

Meg Ellison's Pinhole Camera

Jess Flarity

2021

a review of

Big Girl by Meg Ellison. PM Press 2020

While there are several excellent reprints in the newest volume on Meg Ellison in the PM Press Outspoken Authors series, let's focus on the two originals. An all-too-real dystopian short story titled "Such People in It," and the Nebula-nominated novelette, "The Pill."

Elison's prose veers towards the razor wire and broken glass end of the spectrum in "Such People" as she imagines the near-future U.S. being policed by a sinister entity called the Decencies.

One example is when her protagonist Omar thinks: "He missed the feeling of being hungover. Not the headache like a rusty nail in the eyelid or the nausea that came and went like a siren sounding off in his gut. Just the selfish, bleary-eyed entitlement to be an asshole."

The story opens like a pinhole camera as a subtle satire of what conservative-dominated America would actually look like, then gets blown wide open to the chilling possibilities of an Alt-Right future by the end. Like *The Handmaid's Tale*, Elison's insights become more terrifying the longer her reader thinks about them, exploding like landmines in the subconscious a few days later.

"The Pill" got its Nebula nomination for its mixture of dark humor, absolutely disgusting, yet riveting descriptions, and showcases the author's deep insight into the nature of fatness and society's expectations. I'll spare you any spoilers here because it's truly worth reading this one cold.

I can't remember the last time I laughed and cringed so hard at the same time. The novelette is a refreshing take on traditional sci-fi while including present-day social justice issues without hammering a message over the reader's head. It reads like a classic feminist piece written in the 1960s, but has a decidedly modern feel that even jaded millennials will appreciate, whether or not they would choose to take "the pill."

As an added bonus, the collection includes an exclusive interview by Terry Bisson, and the questions open hidden doorways into the attic of Elison's mind. Her snappy responses make you want to grow fifty feet tall along with her, so that you can both go out and devour entire oyster beds.

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