



# The Best Horror of the Year, Volume Six

*Ellen Datlow (Editor)*

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**“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.”**

**—H. P. Lovecraft**

This statement was true when H. P. Lovecraft first wrote it at the beginning of the twentieth century, and it remains true at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The only thing that has changed is what is unknown.

With each passing year, science, technology, and the march of time shine light into the craggy corners of the universe, making the fears of an earlier generation seem quaint. But this “light” creates its own shadows. *The Best Horror of the Year*, edited by Ellen Datlow, chronicles these shifting shadows. It is a catalog of terror, fear, and unpleasantness, as articulated by today’s most challenging and exciting writers.

The best horror writers of today do the same thing that horror writers of a hundred years ago did. They tell good stories—stories that scare us. And when these writers tell *really* good stories that *really* scare us, Ellen Datlow notices. She’s been noticing for more than a quarter century. For twenty-one years, she coedited *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror*, and for the last six years, she’s edited this series. In addition to this monumental cataloging of the best, she has edited hundreds of other horror anthologies and won numerous awards, including the Hugo, Bram Stoker, and World Fantasy awards.

More than any other editor or critic, Ellen Datlow has charted the shadowy abyss of horror fiction. Join her on this journey into the dark parts of the human heart . . . either for the first time . . . or once again.

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## The Best Horror of the Year, Volume Six Details

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# From Reader Review **The Best Horror of the Year, Volume Six** for online ebook

## **Karl says**

This copy is signed by Ellen Datlow.

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## **Sue says**

Overall an impressive collection of short stories, although I feel many do not necessarily fit within the horror genre.

I have provided an overall review of the book as a whole followed by individual summary reviews of each story. You may need to pop some popcorn before you start this review – it may take a while to get through! Disclaimer: the following is strictly a reflection of my own personal (unconventional?) tastes and may or may not reflect the views of others. In other words, if you don't agree with my opinions, that's cool! That's what makes us all unique – it's a beautiful thing.

This e-book begins with a lengthy summation of the year's most notable horror contributions that were reviewed by the editor in preparation of this collection. I admittedly skipped over this section as it was of little interest to me. Simply put, I was unabashedly eager to get to the meaty carnage of the horror as quickly as possible. So, I settled down in my comfy chair, wrapped myself in a fleecy blanket and prepared to be scared.

I had never read any of the five previous *The Best Horror of the Year* volumes, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Actually, I'll take that back – I fully expected a bone-chilling fear-fest, but that's not exactly what I got. I would classify only a handful of these stories as horror – the majority would be better categorized as paranormal, sci-fi and/or fantasy. In order for me to be satisfied when reading or watching horror, I need it to scare the living bejesus out of me, or at the very least leave me with a serious feeling of the heebie-jeebies for the remainder of the night. Most of these stories just didn't do it for me. For those reasons, I immediately deducted one star from my rating right off the top. Having done that, I based the remainder of my rating on the overall quality and likeability of the individual stories themselves, regardless of what genre I felt they fit in to.

Overall, this was a respectable assortment of 24 short stories (including one poem), although, as previously mentioned, most did not satisfy my entirely subjective definition of horror. Don't get me wrong, I am certainly not a hater of paranormal or science fiction. While my go-to preference is horror, I do also enjoy paranormal or sci-fi offerings that are well-written and compelling. But when I read horror, I need it dark and dirty, raw and gritty – the scarier, gorier and more disturbing the better. If I were to use an analogy to describe this collection, I would call it a sheep in wolf's clothing – advertised as a formidable work of horror (the year's best??) but lacking the fangs to back it up.

If you tend to gravitate more towards science fiction, supernatural or even mild horror, then you will undoubtedly enjoy the majority of this collection. However, if you're like me and consider yourself more a fan of the Jack Ketchum or Stephen King novels, or you can't get enough of the *Saw*, *Hostel* or *Hannibal Lecter* gore-fests on the big screen, then you may be left desperately wishing for more.

**\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*** Following are short summaries and individual ratings of each story (out of 5 stars) which may contain spoilers. Skip this section if you want to maintain an element of surprise.

**The Good Husband (by Nathan Ballingrud):** This story was my favorite out of the entire collection. A woman commits suicide in the bathtub while her husband, who has watched her battle depression for many years, stands by and does nothing to help her. The woman, apparently not realizing she's dead, then continues to exist in the house with her husband as she slowly deteriorates both physically and mentally. Is this zombie-state in retaliation for her husband's callous disregard for his wife in her hour of need? Appropriately creepy and unsettling. [4.5 stars]

**Fine in the Fire (by Lee Thomas):** Although this was not a tale of horror in the fictional sense, the horrific type of treatment depicted in this story was prevalent in the U.S. from the 1940s through the early 1970s. Set in modern day but with flashbacks to the 1950s, this story illustrates just how far a devoted and religious father is willing to go in order to "cure" his eldest son of what he considers a significant yet treatable mental disorder. Exceptionally well-written and poignant. [4.5 stars]

**Halfway Home (by Linda Nagata):** A chilling and captivating read. A strong, confident woman on a flight home from the Philippines to L.A. boasts to the chatty yet mysterious woman next to her about her willingness to do whatever it takes to overcome life's challenges. Halfway to its destination, the plane suddenly crashes into the Pacific near a small uninhabited island. As the only survivors, the two women and one small child make it safely to land. There are some incredibly dark forces at play here as one of these women is not what she seems. Faced with a cataclysmic decision, and with rescue in sight, the L.A. woman must now demonstrate if she indeed has what it takes to overcome this final catastrophe. [4.5 stars]

**The Anatomist's Mnemonic (by Priya Sharma):** A stimulating tale with a shocking ending. A middle-aged, single man with a robust hand fetish goes on a seemingly innocent search for the perfect woman who must, of course, have flawless hands. He soon finds himself visiting the home of two sisters – one with a captivating personality but imperfect hands and the other with a less intriguing persona but impeccable hands. Which sister does he choose to woo and how does he persuade her to openly welcome his advances? [4 stars]

**The Fox (by Conrad Williams):** Mysterious and frighteningly compelling – a real page-turner. A happily-married couple takes their two small children to a rural English farm for a cold-weather camping vacation. (Why they chose to go camping in winter is beyond me, but I digress.) In the morning, the family checks the chicken coop for eggs only to discover missing (and presumably dead) chickens. Later in the day, tensions mount as they come across a deceased fox (...or is it??). We soon learn of a despicable act that the husband, as a teenager, perpetrated on a mother fox and her kits decades prior. Is the fox finally exacting her revenge after all these years? [4 stars]

**Call Out (by Steve Toase):** A small-town veterinarian is lured under false pretenses to a bucolic horse barn where he becomes trapped inside with an evil and hungry barghest (a terrifying wolf-goblin hybrid creature). The writing style of this story was disturbingly convincing – it just ended much too abruptly. [3.5 stars]

**The Dog's Paw (by Derek Kunsken):** This story reminds me of the old Twilight Zone series from the 1960s, when many of the episodes ended with some sort of profound message for the greater good of humanity. Set in an Arabic nation, a young girl brings shame on her family by being seen in the company of an unrelated man. This disgrace manifests itself by turning her father's arm into a dog's paw. The only way he can rectify this aberration is through the honor killing of his beloved daughter. With strong outside forces intervening, will he decide to uphold his family's honor and reverse his disfigurement or will he choose to save the life of

his only daughter? A compelling and sinister morality check. [3.5 stars]

