



## **Fiends**

*Richard Laymon*

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Out on a date at the movies, Marty is horrified to see Willy, the man who broke into her house and raped her 10 years before. Now he is out of jail, Willy is out to get Marty. *Fiends* is the lead-off novella in this collection of horror stories.

## Fiends Details

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Author : Richard Laymon

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## Elso says

When you want a quick fix - turn to Laymon as he never disappoints. Fiends is a collection of short stories. Fiends, The Bleeder, Desert Pickup - stand outs.

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## Andrew Lennon says

Bit of a mixed bag really. Some good stories in here, some which I didn't care much for. Compared to Laymon's other work that I've read, most of these were just alright. Overall a decent collection, but I think I'll probably stick to his novels in future.

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## Dreadlocksmile says

First published back in 1997 by Headline Book Publishing, 'Fiends' has already seen itself reprinted a few times. The book is a collection of Laymon's short stories spanning from 1970 to 1997. This is not in any way a complete collection, but a selected choice of his shorts.

The book includes a very comical five page introduction from the fellow horror author and personal friend of Laymon, Dean Koontz. This short introduction gives the reader a glimpse into the family life of Laymon from behind the eyes of a close friend. Koontz also delivers credit towards Laymon's unique writing ability on numerous occasions within the introduction, which is praise indeed coming from such a well respected author of this very competitive genre. Koontz's introduction is a joy in itself to read, with moments of comedy that are sure to make you laugh out loud.

The book kicks off with the first short story entitled 'Fiends' that was written for this very collection, and as such, this is its first published appearance. The tale is by far and away the longest short to be included in this compilation, running for a total of 112 pages. Not entirely a new scenario for Laymon to write about, the tale involves the kidnapping, rape and murder of teenage girls who find themselves at the hands of a sociopathic killer. The title of the short is taken from the stories theme, whereby the sociopathic male characters are referred to as 'fiends' from early on within the tale. The short follows a few loose storylines and sub plots, which eventually inter-weave until the final and somewhat satisfying conclusion. 'Fiends' is a great start to this collection and if you're new to Laymon's work, then it would form a very good first choice to dip your toe into.

Next up is the 12 page short story entitled 'Kitty Litter' which was first published back in 1992 for the collection of short stories by various authors entitled 'Cat Crimes II'. This humorously written piece of black comedy involves the simple premise of the likeable character named Mr Bishop, who is attempting to give away a litter of kittens for free to good homes. We join the tale when the over-the-top spoilt brat of a girl named Monica, approaches Bishop wanting one of the kittens. She picks out one and a paranormal story regarding that particular feline unfolds, which ultimately ends with a very satisfying conclusion to the whole episode. As is so often the case, Laymon writes what the reader is thinking, without a thought for social

morality. After all, it's just a story!

'The Bleeder' comes next, which takes the reader on a mini 16 page adventure as we follow the character of Byron who notices small drops of blood splashed on the pavement one night and decides to follow them, to locate the source. The short is written from Byron's perspective allowing Laymon to delve into the character's thoughts as he pursues this bleeder. Obviously, being a piece of Laymon's work, the story ends in a dark and twisted fashion. For sheer imagination alone, this simple storyline is an absolute pleasure to read and has echoes of Clive Barker's early Books of Blood era. The short was originally published for the winter of 1989 edition of the publication 'New Blood'

Following on as one would a trail of blood, we have the very short tale entitled 'Desert Pickup'. This 8 page story takes on the simple idea that people are not always as they may first appear. Indeed, this lack of trust for others is somewhat of a recurring theme within Laymon's work. The novel squeezes in a couple of twists to the short and sweet storyline, ending with a slightly predictable but humorously satisfying conclusion. This short story was actually Laymon's first ever professional sale and was published in the November 1970 edition of 'Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine'.

