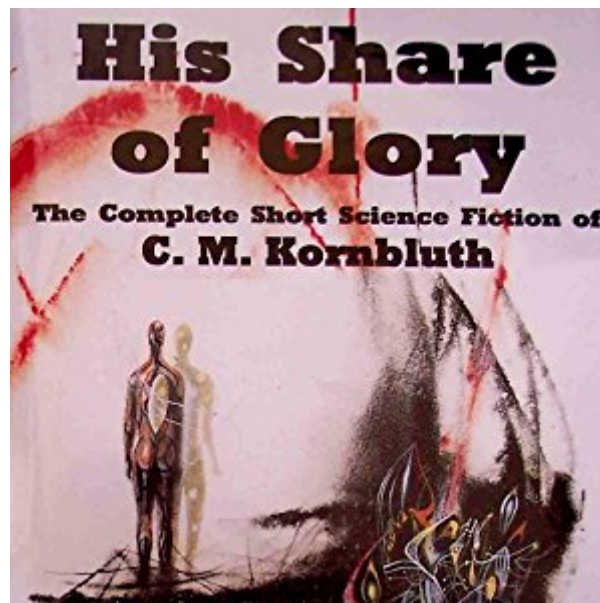




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His Share Of Glory: The Complete Short Science Fiction Of C. M. Kornbluth



Synopsis

His Share of Glory contains all the short science fiction written solely by C. M. Kornbluth. Many of the stories are SF "classics", such as "The Marching Morons", "The Little Black Bag", "Two Dooms", "The Mindworm", "Thirteen O'Clock", and, of course, "That Share of Glory". His Share of Glory includes all of Kornbluth's solo short science fiction, fifty-six works of short SF in all, with the original bibliographic details including pseudonymous by-line. The introduction is by noted SF writer and life-long friend and collaborator of C. M. Kornbluth - Frederik Pohl.

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Customer Reviews

Excellent.

Time and memory being what they are, Kornbluth is unfortunately probably fated to go down amongst most general SF fans as an "and" person, simply a name that got tacked on in collaboration with someone who is more well known today, although given that a lot of the names he collaborated with are probably also fading into the mists of people's memories as glitzier TV shows and flashier book series take more prominence in people's attention that it wouldn't be surprising if pretty much everything he's done is a bit hazy. These days it wouldn't be too surprising if people thought Isaac Asimov was the guy who wrote the adaptation for that Will Smith movie (and were probably very upset when it didn't seem to match what was happening on screen). The most well known Kornbluth involved work is probably his novel with Frederick Pohl, "The Space Merchants", a rather savage satire on advertising and consumerism for the time that was considered a classic then

and still is now (I read it years and years ago but I remember it being very good). He did several other works with Pohl (who only died about three or four years ago at the ripe age of ninety plus and did a lot to keep the memory of his old writing partner alive), among other writers and was widely admired among his peers as being a kind of prodigy. Unfortunately, and this has a lot to do with the reasons he's not well remembered today, his experiences in WWII didn't leave him in the most robust of health and combined with a certain lack in taking care of himself led to his extremely early death by heart attack at the age of thirty-four in 1958. He left a decent amount of work behind but unless you're well versed in SF writers of the early days, chances are you aren't really going to come across him. This collection attempts to go a ways toward fixing that. Between the covers it collects fifty plus short stories that Kornbluth wrote, pretty much all his solo SF (he wrote a couple novels alone but everything else was with collaborators) over the course of his career under a variety of names. Having so much gathered in one place does go a ways toward making a good case for him being far more well known than he is, if only to prove how consistent he was (even when he was really just hacking it out . . . the last handful of stories in the collection are what was known as "spec work", literally banged out for the money and even though they lack bite and focus of his better works, they are still entertaining stories), so consistent in fact that I can't really detect a huge difference in stories that were written earlier in his mature career and ones that were written toward the end of his life (the collection jumbles them up, which some folks wanting to track his development might quibble with but it didn't really bother me). To that end, all the big guns you'd expect are here and they do kind of form the core of the collection. You get finely imagined future scenarios like "That Share of Glory", where negotiation has become a kind of religion as a merchant hires out a herald to assist him on a tough deal, only to encounter a bit of a twist as it winds on. You get the other big classic, the so-true-to-today it's scary "The Marching Morons" which postulates a future where a relatively small group of smart people have to concoct ways to save the world from the masses of sheer idiocy that now comprises most of the population (actually given today's climate it might be optimistic as you wonder who the smart people that are going to save us are). Those two stories alone are strong enough to cement Kornbluth's legacy, emerging as fully formed slices of alternate reality that bristle with a brisk intelligence and a sharp eye for satire, taking current trends of the time and extrapolating them into areas of ridiculousness that doesn't feel dated at all today and in fact feel somewhat prescient at times. Surrounding those stories are equally strong tales, notably stuff like "The Little Black Bag" where an alcoholic doctor discovers a medical bag from the future and uses it to get some redemption (this one was made into TV episodes of several SF anthology series, although I can't imagine how the ending would have been shot without

