



Steel: And Other Stories

By Richard Matheson

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Richard Matheson's classic short story is now the basis for *Real Steel*, a gritty, white-knuckle film starring Hugh Jackman. But "Steel," which was previously filmed as a powerful episode of the original *Twilight Zone* television series, is just one of over a dozen unforgettable tales in this outstanding collection, which includes two new stories that have never appeared in any previous Matheson collection. Also featured is a bizarre satirical fantasy, "The Splendid Source," that was turned into an episode of *The Family Guy*.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Richard Matheson:

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--Stephen King

"His stories not only entertain but touch the mind and heart."

--Dean Koontz

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About the Author

Richard Matheson was *The New York Times* bestselling author of *I Am Legend*, *Hell House*, *Somewhere in Time*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *A Stir of Echoes*, *The Beardless Warriors*, *The Path*, *Seven Steps to Midnight*, *Now You See It...*, and *What Dreams May Come*, among others. He was named a Grand Master of Horror by the World Horror Convention, and received the Bram Stoker Award for Lifetime Achievement. He has also won the Edgar, the Spur, and the Writer's Guild awards. In 2010, he was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame. In addition to his novels Matheson wrote several screenplays for movies and TV, including "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet," based on his short story, along with several other *Twilight Zone* episodes. He was born in New Jersey and raised in Brooklyn, and fought in the infantry in World War II. He earned his bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri. Matheson died in June, 2013, at the age of eighty-seven.

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STEEL

The two men came out of the station rolling a covered object. They rolled it along the platform until they reached the middle of the train, then grunted as they lifted it up the steps, the sweat running down their bodies. One of its wheels fell off and bounced down the metal steps and a man coming up behind them picked it up and handed it to the man who was wearing a rumpled brown suit.

"Thanks," said the man in the brown suit and he put the wheel in his side coat pocket.

Inside the car, the men pushed the covered object down the aisle. With one of its wheels off, it was lopsided and the man in the brown suit—his name was Kelly—had to keep his shoulder braced against it to keep it from toppling over. He breathed heavily and licked away tiny balls of sweat that kept forming over his upper lip.

When they reached the middle of the car, the man in the wrinkled blue suit pushed forward one of the seat backs so there were four seats, two facing two. Then the two men pushed the covered object between the

seats and Kelly reached through a slit in the covering and felt around until he found the right button.

The covered object sat down heavily on a seat by the window.

“Oh, God, listen to ’m squeak,” said Kelly.

The other man, Pole, shrugged and sat down with a sigh.

“What d’ya expect?” he asked.

Kelly was pulling off his suit coat. He dropped it down on the opposite seat and sat down beside the covered object.

“Well, we’ll get ’im some o’ that stuff soon’s we’re paid off,” he said, worriedly.

“If we can find some,” said Pole who was almost as thin as one. He sat slumped back against the hot seat watching Kelly mop at his sweaty cheeks.

“Why shouldn’t we?” asked Kelly, pushing the damp handkerchief down under his shirt collar.

“Because they don’t make it no more,” Pole said with the false patience of a man who has had to say the same thing too many times.

“Well, that’s crazy,” said Kelly. He pulled off his hat and patted at the bald spot in the center of his rust-colored hair. “There’s still plenty B-twos in the business.”

“Not many,” said Pole, bracing one foot upon the covered object.

“*Don’t*,” said Kelly.

Pole let his foot drop heavily and a curse fell slowly from his lips, Kelly ran the handkerchief around the lining of his hat. He started to put the hat on again, then changed his mind and dropped it on top of his coat.

“Christ, it’s hot,” he said.

“It’ll get hotter,” said Pole.

Across the aisle a man put his suitcase up on the rack, took off his suit coat and sat down, puffing. Kelly looked at him, then turned back.

“Ya think it’ll be hotter in Maynard, huh?” he asked.

Pole nodded. Kelly swallowed dryly.

“Wish we could have another o’ them beers,” he said.

Pole stared out the window at the heat waves rising from the concrete platform.

“I had three beers,” said Kelly, “and I’m just as thirsty as I was when I started.”

“Yeah,” said Pole.

“Might as well’ve not had a beer since Philly,” said Kelly.

Pole said, “Yeah.”

Kelly sat there staring at Pole a moment. Pole had dark hair and white skin and his hands were the hands of a man who should be bigger than Pole was. But the hands were as clever as they were big. Pole’s one o’ the best, Kelly thought, one o’ the best.

“Ya think he’ll be all right?” he asked.

Pole grunted and smiled for an instant without being amused.

“If he don’t get hit,” he said.

“No, no, I mean it,” said Kelly.

Pole’s dark, lifeless eyes left the station and shifted over to Kelly.

“So do I,” he said.

“Come *on*,” Kelly said.

“Steel,” said Pole, “ya know just as well as me. He’s shot t’hell.”