*The Same Deep Waters as You* (by Brian Hodge): In this gripping novella, a popular TV “animal whisperer” has been recruited by U.S. Homeland Security as a consultant on a top-secret mission. She reluctantly travels to an undisclosed island off the Pacific Northwest coast in order to attempt communication with mysterious sea-like creatures who were once human. These beings have been held captive on the island in an outdated GITMO-like facility since the 1920s. The mission is one of urgency as these creatures seem to be suddenly mobilizing toward some unseen force somewhere in the ocean depths. The author’s imagery and descriptive writing style really held my attention throughout, and the happenings on the very last page truly shocked me. [3.5 stars]

*Apports* (by Stephen Bacon): In this supernatural tale, the main protagonist searches for, with the intent of executing, the despicable man who years earlier had killed his own young son in a botched murder-suicide attempt. He finally locates the man – who claims he is being viciously terrorized by the ghost of his son – now living in the British equivalent of the “projects”. He almost immediately realizes that the man’s current miserable and pathetic existence might just be a more satisfying revenge than actually ending his life. Although the outcome was quite predictable, it was still an enjoyable, descriptive read. [3 stars]

*The House on Cobb Street* (by Lynda E. Rucker): A young couple moves to Georgia and begins renovations on a large, ramshackle house that they quickly realize is haunted by evil spirits. Apparently driven mad by the spirits, the husband soon commits suicide in the back yard. The woman, following the predictable course of your standard haunted house story, continues to live in the home and eventually determines that the house “makes people disappear”. This story jumps back and forth between published news articles describing various supernatural occurrences at the house over the years (apparently to provide a semblance of realism) and the real time accounts of the young wife. Although it didn’t have any type of good “gotcha” moment at the end, it was still a well-written, fairly interesting ghost story. [3 stars]

*Stemming the Tide* (by Simon Strantzas): A well-written albeit somewhat perplexing zombie tale. A couple takes a touristy day-trip to a very specific location in Eastern Canada to watch the tide roll in, as it does punctually every 6 hours and 13 minutes. After the rest of the onlookers have long since departed the beach, the couple remains as if they are waiting for something more to occur. Although I’m still unclear how they knew what was coming on that particular day, or why they wanted to witness it to begin with, the incoming tide brings with it scores of the undead who attempt to break through the surrounding gates designed to contain the evil. [3 stars]

*The Monster Makers* (by Steve Rasnic Tem): Young siblings with a special “gift” of mind-control carry out horrific acts of violence on random strangers, simply for their own malicious entertainment. A metaphorical take on the harsh level of cruelty that a child can inflict, regardless of whether or not the child intends to be cruel or if he even fully comprehends the potential consequences of his actions. [3 stars]

*Majorlena* (by Jane Jakeman): A handful of U.S. soldiers narrowly surviving an ambush of their convoy in Iraq come across an unfamiliar survivor among the wreckage – Major Lena – a female officer who outranks the other members of the small group. While taking cover from enemy snipers, members of their clan begin to mysteriously die one by one. Is the seemingly honorable Major something more sinister than what she seems? [3 stars]

*The Tin House* (by Simon Clark): An isolated, beachfront house made of tin holds an appalling secret instilled many decades earlier by its original builders who were heavily involved in the African slave trade. Can the vengeful spirits that inhabit this house finally be vindicated? The paranormal storyline was

compelling enough if you could look past the somewhat unimaginative writing style. [3 stars]

**The Withering** (by Tom Casson): Set in the late 19th century, a young college-educated woman continues her dead father's commitment to bring justice to those who have been wrongly accused. In this tale of necromancy, deceased victims of unsolved homicides can be reanimated for short periods of time in order to name their killers or detail the manners in which they died. Can an innocent young man falsely imprisoned for a gruesome murder be freed and the real killer brought to justice before it is too late? [3 stars]

**Bones of Crow** (by Ray Cluley): A vile, chain-smoking woman finds a nest containing gigantic eggs on the rooftop balcony of her apartment building. Unable to contain her curiosity she touches one of the eggs, causing the baby bird inside to die. Needless to say, the momma bird is none too happy and eventually takes her revenge on the woman. Is the woman's violent demise symbolic of her dismal existence during life? Although the storyline had potential, it reminded me of one of those 'B' horror movies from the 1950s and 60s – utterly ridiculous plot and weak script but you can't stop watching nevertheless. [3 stars]

**That Tiny Flutter of the Heart I Used to Call Love** (by Robert Shearman): This is an overly disturbing tale about the abnormally close relationship between a young girl and her older brother whom she allows to brutally "execute" her beloved dolls so that he doesn't have to compete for her love and affection. I would describe this as a pseudo-horror blue-plate special with a side order of incest. To say this creepy story left me feeling "icky" pretty much sums it up. [3 stars]

**Down to a Sunless Sea** (by Neil Gaiman): An elderly, forlorn English woman, still grieving decades later over the loss of her sailor son who was cannibalized by the surviving members of their capsized sailing vessel, carries an eerie memento on a chain around her neck. An interesting and descriptive tale, but much too short (even for a short story); this could easily have been teased out a few more pages for an even more dramatic ending. [3 stars]

**The Tiger** (by Nina Allan): A recently released ex-convict who was wrongly imprisoned for a child's murder moves into an apartment over a small tavern that's owned by a family with a young son. Trying to make a fresh start for himself after 10 years of captivity, he befriends a peculiar group of people who claim they want to help him get re-acclimated into society. He soon learns that these people may have other more dastardly ulterior motives. The choices made by the ex-con at the end of the story could have gone one of two ways – either dark and horrifying or sympathetic and considerate. For me, the author made the wrong decision by taking the moral high-road – not really what I'm looking for in a horror story. I would have given the story at least 3 stars had it not been for the disappointing ending. [2.5 stars]

**The Only Ending We Have** (by Kim Newman): An homage to many of Alfred Hitchcock's classic films. An actress working as a body-double for Janet Leigh on the Psycho movie set becomes disillusioned with the industry and is no longer able to cope with Hitchcock's overtly sexual advances towards her. The author goes into great detail describing Hitchcock as a cruel and sexually deviant person – apparently alluding to The Birds star Tippi Hedren's very public disclosure that Hitchcock was a "creepy old pervert who made [her] life a living hell". I personally didn't care much for this story. The main character had way too many first-person conversations with herself, which I found rather annoying. There were also a number of grammatical and spelling errors throughout. However, serious devotees of the Hitchcock films might find this story enjoyable. [2.5 stars]

**Jaws of Saturn** (by Lair Barron): Living in a dilapidated hotel, a powerful, malevolent sorcerer poses as a struggling hypnotist to help an attractive female neighbor quit smoking. Filled with jealous rage, her hit-man boyfriend decides to put an end to their mysterious relationship, but encounters greater resistance than he

bargained for upon confronting the hypnotist. The main thing that stood out for me was the sexually explicit nature of this story. I'm not a person who is easily offended by depictions of graphic sex or violence, but it seemed to be included simply for the purposes of shock and awe – it didn't really add any context to the story and was basically just a distraction. Also, the ending was weirdly vague – I'm still not exactly sure of the actual outcome. [2.5 stars]

The Soul in the Bell Jar (by KJ Kabza): In this fantasy/sci-fi story, a young girl visits the estate of her eccentric great-uncle, Dr. Dandridge, while her parents are on an extended trip around the world. The doctor is well-known for his work reanimating dead animals by physically stitching them together with their disembodied souls, a process known as vivification. The majority of this story was fairly well-written, but I felt the ending seemed hurried, anti-climactic and somewhat confusing. [2 stars]

Mr. Splitfoot (by Dale Bailey): A tiresome, exceptionally un-scary paranormal tale about an aging 19th century medium and her odd, death-bed interactions with a ghostly spirit. [1 star]

Introduction to the Body in Fairy Tales (by Jeannine Hall Gailey): An extremely short, three-stanza poem that attempts to illustrate the human body through various fairy tale references. There isn't even enough substance here for me to adequately provide a review. I'm not exactly sure why it was included in this collection – apparently the editor had an extra page and a half in her quota that needed filling. [0 stars]

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## **Jonathan Briggs says**

The first thing I do after pulling Volume Six of "The Best Horror of the Year" out of the Amazon box is flip to the copyright page to see who did that cover. Nice job, Pierre Droal! I'm not sure what's going on there, but I'm intrigued.

