

STUDENT LIFE

Ferris's first novel garners critical acclaim



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Joshua Ferris at a book reading promoting his first novel, *Then We Came to the End*.

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The element of comedic happenings within office environments have become a very popular area of focus for the entertainment media as of late, with shows like *The Office* and films like *Office Space* gaining considerable fan bases and critical admiration. It would make sense, then, that a novel would eventually be written that mirrors the humor of the shows and gives readers a glimpse into the life of the antics and adversity that the workers in a seemingly normal office-based company would experience.

Joshua Ferris has done just that with his witty debut novel, *Then We Came to the End*. Ferris writes about an advertising company that consists of an extremely close staff in the midst of downsizing and layoffs. He vividly portrays the hilarious and unthinkable pranks that the friends and workers conduct on one another while also capturing the worry and dread that they face everyday, the feeling that they may be the next one to "walk Spanish down the hall" - a slang phrase for being fired that dates back to the time of pirates and is even featured in a Tom Waits song.

Also incorporated into the story is the workers' love of gossip and their confusion over their workaholic boss, Lynn, who is rumored to have breast cancer but refuses to admit it.

Ferris uses an unusual, basically unprecedented writing style that leaves the reader ignorant of who the storyteller is until the end of the story by using what he calls "the 'we' writing style," or the plural first person.

"Companies tend to refer to themselves in the first-person plural," Ferris said. "It's not just a company's way of showing unity and strength; it's also a matter of making everyone feel as if they're a member of the club. In *Then We Came to the End*, you see just who this 'we' really is - a collection of

messy human beings—stripped of their glossy finish and eternal corporate optimism."

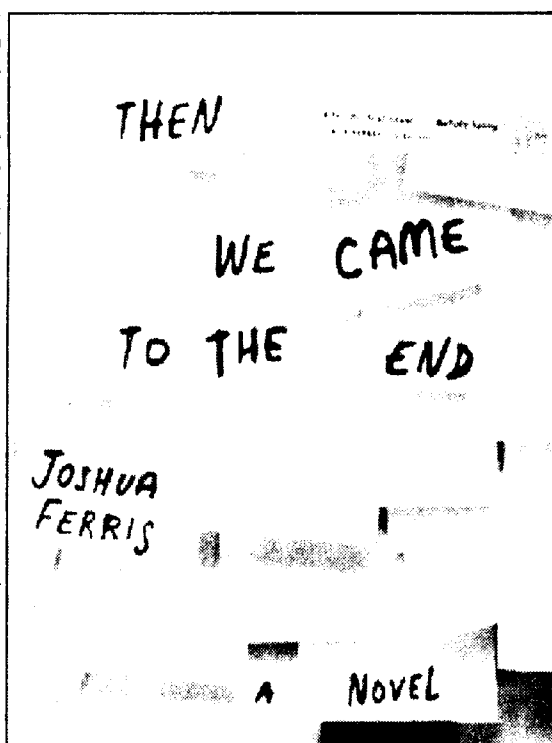
At the conclusion of the story, when the reader is trying to let everything sink in and is probably no longer even considering the enigma of the true narrator, they figure out that it's one of the workers who was working on his first novel, which ends up being the very story itself, and eventually gets it published.

Throughout the first year of its publication, Ferris's novel has garnered him comparisons to two of his literary heroes, Don DeLillo and Joseph Heller. Even Stephen King wrote that *Then We Came to the End* is "Hilarious in a *Catch-22* way." Ferris takes a seemingly normal setting and set of events and turns them into laughter and, at times, serious contemplation and makes it almost too easy

for the reader to empathize with any of the main characters.

There's the usual typecast characters throughout the story: the funny guy, the aspiring novelist, the mean woman, the control freak and the guy that everyone hates for his hard work and quick promotions, but Ferris adds complexity. There's a woman who lost her 10 year-old daughter to a murderous child molester, there's a depressed and vaguely psychotic divorcee and there's a cancerous boss with an extreme phobia of hospitals and doctors.

Through the book's jubilation and depression, suspense and surprises, Ferris captures the attention and thought of anyone who reads his debut, and has no doubt already solidified his name in the list of up-and-coming literary voices of the latest generation. The most surprising thing about it is, though, that it's a type of laugh-out-loud funny that is beginning to disappear from the all-too-serious world of fiction novels.



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Summer Must Read List for Students

- The Abstinence Teacher*, Tom Perrotta
- Catch 22*, Joseph Heller
- 1984*, George Orwell
- The Rum Diary*, Dr. Hunter S. Thompson
- Then We Came to the End*, Joshua Ferris
- The Armies of the Night*, Norman Mailer
- The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Stephen Chbosky
- Haunted*, Chuck Palahniuk
- The Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut
- A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, Dave Eggers
- Boomsday*, Christopher Buckley
- As I Lay Dying*, William Faulkner
- Oil*, Upton Sinclair
- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain
- Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, Chuck Klosterman
- Lunar Park*, Bret Easton Ellis

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Monday, April 21 ---- Thursday, May 8

Monday - Thursday, 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

Friday, 8 a.m.-10 p.m.

Saturday, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.

Sunday, 10 a.m.-1 a.m.

Friday, May 9 ----

8 a.m. -5 p.m.