scaring the crap out of people). And time and again that's what Kornbluth does, taking scenarios that are interesting on their own and finding unusual angles on them ("The Education of Tigress McCardle", which should be required reading for anyone who wants to be in "Teen Mom", still makes me laugh every time I read it). "The Mindworm" postulates a scenario that Theodore Sturgeon would have taken into realms of both horror and love, while Kornbluth lets it play out with overlapping thoughts until the ending sneaks up on you from nowhere. "Two Dooms" sounds a call for a nuclear free world and basically writes "The Man in the High Castle" in a tenth of the space and with about half of Dick's sometimes off-putting oddness. And when Kornbluth did decide to be weird, the results are generally charming, like "MS Found in a Chinese Fortune Cookie" which is amazingly about exactly what the title says it is, but doesn't overstay its welcome. I also had a fondness for the journalist SF tale "Make Mine Mars", probably because he manages to transplant a detailed feel of how a newspaper runs into the future. What strikes in story after story is how seriously accomplished Kornbluth was, and how much more he could have done if his health had allowed him to stick around a little longer. Would he have found ripe subjects in the culture of the 1960s? Could we even say he had peaked? For all we know he was getting ready to enter his prime, which really speaks to the tragedy of his early death. In the meantime, we have these and so much else, which feels like a lot and a little at the same time. Few of the stories have a note out of place and even decades later it's often clear what he's satirizing. He rarely pulls punches and so the stories lack the sometimes sappy sentimentality that even a genius like Sturgeon could let trickle in. But rarely are they cold either, his characters are full of pluck and even if the boy-girl stuff isn't that daring for the time more often than not he manages the dual feat that only the best of SF of that time could pull off: entertaining you with a plausible future (at least as seen from the 1940s) while making you think about the ramifications of that future. With all the old masters gone or nearly gone (are there any big guns from that era left?) and their works gradually beginning the slow fade in the eyes of a general reading population that only likes old stuff when it's linked to an amber haze of nostalgia or repurposed for the sake of being new, there's something to be said for reading a story written over fifty years ago and still being able to sense what the author was thinking, to find it just as passionate or poignant as any story written today, to not make apologies or excuses for its embarrassing moments, to enjoy it simply for what is, a well told tale told well, written by a major talent who unfortunately only stuck around long enough to tease us with how talented he was.

Everything I read in earlier reviews is true. Robert Silverberg's unsurpassable review of Kornbluth's work, "Rereading Kornbluth" in the December *Asimov's* led me to check this book out at the Largo

Library. I'd been fortunate enough to read a few of these stories before, and I was happy to do so again. Silverberg throws out the words, "subtle, oblique, elliptical," and "sardonic" at the start and he's right on the mark as far as he goes. Add to those words, "gritty, insightful, dark and incisive" to get a fuller picture. Benjamin Ivry tells readers that Kornbluth has been called a "strict Jewish moralist," and that's on the mark as well. In Kornbluth's stories, readers will find pure evil, noble heroes, dedicated servants of humanity, moral dilemmas, and sometimes justice. They will be confronted with prose, imagery, and clarity of vision that brings tears to their eyes. Amazingly, Kornbluth began writing perfect stories packed with all of this at the age of sixteen. Kornbluth was a genius whose career was cut short by a heart attack. His *Share of Glory* is 56 masterful science fiction stories. He dealt with issues such as population explosion, ecological disaster, nuclear proliferation, medical ethics, and the degradation of education-- issues still under discussion today. (He may well have invented allohistory with "Two Dooms.") To paraphrase Silverberg, you should read Kornbluth.

C. M. Kornbluth was the most prescient SF author in human history. "The Marching Morons," alone, should put him in the SF hall of fame for getting the real future of humanity dead on. We can only hope that the intellectual 1% eventually try his solution.

His Share of Glory: The Complete Short Science Fiction of C. M. Kornbluth NESFA Press
1997 \$27.00; 670 pages ISBN 0-915368-60-9 I picked up this volume because I had read the [almost] titular short story "That Share of Glory" in Jerry Pournelle's *Imperial Stars* (Stars at War, Vol 1). I was pleasantly surprised at how much I liked just about every story contained within. I suppose I shouldn't be. Jerry Pournelle remains among my all time favorite writers, and I trust his judgment about other interesting authors. This book comes in at 670 pages, and it only represents the sci-fi short fiction of Kornbluth. Not his novels, and not short fiction in any other genre. That is an impressive corpus of writing for a man who only lived to be 34. As Tom Lehrer almost said, by the time Kornbluth was my age he was dead. Some of Kornbluth's short stories are famous. "That Share of Glory", "The Little Black Bag", and "The Marching Morons" are his best, and best known works. Another in this collection that I especially liked was "Gomez", the tale of an unlikely nuclear physicist who finds and then loses great power. The stories I didn't like as much, I still liked a lot. I even liked the stories in the back, set in a smaller font, that came with a warning that they were early works written quickly to fill space in pulp magazines. You have to be damn good to write stories that way that anyone wants to read 75 years later, and Kornbluth was. While most of these stories are sci-fi,

there were a couple that reminded me a bit of Lovecraft and Howard: uncanny and disturbing. Judging by their frequency, this wasn't his specialty, but I enjoyed them nonetheless. His specialty seemed to be journalism. Stories like "The Silly Season" and "Make Mine Mars" show marks of Kornbluth's time as a wire-service reporter in Chicago. This is important, since I'm always interested in what makes a given author's work "hard" sci-fi. While Kornbluth wrote some space opera featuring technology nigh unto magic, most of the works in this volume focused on reasonable extrapolations from Kornbluth's encyclopedic knowledge. I mean that literally, since Kornbluth acquired his facts by reading an encyclopedia front to back. However, it isn't really the technology that makes this hard sci-fi. Kornbluth displayed a keen insight into human motivations, combined with a reporter's cynicism for the tawdriness of ordinary life. Sometimes sci-fi can be rightly castigated for incomplete or wooden characterization. This is not true of Kornbluth; he understood the human condition, and wrote about it with the authority of a jaded confessor. Kornbluth was taken from us too soon; he might have been a yet more remarkable author had he lived longer. What might have been is a fit subject for another story. In the meanwhile, you just need to read Kornbluth. This is what the golden age of science fiction is all about.

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