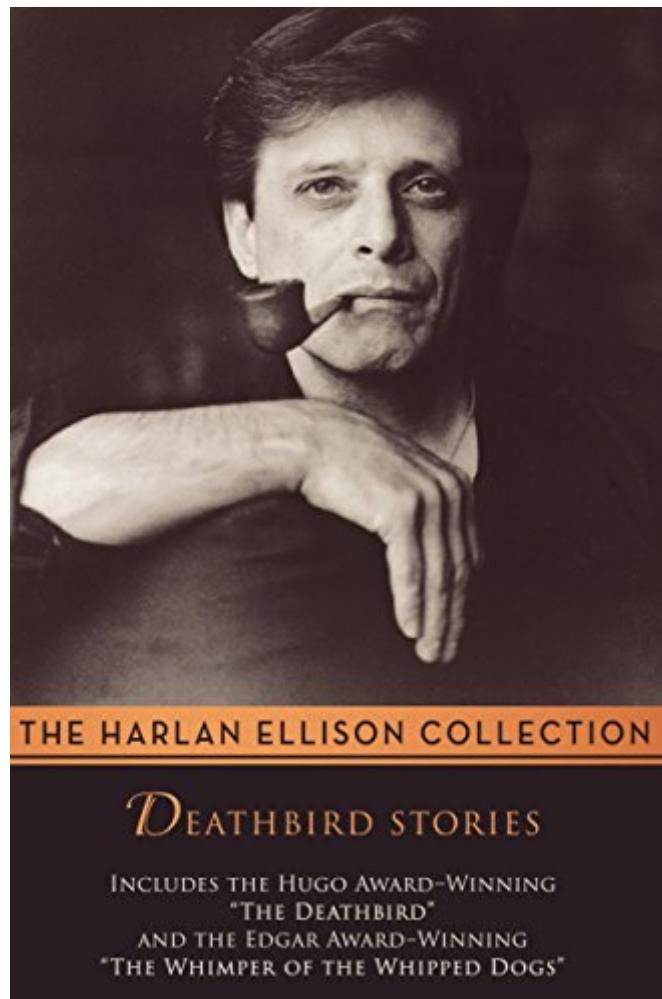


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# Deathbird Stories



## Synopsis

Masterpieces of myth and terror about modern gods from technology to drugs to materialism—“fantasy at its most bizarre and unsettling” (The New York Times). As Earth approaches Armageddon, a man embarks on a quest to confront God in the Hugo Award-winning novelette, “The Deathbird.” In New York City, a brutal act of violence summons a malevolent spirit and a growing congregation of desensitized worshippers in “The Whimper of Whipped Dogs,” an Edgar Award winner influenced by the real-life murder of Queens resident Kitty Genovese in 1964. In “Paingod,” the deity tasked with inflicting pain and suffering on every living being in the universe questions the purpose of its cruel existence. Deathbird Stories collects these and sixteen more provocative tales exploring the futility of faith in a faithless world. A legendary author of speculative fiction whose best-known works include *A Boy and His Dog* and *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*—and whose major awards and nominations number in the dozens, Harlan Ellison strips away convention and hypocrisy and lays bare the human condition in modern society as ancient gods fade and new deities rise to appease the masses—gods of technology, drugs, gambling, materialism—that are as insubstantial as the beliefs of those who venerate them. In addition to his Nebula, Hugo, World Fantasy, Bram Stoker, Edgar, and other awards, Ellison was called “one of the great living American short story writers” by the Washington Post—and this collection makes it clear why he has earned such an extraordinary assortment of accolades. Stories include: “Introduction: Oblations at Alien Altars,” “The Whimper of Whipped Dogs,” “Along the Scenic Route,” “On the Downhill Side,” “O Ye of Little Faith,” “Neon,” “Basilisk,” “Pretty Magpie Moneyeyes,” “Corpse,” “Shattered Like a Glass Goblin,” “Delusion for a Dragon Slayer,” “The Face of Helene Bournouw,” “Bleeding Stones,” “At the Mouse Circus,” “The Place with No Name,” “Paingod,” “Ernest and the Machine God,” “Rock God,” “Adrift Just Off the Islets of Langerhans: Latitude 38° 54' N, Longitude 77° 00' 13" W,” and “The Deathbird.”

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

I enjoyed it overall, but I think I'm not educated/intellectual enough to appreciate the writing fully. There were such elaborate descriptions of some fantastic images, I was overwhelmed, albeit not picturing it; and wondered what was the point of so much of it all? I have a bachelor's degree, but in science, not literature. I'm sure there were references to literature that I didn't get. There was a lot I didn't understand. I do believe I understood the basic premise having to do with God. That was an interesting idea. Also, the situations were fascinating at times. I finished the book. My apologies for my non-intellectual take on it; it's just that some of the lengthy, picturesque, descriptive details were overdone for my level of understanding and enjoyment. I wish I could explain it better.

