



Shadows Beneath: The Writing Excuses Anthology

Brandon Sanderson , Mary Robinette Kowal , Dan Wells , Howard Tayler

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From the Hugo Award-winning hosts of the Writing Excuses writing advice show comes a collection of all-new stories of the fantastic, with beautiful illustrations and a behind-the-scenes look at each story's creation.

Brandon Sanderson's "Sixth of the Dusk," set in his Cosmere universe shared by the Mistborn books and the #1 New York Times bestselling Stormlight Archive, showcases a society on the brink of technological change. On the deadly island of Patji, where predators can sense the thoughts of their prey, a lone trapper discovers that the island is not the only thing out to kill him.

Mary Robinette Kowal's "A Fire in the Heavens" is a powerful tale of a refugee seeking to the near-mythical homeland her oppressed people left centuries ago. When Katin discovers the role the "eternal moon" occupies in the Center Kingdom, and the nature of the society under its constant light, she may find enemies and friends in unexpected places.

Dan Wells's "I.E.Demon" features an Afghanistan field test of a piece of technology that is supposed to handle improvised explosive devices. Or so the engineers have told the EOD team that will be testing it; exactly what it does and how it does it are need-to-know, and the grunts don't need to know. Until suddenly the need arises.

Howard Tayler's "An Honest Death" stars the security team for the CEO of a biotech firm about to release the cure for old age. When an intruder appears and then vanishes from the CEO's office, the bodyguards must discover why he is lying to them about his reason for pressing the panic button.

For years the hosts of Writing Excuses have been offering tips on brainstorming, drafting, workshopping, and revision, and now they offer an exhaustive look at the entire process. Not only does Shadows Beneath have four beautifully illustrated fantastic works of fiction, but it also includes transcripts of brainstorming and workshopping sessions, early drafts of the stories, essays about the stories' creation, and details of all the edits made between the first and final drafts.

Come for the stories by award-winning authors; stay for the peek behind the creative curtain.

Shadows Beneath: The Writing Excuses Anthology Details

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From Reader Review Shadows Beneath: The Writing Excuses Anthology for online ebook

Evgeni Kirilov says

I don't know if I can talk about the anthology as a whole (other than to say it was worth the read), so I'll comment on each story individually,

Mary's *A Fire in the Heavens* was really solid. These days I tend to compare authors to Brandon Sanderson, as that's my own measuring stick for perfection, and Mary ranked really high there. The plot was fantastic. Characters - solid. Quality of writing - good. The worldbuilding was not up to my regular standards, but it was a novelette (or novella?), so that was okay.

Brandon's *Sixth of the Dusk* was - lo and behold! - far from disappointing. It has all the elements I've grown to love and recognize in his writing: fantastic world, unique characters, page-turning quality of writing, and the Brandon avalanche. Initially I was a little concerned, because the first few pages felt slow, but things picked up adequately perhaps not 10 pages in.

Howard's *An Honest Death* was the unexpected jewel in the anthology. I've never read anything by him, but I guess I didn't expect such a good story from a comic writer. And, boy, was I wrong. This story had perhaps the best plot out of all four, and that's a high praise from the Sanderson fanboy that I am.

Finally, Dan's *I.E.Demon*. I must admit, I was not impressed by this - it's possible that Dan was trapped in a format he is unfamiliar with (the story was only about 15 pages), but I can't say much good about it. The idea was fun. But the writing was... devoid of emotion is how I felt it. I would read an emotional action-packed scene, and it would feel like a description of the environment. It might be a while before I pick another one of his books... :(

Brian says

I picked this up due to the Brandon Sanderson novella, but was excited to read all 4 stories.

"A Fire in the Heavens" (Mary Robinette Kowal): This is technically considered a long novelette, although it is almost as long as Sanderson's novella. Apparently she usually writes Jane Austen style novels where the women are magic users. This story centers on a female priest (Katin) who commissions a ship to take her across the world to find the land of her ancestors. The first half is fairly academic with a focus on culture, but then it turns into a fairly tense action-adventure romp as she realizes that there was a reason her ancestors left this land. 4 stars.

"I.E.Demon" (Dan Wells): Short story by an author who writes young adult sci-fi and thrillers. This is a fast-paced and amusing military sci-fi story about testing a new "device" that destroys hidden explosives. That device is actually a demon, which escapes during the test drive and starts wreaking havoc. Enjoyable but maybe a little too lightweight, both in length and tone. 3.5 stars.

"An Honest Death" (Howard Taylor): Short story by an author who writes comedic sci-fi, and wow this was fantastic. More dry humor than outright funny, but the tone was perfect. I don't want to go into details too much other than to say that it stars the bodyguard of the CEO of a pharmaceutical corporation. Potential health improvements that the company is researching may be grabbing the attention of Death. Short stories

don't get much better even if this story was a tease. 5 stars.