'The Mask' is the next short story. This 24 page tale was first published in 1993 within Laymon's limited edition short story collection 'A Good, Secret Place'. This surprising story takes a look at the life of the character Allan Hunter when he develops an obsession with a masked woman he encounters one dark night, on the way back from the cinema. Hunter is an obsessive horror fanatic which, like with the character of Larry Dunbar from Laymon's 1990 novel 'The Stake', is obviously based on Laymon himself. The short builds up a good tension until the dramatic and clever twist at the tales conclusion.

The next short is a tale simply titled 'Eats'. This story was first published for the July 1985 issue of 'Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine'. The tale was later reprinted for the 1988 book 'The Second Black Lizard Anthology of Crime', which was then followed by the re-working of the tale as a cartoon for the 1989 publication 'The Bank Street Book of Mystery'. The 12 page short is a murder-mystery style affair with a strong black-comedy theme running through it. The main character is a private detective who is employed by a very wealthy old woman to find out if a member of her family is trying to poison her. The conclusion is highly amusing, bringing about a great glimpse into Laymon's humorous nature.

Taking the next slot in this collection is the short entitled 'The Hunt'. This 20 page tale was originally published back in 1989 for the compilation book containing tales of terror and suspense entitled 'Stalkers'. The short story revolves around a young girl (isn't it always in Laymon's work) who is kidnapped and taken to the nearby deserted outbakes. She is then let free to escape, whilst being told that she will be hunted down within 10 minutes by her abductor. This gritty tale delivers a clever twist ending that will stay in your memory for a long time afterwards. This truly is a great little story!

Following on we have the 18 page short story 'Slit'. This tale was first published in 1993 for the compilation book 'Predators'. This nasty little tale sees inside the thoughts of the main character of Charles, whose obsession with cutting girls comes to a climax upon one of his co-workers at the library. The ending comes about with somewhat of a surprising conclusion. Moments of this tale depict disturbing thoughts inside the mind a depraved individual, making it quite strong in places.

By far the shortest story included in this compilation is next in line. This 4 page tale entitled 'Out of the Woods' is certainly short and sweet and was first published back in 1975 for the December edition of 'Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine'. Laymon sets down the scenario quickly, with a camper waking up in his tent in the night, hearing an intruder demanding he get out and hand over all his possessions. From here a very

amusing and cleverly achieved twist to the tale brings its short lived life to a very satisfying conclusion that will leave a big grin on your face. Personally, I think this little tale is fantastic.

Next up we have the bizarre tale entitled 'Stiff Intruders' that saw itself first published back in 1980 for the March edition of 'Mike Shayne's Mystery Magazine'. The 8 page story sets out the bizarre premise of corpses being left on the garden chair of a now released ex-serial killer. Laymon's comical approach to this idea is amusing in itself, especially as the tale draws to fitting yet slightly predictable conclusion.

The 22 page short story titled 'Special' is next, which was originally published in 1991 for the compilation book titled 'Under The Fang'. A graphic novel version of the short was later released in 1993 for the book 'System Shock'. The story takes on a very similar modern day vampire premise to that of Stephen Norrington's 1998 movie 'Blade'. Obviously this short predates the film by a long way, but there are definite similarities between the two with the careful play with the social aspect of the vampire lives and their interaction to mankind. 'Slit' is a fast paced slice of pure adrenaline fuelled vampire action. The short has a definite feel to it that it has simply been torn from the middle pages of a full length novel; such is the straight in at the deep end policy taken by Laymon on this tale. Even with its mere 22 pages, the short packs in a full bodied storyline that concludes well. This piece is very different from the rest of the shorts in the collection, and as such, works well within the book as a whole.

'Joyce' follows, which is a 20 page short that, like with the earlier short 'The Mask', was first published for the 1993 limited edition publication 'A Good, Secret Place'. Here we have the slightly surreal story of a woman who finds out that her new husband has his dead ex-wife stuffed and kept in his house. The husband cares for the stuffed corpse in a similar way to that which certain lonely individuals do with their life size human dolls (I'm sure we've all seen a similar disturbing documentary on these guys at some time or another). This bizarre little tale, revolves around the stresses involved for the new wife as she attempts to deal with this oddity to their new marriage. Of course, as it's a Laymon story, things turn nasty. Not a bad story at all, but not one of the better ones in the book.