The second thing I do is check the Table of Contents. A couple of name brands. A couple of personal favorites. But mostly a lot of unknowns. This was a bad thing last year. Volume Five was loaded with newbies who needed a lot more time practicing their craft before graduating to a collection of the "best" in genre writing. But unfamiliar names carry the potential of an exciting discovery. Laird Barron was a nobody not too long ago. So let's keep an open mind, and see what editor Ellen Datlow has unearthed from the crypt for us this year.

Volume Six is off with a plod in "Apports," which begins as a child abuse revenge story, the kind of thing Andrew Vachss can crank out a half-dozen at a time, then veers into suggestions of the supernatural. Stephen Bacon lays down some good seedy scene-setting amid the British projects, but his characters blow the mood when they start making stilted, overly obvious declarations: "That's no excuse for what you did, but I think you're suffering in your own hell."

In "Mr. Splitfoot," an aging, ailing spiritualist drifts closer to an afterlife significantly darker and colder than the Elysian ideal she's sold her followers. Dale Bailey specializes in a horror-lite, the kind of polite, inoffensive fiction that fills up the stodgy genre digests. As "Mr. Splitfoot" starts to build up a head of steam (I'm sorry, these reviews bring out the Crypt Keeper in me), Bailey backs off to deliver a softer, gentler ending. In all fairness, perhaps he was constrained by historical record, but I often get the feeling Bailey is suppressing a nasty streak that I wish he'd indulge (in print, I mean; I don't want him to track me down and sock me in the mouth or anything).



In "The Good Husband," a man walks in on his wife's fourth and most successful suicide attempt and finds himself too worn out to save her. "She will never be happy," he realizes, and a repeat of previous rescue routines "would just be welcoming her back to hell." If she wants to die ... he'll live with it. Til death do us part? Well, not exactly. "The Good Husband" is a record of despair and the literal decay of a marriage haunted by "the ghost of a feeling." It's only the second Nathan Ballingrud story I've read, but already I'm realizing my inexcusable tardiness in getting a copy of his collection, "North American Lake Monsters."

In Nina Allan's "The Tiger," an ex-con moves into an apartment above a pub where he ponders his innocence. Dennis Croft's conviction in a child's murder was overturned, but after 10 years of being treated like a criminal in prison, he's not entirely cleared of the crime in his head. Like Bacon's opening story, "The Tiger" slinks amid the murk between horror and the British crime story, but Allan is more subtle and crafty in the way she doles out information, thereby upping the tension and unease. It's a shame that she breaks the mood by interrupting the story to namecheck its influences before punking out on the ending, but she almost had me.

"The Soul in the Bell Jar" reads like an extended Gahan Wilson cartoon. KJ Kabza applies a touch of the New Weird to the old, dark house in an oddball story honoring the traditions of the mad scientist, the child in danger, the coach ride through the haunted forest. And zombies ... of a sort. I couldn't decide whether to read this story in Universal black and white or garish Corman color.

"Bones of Crow," Ray Cluley's story of giant, man-eating birds in the projects (What's the British term for the projects?), began promisingly as kind of a twisted spin on Ken Loach's "Kes." But as the story got progressively goofier, it put me more in mind of "The Giant Claw," the '50s turkey that featured a turkey, a giant marionette goonybird that knocked toy planes from the sky and gobbled up parachutists. You'll remember it if you've seen it. "Crow," like "Claw," is worth a larf, but I'm not sure that was quite the effect Cluley intended.

In my day job, I got involved in a debate with a fellow editor about the word "meanwhile." It's a useless word, an authorial clearing of the throat onto the page. Skip the preamble, and write your sentence. I told my colleague that the only places I regularly encountered "meanwhile" were at work when I was deleting it and in comic books from the '60s. That night, I came home and read "The Tin House" and found it haunted by the ghost of "meanwhile," along with more malignant forces. Simon Clark was a mainstay during the Leisure cheezer days when that paperback publisher allowed authors to thrive without having to worry much about fussy copy editors. Clark was better than many, but his "meanwhiles," "try ands" and dialog that's "shrieked," "screamed," "bellowed," "gaped"(?) but seldom simply "said" mark him as a first-draft-and-done kind of pulpster. It's juvenile, sloppy, flabby and not exactly to my taste, but lots of readers like their horror quick and brainless, and it can be fun sometimes.

I'm something of an amateur expert on pop culture, and I know my horror history. But all must bow in awe before the body of knowledge regularly drawn from by Kim Newman, who has somehow managed to see every movie and read every book in the horror/SF genres while prolifically adding his own seminal works to the canon. All this, and he's a snappy dresser, too (I can grow a better mustache tho). Newman often brings this encyclopedic expertise to his fiction, drafting figures from history or characters from other people's novels to deploy them for his own evil purposes. Alfred Hitchcock gets repurposed in "The Only Ending We Have," a clever alternate cut of "Psycho," starring Janet Leigh's put-upon body double. (Is this Newman's tribute to Brian De Palma's tribute to Hitchcock?) In addition to incorporating winking references to most of Hitchcock's major works, Newman, ever the dapper gent, makes sure to give a proper nod to terror royalty -- Norman Bates' true creator, Robert Bloch.

Writers who define themselves by agendas run the risk of boring and irritating an audience that knows before the story even starts that it's going to bang on that agenda like a revivalist thumps his favorite Bible. So goes "Fine in the Fire." Within its opening pages, I knew what Lee Thomas was up to: what demons plagued all-star sports jock beloved golden boy character Toby and what his religious father was doing to "cure" him. But Thomas drags his story out for an unconscionable time before dropping his shocker of a denouement, exhausting my patience with his mix of predictability and preposterousness. "Fine in the Fire" follows Derek Kunsken's "The Dog's Paw," a "Twilight Zone"-type twist on Islamic extremism. Purveyors of this kind of preachiness, who try to use the genre as a tool to enlighten us poor benighted readers, often come off as tools themselves.

