



Questionable Practices: Stories

By Eileen Gunn

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Stories from Eileen Gunn are always a cause for celebration. Where will she lead us? "Up the Fire Road" to a slightly alternate world. Four stories into steampunk's heart. Into a very strange family gathering as they celebrate Christmas. Into the golem's heart. Never where we might expect.

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Editorial Review

Review

io9 Best of the Year: "Gunn's talent for the surreal and bizarre is pressed into the service of exploring how our own subjectivity, and the ways we construct our selves, help to imprison us."

"The best of the stories in Eileen Gunn's collection *Questionable Practices* also subvert expectations, taking tropes of fantasy and science fiction and turning them on their head. Elves emerge at the start of one story, only to bring violence rather than enchantment with them; two campers' encounter with a sasquatch moves from the uncanny and into the romantic. Certain stories riff on existing stories and settings, from *Star Trek* to Bas-Lag, and these didn't click quite as much for me. But when this book does click, it does so impressively, bringing with it an impressive sense of wonder."

—Tobias Carroll, *Vol. 1, Brooklyn*

"True to form, Gunn's new book, *Questionable Practices*, contains a number of sardonically weird looks at the future and the strangeness of corporate culture. But her insatiable eye for weirdness branches out this time around, featuring a number of different takes on the fantastical.

There is also a good deal of silliness in *Questionable Practices*, which should be welcomed by anyone who's gotten tired of the pervasive stiff upper lip in SF and fantasy of late. From outright spoofs to metafictional pranks to sarcastic mischief, Gunn is constantly winking at the reader, while also packing tons of clever ideas. And just when you least expect it, she drops a serious truth bomb."

—Charlie Jane Anders, io9.com

"This is an excellent collection. The stories each feel fresh and different, both from one another and from anything else being written today. Sometimes funny, sometimes heartbreaking, always meticulously crafted and brilliantly written, this collection is excellent work from a master of the short story. — *SF Revu*

"It's always good news to get a new Gunn collection, and it's always bad news that they come so infrequently."

—*Locus*

"Gunn's stories spin ideas done up with sharp edges; they hijack pop-culture favorites and redirect the actors within; they draw for us a series of what-ifs that carry reader and characters away into the dark, there, perhaps, to breed more ideas."

— *NYRSF*

"Nebula-winner Gunn combines humor and compassion in 17 short, intricate gems that showcase her many talents. Of particular note among these outstanding works are the poem "To the Moon Alice," in which a bombastic threat provides escape from comedic domestic violence, and "Michael Swanwick and Samuel R. Delany at the Joyce Kilmer Service Area, March 2005," an affectionate fable-like tribute to two legendary authors. "Up the Fire Road" provides dueling accounts of triadic romance and problematic parentage. "Phantom Pain" is a kaleidoscopic examination of a wounded soldier's life. Though Gunn first saw print in the 1970s, this short collection contains a surprisingly large portion of her stories; her rate of publication has recently been increasing, giving fans reason to hope for many more delights to come."

— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"The overwhelming mood is darkly comic science fiction—like a strange blend of Terry Gilliam and Margo Lanagan. Teen fans of either or both of those geniuses would do well to turn to Gunn for a similarly unique ride. Her prose is vividly off-kilter, her plots memorable and usually hilarious, and her characters recognizable even when they are tropes. And even though nothing is quite what it seems in these stories, the author's firm grip on dream logic makes everything feel meaningful, even when it doesn't quite make sense."
—*School Library Journal*, Adult Books for Teens

"'Phantom Pain' is short and terrible and breathtaking in its ambition and its achievement. It takes the idea of a phantom limb, the way the nerves continue to sense an arm or leg that has been amputated, and expands the notion just a little bit. It tells of a man wounded in war who continues to relive the pain of that vivid moment throughout the rest of his life, so that the jungle track where he was shot and the library where he works or the marital home or the hospital where he ends up become indistinguishable. Pain and memory take away the shape of a life. It is a story that owes nothing to anyone else, it opens up entirely new perspectives for the reader, and if an entire collection made up of such stories might be unendurable, still it shows how much Eileen Gunn can achieve when she lets herself go in new directions."
— Paul Kincaid, *Los Angeles Review of Books*

Reviews for Eileen Gunn's stories:

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—*Seattle Times*

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About the Author

Eileen Gunn is the author of the story collection *Stable Strategies and Others* and the co-editor of *The WisCon Chronicles Two*. Her fiction has received the Nebula Award and the (Japanese) Sense of Gender Award. She is the editor/publisher of the late *Infinite Matrix*. She lives in Seattle, WA.

