



The Year's Best Dark Fantasy & Horror, 2011 Edition

Paula Guran (Editor), M.L.N. Hanover (Contributor), Simon R. Green (Contributor), Neil Gaiman (Contributor), Steve Duffy (Contributor), Holly Black (Contributor), Steve Berman (Contributor), Laird Barron (Contributor), more... Peter Atkins (Contributor), Stephen Graham Jones (Contributor), Caitlín R. Kiernan (Contributor), Jay Lake (Contributor), Margo Lanagan (Contributor), Sarah Langan (Contributor), Joe R. Lansdale (Contributor), Tanith Lee (Contributor), George R.R. Martin (Contributor), Maureen F. McHugh (Contributor), John Shirley (Contributor), Norman Partridge (Contributor), Tim Powers (Contributor), Lynda E. Rucker (Contributor), Ekaterina Sedia (Contributor), Michael Skeet (Contributor), Angela Slatter (Contributor), Sarah Totton (Contributor), S.D. Tullis (Contributor), Genevieve Valentine (Contributor), Peter Watts (Contributor), Gene Wolfe (Contributor), Michael Aronovitz (Contributor), M.K. Hobson (Contributor) ...less

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This incomparable annual compilation of the best short fiction and novellas features an unmatched variety of the quietly weird, the merely eerie, high fantasy, modern Lovecraftian horror, nightmarish near-future scenarios, the darkly humorous, the supernatural, and the monstrously mundane from the brightest new talent, legendary authors like Joe R. Lansdale, Tanith Lee, and Gene Wolfe, and bestsellers such as Holly Black, Neil Gaiman, and Sarah Langan. Includes a 36,000 word novella by George R.R. Martin set in his A Song of Fire and Ice universe.

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From Reader Review The Year's Best Dark Fantasy & Horror, 2011 Edition for online ebook

Steve says

Overall a good book with interesting stories. I am a sucker for horror collections. The stories were at their best when they subverted traditional tropes. The more standard zombie/werewolf stories were uninteresting.

The highlight of the collection is definitely MLN Hanover's "Hurt Me", which features just an amazing protagonist and incredibly vivid writing. I'll definitely check out more of his work.

And of course George R. R. Martin has the longest story by far, but it's serviceable, if probably unintelligible if you're not familiar with his fantasy world.

Peter Melancon says

There are some good short stories in this collection especially Laird Barron's "The Broadsword, Lynda E. Rucker's "The Moon Will Look Strange." Stephen Graham Jones's "Crawlspace" and "The Things" by Peter Watts was interesting, especially since it's based on John Carpenter's The Thing. The rest were okay but that's what you get with a compilation but at least I'm more curious what have these writers been upto for the past few years.

Heart1lly says

This is a great collection of short stories, and I'll admit, I bought it mostly just because I saw George R. R. Martin, Holly Black and Neil Gaiman had stories in it. Holly Black's short story was one of my favorites. Recommended!

Lindsay Scott says

Eh. There were a couple of stories in here that I liked, but overall they were disappointing/boring and I gave up reading several of them. The ones that I liked were "Lesser Demons," "Raise Your Hand If You're Dead," "Red as Red" (Caitlin Kiernan's prose is so memorable), "The Broadsword," and "The Dog King." I was irritated to discover that three of the stories in here were reprints from other anthologies that I had already read, which were Neil Gaiman's story, "Hurt Me," and "The Stars Are Falling." While they were good stories, was it really necessary to reprint so many in a different anthology? Most irritating for me was George R.R. Martin's story, which closed out the volume. Not only was it the longest, but it was also the most incomprehensible. Even though I'm familiar with his Game of Thrones world, the sheer number of characters and history referenced just in the first few pages made that one a DNF for me. That level of detail and information is exactly why I never tried to read his book series.

So, some fun stories, but I'll be selling this one back to the used bookstore.

Ben says

There are enough excellent stories in this anthology to warrant five stars. In particular, Laird Barron's "The Broadsword" and Michael Aronovitz's "How Bria Died" are excellent reads, and masterfully crafted. There are a couple clunkers, but that's to be expected. The major problem with this work is the huge amount of editing errors. Typos and grammatical snafus abound.

Logan says

3 reprints from other anthologies, Neil Gaiman's enjoyable but slight "The Thing About Cassandra" story being one of them. A long ass Dunk and Egg Novella by George RR Martin called "The Mystery Knight: A Tale of The Seven Kingdoms". The stories I like best were "The Naturalist" by Maureen McHugh "The Broadsword" by Laird Barron, "How Bria Died" by Mike Aranovitz and "The Dire Wolf" by Genevieve Valentine.

