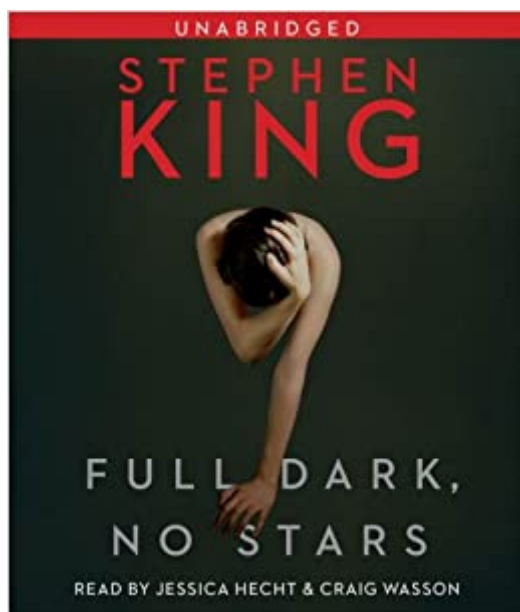


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Full Dark, No Stars



Synopsis

The acclaimed #1 New York Times and undisputed King of Horror Stephen King delivers five unforgettable short works, two of which will soon be adapted for film, and which Booklist called "a raw look at the limits of greed, revenge, and self-deception." Like *Different Seasons* and *Four Past Midnight*, which generated such enduring hit films as *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Stand by Me*, *Full Dark, No Stars* proves Stephen King a master of the long story form. "I believe there is another man inside every man, a stranger," writes Wilfred Leland James in the early pages of the riveting confession that makes up "1922," the first in this pitch-black quartet of mesmerizing tales from Stephen King. For James, that stranger is awakened when his wife Arlette proposes selling off the family homestead and moving to Omaha, setting in motion a gruesome train of murder and madness. In "Big Driver," soon to be a major Lifetime movie starring Maria Bello, a cozy-mystery writer named Tess encounters the stranger is along a back road in Massachusetts when she takes a shortcut home after a book club engagement. Violated and left for dead, Tess plots a revenge that will bring her face to face with another stranger: the one inside herself. "Fair Extension," the shortest of these tales, is perhaps the nastiest and certainly the funniest. Making a deal with the devil not only saves Harry Streeter from a fatal cancer but provides rich recompense for a lifetime of resentment. In the last of the tales, soon to be a major motion picture, Darcy Anderson's husband of more than twenty years is away on one of his business trips and his unsuspecting wife looks for batteries in the garage. Her toe knocks up against a box under a worktable and she discovers the stranger inside her husband. It's a horrifying discovery, rendered with bristling intensity, and it definitively ends "A Good Marriage."

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Audio; Unabridged edition (November 9, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1442335769

ISBN-13: 978-1442335769

Product Dimensions: 5 x 1.2 x 5.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 1,536 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #740,913 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #26 in [Books > Books on CD >](#)

[Authors, A-Z > \(K \) > King, Stephen](#) #66 in [Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Short](#)

Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, November 2010: When a master of horror and heebie-jeebies like Stephen King calls his book *Full Dark, No Stars*, you know you're in for a treat--that is, if your idea of a good time is spent curled up in a ball wondering why-oh-why you started reading after dark. King fans (and those who have always wanted to give him a shot) will devour this collection of campfire tales where marriages sway under the weight of pitch-black secrets, greed and guilt poison and fester, and the only thing you can count on is that "there are always worse things waiting." *Full Dark, No Stars* features four one-sitting yarns showcasing King at his gritty, gruesome, giddy best, so be sure to check under the bed before getting started. --Daphne Durham Exclusive: Justin Cronin, Suzanne Collins, Margaret Atwood, and T.C. Boyle Review Stephen King's *Full Dark, No Stars*

Starred Review. King leaves the supernatural behind to find the macabre in stories of ordinary misfortune. In each, ordinary people discover how their choices define who they are and what they can become. As usual, King's characters are multidimensional and colorful, if not necessarily sympathetic. Craig Wasson takes on two of the stories, and his raspy voice is a pleasure to listen to. The main characters in "1922" and "Fair Exchange" are not young men, and his mature gruffness and easy delivery are perfect. And while Jessica Hecht's reading of both "Big Driver" and "A Good Marriage" is pleasant and steady, her characterizations through dialogue are not very broad, and sometimes sound timid and whiny. Still, the strength of the stories keeps the listener enthralled. A Scribner hardcover. (Nov.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

