



Darkness: Two Decades of Modern Horror

Ellen Datlow (Editor) , Stefan R. Dziemianowicz (Foreword) , Joyce Carol Oates , Neil Gaiman , Clive Barker , Kelly Link , Gene Wolfe , Steve Rasnic Tem , more... Ramsey Campbell , Terry Dowling , Glen Hirshberg , Joe Hill , Kathe Koja , Thomas Ligotti , George R.R. Martin , Dan Simmons , Pat Cadigan , Joe R. Lansdale , Stephen King , Lucius Shepard , Poppy Z. Brite , Elizabeth Hand , Dennis Etchison , Michael Marshall Smith , David J. Schow , Edward Bryant , Peter Straub ...less

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Compiling the finest in frightening tales, this unique anthology offers a diverse selection of horror culled from the last 25 years. Hand selected from cutting-edge authors, each work blends subtle psychology and mischievousness with disturbingly visceral imagery. In the classic "Chattery Teeth," Stephen King provides a tautly drawn account of a traveling salesman who unwisely picks up yet another hitchhiker, while in Peter Straub's eerie "The Juniper Tree," a man whose nostalgia for the movies of his childhood leads to his stolen innocence. Renowned fantasy author George R. R. Martin weaves a sinister yarn about a young woman encountering a neighbor who is overly enamored with her in "The Pear-Shaped Man." Combining acclaimed masters of the macabre, such as Clive Barker, Poppy Z. Brite, and Thomas Ligotti, with bold new talents to the genre, including Kelly Link, Neil Gaiman, and Stephen King's son, Joe Hill, this distinctive collection of stories will delight and terrify.

Contents

"Jacqueline Ess: Her Will And Testament" by Clive Barker
"Dancing Chickens" by Edward Bryant
"The Greater Festival of Masks" by Thomas Ligotti
"The Pear-Shaped Man" by George R. R. Martin
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"Two Minutes Forty-Five Seconds" by Dan Simmons
"The Power and the Passion" by Pat Cadigan
"The Phone Woman" by Joe R. Lansdale
"Teratisms" by Kathe Koja
"Chattery Teeth" by Stephen King
"A Little Night Music" by Lucius Shepard
"Calcutta, Lord of Nerves" by Poppy Z. Brite
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"Refrigerator Heaven" by David J. Schow
"----" by Joyce Carol Oates
"Eaten (Scenes from a Moving Picture)" by Neil Gaiman
"The Specialist's Hat" by Kelly Link
"The Tree is My Hat" by Gene Wolfe

"Heat" by Steve Rasnic Tem
"No Strings" by Ramsey Campbell
"Stitch" by Terry Dowling
"Dancing Men" by Glen Hirshberg
"My Father's Mask" by Joe Hill

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From Reader Review Darkness: Two Decades of Modern Horror for online ebook

Steven Carter says

Chilling. Repulsive. Abhorrent. Dreadful. Disturbing. None of it is scary or frightening but yes, all of it is horrific. Each and every offering is in its own, unique way horrifying, offering a vignette – or a revelation – of the macabre intruding, coalescing into the mundane world. Are you a dog person? Do you like trinkets and brick-a-brack? Are you comfortable in your routine? Do you think that you have a special insight into something sacred? Do you trust or distrust your government? Your loved ones? Yourself? This volume is a nearly ideal sampler for anyone wanting to get into the genre, get out of the everyday or just to poke at the edges of their own self and find out what they feel before, during and after. Some pieces took a little more thought. Some I don't want to think about at all. But I keep thinking. Some... just made me wonder if I missed something then again, I kept thinking about what I did see.

Nicole Cushing says

This anthology compiles a fairly broad array of short horror fiction published from 1984-2005. It's a valuable resource for the newer horror author (or, for that matter, anyone who loves the genre) to use to get the "lay of the land" of recent developments in the field.

I found Glen Hirshberg's novella "Dancing Men" to be the strongest piece in the book, but also enjoyed George R.R. Martin's "The Pear-Shaped Man," Joe R. Lansdale's "The Phone Woman," Poppy Z. Brite's "Calcutta, Lord of Nerves," and David J. Schow's "Refrigerator Heaven".

The only story that felt as though it didn't belong was Stephen King's "Chattery Teeth", a tale that (to me) read like the script from a sub-par episode of TALES FROM THE CRYPT. It just wasn't in the same league as the rest of the stories. I understand King's influence is substantial (especially given the time period on which Datlow focuses), but I couldn't shake the suspicion that he's produced better short work than this.