If you have found your way to this review, then you likely are already well aware of the writings of Harlan Ellison. If you are not, then I highly suggest this as one of the two books to introduce you to him—*The Other Being I Have No Mouth & I Must Scream*. This collects many of Ellison's finest stories—most notably the titular "The Deathbird." The book's original and full title is *Deathbird Stories: A Pantheon of Modern Gods*. Knowing Harlan Ellison to be "a practicing atheist," I was somewhat skeptical about what this book would be. With a basic unifying

concept of an examination of gods in the modern world, it seemed poised to be a tirade against organized religion. That fear was misplaced—except for the story "Bleeding Stones" that depicts a literal attack on organized religion. The collection combines some of the finest fantasy of the 20th century mixed with a loose thread to tie the work together. The collection begins with the Caveat Lector: a warning to the readers to not attempt to read the book in one sitting. For most of the stories, this advice is unnecessary. The utility will vary from reader to reader based upon how each story impacts him/her. For me, it was certainly good advice after the story "Paingod." The collection begins with "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs," a story for the uninitiated that will provide a baptism by fire. It is not for the sensitive persons of the world who cry foul upon reading a four letter word. It is at times extremely graphic (depicting the savage slaughter of a person and depicting a forceful sexual encounter). However, it is the final story to which the Caveat Lector is most applicable. "The Deathbird" is a peculiar story in so much as it is written in a format that is intended to resemble a school exam. There are two portions of the story that can bring the most stoic of readers to their knees. One portion is a section that reads as a short story penned the day after the author put his pal Abu—a pet dog—to sleep. The line "don't leave me with strangers" first arises in the portion dedicated to Abu and then is echoed with tremendous effect later on. In short, I gave this book five stars and quite enjoy the writing of Harlan Ellison. I recommend that you give this book a chance. If you are not sure whether you will like Ellison, pickup the book and jump to "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes" and "Along the Scenic Route." If neither of these stories works for you, then set the book back down and walk away: Harlan Ellison is not for you. If either of these stories works for you, read on.

This was my first exposure to Ellison and frankly it was a bumpy ride. The first few stories were reminiscent of a bad acid trip, as in unpleasant and disturbing. I almost stopped reading. I'm not sure whether I became inured to the writing style or the stories just got better but by about half way through this collection of short stories I was becoming an Ellison fan. By the end I definitely was. Amazing and bizarre perspectives that contort, dissect and then disembowel conventional reality. Highly recommended for adventurous readers who want a truly surreal reading experience. Seriously.

I enjoy reading Harlan Ellison. This three star review is aimed strictly at the collection "Deathbird Stories," and not directed at the author himself, as I will continue to read Ellison in the future. "Deathbird Stories" simply

didn't do it for me. It was hit and miss. Half the stories moved me, inspired me, and the other half fell flat. Take, for instance, "Shattered Like A Glass Goblin". I can only assume this story was a response to the time period in which it was written, when many American youths were lost in a haze of drugs. Ellison paints a picture of the dangers of drug dependency, and although I can respect the moral, this story was lacking something, in my opinion. I need characters who develop alongside a thickening plot, and this tale is little more than a downward spiral into the hallucinations of a drug-addled mind. Good imagery, but no real structure. "At The Mouse Circus" and "The Place With No Name" are in the same vein as far as losing me. Lots of far-fetched, otherworldly gobbledegook. "At The Mouse Circus" had great visuals, but it was rather confusing. I couldn't tell you the actual point of the story. If anyone knows, please message me! "The Place With No Name" follows a down-on-his-luck pimp who is offered an escape from a police manhunt by entering another world. From there I got lost. I can understand why so many people put Harlan Ellison on a pedestal. It is a throne he rightfully earned through diligence and honing his craft over the years. The stories that were good were extremely engaging. Among them were: "The Whimper Of Dogs", "Along The Scenic Route", "Basilisk", "Pretty Maggie Money Eyes", "The Face Of Helene Bournouw", and "Bleeding Stones". I must say it brought a smile to my face to see Ellison do horror so well in the aforementioned "Bleeding Stones". The story was brutal and dark. Many kudos. The longer stories at the end of this book are worth a read, too, although very strange, as tends to be the case in this collection. All in all I give "Deathbird Stories" three stars. I enjoyed most of it, though there were stories that made me scratch my head as to why this book receives raving reviews. Maybe it's just me. Maybe the theme of gods and goddesses is lost on me because I prefer more boundaries in the fiction I read. It seems like anything goes when you're dealing with gods, afterlives, and dreams. This could be the same reason I gave three stars to Neil Gaiman's "American Gods" when all my peers were so impressed by it. The writing is good, the talent is there, but the ideas are so terribly far-fetched. I guess that's how it goes when dealing with the gods!

These stories project a very noir mood. I enjoyed it, but it is probably not the Harlan Ellison book to start on

This was what I have waited for. A wonderful adventure into the mind of a writer who sees gods for what they are. Love it.

I read this book for the first time as a teenager. It made a huge impact on how I think and how I refuse to just believe anything.

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