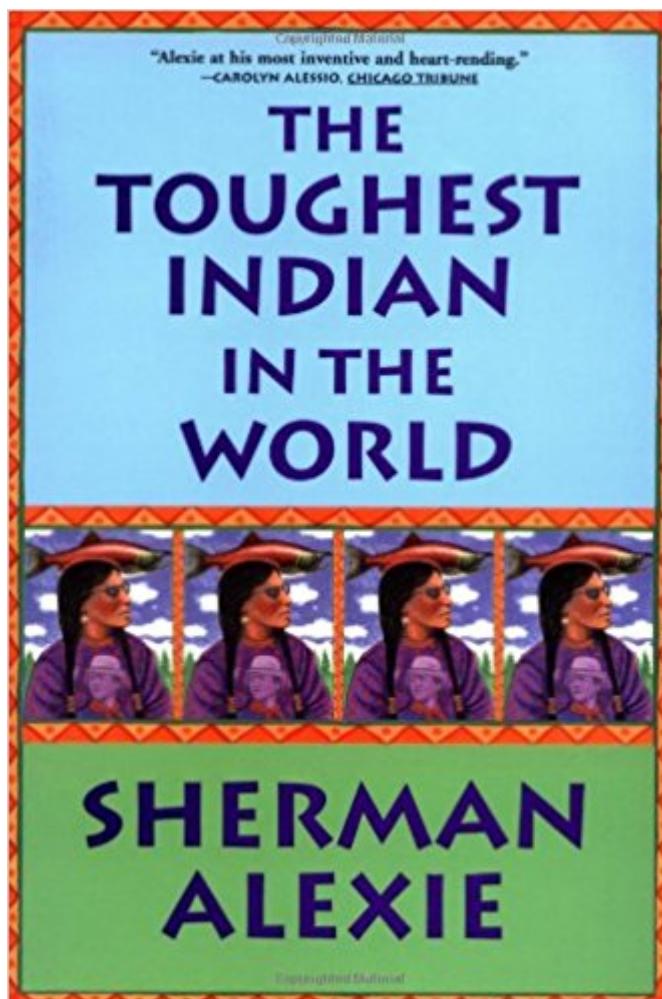


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The Toughest Indian In The World



Synopsis

A beloved American writer whose books are championed by critics and readers alike, Sherman Alexie has been hailed by Time as "one of the better new novelists, Indian or otherwise." Now his acclaimed new collection, *The Toughest Indian in the World*, which received universal praise in hardcover, is available in paperback. In these stories, we meet the kind of American Indians we rarely see in literature -- the kind who pay their bills, hold down jobs, fall in and out of love. A Spokane Indian journalist transplanted from the reservation to the city picks up a hitchhiker, a Lummi boxer looking to take on the toughest Indian in the world. A Spokane son waits for his diabetic father to come home from the hospital, tossing out the Hershey Kisses the father has hidden all over the house. An estranged interracial couple, separated in the midst of a traffic accident, rediscover their love for each other. A white drifter holds up an International House of Pancakes, demanding a dollar per customer and someone to love, and emerges with \$42 and an overweight Indian he dubs Salmon Boy. Sherman Alexie's voice is one of remarkable passion, and these stories are love stories -- between parents and children, white people and Indians, movie stars and ordinary people. Witty, tender, and fierce, *The Toughest Indian in the World* is a virtuoso performance by one of the country's finest writers.

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Customer Reviews

Call Sherman Alexie any number of things--novelist, poet, filmmaker, thorn in the side of white liberalism--just don't call him "universal." Aside from his well-documented distaste for the word, its

fuzziness misses the point. *The Toughest Indian in the World*, Alexie's second collection, succeeds as brilliantly as it does because of its particularity. These aren't stories about the Indian Condition; they're stories about Indians--urban and reservation, street fighters and yuppies, husbands and wives. "She understood that white people were eccentric and complicated and she only wanted to be understood as eccentric and complicated as well," thinks the Coeur d'Alene narrator of "Assimilation," who's married (unhappily) to a white man. And yet the issue of race has taken up permanent residence inside her house: the marriage survives, but it's love that's the most thorough assimilation of all. Like *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, much of *The Toughest Indian in the World* combines deft psychological realism with the kind of narrative logic more commonly found in dreams. In "South by Southwest," a white drifter finds love on a "nonviolent killing spree" with an overweight Indian he calls Salmon Boy; in "Dear John Wayne," the cowboy actor falls in love with a young Spokane woman and proves himself a charmingly feminist hero. ("Oh, sons, you're just engaging in some harmless gender play," he tells his boys when he finds them trying on lipstick.) But for every bear hibernating on top of the Catholic church, there's also a GAP-wearing, Toyota-driving urban Indian on a quest for his roots. In both realist and surrealist modes, Alexie writes incantatory prose--as well as the kind of dialogue that makes even secondary characters leap into sudden focus: "'What?' asked Wonder Horse, as simple a question as could possibly be tendered, though he made it sound as if he'd asked *Where's the tumor?*" Alexie is sometimes guilty of painting his white characters with too broad a brush. (Is any anthropologist truly as obtuse as the one in "Dear John Wayne"? Could any reader really want Mary Lynn, the narrator of "Assimilation," to stay with her boorish white husband?) Yet his kind of firebrand politics still has the power to shock. A harrowing fable about whites kidnapping Indians for the medical properties of their blood, "The Sin Eaters" could be dismissed as paranoid if it weren't so hauntingly written: On that morning, the sun rose and bloomed like blood in a glass syringe. The entire Spokane Indian Reservation and all of its people and places were clean and scrubbed. The Spokane River rose up from its bed like a man who had been healed and joyously wept all the way down to its confluence with the Columbia River. There was water everywhere: a thousand streams interrupted by makeshift waterfalls; small ponds hidden beneath a mask of thick fronds and anonymous blossoms; blankets of dew draped over the shoulders of isolated knolls. An entire civilization of insects lived in the mud puddle formed by one truck tire and a recent rain storm. The blades of grass, the narrow pine needles, and the stalks of roadside wheat were as sharp and bright as surgical tools. It's a hard story to read, and that's only right. *The Toughest Indian in the World* offers so many pleasures, who could deny it the power to disturb us as well? Funny, dreamlike, heartbreakng, angry--these are