“That ain’t true,” said Kelly, shifting uncomfortably. “All he needs is a little work. A little overhaul ’n’ he’ll be good as new.”

“Yeah, a little three-four grand overhaul,” Pole said, “with parts they don’t make no more.” He looked out the window again.

“Oh ... it ain’t as bad as that,” said Kelly. “Jesus, the way you talk you’d think he was ready for scrap.”

“Ain’t he?” Pole asked.

“No,” said Kelly angrily, “he *ain’t*.”

Pole shrugged and his long white fingers rose and fell in his lap.

“Just cause he’s a little old,” said Kelly.

“Old.” Pole grunted. “*Ancient.*”

“Oh...” Kelly took a deep breath of the hot air in the car and blew it out through his broad nose. He looked at the covered object like a father who was angry with his son’s faults but angrier with those who mentioned the faults of his son.

“Plenty o’ fight left in him,” he said.

Pole watched the people walking on the platform. He watched a porter pushing a wagon full of piled suitcases.

“Well ... is he okay?” Kelly asked finally as if he hated to ask.

Pole looked over at him.

“I dunno, Steel,” he said. “He needs work. Ya know that. The trigger spring in his left arm’s been rewired so many damn times it’s almost shot. He’s got no protection on that side. The left side of his face’s all beat in, the eye lens is cracked. The leg cables is worn, they’re pulled slack, the tension’s gone to hell. Christ, even his gyro’s off.”

Pole looked out at the platform again with a disgusted hiss.

“Not to mention the oil paste he ain’t got in ’im,” he said.

“We’ll get ’im some,” Kelly said.

“Yeah, *after* the fight, *after* the fight!” Pole snapped. “What about *before* the fight? He’ll be creakin’ around that ring like a goddamn—*steam shovel*. It’ll be a miracle if he goes two rounds. They’ll prob’ly ride us outta town on a rail.”

Kelly swallowed. “I don’t think it’s that bad,” he said.

“The *hell* it ain’t, said Pole. “It’s worse. Wait’ll that crowd gets a load of ‘Battling’ Maxo from Philadelphia. Oh—*Christ*, they’ll blow a nut. We’ll be lucky if we get our five hundred bucks.”

“Well, the contract’s signed,” said Kelly firmly. “They can’t back out now. I got a copy right in the old pocket.” He leaned over and patted at his coat.

“That contract’s for Battling Maxo,” said Pole. “Not for this—*steam shovel* here.”

“Maxo’s gonna do all right,” said Kelly as if he was trying hard to believe it. “He’s not as bad off as you say.”

“Against a B-seven?” Pole asked.

“It’s just a *starter* B-seven,” said Kelly. “It ain’t got the kinks out yet.”

Pole turned away.

“Battling Maxo,” he said. “One-round Maxo. The battling *steam shovel*.”

“Aw, shut the hell up!” Kelly snapped suddenly, getting redder. “You’re always knockin’ ’im down. Well, he’s been doin’ okay for twelve years now and he’ll keep on doin’ okay. So he needs some oil paste. And he needs a little work. *So what?* With five hundred bucks we can get him all the paste he needs. And a new trigger spring for his arm and—and new leg cables! And everything. *Chris-sake.*”

He fell back against the seat, chest shuddering with breath and rubbed at his cheeks with his wet handkerchief. He looked aside at Maxo. Abruptly, he reached over a hand and patted Maxo’s covered knee clumsily and the steel clanked hollowly under his touch.

“You’re doin’ all right,” said Kelly to his fighter.

* * *

The train was moving across a sun-baked prairie. All the windows were open but the wind that blew in was like blasts from an oven.

Kelly sat reading his paper, his shirt sticking wetly to his broad chest. Pole had taken his coat off too and was staring morosely out the window at the grass-tufted prairie that went as far as he could see. Maxo sat under his covering, his heavy steel frame rocking a little with the motion of the train.

Kelly put down his paper.

“Not even a word,” he said.

“What d’ya expect?” Pole asked. “They don’t cover Maynard.”

“Maxo ain’t just some clunk from Maynard,” said Kelly. “He was big time. Ya’d think they’d”—he shrugged—“remember him.”

“Why? For a coupla prelims in the Garden three years ago?” Pole asked.

“It wasn’t no three years, buddy,” said Kelly.

“It was in 1994,” said Pole, “and now it’s 1997. That’s three years where I come from.”

“It was late ’94,” said Kelly. “Right before Christmas. Don’t ya remember? Just before—Marge and me...”

Kelly didn’t finish. He stared down at the paper as if Marge’s picture were on it—the way she looked the day she left him.

“What’s the difference?” Pole asked. “They don’t remember *them* for Chrissake. With a coupla thousand o’ the damn things floatin’ around? How could they remember ’em? About the only ones who get space are the champeens and the new models.”<...

Users Review

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