"Dream within a dream. ... Nothing mysterious or creepy about that," says the tough guy protagonist of Laird Barron's "Jaws of Saturn." As the oft-unsettled owner of an overactive unconscious myself, I must disagree. It might just be a matter of concurrently reading a Best of anthology from the '90s by Ellen Datlow's chief competitor as horror's most venerable editor, but "Jaws of Saturn" reminded me of the kind of stories Karl Edward Wagner was writing before he died: sexually explicit nightmares bleeding and blurring into the waking world. Another classic genre tradition Barron enlivens is that of "apartment horror." This is the second Barron story I know of about The Broadsword building. "Almost a century old, and enormous, its caretakers kept alive certain elements and traditions not often present in its modern counterparts." Grammatical flub aside, that sentence hints at caretakers somewhat more ominous than the landlady banging on the door to demand the rent, and in *The Broadsword*, neighborly disputes take on higher stakes than how late it's reasonable to crank Zeppelin on the stereo. Barron is perhaps setting up his own mini-mythos, similar to Roman Polanski's loose trilogy of urban dweller unrest.

A plane crash at sea would be harrowing enough, but Linda Nagata takes the worst-case scenario further in "Halfway Home." She spoils her ending early-on by mentioning biohazards and a passenger wearing a thick coat of makeup, but the story's a thrill for most of its duration, and it should make its more well-traveled readers rethink their frequent flier miles. Neil Gaiman also turns in a maritime disaster in the slight but finely sliced "Down to a Sunless Sea."

Best for last, right? Ellen Datlow often saves something special for the final slot in her annuals, and Brian Hodge gets the honored position this year with his novella "The Same Deep Waters As You." Kerry Larimer, an "animal whisperer," is recruited by Homeland Security to utilize her insight at "an older version of Guantanamo Bay. ... It's the home of the most long-term enemy combatants ever held in US custody." Kerry has been summoned to try to communicate with the inmates, 63 travesties of nature captured in the 1920s from a blighted little town called Innsmouth. After decades in slimy saltwater captivity, the prisoners sense the imminence of an event inconceivably apocalyptic, and the U.S. military would like a sneak peek. Too many Mythos acolytes cluster in their foetid little klatches to regale each other with the same old stories using the same old set of monsters described by the same old set of adjectives. (Look no further than the first volume of the anthology series Hodge's story was taken from.) The unspeakable, unfathomable cosmic unknown has become the toothless, tentacled, comfortable familiar. Hodge doesn't do comfortable, and if he's going to swim Lovecraft's fishman-infested waters, "full of secrets and unintended tombs," he's going to leave a singular ring around that tub. (That probably doesn't sound like a compliment.) I get downright irate that Brian Hodge isn't wildly popular and disgustingly successful. We all have our favorite obscure cult artists, but come on, people, he's way past due! This isn't an entirely altruistic wish. I just want my fair shot at getting a copy of his books before they go out of print.

Despite a batch of stories centering on the great oceanic unknown, "The Best Horror of the Year Volume Six" doesn't reach the series' high-water mark of Volume Four, but it's a league or two above last year's bottom feeder. Although there are few stories so exceptional that they warrant the appellation "best," there's

a uniform solidity to the selections this year. The copy editing was more attentive (still leaving room for improvement), and even the worst tale of the bunch is quite readable and well-constructed. Datlow's picks may be overly safe -- shocks and shivers are in short supply. But they're solid. And there's particularly fine work from Nathan Ballingrud, Kim Newman and Brian Hodge.

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### **Cats of Ulthar February Weird Fiction says**

When a reader must stop in the middle of a story in order to wait for daylight before continuing, and when a tale leaves the reader shivering even at the memory, that is a sign of a Horror Anthology well worth the reading. This is very true of this volume, which effectively proves that Horror can be subtle, not splatter.

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### **Heidi Ward says**

Another superior collection from editor Ellen Datlow. (I'd give it a 4.5, but the system won't let me.)

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### **Shawn says**

Well, I'm rapidly approaching the end of my previous reading list and will soon be plunging into my next one (newly retooled with expanded categories) which should, by a rough estimation, take me about 2 years or a bit longer to cycle through. So here I am mopping up the most recent of the big two "year's best" - having just finished Best New Horror: Volume 25, here's the complimentary volume in the annual publishing ritual...

Experientially, I enjoyed this more than Jones' volume (some side comments in Datlow's opening "Summation" lead me to believe we may share some more subtle definitions of genre), but toting up the "grades", it ends up at about the same place, when all's said and done. Repeat after me - anthologies, editor's tastes, varied quality, subjectivity... etc. And, my usual statement of structure for this and all anthology reviews: least engaging to most engaging.

As is my wont, I skipped the poetry so no comment from me on "Introduction To The Body In Fairy Tales" by Jeannine Hall Gailey. This volume shares a story with Jones' collection - a story I didn't like then and didn't reread now, so here's a re-purposing of my previous review of "Stemming The Tide" by Simon Strantzas, which I found thuddingly obvious (more so because the main character actually voices the metaphorical implications of the story's scenario in which the dead periodically rise from the sea for no good reason except to be a metaphor - and even more so because there's not much, if any, actual story told through which the metaphor could naturally flow). Honestly, at most there's an image and a setting/scenario standing in for a full story. Eh. Much like the short Clive Barker piece in the Jones' volume, here we get a slim trifle from Neil Gaiman - "Down To A Sunless Sea" - and, you can quote Coleridge in the title all you want but that doesn't mean this barely developed scene featuring a mother distraught over the fate of her castaway son (cannibalism on the open ocean) is actually a developed story - I have no doubt that, like the Barker piece mentioned, it was included simply to cash in on the author's audience. I started "The Soul In The Bell Jar" by KJ Kabza but didn't finish it due to an admitted personal bias. The piece starts fine as a ripe piece of

Victorian-era Gothic, a daughter abandoned by her parents arriving at the gloomy, sprawling mansion of her notorious crazed mad-scientist uncle but, sadly, the story takes place in some steampunkish alternate reality where "souls" can be surgically stitched back onto corpses, or even different corpses, to enable a form of revivification - and this is not some mad-science breakthrough of the Uncle's but an accepted scientific art (although the Uncle is pushing the limits) in a world with a decidedly different religious history. Sorry, but that's just not my bag - too far from reality for me to suspend disbelief - and I threw in the towel after the effective start suddenly lurched into overdrive to begin rushing towards the ending. YMMV. Steve Rasnic Tem's work has never really clicked with me, and his piece here - "The Monster Makers" - is a similarly abstracted (if solidly written) piece in which a Grandfather attempts to reign in his two monstrous grandchildren who have the power to distort reality on a whim... or something like that. It didn't really hang together for me as a story. Finally, in the "okay" category, we have "The Tin House" by Simon Clark - one of those stories that's perfectly fine for what it is, a run of the mill horror story, but perplexes when it shows up in a "Year's Best" collection. A cop investigating a disappearance from the titular location discovers an old evil within the walls. The central concept is the usual bog-standard "sins of the past revisited" (in this case, slavery) embodied in one of those gruesomely physical ways that seems more like something from a horror comic book than anything from real life and I guess that fits because the ending is all TALES FROM THE CRYPT retribution. Now, I have room for that kind of stuff when done well (and by that I \*don't\* mean the lazy cliché of "reinvented in an interesting way") but this was just the usual, wrapped up in some fine but also clunky and inelegant writing. Disappointingly old-school (and, again, I say that as someone who \*likes\* old school).

