

BOOK REVIEW

FRAGILE THINGS

CHARMING AND CREEPY

ISHRAT JAHAN

Fragile Things is not a conventional short story collection. It is quite possibly an odd and approximate sketch of what the inside of Neil Gaiman's head looks like.

Stories, as Gaiman says in the introduction, are fragile things made up of 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks and yet they outlast the people and lands that create them. Fragile Things is a collection of dreams: some vivid some vague. Gaiman takes inspiration from everything: from Narnia and Sherlock Holmes to wedding invitations he receives in the mail. There is nothing consistent about Gaiman's assortment of short stories - the book contains stories that look like potential novels, followed by 100-word stories that are more relevant as writing exercises and interspersed with poems. The original title that Gaiman wanted to give this book was: These People Ought to Know Who We Are and Tell That We Were Here, however real life came along.

This book lives up to Gaiman's

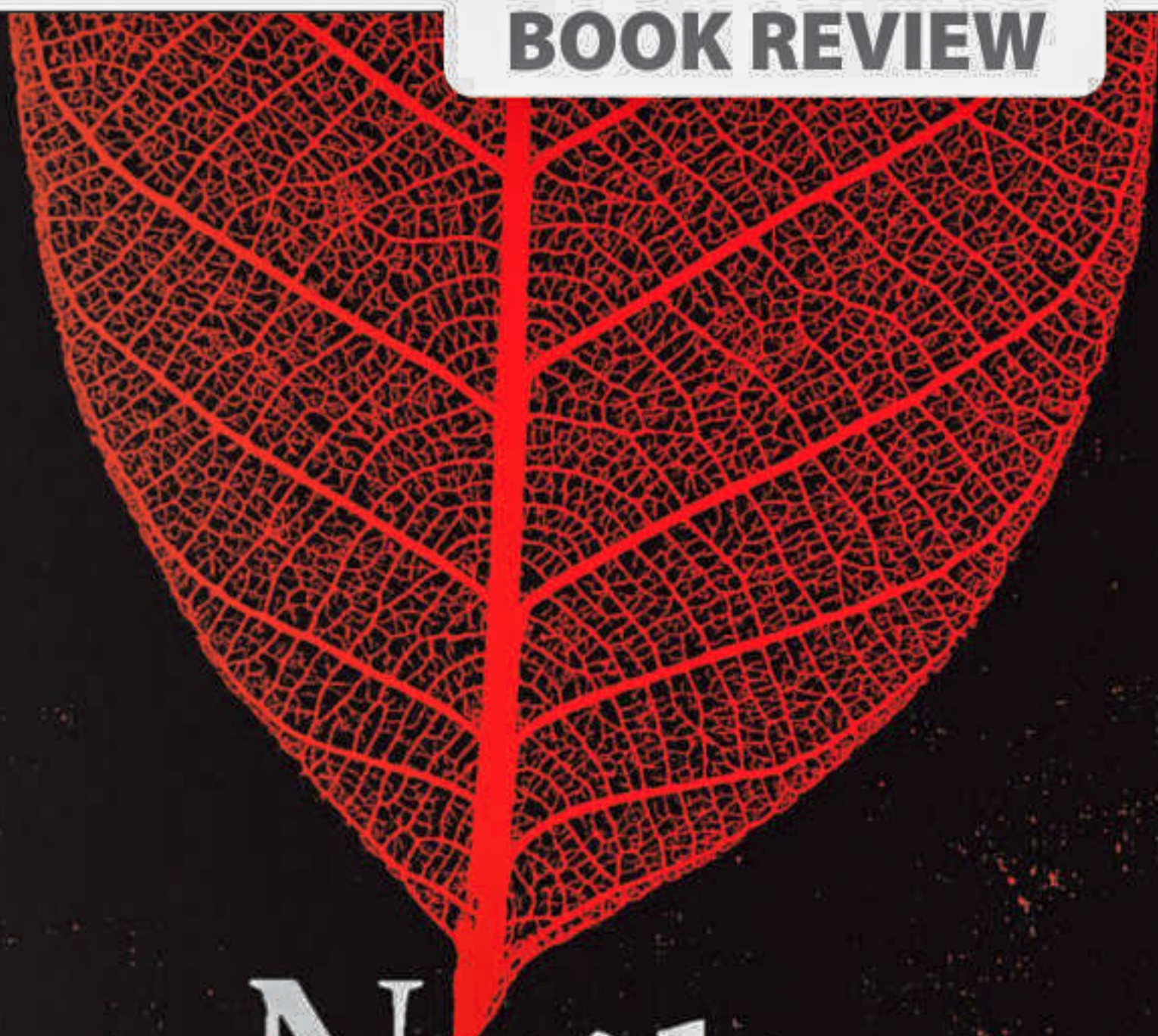
reputation as an inveterate storyteller. Every story has a narrator, in Gaiman's words—dodgy and unreliable narrators: they are fantasy writers, drifters posing as anthropologists or a month of the year. Sometimes these storytellers hand over their narrative to another character. "Feeders and Eaters" that begins with its protagonist stranded in the wrong part of town, slips into the story of an old acquaintance he meets at a squalid cafe, and the hungry woman (or something that appears as a woman) his acquaintance keeps at home. The ones that I personally, would re-read time again would be the following five: *The Problem with Susan*, Gaiman's heart-warming spin on Susan's story years after Narnia becomes nothing more than faded memories. *Harlequin Valentine*, a short story based on the Harlequinade pantomime, who gives his heart only to have it eaten. *Other People*, which seemed to be Gaiman's take on after-life. *Instructions*, a poem about how to navigate inside a magical land and come back with your dreams intact. And most importantly, *A Study In Emerald*, where the worlds