The Stephen King and Clive Barker contributions aside, the focus in this anthology really is on quiet horror that shoots for "disturbing" rather than "revolting". In this way, DARKNESS (along with Gary Brauback's TO EACH THEIR DARKNESS) has had a significant influence on my writing. More and more, I find myself attracted to the possibilities of a quiet, dread-inducing approach.

Thanks to Tachyon for once again publishing a cool book at an affordable price.

Jay McCue says

3.5 stars.

The collection was a little uneven. Clive Barker, Stephen King, and George R.R. Martin had some interesting stories. A few others felt a little flat. Steve Rasnic Tem's "Heat" was also mildly intriguing for me.

Joel Nichols says

varied anthology that's pretty readable right through and with a few gems. I really liked the ones from Edward Bryant, a really queer take on alien invasion, and Poppy Z. Brite's, which was traditional zombies in Calcutta. The Dan Simmons one is interesting but instantly forgettable. There's probably stories you've already read though, like the (still excellent) stuff from Kelly Link, Joyce Carol Oats, Stephen King, etc. The last story in this one is from Joe Hill, and is vivid, uncanny and creepy and seductively convincing all at once. (It's the first time I've read any Hill and I liked it.)

Maxine Marsh says

4.5*

So I'd read some other anthologies earlier this year and remembered how much I do enjoy a good collection. So when I realized that Darkness was one of my reads for the Horror Aficionados yearly challenge (from the Nightmare Top 100 Horror Books list), I cracked this puppy open! After the first few stories I was glad that I did. Most of the selections are top notch, with only a few that didn't seem up to par with the others.

The most striking stories included:

- The very creepy "The Pear-Shaped Man" by George R.R. Martin
- "The Juniper Tree", in which Peter Straub introduces Tim Underhill in a very disturbing story
- "The Phone Woman," by Joe R. Lansdale, also very disturbing
- The triumphant "Chattery Teeth" by Stephen King
- Poppy Z. Brite's dark vision of Calcutta in the midst of a zombie plague, "Calcutta, Lord of Nerves"
- "The Tree is My Hat" takes us to a small Pacific island guarded by the old gods, courtesy of Gene Wolf
- "Stitch" by Terry Dowling will leave you speechless, truly satisfying in the most horrific way

Kassandra says

A decent collection of horror, though a couple of the stories were so boring I couldn't get through them. A very dark and grotesquely sexual story by Neil Gaiman was a surprise, in the form of a screenplay/prose poem, no less. A good one by Clive Barker, a very upsetting story by Peter Straub that I'd already read, a fantastic one by Pat Cadigan whom I'd never heard of before, something typical but fun from Stephen King, and a dreamily sick piece by Joyce Carol Oates which was worth going through the book to get to.

Andrea says

I really liked reading this collection, more for the fact that it helped me narrow my likes and dislikes when it

comes to horror, than because the stories were all consistently good. There were some true gems and some real bombs in here, but I guess that's to be expected in an anthology. Overall I recommend this book, especially if you're looking for a sampling of what the genre has to offer and some new authors you may not have heard of before.

•Jacqueline Ess: Her Will and Testament-4.5 stars

A disturbed and depressed woman has the ability to manipulate and control flesh.

Gory and twisted, with interesting complex characters and great writing.

•Dancing Chickens-3 stars

Orphaned and abused kid makes first contact with aliens in a very twisted turn of events.

Surprising, yet ultimately not horrifying enough. The realities of street life had more impact than the climax of the story.

•The Greater Festival of Masks-1 star

Man stumbles upon weird town's mask ceremony.

Totally forgettable, not scary, and uninspired.

•The Pear Shaped Man-3.5 stars

An oddly figured and mysterious man becomes obsessed with his new neighbor, and he wants to show her his special things.

Creepy stalker body horror, with a helping hand of paranoia and the supernatural bumping up against the everyday.

•The Juniper Tree -2.5 stars

Boy meets a predator at his local cinema.

A slightly disjointed account of one boy's loss of innocence in his local movie theater. Not really horror, more of an account of one boy's sick encounter with a pedophile and the psychological repercussions.

•Ten Minutes Forty Five Seconds- 2 stars

A man afraid of heights is on a flight with his coworkers.

This had some good writing and imagery, but overall left me wanting more. Too many unanswered questions and the convoluted technobabble was a miss.

•The Power and The Passion-5 stars

Human monster vs. supernatural monster.

Excellent writing, unapologetic, vivid imagery, and an awesome character study of a total psychopath. Might just be my favorite story of the collection.

