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Knockemstiff



Synopsis

"More engaging than any new fiction in years." —Chuck Palahniuk
An unforgettable work of fiction that peers into the soul of a tough Midwestern American town to reveal the sad, stunted but resilient lives of its residents. Knockemstiff is a genuine entry into the literature of place. Spanning a period from the mid-sixties to the late nineties, the linked stories that comprise Knockemstiff feature a cast of recurring characters who are irresistibly, undeniably real. A father pumps his son full of steroids so he can vicariously relive his days as a perpetual runner-up body builder. A psychotic rural recluse comes upon two siblings committing incest and feels compelled to take action. Donald Ray Pollock presents his characters and the sordid goings-on with a stern intelligence, a bracing absence of value judgments, and a refreshingly dark sense of bottom-dog humor.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Significant Seven, March 2008: A quick Internet search for "Knockemstiff, Ohio" reveals a lazy nexus of shabby houses and dirt roads in southern Ohio, lacking a post office and grocery store, but rich in legends of epic fistfights and swamp-dwelling ghosts. Donald Ray Pollock, a native of this "ghost town," populates his own Knockemstiff with living revenants: huffers, murderers, sex fiends, and their hapless (though not innocent) victims, all tethered to the woebegone "holler" by their own self-inflicted shortcomings and depravities. Pollock pulls no punches--his prose is blunt and visceral, as well as stylish and skilled--and reading these mini grand guignols can be like crunching on a mouthful of your own broken teeth. He resists casting judgment (or sympathy) on his doomed reprobates; predator or prey (or sometimes both), Pollock contemplates his characters with all the

warmth of a "frozen bleach bottle." It's an astonishing debut. --Jon Foro --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A native of Knockemstiff, Ohio, Pollock delivers poignant and raunchy accounts of his hometown's sad and stagnant residents in his debut story collection that may remind readers of its thematic grand-daddy, Winesburg, Ohio. The works span 50 years of violence, failure, lust and depravity, featuring characters like Jake, an abandoned hermit who dodges the draft during WWII, lives in a bus and discovers two young siblings committing incest on the bank of a creek, and Bobby, a recovering alcoholic who must face the imminent death of his abusive father. The language and imagery of the novel are shockingly direct in detailing the pitiful lives of drug abusers, perverts and a forgotten population that just isn't much welcome nowhere in the world. Many of the characters appear in more than one story, providing a gritty depth to the whole, but the character that stands out the most is the town, as dismal and hopeless as the locals. Pollock is intimate with the grimy aspects of a small town (especially one named after a fistfight) full of poor, uneducated people without futures or knowledge of any other way to live. The most startling thing about these stories is they have an aura of truth. (Mar.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The 18 gritty short stories here come at you hard and fast like a claw hammer fight in a bar parking lot. *Knockemstiff* is the first book by Donald Ray Pollock and is a terrific collection based in the small dying holler of Knockemstiff Ohio. This outstanding volume won the 2009 PEN/Robert Bingham Fellowship, which goes to "exceptionally talented fiction writers whose debut work a first novel or collection of short stories...represent distinguished literary achievement and suggests great promise." Stories that stand out for me include *Dynamite Hole*, about a young runaway who spends three years hiding in the woods of rural Ohio, *Blessed*, about an injured second story man hooked on pain meds, and *Honolulu*, about a man slowly losing his mind and his caregiver wife slowly losing the dreams of her youth. Many of the characters in *Knockemstiff* appear in more than one story, lending an authentic layering depth of place. They are desperate, clinging to hope amidst their dying town and its disappearing dreams. This read is not for everyone. It will beat you up and leave you bruised and bloody, but always wanting more. If there is a problem with *Knockemstiff* it is that there is very little if any letup. The haunting hopelessness is unrelenting, but maybe that is more a valid reflection of the characters' circumstances than

on any arguments about traditional style and pacing. Traditional it is not, and the pace fairly blisters through each of these dark trips through the side of Middle America that most only whisper about. I spent time growing up in southern West Virginia, and most of these characters and places ring true to me. Pollock is brutally unforgiving, unsentimental, and without judgment. He leaves us with a sense of reality so cold and clear that it blindsides us and slaps us in the face. Pollock is the real deal. His second book and first full length novel *The Devil All the Time* is a must read as well.

This is a collection of loosely related short stories that all take place in the rural holler of Knockemstiff, Ohio. Tales that chronicle bleak lives of rural poverty. You will meet characters plagued by mental illness, obesity, roid rage, oxycotin addiction, alcoholism and much, much more. PBR, Pabst Blue Ribbon is the beer of choice for the denizens of Knockemstiff, but they sure aren't the bearded urban hipsters who have hijacked that brand in recent years. These are the real consumers of PBR, before it became cool and ironic. There is beauty in these stories, albeit harsh and gritty. These are uneducated and poor white people, struggling to survive in a cycle of poverty, addiction, dysfunction and often times violence. There sure isn't any white privilege going on here. What makes this book even more satisfying is that the author was actually from Knockemstiff. Knockemstiff is now not much more than a ghost town, and these tales will linger with you. I have already ordered another Donald Ray Pollock novel and cannot wait to receive his. His writing is that good.

If you have a stomach made of leather then you can probably handle this book. In a word...this book is vivid. Oddly, I think this is the first book that I have read that changed the way my senses interpret the world. The air smells a little more musty, the soft bed sheets a little more stiff and cold, colors not quite as bright, ambient noises a little bit more annoying after reading this book. You can have the imagination of a rock and still find yourself smack in the middle of Knockemstiff, Ohio due to how well this is written. To be honest, living in the south and reading about a little town in Ohio wasn't all that exciting to me. I only bought it because Pollock's other novel, *Devil All the Time* is one of my all time favorites. I put this book in the rear of the read list for quite some time and finally decided to give it a try. By chapter 2 I was totally blown away. Actually, I could not believe what I just read. I cannot say enough about this book, but at the same time I am finding it very difficult to describe it. If you have never read any Donald Ray Pollock, ease into it with *Devil All the Time*. If you have read *Devil All the Time*, you'll have an idea of what you are in for but I would suggest buckling up for a

wild ride.

Probably the sickest, most depraved and cringe filled book I've ever read. I read things in here I did not want to know people even thought about doing. It covered every deranged topic from violence, drug addiction, abuse, child abuse, suicide, mental illness, traumatic brain injury to a disturbing chapter on Alzheimer's. Thanks to Jerry Garcia and enough LSD-25 in the 80's to make Satan weep, I have absolutely no short, intermediate or long term memory left. Which makes the chapter on Alzheimer's all the more disturbing for me. However on the plus side I will have forgotten this book completely by weeks end.

A series of stories about the beleaguered survivors of a small town in Ohio. Staggeringly good writer who has written two other novels so far. All 3 must reads. Reminiscent of Chuck Palahniuk but stands alone in its own right. Not for the squeamish or for those who like things in neat little packages.

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