Last up we have the short entitled 'A Good, Secret Place' that was taken from the same limited edition compilation book as 'The Mask' and 'Joyce'. This final tale was actually short-listed for a Bram Stoker Award by the Horror Writer's Association for 'superior achievement in a collection'. This 27 page short story includes the strongest content of all the shorts included within the compilation. The story follows two friends who try to avoid a nerdy new kid who moves to their neighbourhood. When the new kid finally latches on to them, they decide to teach this nerdy kid a lesson. Their nasty prank back fires somewhat, with a final ending to the short (and indeed the whole book) that will leave you with mouth agape. Quite a shocking ending with a dare I say bad-taste finale. But that's what we love about Laymon – his no holds barred approach to writing.

All in all, 'Fiends' delivers a powerful and thoroughly enjoyable collection of shorts that are sure to please every fan of Laymon's work. The book also serves as a good introduction to Laymon for people who have so far missed out on this great horror writer. Each tale stands out from the next, with clever ideas, bold statements and pure Laymon shock value.

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## Adamus says

I'm not a huge fan of short stories, but Laymon is one of my favorite authors so I didn't mind too much. The first novella in the book was really good I enjoyed it a lot it probably could have been a longer book, but it

was good for this type of book. The short story's were all 4 & 5 star short stories to me maybe 1 or 2 were 3 stars, but they were pretty good. Some were funny, others were weird, & some you wished were whose books because they were interesting. I also liked how some were from way back in the day & some were new you have a pretty good variety of stories from 1970-1993 so you can really see the writing style getting better as he grows which is pretty cool. Once again another Laymon book I enjoyed

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### **Noel Penaflor says**

14 Short stories from my favorite Horror author of all time (RIP). Half of them are very good to excellent, the other half are okay. Though "Okay" for Laymon is still better than most. His other collection DREADFUL TALES is slightly better, but this won't disappoint Laymon fans new or old

Now I only have to read one more book of his to complete his works, which makes me sad now that I'm about to cross that finish line

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### **Steveo says**

Interesting, plays with your imagination, good short horror stories

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### **Alex Budris says**

Though definitely not for everybody, Richard Laymon is a very good writer in the genre that he works in. Unfortunately this collection of stories falls short. It's almost as if Richard Laymon was writing as Richard Laymon, but with limited talent. The title story especially is just flat shock-value that doesn't even shock you much because the characters are seemingly making random, stupid decisions out of nowhere. A couple of the other works in the book have some merit, on the value of simply being vaguely entertaining, but still don't match-up to what I have seen this writer accomplish.

It takes something special to be able to hold your own when writing what is often referred to as "splatter-punk" horror fiction. Laymon has that something special. But it doesn't display in this collection. Not a bad read for true fans, but to really experience what this writer is about I would look at other works.

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### **Leigh Thomas says**

Great little anthology!

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### **Amanda says**

Fiends is one of the worst horror books I've ever read. I am a fan of this author, and I couldn't even finish it. The characters are hollow and irritating, making unrealistic, stupid decisions to facilitate a hollow plot. I was

unable to swallow my suspension of disbelief long enough to believe that Marty, not once but multiple times during the opening scene, refuses to tell her boyfriend the identity of the man who is stalking them on their date--the convicted rapist who assaulted her ten years ago! Even to the point of not calling the police when Willy the rapist breaks into her home and tries to attack her. She also gets angry at the boyfriend for wanting to beat the crap out of the stalker. Blech.

The second storyline revolves around an engaged couple. When the woman walks in on her fiancé having sex with a random stranger on the floor of his store, her first reaction is to go hitchhiking??? She is picked up by a "fiend" and barely escapes before getting picked up by another man who assures her that all men cheat on their partners. It's as if Laymon set out to create the most repugnant human beings possible and turned them all loose in a freaky pinball machine.

The end for me came when Marty decides to perform oral sex on her rapist voluntarily to keep him from menacing a half-naked girl they just drove away from.