Next up are the stories that mostly work but have some kind of flaw or mitigating factor in their success. "The House On Cobb Street" by Lynda E. Rucker is an interesting haunted house tale, assembled from blog posts, newspaper reports and a first person narrative from a now vanished occupant. This is well-written and the idea is fairly well-handled although I wish the author could have been more deft in getting the inventive concept (how the haunting "works") across to the reader without blatantly stating it. Steve Toase's "Call Out" is a simple monster story in which a rural veterinarian is lured into a trap involving a folkloric beast. Well-written and suspenseful but a detail in the ending kind of rankled, considering the situation was based on the character being trapped. "Bones Of Crow" by Ray Cluley is another monster story, this one in an urban setting as a defeated young woman, tending to her dying father in his dismal tower-block apartment, encounters monstrous birds on the building's roof. The added element to make it something more of a story is psychological, which works partly but the ending felt a bit easy. Similarly, Jane Jakeman's "Majorlena" - a short monster story set during the Iraq war featuring ambushed soldiers being preyed on by something awful - works because of its stripped down nature - but with little added element all you get is an okay monster story. I was quite digging the echoes of de Maupassant's interrogation of fetishism in Priya Sharma's "The Anatomist's Mnemonic" - in which a hand fetishist's dreams are fulfilled - until the story reached the (seeing a pattern yet?) bit too "on the money"/ "lurid horror story" ending, which undid some of the delicate build-up. "The Withering" by Tim Casson has a lot going for it - a historical setting (America in the 1890s) and good understanding of the characteristics and mores of the time, just to name two - but its story of a female scientist using her father's invention to speak to the dead and solve crimes has an oddly self-cancelling quality to it, as failure is the only achievement, and that feels doubly odd as it seems intended to set-up a series character. Oddly unsatisfying. Similarly, Laird Barron's "The Jaws Of Saturn" has a great set-up, as a tough-guy bodyguard decides to rough-up an aging hypnotist/magician who's been spending time with his girl, only to discover the magician is the real deal. There's some very effective cosmic horror here as the main character plunges into well-described, maddening hallucinations - and Barron excels at sketching real world, lived-in characters and settings with efficient gestures - but the downward spiral trajectory of the plot - while true to the genre - ultimately felt unsatisfying.

Next up are the solidly "good" stories by my estimation. Stephen Bacon's "Apports" has a man intent on

revenge track down a suicide survivor (who killed in innocent in his attempt) to find him living in squalor and tortured by ghostly phenomena. What starts as a nasty ghost story with no actual incident ends as a story of damnation and redemption. "Fine In The Fire" by Lee Thomas has a younger brother discover the dark secret that his older brother has endured over the years in service of their father's need for conformity. Such awful things still happen every day, sadly and this piece of quasi-psychological horror, while perhaps the slightest bit too long relative to the payoff, does an excellent job illustrating what some people endure in the name of all that is good and right and Christian. Linda Nagata's "Halfway Home" starts with a passenger jet ditching in the Pacific Ocean but what starts as a survival horror tale develops into a story about greater responsibilities to the whole of mankind as an athletic, proactive young woman rescues two of her fellow passengers only to find them all doomed for a worse fate. An efficient, cruel little thriller.

I liked Derek Kunsken's story "The Dog's Paw" (when it passed through my submissions process last year) so much that I bought it for the Pseudopod broadcast (it can be heard here) and was happy to see it here, getting the recognition it deserves. A diplomatic functionary in an Arabic country has to deal with a minor, transformative miracle while also attending to the aftermath of an honor killing. Good stuff. "The Good Husband" by Nathan Ballingrud starts on a grim note as a husband, exhausted by his depressed wife's unending suicide attempts, finally decides to let her succeed - only to have her turn up the next morning at the breakfast table - although not unscathed. What follows is a tale of love and necrophilia and I appreciated that this well-written, well-thought-out story took a thoroughly \*human\* approach to its characters. Some male writers would have made the focus the husband's grief, exhaustion and stress at the wife's pre-story actions. Some female writers would have focused on the wife's transformation and the husband's choice as displaying the deep-seated sexist roots of their relationship in which she was only an object that he owned. Instead, we get a thoroughly \*human\* author who maturely treats both characters with understanding and honesty, allowing us to experience the various aspects that the plot uncovers on our own, not led by an agended hand. The wife's slow-motion devolution into passive death puts to shame much modern zombie writing, it should be said (and here without many of the violent crutches of that subgenre).

Brian Hodge, in "The Same Deep Waters As You" has a tv-star "animal whisperer"/animal communications expert (more of a preternatural "gift" than a skill) drafted by Homeland Security to help them attend to a long-lived problem kept deeply secret for decades. It seems they've been warehousing a population on a prison island, a colony of the degenerate inhabitants of a New England seaport town that was raided by the FBI back in the twenties. This population doesn't age and, now, seems to be evidencing some renewed vigor after years of torpor. While it's the usual modern take on Lovecraftian themes and not particularly profound or ambitious in its treatment of the material, the story is still solid and well-told. "That Tiny Flutter Of The Heart I Used To Call Love" by Robert Shearman is a powerful and disturbing portrait of psychological horror - of an obsessive and quasi-incestuous ritual between siblings that manifests itself in the execution of dolls, and the imprinting of this habit as it affects the girl into her adulthood and marriage. Not only a deft portrait of the mental imbalance of the idle rich, this also features some nicely subtle commentary on the damaging normalization of the costs of war in western culture. Dale Bailey's "Mr. Splitfoot" treats us to the deathbed reminiscing of Maggie Fox (one of the two girls who began the Spiritualism craze of the 1800s with her toe-cracking abilities) as she reflects on a life of fraud and fame and regret - and the awful supernatural truth that she and her sister experienced behind the facade. This reminded me a bit of Joyce Carol Oates "The Night-Side".

Finally, the three best stories in the collection, by my tastes. "The Only Ending We Have" by Kim Newman is much in the vein of the author's previous "Illimitable Dominion" (which posited an alternate world in which Roger Corman/Hollywood's mass-mediuming of Edgar Allan Poe's worldview to the AIP/Beach Movie crowd changed history) - that is to say, a deliberate interrogation of horror's resonance through pop-culture. Here, we're given a scenario in which a body-double actress (having just completed filming of a

famous scene in a now well-known horror film) flees the set in disgust and frustration with her domineering director, taking along the only copy of that pivotal scene. Her theft puts her on the run, plunging into a rain-soaked road journey through suspense and darkness that ends at a collapsing seaside motel run by a lonely, strange young man and his hated mother.... At this point, one could write a tidy monograph on short horror fiction based on the actors, directors and general cultural influence of horror films (see my recent review of "Whitstable" by Stephen Volk in Best New Horror: Volume 25, or Joe Hill's non-genre, non-horror "Bobby Conroy Comes Back From The Dead" from his 20th Century Ghosts for just two examples, there are many more) and I generally feel trepidation when starting such a story for two reasons: one is my worry that we'll be treated to either a hagiography or a hatchet job - or perhaps just a clumsy reduction - of real people who lived in the real world and were all more complex than any short form can encompass. Secondly is my growing awareness that meta-horror fiction's secret trap is the author forgetting to actually make it a horror story while being all smug and referential - and this seems even more likely for a story anchored in the real world (which arguably limits the fictional options somewhat). But here, Newman cannily and inventively composes a story not so much around PSYCHO itself but instead exploring the whole mid-50s Hitchcockian milieu, brimming with all the signifiers. Perhaps the slightest bit ripe in spots (you get the expected playful placing of film titles and resonant iconography into the text), this also features some very deep-level Hitchcockian references (AHP episode details) and, most enjoyably, a wonderfully paranoid expansion of the "Hitchcock cameo" conceit into suspenseful noir/stalking territory. More impressive still is Newman's conjuring of the whole seedy/paranoid/homicidal worldview of Hitchcock/Noir at the time - everyone and everything is potentially corrupt and suspect, exploiter or exploited, every object a weapon, every setting a trap - suffusing the atmosphere that permeates the piece. The seedy aspect is accentuated through an unflinching presentation of the psychological, psychosexual and misogynistic drives underpinning the films and the era, manifest in language and jokes and career options. An impressive story.