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"A Different Engine (from "Steampunk Quartet")

Eileen Gunn

(with apologies to Messrs. Gibson and Sterling)

Nth Iteration: The Compass Rose Tattoo

A phenakistoscope of Ada Lovelace and Carmen Machado, with Machado's companion dog, the brown-and-white pit bull Oliver. They are apparently at a racetrack, although the tableau was no doubt staged at the maker's studio. The two women, clearly on friendly terms, are attired in pale silk gowns and overdresses, billowing out over crinolines but still elegantly simple in effect. They are shown seated at first, on an ornate cast-iron bench in front of a painted scrim, watching the start of an invisible race. They move their gaze to follow the speeding steam gurneys. They stand, caught up in excitement. Carmen puts her hand on Ada's arm, and removes it quickly. Then she surreptitiously dips her hand in Ada's reticule bag, withdraws an Engine card, slips it into a hidden pocket in her own dress, and resumes watching the race. The two women jump about triumphantly, laughing and clapping their hands in an artificial manner. The race has been run

and an imaginary purse no doubt won by at least one of them. At the end, Machado turns to hug Lovelace briefly. Her dress dips elegantly low at the back of her neck, and we get a brief glimpse of the famous tattoo between her shoulder blades: a large, elaborate compass rose. Then the two women sit down as they were at the beginning, a slight smile on Machado's face.

* * *

Carmen Machado, alone but for faithful Oliver, gazed into the slot of the phenakistoscope and turned the handle. The two women watched invisible gurneys, stood up, leaped around, and sat down again, over and over.

She tapped a few more paragraphs into the document she was working on, weaving the scene on the disk into the text of the novel she was writing. When she was done, she pulled the Compile lever, sat back, and addressed the dog. "All done, Oliver. I think this is as good as it's going to get. Thank heaven for the phenakistoscope. The dead past revived through the wonders of light and shadow, as the adverts say." And so fortunate for herself, she thought, that she and Ada had spent so much time playacting. She need only view a few silly phenakistoscope disks, and she had the plot for the next installment of her fanciful thriller.

When the Compile was done, she gathered up the huge stack of Engine cards, careful to keep them in order. She wrapped them securely in brown paper and tied the package with string. Then she reached for her shawl and Oliver's leash. Oliver was getting old, but he wriggled a bit in anticipation of a walk. They went outside, and she closed the cottage door behind her, pushing a few vines aside. Must get those cut back, she thought—dreadful cliché, a vine-covered cottage.

At the village postal office, the old clerk, Mr. Thackeray, took the package from her as she entered.

"Ah, Miss Machado," said the clerk. "Another installment of your wonderful entertainment about the Queen of Engines! I will send it right off: the wires are free."

"Thank you, Mr. Thackeray," said the writer, watching as he fed the punched cards into the hopper. "I'm so glad you are enjoying the fruits of my misspent youth."

"My pleasure, Miss Machado," said the clacker clerk. "I might have been a writer, you know, but for the attractions of technology and my responsibilities as the head of a household. An artist's life, writing. A restful life of the mind."

"La, Mr. Thackeray!" said the writer. "Nowadays it's scribble, scribble, scribble, and the more scandal and naughtiness the better. I doubt you would find it either artistic or restful."

"That may well be the case, Miss Machado, for a novelist like yourself," said Thackeray. "A fine novelist," he added quickly. He hesitated. "But I—in my youth—I had aspirations to be a kinetoscope writer. Greek tragedy, retold for the small screen." The wire transmission was finished. He rewrapped the cards and tied them up tight.

Carmen Machado nodded. "Quite right, Mr. Thackeray. Quite right. A far more elevated profession," she said, taking the package from the clerk. "But the money is in the novel, sir. The money is in the novel."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Daniel Smith:

What do you consider book? It is just for students because they're still students or it for all people in the world, exactly what the best subject for that? Just you can be answered for that problem above. Every person has different personality and hobby for each other. Don't to be forced someone or something that they don't desire do that. You must know how great as well as important the book Questionable Practices: Stories. All type of book would you see on many solutions. You can look for the internet sources or other social media.

Paul Gay:

Typically the book Questionable Practices: Stories has a lot details on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of help. The book was published by the very famous author. Mcdougal makes some research prior to write this book. This specific book very easy to read you will get the point easily after perusing this book.

Rhonda Munoz:

This Questionable Practices: Stories is great reserve for you because the content which is full of information for you who have always deal with world and possess to make decision every minute. That book reveal it info accurately using great organize word or we can point out no rambling sentences inside. So if you are read it hurriedly you can have whole details in it. Doesn't mean it only offers you straight forward sentences but tricky core information with lovely delivering sentences. Having Questionable Practices: Stories in your hand like getting the world in your arm, information in it is not ridiculous just one. We can say that no reserve that offer you world within ten or fifteen tiny right but this publication already do that. So , this really is good reading book. Heya Mr. and Mrs. active do you still doubt which?

Kimberly Smith:

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