They are stuffed full of imagination and descriptive writing (one character says, “I wiggled into the robe. It was even softer and fluffier than I’d imagined.

It was like wearing an Ewok."). The best story, "Loaded," has nothing supernatural, nor does it have any strange weather. It does feature a stupendous wildfire, gritty reality and a high body count. When I arrived at the last novella, "Rain," I entered the Colorado neighborhood with trepidation. The characters include a crude Russian immigrant and his stripper wife; a widow who cannot bear to be touched and her little boy, who thinks he is a vampire; and a religious group wearing silver robes with hubcaps on their heads while singing old rock songs in place of hymns. A road trip ensues through an apocalyptic landscape and improbable coincidences abound. I couldn't hold my disbelief at bay and was relieved to read that Hill considers the tale a spoof of his own work.

I am seriously blown away at how good Joe Hill has become. He started off great with *Horns* and *Heart-Shaped Box*, and then took it up another level (or three) with *Nos4A2*. I absolutely did not like *The Fireman* and couldn't make it through despite two attempts, but that's a one-off. ;) *Strange Weather*, however, is absolutely incredible. The novellas are instantly compelling and draw you right in, and the characterization is outstanding for such short pieces. And such imagination! I am very excited to see what Hill does in the future.

The first story in this collection is a standard boogeyman story. A supernatural-ish enemy is introduced, feared, and things happen. It's a standard template and Hill's rendition is fine, but not remarkable. The second is a genre I'm going to call 'social horror', because I'm not sure if there's a term for this. It's about racism and gun violence and a lot of the stuff I could get sick to my stomach reading about in the news so why on earth would anyone want to read about it in fiction? Maybe for some people it can be cathartic to read about this fictionalized version of what we're seeing a lot of in real life, the same way some people like to read plodding LitFic about failing marriages, but ugh, no thanks. And after a perfectly serviceable generic Supernatural Bad Guy story and a (I'm not kidding here) nauseatingly believable story of moral decrepitude in modern America, well, I wasn't interested in reading the next two stories.

If you've read Joe Hill, you know he can churn out a stellar horror story - I mean, hello! *The Fireman* is just killer, it's one of those books that surprises, touches and thrills all at once. What was I talking about? Oh yeah, *Strange Weather*. So, *Strange Weather* is four short stories. I generally dislike short stories, because I like the build, investment and payoff of a longer novel, which short stories don't always contain. So I started this out with low expectations. I loved it. Hill manages to shove a ton of

story into a little bit of space, and yes, there is a build, investment and payoff in each one. It takes talent to be concise enough to do that. It's hard to go into too much detail without giving the whole plot away, but Snapshot, the first story, is about an outcast who encounters a terrifying villain who hurts using Polaroids. Rain, the last story, should be a whole novel. It is the story of life after a freak storm decimates Colorado. It's great, but I'm greedy and I want more. Loaded was my least favorite - it felt preachy and the plot was a little disappointing. Aloft is the story of a skydiver who gets stranded on a strange cloud. It's so good. Strange Weather hits so many buttons: coming-of-age, the horrors of the duality of humankind, loneliness, self delusion, greed, all wrapped up in punchy, character-driven thrills. Hill really showcases his versatility and totally worth the read. By the way, I had no idea Joe Hill was Stephen King's son... I can see the influence now that I know that, but I have to say that he has certainly found his own footing. And I also have to say, he does a better sex scene than King.

Joe Hill has become one of my favorite writers, although I must declare myself a fan of his well-known father for some time. These novellas run a variety of ideas with what I would consider an overarching theme of "Isn't life strange?" And how tge normal can so easily spiral out of control. The only one of these that didn't particularly work for me was "Aloft" which was undeniably well-written, just not my cup of fantastical tea. Very enjoyable read overall.

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