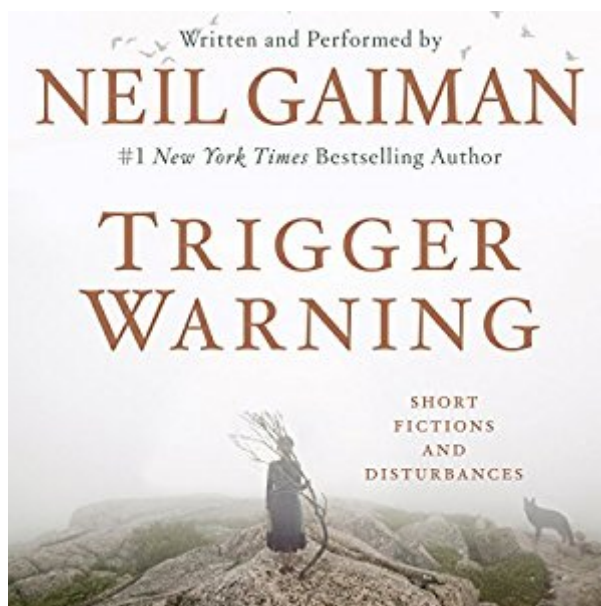


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# Trigger Warning: Short Fictions And Disturbances



## Synopsis

Neil Gaiman returns to dazzle, captivate, haunt, and entertain with this third collection of short fiction following *Smoke and Mirrors* and *Fragile Things*--which includes a never-before-published *American Gods* story, "Black Dog", written exclusively for this volume. In this new anthology, Neil Gaiman pierces the veil of reality to reveal the enigmatic, shadowy world that lies beneath. *Trigger Warning* includes previously published pieces of short fiction--stories, verse, and a very special *Doctor Who* story that was written for the fiftieth anniversary of the beloved series in 2013--as well as "Black Dog", a new tale that revisits the world of *American Gods*, exclusive to this collection. *Trigger Warning* explores the masks we all wear and the people we are beneath them to reveal our vulnerabilities and our truest selves. Here is a rich cornucopia of horror and ghost stories, science fiction and fairy tales, fabulism and poetry that explore the realm of experience and emotion. In "Adventure Story"--a thematic companion to *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*--Gaiman ponders death and the way people take their stories with them when they die. His social media experience "A Calendar of Tales" are short takes inspired by replies to fan tweets about the months of the year--stories of pirates and the March winds, an igloo made of books, and a Mother's Day card that portends disturbances in the universe. Gaiman offers his own ingenious spin on Sherlock Holmes in his award-nominated mystery tale "The Case of Death and Honey". And "Click-Clack the Rattlebag" explains the creaks and clatter we hear when we're all alone in the darkness. Full of wonder and terror, surprises and amusements, *Trigger Warning* is a treasury of delights that engage the mind, stir the heart, and shake the soul from one of the most unique and popular literary artists of our day.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Trigger Warning is a collection of 24 pieces of short fiction and poetry written by Neil Gaiman. If you know what a trigger warning is (I had to look it up) you may be thinking this collection is darker, edgier, and/or more risque than it really is. (For those who don't want to look it up, a trigger warning is a blurb that intimates that a work has words or images that may induce a traumatic reaction.) However, these stories are Gaiman to the core, which means they are humorous, clever, and often quirky; but they are unlikely to throw one into catatonia or an apoplectic fit. The pieces include Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Who stories, spin-offs from Sleeping Beauty and American Gods, as well as a few homages to other authors, including Ray Bradbury, Gene Wolfe, and William Blake. Without further ado, I'll give a rundown of the included works: 1.) Making a Chair: This is a poem about writer's block. 2.) A Lunar Labyrinth: An homage to Gene Wolfe's work, Solar Labyrinth. This short story is about a maze that was destroyed, and that wasn't to be walked on full moon nights. 3.) The Thing About Cassandra: This is among my favorite stories in the collection. What happens when your friends and family start bumping into the girl who you made up as a girlfriend back in school? 4.) Down to a Sunless Sea: This was written for a water-themed event. It's about a person riding in a lifeboat down the Thames toward the sea. 5.) The Truth is a Cave in the Black Mountains: This one was inspired by an island off Scotland called Skye, but the story is fantasy with magic elements. A man strikes out in search of revenge and closure, regarding a daughter who he thought had run away. This is one of the most engaging pieces in the collection. 6.) My Last Landlady: This is a story, conveyed in poetic form, about a mean landlady. 7.) Adventure Story: In the Introduction, Gaiman calls this a companion piece to his novella The Ocean at the End of the Lane. However, I didn't make that connection, (and I've read that story.) At any rate, it's a great story about an intriguing artifact left behind by a [deceased] father whose stories were always painfully dull. It's told by a mother to a son who is incredulous that his, seemingly milquetoast, father lived through such a fascinating event. 8.) Orange: Like several of the pieces in this book, this one is unconventional / experimental. However, it's creative, and it works. It consists of answers to a questionnaire, from which the reader pieces together the story. One doesn't have the questions, but most of them are fairly clear from the context of the answer. 9.) Calendar of Tales: This is

