



Generation Loss

Elizabeth Hand

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Cass Neary made her name in the 1970s as a photographer embedded in the burgeoning punk movement in New York City. Her pictures of the musicians and hangers on, the infamous, the damned, and the dead, got her into art galleries and a book deal. But thirty years later she is adrift, on her way down, and almost out. Then an old acquaintance sends her on a mercy gig to interview a famously reclusive photographer who lives on an island in Maine. When she arrives Downeast, Cass stumbles across a decades-old mystery that is still claiming victims, and into one final shot at redemption.

Elizabeth Hand grew up in New York State. In 1975 she moved to Washington, DC, to study playwriting at Catholic University. After seeing Patti Smith perform, Hand flunked out and became involved in the DC and New York City nascent punk scenes. From 1979 to 1986 she worked at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum; she returned to university to study cultural anthropology, and received her BA in 1985. The author of seven previous novels and the recipient of a Maine Arts Commission and an NEA Fellowship, she is a regular contributor to The Washington Post Book World. Hand lives with her family on the Maine coast.

Generation Loss Details

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From Reader Review Generation Loss for online ebook

Randy says

Brilliant book. As soon as I finished it, I had to start in on the next Cass Neary novel. For popular fiction, this is what I call a real work of art.

Fully realized characters, no-frills through-the-camera-lens descriptions so real that they put you inside the scenes, an organic plot and a setting that reflects the inner bleakness of protagonist Cass Neary--all these elements come together to make even the most jaded reader's heart race with excitement at discovering that a book can still be such an entertaining and rewarding experience.

GENERATION LOSS played a movie in my head. I saw the whole thing--which has to be by design because it is so in keeping with the Eye See You undercurrent theme of the story. Absolutely brilliant.

I am in awe. Thank you, Liz Hand.

Charlie Anders says

An aging punk-rock photographer travels to Maine, aka Vacationland, to visit a brilliant reclusive artist who hasn't spoken in decades -- and discovers a world of weirdness and horror. The meditation on seeing, and how the observer changes what is seen, is brilliant, and so is the the extended metaphor for photography as a way of turning light and time into images. Cass Neary is a brilliantly unpredictable fuckup, great protagonist.

Justin says

Wow. This book was less than sub par. So cliché and poorly written. I'm astonished by all the five star ratings. Clearly those people have very low expectations for mystery novels. So many eye roll worthy moments that were unbearably forced. Horrible book club choice (not made by me).

Nigel says

Great to encounter a writer at the absolute top of their game and in their groove. Elizabeth Hand feckin rips it up with her wounded, damaged ex-punk photographer anti-heroine who can see the damage in others but who still has a heart, even if she doesn't believe in it. Hired after decades in failure and obscurity to interview a reclusive photographer who lives on an island off the coast of Maine, she finds a damaged place full of damaged people and is soon drawn towards a web of old crimes and new: missing people, bloated bodies washed up with the tide.

The writing here is absolutely top of the line, the voice, the characters, the setting, the sinister development of the plot as its outlines become visible. Bleak and brutal and brilliant.

else fine says

Generation Loss is impossible to put down, in the same way that it's impossible to refrain from poking a beached dead seal with a stick: repellent but compelling. Hand combines a bunch of unlikely elements - an aging meth head, a famous photographer, a serial killer, an artists' commune, a sullen teenager, and the lonely, tangled wilds of the Maine coast - into a lean and perfect tale about endurance and redemption. A beautiful and unsettling book.

Anthony says

Had I read Elizabeth Hand's work before, I might have been very surprised at this book. When I met Elizabeth this past summer and expressed my praise for such a wonderful book, she expressed some doubt if I would like her other work as it was more standard fantasy. It was only later in a seminar about the experience of writing the book that I got a deeper glimpse into her reasoning: She hated writing this book.

I can see why. "Generation Loss" is as disturbingly beautiful as the photography the protagonist describes-- think Robert Mapplethorpe meets Man Ray-- and unabashedly self-effacing. It is quite obvious that the protagonist is based on the author herself (although, thankfully, not all of the events described therein). This kind of self-effacement can easily turn tedious, but Elizabeth never lets it sink into mere self-indulgent confession. Her shared experiences with her protagonist are merely a springboard for a great story with characters one finds compellingly human, in both positive and negative ways. "Warts and all" as they say.