Unfortunately this collection was the type of anthology that gives short story compilations a bad name—reprints, a few stellar stand outs, and a few flops, and the rest solid, if uninspired (and uninspiring) reads.

Kristian Thoroughgood says

Excellent. A great bunch of short dark fantasy/horror stories, with very few weak ones. There were two written in second person which I found annoying, but the rest were solid & well told. Last story by GRR Martin was longer & not as dark as the rest, but also a clear stand out.

I will seek out other collections with the same editor.

Marie says

Dark fantasy, so this isn't really my genre. Since I picked it up to get an overview of what this rather nebulous genre is about, I can't say whether this is representative or not, or good for that matter.

It covered quite a bit of ground, but few stories stood out to me, and I don't think that says much for the genre as a whole. Again, I don't know whether that's just because I don't know much about the genre and what it's compared to: but if I couldn't find much, is that really a good thing?

Maybe a year is too short in time to get a decent overview.

The first three stories were all first person and all disappointing. I almost thought there was a conclusion to be drawn there until "Tragic Life Stories" which was third person and fantastic. I think the only first person story that stood out to me was Gaiman's, and though I didn't think anything of it in particular (sacrilege!) but at least he used the first person properly—I knew who the character, the "I", was pretty quickly. I just think 3rd person is better at orientating the reader. Second person, of course, is most difficult of all for an author

and reader alike, and there are three in the collection: decent, as best I recall.

As for the standout stories:

"Tragic Life Stories" How much I enjoyed this because I connected to a narrator who was an author as well may have made this story more appealing to me than a reader who doesn't write, but I hope not, because that would say nothing good about Duffy as author or my reading. Nevertheless I immediately connected to how Dan created his fictional worlds, and then that's where it all went wrong. Well-constructed, good pacing, and a fascinating premise (the inability to discriminate between hallucinations and reality) took me by surprise. And I cared about the character and wanted the best for him. But did he want the best for himself in this story?

"The Naturalist" A zombie story, and once I enjoyed *The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor* that I won on First Reads, but I'm starting to think, with the handful in this collection, that zombie stories, by definition, all sound the same. I was curious about the narrator's observations, and thought that the most interesting part of the work, but given how quickly the end came after, I'm not sure even the author knew what it meant. A disappointment, since I saw that as really the most original part of the story.

"The Broadsword" I wanted to like this one, and it is dark, I'll give it that. But it felt unsatisfying. There seemed both too much of information that contributed nothing, but then too little about the coming darkness. Some vividly disturbing description though.

"A Thousand Flowers" Not only did I not know what I was supposed to get out of it: what was the point? why was it written? (that seemed to be the weakness of much of the collection: someone had an image they wanted to share, but seemed to have trouble making it into a full story. The sheer amount of detail everywhere that made no sense, went nowhere and never connected to anything else boggled my mind. Peeing on flowers is bad. Why? I have no idea. Is it related to this world's culture? I don't know. I'm not even sure what this culture is supposed to be.

Frankly, I hated this story—terrible characters, pointless plot accomplishes nothing, plenty of creepy and unfortunate implications in a quasi-medieval setting (with Narwhals, Africa, and rhinoceros WHAT). Decent ear for dialogue at least.

"Hurt Me" I did like this one. The fantasy, the supernatural darkness of the story paralleled the character growth and back story and became a metaphor for the underlying plot. That's what I mean by a plot with a point. Not only did something happen, but it changed the characters and it made a difference. Worth it.

"Sea Warg" Only notable because it has a misanthropic philosophy that I don't disagree with, but in the story found unconvincing. I rather liked the clinical Johnson, but the uneven pacing made the end sudden and unconvincing.

"The Thing About Cassandra" Gaiman's story. I rather liked it, but the end was too telegraphed and obvious. Felt cliché, even though I couldn't say that it actually is.

"The Things" Lee developed an interesting and distinct alien consciousness. I haven't seen the movie it's based on (*The Thing*), so I'm not sure how it fits in? But I think I know enough of the genre tropes to get what the human characters were up to anyway.

"The Return" Again, a story without a real premise. An idea: a girl disappears, returns without her soul, but went where?

"How Bria Died" A good story I guess, like any horror story. But there's a bit about a promise at the very, very end and it made no sense and made me think I missed something. I may have. I tried rereading and it didn't help. Otherwise a fairly standard ghost-story type, and I rather liked it.

"Parallel Lines" another one where the supernatural element highlights the character growth. Engaging and good character growth: well, for someone.

"The Mystery Knight" This isn't going to be fair. But.