In his afterword to this book, King writes that he wants to 'provoke an emotional, even visceral, reaction in my readers'. Well, I do believe he has succeeded in this book. So much of King's writing explores dark worlds that are only real in our imaginations and nightmares. In "Full Dark No Stars" he writes about the dark sides of men (and women) that we actually see and experience in real life. And, to me, that makes this book much more difficult to read. I had to pause and take a break a few times throughout the book - to catch my breath, to banish disturbing images behind the curtain again. The first story "1922" is about love and how twisted it can become, and it is about greed. And it is about normal, everyday hardworking people that make wrong decisions - for a lot of reasons. Of course King is very graphic in describing these mistakes and the consequences. "Big Driver" is

going to be read differently by male and female readers, I believe. There aren't too many male readers that will fully understand a woman's fear of rape - the powerlessness, the violation, the fear and panic that continue long after the physical act of rape is done and the woman is left with the aftereffects for the rest of her days. I think King did a great job capturing this story from the female perspective. And understanding the anger - no, rage - that could power a woman to exact vengeance for this devastation. "Fair Extension" was probably my least favorite of the stories but still very good. What would you trade to the dark powers if you were dying and were offered the chance to live? I think King could have done more with this story. It was the shortest of the four and to me came across a little flippant. Maybe that was planned. "A Good Marriage" was superb. I kept trying to put myself in the wife's position (which is what King wanted in all these stories, I think). It was easy to try to imagine. I'm close to the age of the wife in the story and have been married about the same length of time. I have grown children. What would I do if I discovered that the man I thought I was married to had been deceiving me for years and was truly a human monster? I love stories and books that make me think and King's books usually succeed in doing that, in one way or another. I like his short story or novella collections. He really can up the ante when he has a limit on the number of words he can use. He pares the story down to the essentials and there is a wonderful rhythm and freshness in his shorter works. I also liked the Afterword in the book. King took a few words to try to explain some of the Whys of these stories, which he doesn't do too often. And I appreciated the glimpse into a bit of his creative process.

Stephen King's latest collection of stories "Full Dark No Stars" certainly lives up to its title; we get four stories with characters who have awful things happen to them or do awful things to those around them. That's nothing unusual for a King story but the difference here is that most of the supernatural trappings that we expect from King are minimal to nonexistent in these stories; he goes for a more realistic vibe in these stories. He's done this before in some of his other collections as well but not to this extreme--these are horror stories where the horror derives almost exclusively from human nature. SPOILERS: The first story "1922" focuses on a farmer who decides to murder his wife with the assistance of his teenage son when his dominance as head of the house is threatened. She wants to sell off the land she inherited to a large hog farm that will ultimately pollute their farm. The resulting brutal murder haunts both men driving them to the brink of insanity. The second story in the collection "Big Driver" focuses on a mystery writer who after making a personal appearance decides to take a rural deserted route home. A flat tire and a large stranger who offers to help her repair it cause her life to fall apart in a story that echoes elements of James Dickey's

novel *Deliverance*. The third and most King-like (because it has a supernatural element) story "Fair Extension" focuses on a loan officer at a bank who is dying of cancer. The loan officer meets the Devil at a roadside stand where deals are made. He wants the exceptional life of his now hated best friend--who he carried throughout school and has had success that the loan officer feels he deserved--discovering that as part of the deal his "friend" must suffer. The catch--the Devil wants 15% of the loan officer's income for the next 15 years of an extended life and he must watch his friend suffer. The fourth "A Good Marriage" takes us behind-the-scenes of a woman who discovers his "good marriage" has allowed her husband to carry on a thriving life as a serial killer. The story focuses more on the impact the discovery has on her life rather than the serial killer himself.

END OF SPOILERS: King's latest has stories that vary in quality but all of them--as dark and filled with some of the most truly evil characters I've seen in a King book--are worthwhile. They lack the redemption that often appears in King's work for the characters and we really don't learn to care about these characters like we do in many of King's novels but that isn't the point here--King wanted to create characters that were difficult to like in extreme circumstances that have to face the darker side of human nature and their own dark side as well. Whether or not you enjoy "Full Dark, No Stars" will depend on whether or not you are looking for pure entertainment from this book or a series of more complex, ambitious stories that don't offer the easy answers that appear in some of King's work. "Full Dark, No Stars" isn't an easy book to like but if you find the characters, their situations and the lack of redemption for these characters makes this a difficult read for the average King fan but for those who stick with it (and enjoy the stories), you'll find a series of gripping, involving stories with characters as complex as any King has created. "Full Dark, No Stars" lives up to its title and, as a result, may not be for everyone. I'd suggest reading an excerpt before purchasing the book to see if it appeals to you. It is, however, one of King's most fascinating and ambitious novels yet demonstrating that he continues to grow as a novelist. This isn't an easy book to like--but if you do and are drawn into it as I was, you'll enjoy one of King's richest works in years. 4 1/2 stars

Each of these novellas delivers a hard, tough and bleak perspective on humanity. Yes, we find characters with whom we can sympathise, but these have been brought into bad places by others whose terrible deeds wreak havoc. There is plenty of violence, some of it sexual, and each story is tense and taut. Gripping is an understatement. "The souls of humans have become poor and transparent things" says the Devil in *Fair Extension*, the least violent but for me, the most bleak of the tales. These words could serve as an epigraph to the collection. It is visceral, disturbing and although King says in the Afterword that he doesn't want to make readers think as they read, yet

throughout Full Dark, No Stars I was challenged intellectually as well as emotionally. What would I do in, or following, the situations depicted here? How do we grapple with the age old problem of evil? The concept of revenge is another age old philosophical and literary concern, wrenched open again for our consideration by Stephen King. If you are a King fan you'll have this book already. If you are an occasional reader of his work, then I urge you to grab a copy asap. It ranks with his best.

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