"The Fox" by Conrad Williams features a family camping excursion in the late-autumn gone wrong as the father senses something amiss with the appearance of dead chickens and dead foxes in the snow. Nature as malignant background is well-deployed here to generate suspense, with some very sharp attention to real-world detail and slowly creeping atmosphere, spiced with psychological insight, that builds to a very Daphne du Maurier-like ending. Excellent work.

Finally, "The Tiger" by Nina Allan confidently uses one of the genres most slippery and dangerous tools, ambiguity, to greatly impressive effect. An ex-convict (who may or may not have raped and murdered a girl - he's not sure himself) finds adjusting to life in the real world extremely difficult. There are many ways to use ambiguity in horror and the approach chosen here - ambiguity of character - is extremely well-considered, playing on our feelings of empathy and suspicion through use of stressful detail or off-kilter, oddly turned phrases and thoughts. A haunting piece.

And that is, as they say... it!

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## **Mack Moyer says**

A strong anthology, no question. "The Good Husband" showed me how not to handle my wife's suicide and "Apports" is unsettling to the core (scary tykes always get me).

"The Same Deep Waters As You" is a Lovecraft homage, complete with a return to Innsmouth and collection of amphibious humanoid fish folk, and it shines albeit with a cameo I fully expected. I didn't want it at first but when a certain something showed up at the end, I got the chills.

"Introduction to the Body in Fairy Tales" is a ghostly poem which I enjoyed. Generally the creepiest part of any poem I read is the possibility that someone might ask me to explain it. (Me: "The, uh, words go together...good.")

The featured lowlight is Neil Gaiman's "Down to a Sunless Sea" which is barely a story at all. With second-person narration (christ...) it reads more like a 19-year-old's first draft in a creative writing class that he never should have paid for in the first place.

"The Tin House" isn't bad, actually, though I could have done without the heavy handed condemnation of American slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation did that already.

Overall, a great read. Reading Volume Seven shortly.

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### **Rachel says**

Where to start? Why 2 stars? It's because out of 23 stories (one is a poem), only 3 were actually entertaining, and only one was scary (The Good Husband). Neil Gaiman's teensy story was a good "gotcha!" moment, but still not horror. The last is almost a novella, and it's an update on Lovecraft's Innsmouth story. Still wasn't scary.

This whole volume read as more of a strange tales collection, rather than any sort of horror. If they did hint at the horror genre or anything vaguely horrifying, the stories would veer off into safer territory, or just end suddenly.

If you would like to actually read something scary, I highly recommend The Lovecraft ezine, anything by Junji Ito, or The New Gothic. I've written reviews for these as well.

Maybe I just have too high standards, but I expect certain things from the genre: (1) to be grossed out, (2) get goosebumps, (3) have the potential for nightmares, (4) explore a new, unseen world, or (5) to experience a story from the antagonist's or antihero's POV.

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### **Bob Milne says**

When it comes to the annual 'Best of' anthologies, Jonathan Strahan may be the editorial King (especially in recent years) of sci-fi and fantasy, but Ellen Datlow is the undisputed Queen of horror.

That brings us to The Best Horror of the Year, Volume 6, which is scheduled to hit the shelves early next month. The anthology begins with her usual summation on selection, awards, and notable novels, magazines, stories, anthologies, collections, and more. If you ever wondered just what an editor has to go through to put together an anthology like this, or wondered just how much reading they might have to do, then gaze in awe and wonder at the wealth of material she had to read to get to this point. It's staggering.

With 24 pieces from different authors clocking in at anywhere from 1,100 to 15,800 words, there's a lot to read here. My approach to these kinds of anthologies tends to be layered, with a first pass at stories by authors I recognize, a second at the titles that intrigue me the most, and a final pass as the rest of the collection. It's an approach that I find interesting because it allows me consider the individual merits of the

stories, as opposed to how they compare to the bigger names in the collection.

As for those recognized names I hit on my first pass, Simon Clark's *The Tin House* is a different sort of haunted house tale, one populated by memories (particularly the guilty) ones of those who passed in cruelty, while Steve Rasnic Tem's *The Monster Makers* takes an awkward, uncomfortable look at the cruelty of children - children who are neither as innocent nor as blameless as we might like to think. Kim Newman's *The Only Ending We Have* was my second-favorite of the collection, a Hitchcock tribute about a young woman on-set for *Psycho* that I had to read twice - once for the story, and a second time to catch all the references. Down to a *Sunless Sea* by Neil Gaiman will likely garner a lot of attention, but as much as I liked its surreal sort of dreamy quality, I was left wanting something more. The final story in the anthology, Brian Hodge's *The Same Deep Waters as You* was the one story to beat out Newman for my favorite entry, with a fantastic tale of Lovecraftian monsters versus Homeland Security.

Of those I encountered on my subsequent passes, Stephen Bacon's *Apports* was a great tale of a vengeful poltergeist; Steve Toase's *Call Out* involved a twisted sort of human sacrifice that I quite enjoyed; and Lynda E. Rucker's *The House on Cobb Street* was an amazingly constructed story that I can't find a way to describe without spoiling the tale. *The Fox* by Conrad Williams was a great campfire horror story (literally) that does a nice job of building the suspense to a never feverish intensity, while Tim Casson's *The Withering* was a solid period piece about a young woman who can hear the voices of the dead, and who is called upon to determine a question of guilt.

Overall, a solid collection of atmospheric, subtle sort of horror stories that unnerve and creep rather than outright horrify. With a focus more on emotion than gore, Datlow has taken what seems a very 'classic' sort of approach to *The Best Horror of the Year, Volume 6*, and I suspect that will really appeal to many readers. Check it out, even if just for Newman & Hodge - they're worth the price of admission alone.

*Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins*

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## **Erin says**

These anthologies are always a crap shoot, and it's impossible to please everyone with every story - there are twenty-three stories and one poem in this book, so while there's probably something for everyone here, the question is really how many out of the twenty-four. For me, sadly, I don't think the ratio favored this book.

Since twenty-four stories/poems are just too many to review (and, frankly, the only thing I might have to say about some of them would be "Ugh." or "How did this get published?" and that's just not nice), I'll simply list the ones I thought were decent to okay (there wasn't even one that I really loved, and therein lies the two star rating, since with twenty-four options, the odds are that I should have really liked ONE of them, right?):

"*The House on Cobb Street*" by Lynda E. Rucker - liked, but didn't love the story, but did enjoy the acknowledgment that should ALWAYS be made in haunted house stories...the answer to the question, "Um, why don't you just leave, then?" Rucker's reply, "Countless storytellers worked themselves into contortions and employed ludicrous plot contrivances to keep their protagonists captive, and yet the answer, Vivian learned, was so much simpler: You stayed because you gave up. You succumbed to a kind of learned helplessness that convinced you that the veil between worlds had been pulled back and you could not escape; wherever you went, you would always be haunted. You entered into an abusive relationship with a haunted



house." - I'll buy that.

"Call Out" by Steve Toase - Country vet called out on a livestock birth - interesting concept and well written. Nice sense of dread.

