



CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella

By George Saunders

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CivilWarLand in Bad Decline: Stories and a Novella By George Saunders

Since its publication in 1996, George Saunders's debut collection has grown in esteem from a cherished cult classic to a masterpiece of the form, inspiring an entire generation of writers along the way. In six stories and a novella, Saunders hatches an unforgettable cast of characters, each struggling to survive in an increasingly haywire world. With a new introduction by Joshua Ferris and a new author's note by Saunders himself, this edition is essential reading for those seeking to discover or revisit a virtuosic, disturbingly prescient voice.

Praise for George Saunders and *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*

“It’s no exaggeration to say that short story master George Saunders helped change the trajectory of American fiction.”—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Saunders’s satiric vision of America is dark and demented; it’s also ferocious and very funny.”—**Michiko Kakutani**, *The New York Times*

“George Saunders is a writer of arresting brilliance and originality, with a sure sense of his material and apparently inexhaustible resources of voice.

[*CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*] is scary, hilarious, and unforgettable.”—**Tobias Wolff**

“Saunders makes the all-but-impossible look effortless.”—**Jonathan Franzen**

“Not since Twain has America produced a satirist this funny.”—**Zadie Smith**

“An astoundingly tuned voice—graceful, dark, authentic, and funny—telling just the kinds of stories we need to get us through these times.”—**Thomas Pynchon**

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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- Rank: #97862 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-11-27
- Released on: 2012-11-27
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

George Saunders, a geophysicist, maps out magical realism with this short story collection. He puts an American spin on that sensibility in the sensationally good title tale, where things in a "Westworld"-like amusement park go extraordinarily wrong, but in ways that make perfect sense to any denizen--or reader--in the modern world. *CivilWarLand* is hilarious, yet ultimately sad and moving--and isn't that life in a nutshell? And how can you resist any writer who cooks up titles as good as "Downtrodden Mary's Failed Campaign of Terror"?

From Publishers Weekly

In this debut collection of seven dystopian fantasies, some of which have appeared in the *New Yorker* and *Harper's*, America in the near future is a toxic wasteland overrun by vicious thugs and venal opportunists who prey on the weak and misshapen. Saunders's feverish imagination conjures up images as horrific as any from a Hieronymus Bosch painting: a field full of braying mules toppled over from bone marrow disease; a tourist attraction featuring pickled stillborn babies; and cows with Plexiglas windows in their sides. The black humor and vision of American enterprise and evangelism gone haywire are reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut's early works. In the novella "Bounty," for example, the clawed-foot narrator, who flees slavery under the "Normals" to find his sister, sees a McDonald's that is the headquarters of the Church of Appropriate Humility, aka "the Guilters." "In Guilter epistemology," he observes, "the arches represent the twin human frailties of arrogance and mediocrity." Despite the richness of the vision and the occasionally heart-melting prose, however, there is little difference in voice to distinguish one story from another. Read in one sitting, they blur into a bleak and unsettling vision of the world to come.

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From Library Journal

This group of stories focuses on characters who work in a theme park called CivilWarLand in the future United States. Environmental pollution and genetic mutation have taken their toll, dividing the population into Normals and Flaweds. America's farmland lies fallow. All scramble to feed themselves and their families. Cars are hauled by horses, barges are hauled by humans, and technology continues its amazing feats, such as "off-loading" human memories, which are then sold as virtual-reality experiences. People continue to struggle for recognition, for wealth, and for the American Dream in the face of grinding poverty and limited opportunities. Saunders's surreal depiction of a bleak future for the country is both startling and believable. Here's hoping he is not a prophet. The author is a teacher and consultant for Raytheon. This is his first work of fiction. Recommended for public libraries.

Joanna M. Burkhardt, Univ. of Rhode Island Continuing Education Lib.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Catherine Browning:

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Sheree Gonzalez:

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