•The Phone Woman- 2.5 stars

When a crazy person asks to use the phone, weirdness ensues.

This tried too hard to be a deep and philosophical study on modernity and the suburban lifestyle's effects on the human condition. However, it was a pretty decent portrait of one man's sexual and homicidal deviance being awakened.

•Teratisms-1 star

Have no idea what this was actually about as the writing was virtually unreadable. Just skip this one!

•Chattery Teeth-1 star

A hitchhiker's nefarious plans are interrupted by a deranged set of toy teeth.

Boring, blah storytelling. Not scary at all or creepy in the least. Just kind of laughable really.

•A Little Night Music-3 stars

An original and musical take on Zombie lore.

An oddly unique story about transformation and what it means to be dead inside.

•Calcutta, Lord of Nerves- 3.5 stars

A young woman worships a goddess in a zombie infested Calcutta.

Really interesting story, with visceral horrifying imagery and a mythological slant on zombies. The young female character was also a strong point to the story, being interesting in and of herself.

•The Erl-King- 0 stars

I just skimmed this one as I found it to be really boring. Fantasy just isn't for me and this was no exception. It just didn't grab me.

•The Dog Park- 1 star

A man searches for his missing dog at a dog park frequented by Hollywood types.

Not sure if I just missed the point or if there wasn't one. The story was cut off prematurely, there was no horror anywhere, and it just kind of petered out. Good writing that went nowhere.

•Rain Falls- 3 stars

A man's encounter with violence in a pub may be more dangerous than he expected.

I liked this one quite a bit. It had an excellent build up and a supernatural twist which I'm learning that I like in my horror.

•Refrigerator Heaven- 4 stars

A refrigerator becomes one man's path to enlightenment.

Really really like this one! A claustrophobic and imagery laden story about being pushed to your limits and the horrifying things humans do to one another.

•_____ - 2 stars

A girl's trip to visit her wealthy family turns into a disturbing experience that will haunt her into adulthood. An intriguing exercise in exploring memory and the fallibility of our minds, but a little too vague to actually be horrifying or shocking. An interesting writing device in the form of a black rectangle is used to represent lost or blocked memories, but even that wasn't as effective as it could have been.

•Eaten- 2 stars

A brother looking for his sister gets more than he bargained for in this poem style depiction of scenes from a pornographic horror movie.

What a bizarre story. Weirdly sexual and dark, this was unexpected from what I've read of Gaiman's other works. I think this would have been better had the style been less gimmicky and more straightforward, as the format seemed to limit the amount of details, which I think the story needed to be more effectively horrifying.

•The Specialist's Hat- 3 stars

Twin girls move into a haunted house with their father after their mother passes and creepiness ensues.

Really good atmospheric writing and an all around interesting addition to the gothic haunted house genre. I wish there was a little less ambiguousness, but it was still pretty creepy. Love the descriptions of the old mansion.

•The Tree is my Hat- 1 star

A man travels to an island where his life and local mythology begin to meld.

What a stupid and pointless story. I hated the writing style, it was full of wooden and stilted characters, silly asides, and purposefully vague nonsense. There was no real explanation of the magic/mythology and the story itself was just ridiculous. Not scary or tension filled in the least and the "poignant" ending was anything but, because at that point who cares. I have no idea how anyone could think this story was worth putting in a collection like this.

•Heat- 2.5 stars

A grief stricken mother hallucinates and becomes obsessed with fire.

I liked this story but did not find anything significantly interesting about it or particularly horrifying. Instead it was a slow (pardon the pun) burn about one woman's attempts to deal with tragedy and the toll it's taken on her psyche.

•No Strings- 1 star

Radio host finds himself the victim of mimicking monsters after a late night in the studio.

Boring, not well plotted and frankly a waste of time. Not scary or even suspenseful and the ending felt rushed and like it came out of nowhere.

•Stitch-2.5 stars

A woman is obsessed with the embroidered picture in the upstairs bathroom.

While somewhat suspenseful and interesting, I was looking for more. More intrigue, more sinisterness, more fear, more everything really. While the story boasts a nice twist, I didn't care enough about the characters for it to be impactful or horrifying. Just another ok selection in this collection.

•Dancing Men- 1 star

A boy visits his dying Grandfather who lived through the Holocaust.

Didn't like this one either. Boring and not interesting at all. Way to mystical and not scary in the least.