"The Fox" by Conrad Williams - Family camping trip. Moral: don't fuck with nature. It will always get it's own back, and you probably deserve it.

"The Anatomist's Mnemonic" by Priya Sharma - Great title for a story with an ending I didn't see coming, always a pleasant surprise.

"The Dog's Paw" by Derek Kunsken - This wasn't a GREAT story, but brutal and had some nice touches (two stories in the collection touch on honor killings), I think it was the unusual setting that I enjoyed - brought to mind the excellent Song of Kali by Dan Simmons.

"Fine in the Fire" by Lee Thomas - You'll see where this is going right away, but you understand why the protagonist doesn't not, and I enjoyed the style.

"Halfway Home" by Linda Nagata - Terror at twenty-thousand feet. Would have been my favorite of the collection but for the disappointing ending.

"The Same Deep Waters As You" by Brian Hodge - Animal behavior expert brought in by Homeland Security - but why? Another candidate for my favorite but for a rather nothingish ending.

So, there you go. I do enjoy reading these books, hoping I can find some new favorites, and I very much appreciated the effort taken by Datlow to talk about notable publications during the year - I'm adding several of those to my Mount TBR.

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## Bill says

Volume six of *The Best Horror of the Year* is a welcome return to the edgy and diverse selection of stories this series presented in its first two volumes; recent volumes have been a little bland, presenting stories that are fairly similar in tone and style. This year's volume contains several stories that provide food for thought as well as a few scares.

From the first story on throughout the collection, there are morally complex tales in which the protagonist finds himself in a hopeless situation from which the story's horror derives. More often than not, the inaction of the protagonist is the most horrific aspect of the story. The stories deal with suicide, neo-colonialism, repressed homosexuality, terrorism, honor killings, and other difficult subjects. Most of the stories with a moral imperative have an innovative plot structure or narration, including an effective use of second-person narration by Neil Gaiman and the demi-epistolary "The House on Cobb Street" by Lynda E. Ruckner.

Scattered throughout the edgy stories with a statement to make are straightforward narratives whose plots

would be right at home on *Night Gallery* or in an EC comic. Among these "choke, gasp" stories are: "Call Out" by Steve Toase; "The Tin House" by Simon Clark; and "The Anatomist's Mnemonic" by Priya Sharma. I tend to like this type of story a little less only because there are so many horror anthologies that traffic in only this type of monster story, and not the more psychological fare described above.

There are also subgenre stories, such as the steampunky "Soul in the Bell Jar" and the Lovecraft mythos story "The Same Deep Waters as You" by Brian Hodge. The latter is the final story of the collection, and it is a weak ending to the volume. It's not a bad story, I suppose, but we have seen the monsters countless times, and this seems like a flat note to end what is otherwise an engaging and original collection.

Well worth the read.

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## **Jaime K says**

I received a copy at Book Con in NYC and haven't read the other volumes.  
This is a good anthology.

**Apports** by Stephen Bacon: Chilling story about a dead child's ghost and the apports the kid leaves his father...and almost step-father.

**Mr. Splitfoot** by Dale Bailey: It was an odd story that I didn't enjoy about girls in the 1800s raising a spirit.

**The Good Husband** by Nathan Ballingrud: Gross (but not horribly so) story about a wife who committed suicide, but comes back (scaring her husband) until she rots away.

**The Tiger** by Nina Allan: An accused murderer was (and becomes) possibly possessed and homicidal. It gave me goosebumps.

**The House on Cobb Street** by Lynda E. Rucker: A woman (and her husband) enters "an abusive relationship with a haunted house." Some Lit stories I read in high school ('Rose for Emily' and 'Yellow Wallpaper') were mentioned and were relevant to the story. It wasn't all that bad.

**The Soul in the Bell Jar** by KJ Kabza: A very creepy adult-like "Series of Unfortunate Events" story of vivified animals and a doctor who extracts and restitches souls.

**Call Out** by Steve Toase: Malcolm, a Veterinarian, witnesses a bargest (huge black dog, the Grim in 'Harry Potter') come to life.

**That Tiny Flutter of the Heart I Used to Call Love** by Robert Shearman: A young girl loves her brother so much that when she comes to love the dolls her father brings back from his trips, the siblings go out and kill the dolls. When her brother dies, Karen's heart is so full of love she can't fully love her husband until they kill her current dolls. It was CREEPY.

**Bones of Crow** by Ray Cluley: A woman finds huge eggs left by a crow and touches one. The baby dies in the egg, and the mother has grotesque revenge. I didn't personally enjoy it, but it is perfect for the anthology.

**Introduction to the Body in Fairy Tales** by Jeannine Hall Gailey: That was a pointless piece of random writing and had no reason to be in here.

**The Tin House** by Simon Clark: A tin house by the ocean holds an extremely chilling secret leading back to the days of slaves.

**The Fox** by Conrad Williams: On a mountain farm, a man and his family notices dead chickens and then a dead fox. The fox exacts revenge on the man from a mistake made many years prior.

**Stemming the Tide** by Simon Strantzas: It was weird, but it worked; zombies roll in with the tide and are unleashed on the world.

**The Anatomist's Mnemonic** by Priya Sharma: This was reminiscent of Stephen King. I was able to predict the ending of an interesting story of a man with a hand fetish, and needs to find the perfect pair to find his soul mate.

**The Monster Makers** by Steve Rasnic Tem: This was weird and I wish was fleshed out more. A family's mind creates monsters of people...but only sometimes.

**The Only Ending We Have** by Kim Newman: A Hitchcock actress learns the limits and strengths of hate.

**The Dog's Paw** by Derek Künsken: A man is penalized by the gods for his daughter's misbehaviour by growing the paws of a dog. It was odd.

**Fine in the Fire** by Lee Thomas: This was a slightly eerie story of a country man trying to shock his son's gay away.

**Majorlena** by Jane Jakeman: Soldiers in Iraq randomly meet Major Lena, who has a freaking creepy secret.

**The Withering** by Tom Casson: I enjoyed the necromancy of this. The dead can be recalled for a brief period of time to name a killer or explain the method of their death.

**Down to a Sunless Sea** by Neil Gaiman: I felt this was an incomplete story of a boy who joins sailors and is ended up eaten to his bones after an accident.

**Jaws of Saturn** by Lair Barron: A sorcerer acts as a hypnotist for a woman who is trying to quit smoking. Yet he has a more sinister plan, where nightmares become reality. It'd be interesting to see this more fleshed out.

**Halfway Home** by Linda Nagata: Not a real "horror" story in the eerie/supernatural sense, but horrific in a 'the onset of a bioterroristic plague' way. There was also a plane crash, which is frightening in itself.

**The Same Deep Waters As You** by Brian Hodge: This involves an older version of Guantanamo Bay, where prisoners from 1925 are still alive. A woman named Kerry, who can speak with animals, can attune to the non-humans' thoughts to determine why there is a near-uprising at hand.

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## **Bogdan says**

“Apports” by Stephen Bacon (Black Static, #36) Spiritul unui copil il bantuie pe ucigasul sau. Slabut.

“Mr. Splitfoot” by Dale Bailey (Queen Victoria’s Book of Spells, eds. Ellen Datlow & Terri Windling, Tor Books) Bla, bla...Plictisitor.

