



## Like You'd Understand, Anyway (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Jim Shepard

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Following his widely acclaimed *Project X* and *Love and Hydrogen*—“Here is the effect of these two books,” wrote the *Chicago Tribune*: “A reader finishes them buzzing with awe”—Jim Shepard now gives us his first entirely new collection in more than a decade.

*Like You'd Understand, Anyway* reaches from Chernobyl to Bridgeport, with a host of narrators only Shepard could bring to pitch-perfect life. Among them: a middle-aged Aeschylus taking his place at Marathon, still vying for parental approval. A maddeningly indefatigable Victorian explorer hauling his expedition, whaleboat and all, through the Great Australian Desert in midsummer. The first woman in space and her cosmonaut lover, caught in the star-crossed orbits of their joint mission. Two Texas high school football players at the top of their food chain, soliciting their fathers' attention by leveling everything before them on the field. And the rational and compassionate chief executioner of Paris, whose occupation, during the height of the Terror, eats away at all he holds dear.

Brimming with irony, compassion, and withering humor, these eleven stories are at once eerily pertinent and dazzlingly exotic, and they showcase the work of a protean, prodigiously gifted writer at the height of his form. Reading Jim Shepard, according to Michael Chabon, “is like encountering our national literature in microcosm.”

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Following the novel *Project X* and *Love and Hydrogen: New and Selected Stories*, Shepard's new collection takes in landscapes as diverse as 1986 Chernobyl in "The Zero Meter Diving Team," to 1840s down under in "The First South Central Australian Expedition." It's clear that Shepard has done his research in these 11 first-person tales—be it on Alaskan tidal waves for a story about a man contemplating a vasectomy while reliving a childhood tragedy in "Pleasure Boating in Lituya Bay" or Sherpas and the Chang Tang tundra in "Ancestral Legacies", and his precision gives the poignant longing and human emotion of the stories room to resonate. Save for "Eros 7," about a lovelorn Soviet Cosmonaut set during the US/Russian space race, all are the stories are told by men, often with few female characters. At the core, each is essentially an exploration of familial relationships between men—be it the ill-fated trio of brothers working at the nuclear reactor or the unhappy adolescent camper calling home to find out about his mentally disturbed younger brother in "Courtesy for Beginners." Shepard's far-flung explorations get very close to the male heart.

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Recently nominated for the National Book Award, Jim Shepard's latest collection of short stories struck a chord with reviewers, who couldn't agree on which stories were the best. Though each story is related through first-person testimony, Shepard gives each narrator his or her own voice with its own subtle nuances, and he masterfully sets the characters' internal conflicts at odds with their external predicaments. The characters are convincing despite the incredible dilemmas they face, and the stories themselves are at once deadly serious and darkly humorous. Shepard's tales may be bleak: some reviewers found the unrelenting hopelessness a bit wearying and urged readers to savor them one at a time. Yet Shepard's compassion and sympathy shine through in what reviewers claim is his best work yet.

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### Review

"Forged from the world with a sharp eye and a careful ear, serving no agenda but literature's primary and oft-forgotten one: the delight of the reader." —*The New York Times Book Review* "Gutsy, brilliantly imagined, strongly made, fresh and propulsive." —*Chicago Tribune* "With a near spooky sense of empathy and a wit that finds its mark like lightning, the stories in Jim Shepard's *Like You'd Understand, Anyway* transport readers light-years beyond what they think they know of the world." —*Vanity Fair* "Exquisite, multifaceted tales." —*The New Yorker* "A macro book with a micro eye. These wildly diverse stories share a fascination with the inevitable cost of familial obligation and the inescapable fallout from disaster, both natural and human-made." —*Los Angeles Times Book Review* "Cannily crafted. . . . The stories couldn't be funnier-or deadlier-in this mad-smart, wildly inventive set." —*Elle* "Jim Shepard is really a terrific writer. And it's not just the precision of the sentences. . . . It is the way he captures people throughout time with such an exact piercing, as though he's mapped out every corresponding nerve that can make us go weak at the knees." —*Providence Journal* "An astounding set of stories . . . so dangerously brilliant, they're radioactive." —*O Magazine*

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