•My Father's Mask- 3 stars

A boy is taken on vacation with his parents to a cabin in the woods, when things take weird turn, his parents are acting bizarrely, strange people are hanging around and masks clutter the interior of the cabin.

I enjoyed this story. It was well written, mysterious, intriguing, and magical without being ridiculous. The parents' disturbing behavior and oddness gave the story tension and the mother was just weird. While I wish there had been more clarity about what was going on, it made sense that the story left me with questions as it was told from the POV of the young son, who also didn't have a clue.

Therese says

So I'm a huge horror fan, and while a couple stories were decent, there were too many that just did nothing for me. I ended up stopping about halfway through because I lost interest mainly due to being upset about a couple of the stories being uncomfortably and disturbingly sexual; simply having content that is gross to read in my opinion doesn't really count as good horror. The good stuff messes with your mind in a cool psychological kind of way, like what "The Pear Shaped Man" did, but out of all the stories I read, that was the only one I really liked.

bogdan maznitsky says

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Steve says

Solid collection, but a bit long.

Robb Bridson says

It's what you expect from a horror anthology: a few good stories, a few decent stories, a few boring stories. Some of them I had already (the Joe Hill story is in 20th Century Ghosts; the Clive Barker story is in Books of Blood, Vols. 1-3). My personal favorites from this collection are the Stephen King, George R. R. Martin, Elizabeth Hand, and Gene Wolfe stories; I didn't care for the Peter Straub and Neil Gaiman stories.

Rachel Hall says

Honestly I was really disappointed with this horror anthology. I have been looking forward to reading this for a while especially because of the selection of horror authors, which was truly impressive. But I'm not really sure the editor has a very clear picture of what horror is, and it seemed very apparent because of the selections made. I wouldn't really recommend this to anyone, although it was not wholly awful (there were a handful of creepy tales.) I say if you're thinking about picking this up for a read just go ahead and put back.

Wil Wheaton says

Some of the stories in this very uneven collection are really good, but too many entries just did nothing for me. I abandoned it a little less than halfway through (so feel free to judge me and this review accordingly), because I have a huge stack of stuff that I genuinely want to read, and life's too short.

DeAnna Knippling says

Lots of good short horror, although (probably due to the nature of two decades of the best of the best, which has spread downstream in an imitable fashion) nothing really surprising. I'd read more of these than I expected.

Highlights in a collection of highlights:

Dancing Chicken - Edward Bryant. I...don't want to spoil it. In any fashion.

The Pear-Shaped Man - George R.R. Martin. I felt like hugging people after this. I *dare* you...

Teratisms, by Kathe Koja. Had to read this three times.

Chattery Teeth - Stephen King. I don't know how, but I'd missed this one previously.

My Father's Mask - Joe Hill. Another I-won't-say-because-spoilers story, but one of the finer (obscure) examples of a type of story that I've read. I will say it's almost Wolfian.

Flow:

Some neat bridges between stories. I had forgotten the story order, and had to laugh when "The Tree is My Hat" followed "The Specialist's Hat," because during "The Specialist's Hat," I kept going, "That word 'hat.' I'll never be able to read the word 'hat' in the title without thinking of..." And there it was.

Also the thematic bridges between "No Strings" through "My Father's Mask" were particularly moving. Watch for threads, strings, inheritances.

Shel says

I like to joke that since my last name is Graves, if I am unable to publish my utopian, sf, or fantasy novels I will eventually switch over to horror and achieve success. The first step: Read horror.

I have a long way to go, however. This anthology quickly reminded me why I haven't read much horror since my Stephen King phase in high school, which ended abruptly with *The Tommyknockers* (1987) (in his excellent book *On Writing*, perhaps not coincidentally, King says *Tommyknockers* was written at the height of his drug addiction). I found it too disturbing.

I am a horror lightweight. I was disturbed by the first story in *Darkness*, Clive Barker's "Jacqueline Ess: Her Will and Testament," took a long break before returning to the anthology, made it as far as George R.R. Martin's "The Pear-Shaped Man," was deeply disturbed again, and am on hiatus from the book.

Reading horror, empathy becomes a serious flaw (this could be me!!). I can't turn out the lights at night. These psychological horror stories sink deep and do their job — horrify!

Pairs well with: Joyce Carol Oates' *Zombie*. Oates' masterful prose whipped me through this novel slice 'n dice in one night, and I am now working to push it to the dark recesses of my mind to be "forgotten" along with "The Pear-Shaped Man". Wish me luck!

Alas, I'll have to keep on with fantasy for now and return to "Darkness" at a later date. Wuss!