Make no mistake, though, this is not standard fare fantasy, nor urban fantasy. Like all wonderful books it is hard to pin down, but I found it an intense psychological thriller with just-on-the-edge-of-surrealism twists very reminiscent of *Night Gallery* or *The Twilight Zone* at their very best, with some hard-edged cynicism to keep it all from straying from frighteningly believable.

I still haven't read any of her other works. Ms. Hand said in her talk that she wanted so many times to reach for her standard fantasy tropes to move the story along, but resisted. As a result we are given a rarity-- that wonderful thing that comes from an artist willing to stretch herself beyond her comfort zone and stay there until the job is done.

Daniel says

A short take:

I really liked Hand's beautiful prose. The story starts out tragic, gets weird, and then goes into some wicked places. Hand hits the right balance in her mix of psychoses and the artistic impulse. This book will stick with me for a long time.

More thoughts:

I was looking for a good horror read from a female writer (since it was very easy to locate and pile on work by male writers), and I found "Generation Loss" on a list of works recommended by Ann VanderMeer. I'm glad that I went with the rec, because this book is awesome.

I mention my take on Hand's prose above, and I repeat: the writing is gorgeous. I read a few passages aloud to my wife one night, and the language just flowed. Hell, I bet this reads really well aloud--something that other books cannot claim. Hand also creates an interesting and magnetic character in Cass, whose tendency towards sabotage demands viewing. It's tough to write a wounded character who doesn't come across as whiny or overly narcissistic, and Hand avoids both pitfalls with economy and grace.

Speaking of economy--this book is less than 300 pages long, and yet it filled me up with spooky atmosphere, gorgeous images and a taste of the crazies. I really enjoyed living with this book.

Ellen says

I first started reading Elizabeth Hand's books in the mid 90's. I've always had a hard time exactly describing my response to her books. Her early works (the books I read in the mid 90's) were EXTREMELY dark post-apocalyptic science fiction. Beautifully written - I used to say that if other books were like cotton, her books were velvet. Maybe a better comparison is water and blood. Generation Loss is different. It's more or less a mystery, set in modern day, and not science fiction. I suspect, from the little I know about Elizabeth Hand, that it's semi autobiographical, or, probably more precisely, that the main character is based a little bit on Elizabeth herself.

The book is really about the dark side of art, how some artists see beauty in the grotesque, whether they want to or not. Elizabeth Hand is a writer and Cass, the main character, is a photographer, but I suspect that the obsession and compulsion to capture the macabre is quite similar.

I probably would have enjoyed the book even more if I knew anything about the world of photography, but just knowing what I know about art was enough.

knig says

Finally. Eureka. A strong female lead, a middle aged single woman whose existenz isn't defined with the platitudes of a man hunt. OK, so she's a junkie and an alcoholic – her main love in life is Jack Daniels and Corona.

Actually, that IS her life, now: questing from hit to hit, focused on the singularity of a microscopic raison d'être in order to avert, no subvert, a kaleidoscope of opportunity costs, each one destined to crystallise an actuality of failed possibility.

Cass Neary is strummed of despair, unpotentialised, raw: a woman obsessed with death, a mind negotiating subreality as a genre, an artiste photographer who dagguerotypes instead of digitalises: 220/120 on the 1970s NYC Lower pulse: so, a supernova in the making.

This woman rocks.

Actually, I've seen this early woman before, this woman who vaguely sonorifies her autobiography: Chris Kraus and Jane de Lynn might have been her drinking buddies in CBGS. But the latter two:, well, when the music stops and the chairs are taken, what do they do? The first starts obsessing over a man. The second, over a woman. But Cass Neary? Jack Daniels and a phot-shoot. Please. Hell, yeah.

NEways. Off to Maine she goes, to interview a reclusive octogenarian photographer. Shit happens. I want to focus on the man here. Although Cass is equal opportunities when it comes to the whole birds and bees things: any representative of the homo sapiens race will do.

But the man. There IS a man, but nothing happens. My point being that this is what we have come to in modern literature: to signify existential love, it is pre-requisite to NOT fuck. Screwing is only allowed when you're not invested. Any real feelings have to be recontextualised through abstinence. Sad, but not surprising. In a zeitgeist where 'something for the weekend, sir?' has morphed into a daily ritual of 'hows your father', how does one express emoticons? Through self denial, of course. See the sense?