I didn't like A Game of Thrones. It felt bloated. I can only imagine this equally bloated so-called story means he's incapable of conciseness. Much of it is unnecessary of the story I actually did manage to discern. Also the main character is introduced with his squire as Dunk and Egg. I think Martin may have found it amusing. But I found it increasingly difficult to remember who anyone was, especially since everyone has at least three names and there are approximately one hundred named characters.

This seems to take place in the same universe as his series, though I'm not sure where or when it takes place, this is one time I would have preferred some appendices. It's some kind of really, really dull political intrigue, without any actually intrigue, just a badly put together conspiracy that's already been 'solved' before our characters were even introduced. They're just witnesses. So pointless! Yes, that may be how "real life" happens (which seems to be how Martin's work is often defended, but that doesn't mean it makes good fiction. And hey, Nick wasn't involved in Gatsby's story, but at least he had a point, and he observed a story and drew conclusions. The interlude described in this novella-length work happens but doesn't seem to matter, and the observers don't actually accomplish anything other than to be there for literally no good reason. Just terrible storytelling all over.

Unfortunately it affected my entire view toward the book as a whole, which did have some good stories.

Still, I do want to say it's probably worth picking up for anyone who does like the genre.

Brad Hutchinson says

My problem with this book was the number of zombie stories. I was really tired of zombies by the time I finished it. Because of this collection, I don't even want to watch the next season of _The Walking Dead_-a television show I used to like.

P. Aaron Potter says

This is an unusually good entry in this venerable series, and happily new editor Paula Guran has given up the awkward trick she had in the 2010 edition of trying to ask open ended pseudo-analytical questions which frankly made her sound like a cut-rate Rod Serling at the end of a really bad Twilight Zone. Instead, she lets the tales talk for themselves, and this is an unusually excellent crop. There's a little something for everyone here frmo the Urban Paranormal Romance reader in your life who despises true "horror" to a Walking-Dead-level zombie tale which was as bleakly entertaining as anything I've read in the genre in the past ten years.

Best of all, this collection is likely available free from your local library's e-collection, with an unlimited check-out time. This is a fine way to promote new authors, and a credit to new publishing models.

Bill says

There are a few gems throughout this anthology, such as the stories by M.L.N Hanover and Tim Powers, among others, but I thought the 2012 edition was better. Still, there's not a bad story in here, though there are a few that fall between "not bad" and "good". The George R.R. Martin novella at the end seems out of place: it's not particularly dark, and the fantasy elements are tangential to the main story.

There is enough here to get your money's worth, but I would recommend the 2012 edition.

Emily says

As with any anthology there's going to be some good stories and some not so good stories. All of them were decent, I just liked some better than others (looking at you Neil Gaimen and Holly Black), but over all, 4.5 stars. I'd read it again and recommend it to people that like the darker side of things.

Critter Reyome says

God, I love Christmas, because I usually get a load of new books. Most of them are ones I have asked for, but occasionally my wife surprises me, and this year's surprise was this hefty tome, which is I believe in its second year and appears to finally gives us a viable replacement for the venerable DAW "Year's Best Horror" series that sadly left us in 1994 when editor and author Karl Edward Wagner tragically passed away.

Guran's choices are certainly worthy, though as a whole I found the collection is a bit uneven in spots. Overall it is quite good...the stories by Joe Lansdale and Neil Gaiman, as per usual, are worth the price of admission all themselves--these guys are demented geniuses and I love their work. And there's a lot more to like between the garish green covers.

Only...it's too bad there are so many typos to be found in the text. At times they are quite jarring, and really, you would think that a commercially available volume such as this would be vetted at least a little better. For the price, which is very reasonable, it's still worth it, but I'm taking a star off the review because of it.

Michael Samerdyke says

Evidently Paula Guran's taste in stories and mine do not intersect, or intersect only rarely.

I tried to read the 2010 edition of this anthology and gave up after none of the first nine stories interested me.

This time, I made it two-thirds of the way through the book, but most of the stories did not appeal to me at all.

I did like the stories by Norman Partridge, Maureen McHugh, Jay Lake and M. K. Hobson.

"Tragic Life Stories" by Steve Duffy was outstanding, both funny and terrifying. It is a terrific story of a writer haunted by his own creation.

But apart from that, the stories failed to engage my interest, and reading this book became a chore, so I gave up.

I don't think I will read further books in this series.

Christopher says

Not a great collection, especially in view of its length [that is, I was disappointed to read so much and find that the hit/miss ratio remained low for me no matter how many chances I gave it]. A+: Watts. A: Martin. B+: Tullis, Aronovitz. B: Partridge, Lansdale, Hanover.