I don't ask that every character be likeable in a book. I don't ask for a complicated plot full of twists and turns. I am familiar with the weirdos who frequent Richard Laymon books. But SOME realism would be appreciated.

If you have never read a Richard Laymon novel before, I beg of you, pick another title. The Traveling Vampire Show, Bite, Beast House, and In The Dark all come to mind.

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### **Laura says**

HOLIDAY READS FROM SPAIN I really enjoyed this. I especially loved the small stories towards the end which were suitably tense but also incredibly ironic/comical

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### **Alexandria says**

Like all of his books, very very good!

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### **Mark says**

Unfortunately, this collection of shorts marks the downturn in Laymon's intense, brisk fiction. The title story is a case in point.

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### **Michael says**

Fiend is an interesting short story collection, and at times, it doesn't feel like a Richard Laymon book. The opening novella is classic Laymon, but it for all of its brutality, there's a bit of a disconnect. This is what we've come to expect from the guy, but here, it's just to lure in his faithful readers, and Fiends as a whole just feels nonsensical. Who acts this way? Why are these people so fucking stupid? Laymon is better than this,

and as the collection rolls on it's clear that he is. There's a bit of humor that flows through some of these stories. You even have a story called Eats that follows the formula of a pulp detective story, but ends in a such an unexpected way, you can't help but laugh at how it all turns out. Who would have thought that Laymon of all people had a sense of humor?

There are some horror stories, but they aren't what you would expect. Slit is a weird little piece about a man who is addicted to cutting people and becomes obsessed with Lynn, but the twist at the end is what makes this story so interesting. Fiends finds Laymon writing different styles of fiction, and taking his readers on a ride. For the fans, it's an interesting glimpse at a writer experimenting, but this isn't a book for people just discovering Laymon. There's no way you could read this, and go right into a book like Stake, or even Night In the Lonesome October. The only straight horror piece is Fiends, but Stiff Intruders, and The Mask would throw people off due to its subject matter, and dark sense of humor.

I thought it was solid collection that collects Laymon's shorter work written for various magazines and anthologies. We know Laymon was capable of writing dark, brutal fiction, but Fiends shows us another side of Laymon's writing. These stories are a part of the Laymon canon, and prove that he was a great writer. His sense of humor shines through in the majority of these. Sure, it's black humor, but as a fan, it's refreshing to see another side to him. Fiends may not be perfect, but it's pretty damn close.

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### **Nicole says**

I hate to be redundant here but Richard Laymon is not an author everyone can enjoy. Unless you enjoy disgusting, disturbing horror you WILL hate Laymon's books. That is not a ploy to get people interested. One look at the reviews for any of his books and you will see that most love or hate him, there really is no in-between. A couple more things to keep in mind; he's been described as "Stephen King without a conscience" and "A dirty old man." I've found both statements to be accurate. Being a big fan of horror I absolutely enjoy reading Laymon when I'm not cringing or feeling nauseous lol. Fiends has two things going for it, one being it is a collection of short stories which happens to be, in my opinion a very underrated genre, and of course Laymon is a favorite author of mine. I find this collection quite close to absolute genius, all tales interwoven with the same theme as the title story yet never quite being sure who is the fiend and who is not.

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### **John says**

I'm having a hard time deciding what to rate this book, considering I have mixed feelings about virtually each and every story collected in it. Laymon knows how to hook you with a great beginning, but he almost inevitably botches the endings.

Then there's the fact that everything Laymon writes is in varying levels of bad taste. I can't say that much in this book really offended me, but I certainly felt oily while reading it. Especially, the titular novella, "Fiends," which was as mindless as it was graphic. This story is the reason I rated this book two stars rather than three.

At best, Laymon is a master of tawdry, cheap thrills. Yet, there's a certain playfulness about his writing, a certain black humor, that I really enjoy. This is best seen in the story "Eats," which is both a funny hardboiled detective parody and the only piece in this collection I would actually recommend. The rest of the stories I could leave or take. I found most of them intriguing in the beginning, but was consistently let down



in the end.

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