of H.P Lovecraft and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle collide in another case for the Baker Street detective.

What becomes a more interesting read (and this is a case for all of Gaiman's books) is the introduction. Gaiman writes the most intriguing introductions, punctuated with anecdotes about his travels and stories about his stories. Sometimes, little stories that never fit anywhere else are stitched inside the seams of the introduction. This collection is no exception.

While many of these stories are Gaiman's best works, this collection carries the sense of being bounded together without thought, mostly because it was a simple round-up of anthologised stories. While that makes the book raggedly charming, the unevenness and stories that pose as filler content can dampen the experience for the readers.

Ishrat Jahan writes things and gets mistaken for a twelve-year-old, when she isn't procrasti-reading, she tries to salvage her undergrad degree. Mail her at ishrat.jahan1620@gmail.com



Neil
Gaiman
Fragile Things
Short Fictions & Wonders

RANTAGES DEBUTS THEIR SHOW

RAYAAN IBTESHAM CHOWDHURY

Rantages started when Bangladesh didn't have too many humour sites. Started in 2010, TehGoatlord's website has had a stop-start journey, rising in popularity and then going into indefinite hiatuses. What started with just articles has expanded in recent years to include a wide variety of original content. They've been a constant presence for the past two or so years and "The Rantages Show" is the newest of their offerings.

"The Rantages Show" debuted on BongoBD, where the first episode is currently available. The episode is 15 minutes long and features a number of comedy skits. The content itself is slightly different from everything else we've seen on Rantages so far. While the material Rantages has mostly been associated with is crude, not-so-politically correct humour over the years, "The Rantages Show" is a lot more subtle. Don't get me wrong, the jokes are still there but they are scripted very carefully so I didn't have a problem watching it with my speakers blaring.

The segments are varied and focus on a number of subjects. The first section is a parody on the dating service Tinder, where a local *ghotok* helps a groom-to-be find a bride through "Tender Ghotok Services". Be warned though, the conclusion isn't something you will be expecting.

The other skits are witty too, taking clichéd Bangladeshi topics like *bhooter bari*, *genjam* etc. and taking a new, unexpected



angle. The script is cheeky, as expected. The punchlines are less 'in your face' and more 'surprise awaits,' so you will have to keep your ears on alert.

The actors are mostly Rantages team members so the acting isn't worth writing home about. You can tell that they haven't acted before. But it's a comedy show, so not a big deal. The camera and post-production work is top notch though.