what it sounds like, 12 stories each matched to a month. It's another of the unconventional and unusual pieces. Each story was spun from a tweet response to a question about a given month of the year.<sup>10</sup>) *The Case of Death and Honey*: Few characters in the public domain have spurred as many offshoot stories as Sherlock Holmes, and this is Gaiman's entry in the pool. Holmes's interest in bee-keeping is central to the story.<sup>11</sup>) *The Man Who Forgot Ray Bradbury*: An homage to Bradbury. If one forgets a person, did they ever exist?<sup>12</sup>) *Jerusalem*: This work was influenced both by a poem by William Blake and a trip the author took to said city. The story is about a couple of tourists and the unique mental illness associated with this locale.<sup>13</sup>) *Click-Clack the Rattlebag*: A scary bedtime story told by a child about a different kind of monster.<sup>14</sup>) *An Invocation of Incuriosity*: A story about one of the strange and colorful people one might meet at a flea market.<sup>15</sup>) *And Weep, Like Alexander*: A light-hearted story about an un-inventor, one who keeps you from having flying cars and all the other promised technology from sci-fi.<sup>16</sup>) *Nothing O'Clock*: This is a *Doctor Who* story. It's not necessary to be familiar with the series (necessary backstory is provided), but it could make it more appealing*"i.e. the inside joke effect.*<sup>17</sup>) *Diamonds and Pearls: A Fairy Tale*: This is from *Who Killed Amanda Palmer?* Palmer is a cabaret-punk singer/songwriter and Gaiman's wife, and the aforementioned booklet consists of a series of photos of Palmer looking deceased with brief stories to go along. This is one of the stories that could stand alone. It's a fairy tale of the adults-only variety.<sup>18</sup>) *The Return of the Thin White Duke*: Another fairy tale, this one about a Duke that strikes out on a quest for adventure in order to rescue a Queen who doesn't need rescuing.<sup>19</sup>) *Feminine Endings*: A story about a human statue*"by that I mean one of those people who deck themselves out and stand on a box in the town square in touristy places in many parts of the world.*<sup>20</sup>) *Observing the Formalities*: A poem about one who doesn't get invited.<sup>21</sup>) *The Sleeper and the Spindle*: A take on the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, but from a different point of view.<sup>22</sup>) *Witch Work*: This is another poem. I believe it's the only one that's not free verse. It's about the life of a witch.<sup>23</sup>) *In Relig Odhrain*: This is a true story about a saint, written in free verse.<sup>24</sup>) *Black Dog*: This is a spin-off from the novel *American Gods* and it features that book's protagonist, Shadow. You don't need to have read that book, but you might have a greater affinity for the story if you have. It should also be noted that this is the one piece that

is original to this collection, and it's one of the most substantial pieces in the collection. i.e. it gives fans a reason to pick up the book even if they've read a lot of it from the original source. I enjoyed this book. Gaiman is a masterful story teller. Whether it's one of conventional pieces based in established worlds (e.g. Doctor Who or that of Sherlock Holmes) or one of the off-the-wall, experimental pieces, these stories and poems are a pleasure to read.

I love Neil Gaiman--in particular "Sandman" and "American Gods"--but I've never been a particular fan of short stories. This collection has a definite hit/miss ratio on it, unfortunately. Particular standout pieces that I really adored: "The Truth Is a Cave in the Black Mountains", "My Last Landlady", "The Case of Death and Honey", "The Return of the Thin White Duke", and "The Sleeper and the Spindle". Those were well-drawn stories that captured me from the first word to the last. Several others, like "Jerusalem" and "A Calendar of Tales" just didn't engage me at all. I found myself ready to skip page after page, which isn't the place I normally find myself when I'm reading Neil's work. The thing is, I'm NOT a huge fan of short stories because I prefer character development--which often needs to happen over a longer horizon than a handful of pages--and I'm not necessarily big into poetry. So some of the disconnect here for me may just be the form factor; Neil did a bunch of experimental writing here, and some of it just worked better for me than others. Fans of Gaiman's work should definitely give it a read--but don't be surprised if, like me, you find yourself okay with skipping a few pages here and there.

Gaiman gets more experimental in "Trigger Warning" than past short story collections--and while not all of it sticks the landing as well as previous stories in "Fragile Things", it's still pretty phenomenal. For example: "Orange (Third Subject's Response to Investigator's Written Questionnaire.) EYES ONLY." consists entirely of numbered responses to an interrogation of a glib teenager girl regarding her sister's supernatural disappearance. We don't get the questions, only the answers--no full-on conversations, just answers to questions--and yet Gaiman manages to deliver a fully-fleshed out storyline and cast of characters that are more memorable than just the story's unusual format. Meanwhile, "A Calendar of Tales", which Gaiman wrote as a sort of collaboration with followers on twitter (he details the process in the foreword) seems a little over-long and too loose for my taste--but it's still an interesting experiment of a story. Time seems to be an overarching theme of "Trigger Warnings" as well, in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut's fixation on the subject, but with more traditional fairy-tale horror and timey-wimey British sensibilities

(yes, there's a Dr. Who story in there). And as usual, I love the foreword. As an aspiring writer, I love Gaiman's blurbs about what he was doing at the time certain stories were being written, or hearing the process he went through to write it. The foreword also includes a short essay on the idea of "Trigger Warnings" online and in academia that is worth reading on its own, even if fiction like Gaiman's isn't your bag. Overall, definitely worth the read, if you're already a fan, a writer, or just somebody who likes good short stories about weird, beautiful and scary things.

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