“The Good Husband” by Nathan Ballingrud (North American Lake Monsters, Small Beer Press) Prima povestire prezenta si in antologia Paulei Guran (The Year’s Best Dark Fantasy & Horror, 2014 Edition) citita recent (am scris pe Goodreads cateva impresii despre ea) si care mi-a placut. Atunci.

“The Tiger” by Nina Allan (Terror Tales of London, ed. Paul Finch, Gray Friar Press). Am auzit cate ceva despre autoare, dar nu m-a dat peste cap povestirea.

“The House on Cobb Street” by Lynda E. Rucker (Nightmare, June 2013) Uffff!

“The Soul in the Bell Jar” by K.J. Kabza (The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, November/December 2013). A doua povestire prezenta si in cealalta Antologie si care mi-a placut. Nenorocul lui Datlow ca acolo am citit-o prima oara.

“Call Out” by Stephen Toase (Innsmouth Magazine, #12). Si asa mai vedem ce creaturi mai nasc oile pe la tara.

“That Tiny Flutter of the Heart I Used to Call Love” by Robert Shearman (Psycho-Mania!, ed. Stephen Jones, Constable & Robinson) Asa si asa. Era si dincolo.

“Bones of Crow” by Ray Cluley (Black Static, #37) Mmm, nimic extraordinar.

“Introduction to the Body in Fairy Tales” by Jeannine Hall Gailey (Phantom Drift, #3). Fuuu!

“The Fox” by Conrad Williams (This is Horror chapbook). Fuuu, iar!

“The Tin House” by Simon Clark (Shadow Masters, ed. Jeani Rector, Imajin Books). Asa si asa. familia unui comerciant englez care a facut avere din comertul de sclavi ascunde un secret cutremurator.

“Stemming the Tide” by Simon Strantzas (Dead North, ed. Silvia Moreno-Garcia, Exile Editions) MMMmm, asa si asa. Zombie vin dinspre mare.

“The Anatomist’s Mnemonic” by Priya Sharma (Black Static, #32). URASC povestirile despre criminali. NU vad NIMIC horror in ele. Unu are o obsesie pentru maini si prin urmare le cioparteste pe doua artiste sa faca schimb de membre.

“The Monster Makers” by Steve Rasnic Tem (Black Static, #35) NU a fost rea. Niste copii pot transforma in creaturi, nu prea placute, orice om pe care li se pune pata.

“The Only Ending We Have” by Kim Newman (Psycho-Mania!, ed. Stephen Jones, Constable & Robinson) Nu am avut rabdare sa o citesc si are... multe... multe... pagini!

“The Dog’s Paw” by Derek Künsken (Chilling Tales: In Words, Alas, Drown I, ed. Michael Kelly, EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing). Pfuu!!! O combinatie intre fantastic si uciderea unei fete musulmane cu pietre. DEZAMAGITOR subiect. MAI RAU NU SE POATE!

“Fine in the Fire” by Lee Thomas (Like Light For Flies, Lethe Press) Mai mult fantastica decat horror. NImic special.

“Majorlena” by Jane Jakeman (Supernatural Tales, #24) Scurta, dar mai buna decat multe de aici. Teatrele de razboi din diferitele zone fierbinti ale Globului pot fi martore la aparitia unor creaturi misterioase si stravechi.

“The Withering” by Tim Casson (Black Static, #32) Frumusica. Intr-o atmosfera gotica, o detectiva ce se foloseste de mijloace mai neconventionale incerca sa rezolve o crima misterioasa.

“Down to a Sunless Sea” by Neil Gaiman (The Guardian.com) Scurta, dar ok. NU e “wow”.

“Jaws of Saturn” by Laird Barron (The Beautiful Thing That Awaits Us All, Night Shade Books). In sfarsit ceva mai intens. Un cuplu se afla sub influenta unui mag “negru”(warlock in text) si trece prin tot felul de situatii incredibile, ce le testeaza sanatatea mintala.

“Halfway Home” by Linda Nagata (Nightmare, September 2013) Mai mult povestire de suspans, decat horror.

“The Same Deep Waters as You” by Brian Hodge (Weirder Shadows Over Innsmouth, ed. Stephen Jones, Fedogan & Bremer). Text de inspiratie Lovecraftiana. Foarte bine gandit si realizat.

Daca e sa tin cont ca doua dintre cele mai bune povestiri le-am citit si in The Year’s Best Dark Fantasy & Horror, 2014 Edition de Paula Guran si de fapt doar alte doua texte mi-au placut foarte mult, procentul lucrarilor speciale si reusite nu este unul foarte imbucurator pentru Antologia de fata. Daca ar fi sa le analizez pe cele doua noi observ ca ambele sunt prezente in lucrari cu tematica Lovecraftiana, desi in “Call out” acest curent nu este chiar asa de evident si as trage concluzia ca lucrarile tematice de acest gen publica, cel putin pentru mine, textele mai interesante . Sau au publicat in 2014.

O alta observatie ar fi ca urasc povestirile si oamenii care gasesc de cuvinta ca actiunile celor cu afectiuni psihice si tendinte criminale pot fi incadrate la categoria de horror. Eu as spune ca e mai degraba o boala sau o deviatie si nu un caz de pus intr-o Antologie horror. Sunt foarte iritat cand se intampla asa si imi creeaza frustrare si antipatie fata de Antologator. Mai ales cand vad ca se intampla din ce in ce mai des.

Cam inegale ca si valoare antologiile de genul asta din ultima vreme. Chiar daca in final e o chestie de gusturi cred ca dreptatea e de partea mea.

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## **Aaron Bellamy says**

I won't say I'm losing faith in Ellen Datlow. I'm not. But this volume is one of the weaker anthologies I've read in the past year. Maybe the horrors in the actual world are simply stealing the stuff of nightmare slipped

into the seams of things, and the urge to face them have lessened, I don't know. I still love the look of this series, and I always like Datlow's long summation at the beginning. People don't talk enough about how a book looks these days... these volumes are well made with a great type face, easy to read, and look great on the shelf. And usually the stories are pretty good too. This volume isn't bad, it just isn't good. Almost every story fell into that 'pretty good' category for me. Standouts were "The Good Husband" by Nathan Balingrud, "Call Out" by Steve Toase, "The Only Ending We Have" by Kim Newman was probably my favorite, with "The Same Deep Waters as You" by Brian Hodge a close second. Laird Barron's "Jaws of Saturn" kind of goes without saying. A decent way to pass the time while the blood drains out of your latest victim.

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### **Nicholas Kaufmann says**

Calling anything the best of the year is a tricky proposition. Taste is subjective; one person's trash is another person's treasure. However, I've never read an Ellen Datlow anthology that I didn't think was top-notch, so I've come to trust her taste implicitly. While there were a small handful of stories in this volume that didn't resonate with me the way they clearly must have for Datlow, overall this is a very strong sampling of short-form horror fiction from 2013. Among the standouts for me were "The Good Husband" by Nathan Balingrud, which might be my favorite story of the bunch, "The Soul in the Bell Jar" by KJ Kabza, "That Tiny Flutter of the Heart I Used to Call Love" by Robert Shearman, "The Monster Makers" by Steve Rasnic Tem, "The Only Ending We Have" by Kim Newman, "Fine In the Fire" by Lee Thomas, which is another favorite, and "Jaws of Saturn" by Laird Barron. This is my first time reading a volume of THE BEST HORROR OF THE YEAR but it certainly won't be the last. Recommended for fans of horror, and also for writers interested in learning how great short-form horror fiction works.

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