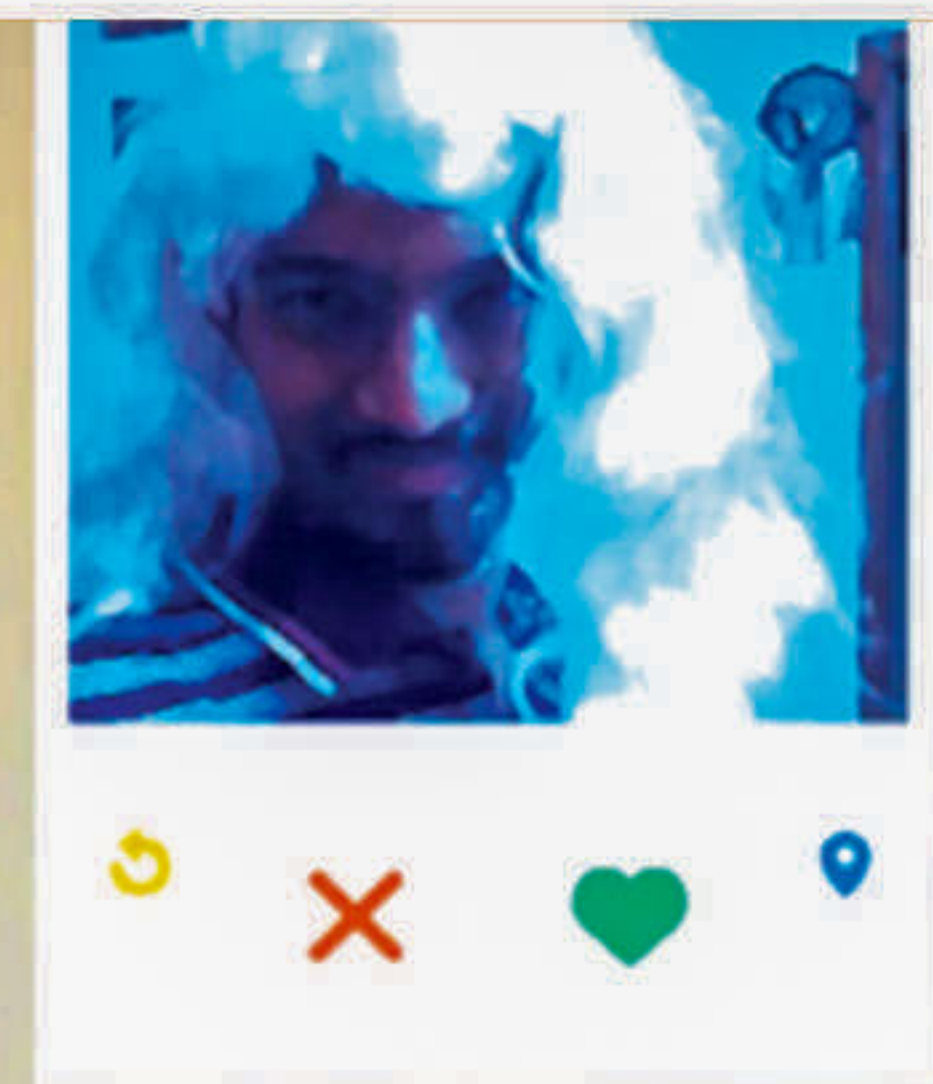
Fahad Zaman, from Dhaka Electronica Scene, has been heavily involved with the editing.

The show is available in 360p and 720p on BongoBD.com for free. The streaming is seamless but you might or might not face a few problems if you decide to watch in on your phone. It's also a step in a new direction for BongoBD, as they've mostly been associated with giving us streams of

old TV shows.

If you're looking for a few laughs, the first episode of "The Rantages Show" will not disappoint. It's a solid debut.

Rayaan Ibtesham Chowdhury is a 19 year-old with pent-up years of teenage angst who loves to complain about most things while listening to blues guitar tracks. Reach him at rayaansmail@gmail.com



WEB SHOW
REVIEW