Oh, Cass.

I'm still on a high from this book: 24 hours after finishing, and I still can't start a new book.

Nilchance says

[As a commentary on cults of personality destroying themselves and others, it's unparalleled. As a reflection of how small towns affect the younger generation, it's insightf

Karen says

A kind of redemption story, in the bleakest possible terms. Cass Neary (cf. Cassandra of Greek myth) is a washed-up ex-punk photographer who lives from bottle to bottle, stocking boxes in the back room of the Strand. She gets a call to go to a remote island in Maine, to interview a mysterious icon of photography, Aphrodite Kamestos, who's holed up there since the 1960s. Cass makes her self-destructive, stumbling way through the frozen wasteland of the "real" Maine, where the economy has tanked and people regularly wash up on the beaches, drowned and frozen. She gets no warm welcome from anyone she meets, and gradually starts to recognize a sinister pattern of missing people that none of the locals seem to see.

This is a book about seeing and witnessing, as well as about making decisions and acting. Palimpsests recur over and over, often in sinister terms: a horrible photograph scratched to reveal something else beneath, clouds spinning in the sky like an iris opening, the suggestion that the world we see is just a thin veil over something else that only reveals itself to the artist or the visionary. It's a tense, building read with a dramatic, satisfying conclusion. Cass is a complicated antihero, someone who does horrible things but who had my attention and sympathy regardless--and in the end, she's the only person who can do what needs to be done.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I get all the Elizabeths with the four-letter last names confused, and I thought I had tried Elizabeth Hand already. Nope. (It was probably Elizabeth Bear but there is also an Elizabeth Moon.) When Jeff VanderMeer gave a glowing review to the most recent Cass Neary book, I felt I missed something and got the first book in the series immediately.

Fantastic. Darker and grittier than I expected, loved Cass, loved the hint at potential supernatural elements that may just be the side effect of a drug-addled mind (or maybe not), love the setting of bleakest remotest island Maine in the winter, love the art elements. I got up early and went late to work so that I could finish it.

I haven't needed to read a book straight through like that for a long time. Only sleep got in the way.

This book was discussed on Episode 062 of the Reading Envy Podcast.

Kitty says

Like Deliverance, if it took place at a defunct artist colony in Maine. Creepiness abounds, and even the protagonist in this novel made me a little uneasy-- possibly because one wrong turn in life, and that could have been me. I kept having the urge to put this down, but I really wanted to see what it all was going to amount to, and I have to say, but about page 200 it doesn't disappoint. Dark and a bit unnerving, but worth reading. Just not, perhaps, lighthearted beach reading.

Karl says

In the book "Generation Loss" by Elizabeth Hand we enter the life of Cass "Scary" Neary, a self-destructive photographer. who captures on film the Punk scene of the '70's , and became famous for her efforts, as she lived the punk life and not just capture it on film.

We join her as she has become a much older uninspired investigator as Cass is now a sneering, pill-popping junkie. This may be due to Cass also being the victim of a violent rape that ended her love affair with the punk scene.

In an effort to try and re-inspire her, she is given the opportunity to travel from New York to Maine (Hand's home base), in the dead of winter, so she can interview the man who was her inspiration to become a photographer.

This is a violent and unsympathetic voyage containing unsavory characters and a really damaged main character, yet the book is brilliant, touching and cruel with what may be a slant toward the supernatural.

Elizabeth Hand avoids the usual formulas of mystery and much of the other crime stories currently available.

Highly recommended.

Small Beer Press is based in Massachusetts and would be considered a micro-publishing concern.

Ludmilla says

Kitabın güzel bir arkaplanı var ve ana hikayeye girişi 150 sayfadan sonra olmasına rağmen kendini okutuyor. Ama (evet tabii ki ama var) bence korku filmleri tadına bürünen hikaye ve klişe son kitabın çok iyi olmasına engel oluyor. Karakterin 48 yaşında olduğuna bir türlü inandıramaması da cabası. Hand, girişi için harcadığı eforun yarısını hikayenin gidişatı için harcasaymış keke. O zaman tadından yenmez mi? Bu haliyle biraz sönük. 3/5