stories that could have been written by no one but Sherman Alexie. --Mary Park --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A prolific novelist, poet and screenplay writer, Alexie (*Indian Killer*; *Reservation Blues*) has been hailed as one of the best young writers of his generation. This dexterous second collection of stories contains what may be one of the best short fiction pieces of the year. "The Toughest Indian in the World" follows a young Spokane Indian who works at an all-white newspaper in Seattle and, in a forlorn attempt to reconnect with his roots, has his first homosexual experience with a tough Lummi fighter. It's a moving story that skillfully employs symbolism and flashbacks to construct an ending that is both uplifting and sorrowful. Many of the eight other stories in this collection also deal with urban Indians who are straddling two worlds: an intimate but indigent life on the reservation and an affluent but strange and sometimes hostile white middle-class existence. Their solutions to this double bind are rarely ordinary. "Assimilation" tells of a Coeur d'Alene woman who deliberately cheats on her white husband, only to rediscover her affection for him in the middle of a traffic jam. "Class" features a Spokane who sometimes tells white women he's Aztec, because "there were aphrodisiacal benefits from claiming to be descended from ritual cannibals." In "South by Southwest" a white man and a fat Indian nicknamed Salmon Boy, who declares he's not homosexual but does believe in love, set off on a nonviolent killing spree. Two tales, "Saint Junior" and "A Good Man," deal with marriage and death on the rez. The anger in these narratives is leavened by Alexie's acerbic wit and his obvious belief in the redemptive power of love. One exception, however, is "The Sin Eaters," an apocalyptic tale in which America's Indians are rounded up into massive underground prisons where soldiers force them to breed and give up their blood. Humorous, disturbing, formally inventive and heartwarming, Alexie's stories continually surprise, revealing him once again as a master of his craft. Agent, Nancy Cahoon, N. Stauffer Assoc. (May) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I love this book. It is written simply yet contains depth. It is written with the raw honesty of a young man whose life is a struggle, but he does not let that deter him. His Native reality is brutally factual. He delivers the information in a way that is not a criticism of non-Indians. I have read other books by Sherman Alexie and this is my favorite.

I have a love/ hate relationship with Alexie's books. This one, I really liked. It was a great story and I

felt I got to know the characters. Spoiler alert: one of them could be Alexie.

This is a funny, touching thought provoking semi-true story about a young man straddling 2 worlds and beginning to feel like he doesn't fit in either. His innate intelligence will help him get far but each step forward is away from his family. But his grandma seems to understand and be in his corner.

Semi-autobiographical (realistic), poignant, sad, and hilarious at the same time - an excellent story about a young American Indian and his struggles to pull himself out of the cycle of poverty, depression, and alcoholism of life on the reservation. Realistic in it's tough portrayal of racism and cultural bigotry.

I read this book because so many of my students read it as kids and really enjoyed it. The book is unflinching in its depiction of social reality--alcoholism and violence on the reservation and racism in wealthier, white towns surrounding that reservation while at the same time avoiding easy stereotypes. The characters--white and Native American, male and female--are all three-dimensional and believable, especially the teenage narrator. More than that, the novel is fun to read. This sounds odd, given the nature of the subjects covered, but Alexie's wit and insight are riveting. I read it through in one night and look forward to reading it again in a few months.

Even if it is a crappy book (which it isn't), I always like how Sherman Alexie sees the world. I like it because it is a story of overcoming adversity plus it is funny. I also applaud Mr. Alexie's fairness in portraying the white character- the positive and the negative. I must admit that I have my own biases (as a non-white), but like the character in the story, my personal growth was supported and encouraged by some white people too. It is because of this support that one changes.

The book is humorous with an undercurrent of sadness. Junior, a bright Native American with some physical problems, grew up and lives on a reservation but decides to go to a public high school. There he tries to fit in with the white teenagers and teachers. His perceptions of white people and Native Americans are insightful and often funny. I enjoyed reading this book and recommend it.

I did not get to read this book when I was in high school, and I regret it because it's great. As a college English major I felt like this is the kind of book that you can't really label in terms of age group. On one hand, the themes are timeless, and I think everyone should be able to enjoy or relate

in some way regardless of age group. On another hand, the comics are a little immature. The writing style is very simplistic. The jokes are crude. The descriptions of the teenagers are...accurate compared to most. So there's no good age to give this to your kid. I guess it is up to the parent read it as an adult and then determine whether your child is mature enough to handle it. Personally, I thought the jokes were done well and tastefully. Bonus tip: there's nothing in this book that your kids haven't already heard at school.

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