“Sixth of the Dusk” (Brandon Sanderson): This is barely long enough to be considered a novella. Once again, I don't want to go into details, but it involves a world of archipelagos and birds that bestow psychic-like abilities on their handlers. I do want to point out that Brandon Sanderson has stated that he thrives with long novels and that shorter works are harder for him. This baffles me as this story, *Shadows for Silence*, *The Emperor's Soul*, *Defending Elysium*, and even the *Infinity Blade* stories to a certain extent, prove that he is a master at writing novellas. 4.5 stars.

The entire collection averages out at 4.25 stars, which is not a rating I would typically give. However, whether I consider it 4 stars or 4.5 stars, I will still mark it as 4 stars on Goodreads since only whole stars are allowed. So whatever...

4.25 stars.

Liam Harvey says

What a whirlwind couple of days! I was completely blindsided by the announcement of SHADOWS BENEATH in an episode of the (quite brilliant) Writing Excuses podcast. Much to my delight, this is a follow up to the Brainstorming episodes from last year; each of the Writing Excuses team pitched a story idea and together discussed possible characters, plot, world-building etc. The result was really illuminating, but I had no idea an anthology was in the works!

The format of *Shadows Beneath* is pretty neat; four authors, four stories. With each you get the transcript of the initial brainstorming, a first draft, a critique workshop, then a final draft. In a nice touch, all the edits made are there to see side by side- often with annotations and lines crossed out. It's a refreshingly honest look at the writing process, and shows the graft needed to get tiny germs of a story to a fully fleshed out tale.

The stories themselves are all fun and well-written. As with any anthology you tend to gravitate towards some more than others. I'm probably most familiar with Dan Wells outside of SHADOWS BENEATH- having devoured the John Cleaver series in a single, GLORIOUS day. With I.E.DEMON here though, it's short and sweet, but the modern military trappings weren't totally to my taste.

The big draw for me personally was Howard Tayler's AN HONEST DEATH, whose original pitch got me really excited. I really thought I'd never see his take on the concept, but here it is! A brave change of pace from the also brilliant *Schlock Mercenary*- Howard nailed it!

Mary and Brandon's stories just convinced me that I need to catch up on literally everything else they've written, period. All the *Glamourist Histories* and *Mistborn* books are all on my bookshelf already waiting, with cheeky come-hither eyes.

I bought the e-Book version, so missed out on some apparently super nice illustrations in the hardback. Will be ordering one though, I want to see more anthologies in the future. SHADOWS BENEATH is both the best kind of fan-service, and a wicked primer for the Writing Excuses uninitiated.

Amy says

I loved the short stories. I'm amazed at the creativity of all four of the authors. The best part of this books was the "behind the scenes" part. The transcripts of the brainstorming sessions and the first draft edits and markups were fascinating.

Chris Cutler says

This is absolutely worth getting for the stories, even if you have no interest in the bonus content. If you are not already a Writing Excuses listener, I suggest diving straight into the stories without reference to the brainstorming podcasts that inspired them.

My favorite of the bunch is Howard Tayler's entry, *An Honest Death*. The story is fun and imaginative, the side characters are great, and the POV character is a thoroughly competent and entertaining bodyguard. The conclusion of the story is perfect, and not at all what I expected from the outset. Mary's story is a wonderful depiction of cultures meeting, and I really liked the way language and other disconnects were handled. Brandon's is imaginative and introduces a great world (and inspired the incredible cover art). Dan's is an entertaining mil-fic fantasy that I probably would have enjoyed more if I hadn't heard the brainstorming session, since almost everything was as discussed there.

Katie.g says

I really enjoyed reading this collection of short stories and seeing how the authors first brainstormed their ideas, write their first drafts and then changed them. It was very insightful for me, as someone who is trying to write a novel myself but even if I wasn't planning to write one, it is still very interesting. It shows a side of authors' work that we don't normally get to see, having only read the finished product.

Brandon Sanderson's Sixth of the Dusk was without doubt my favourite short story but Mary's story was also very good and Dan and Howard's stories were interesting, if not the kind of thing I usually read. They are all brilliant examples of how an idea can shape and some of the snagging points that authors can get stuck on when they have an idea which isn't quite right in some way and then they have to go back and change stuff. It was interesting to hear the rest of the groups input on these and to see which things the author took on board and which things they did not.

Neil Hepworth says

This book is a fantastic and rare look behind the curtain of the writing craft.

To many people (even if they are bad at it themselves) writing *seems* simple. I mean, how hard can it be to pound on a keyboard and make a decent short story of only 3,000 words? Well, as any writer will tell you, it's damn hard.

As other reviewers have pointed out, the four stories to start this book are fun and entertaining, but none of them will knock your socks off. However, after reading each story, and *then* reading about the process and

edits for the selection, I came to appreciate each story, and view each story in a new light that readers are rarely privileged to see. I loved how Kowal fleshed out her new culture and religion. I loved how Wells had to write a very specific type of story because his piece was to be printed in an anthology for American soldiers. I loved how Tayler changed the POV character and the POV itself, thus making for a much more engaging read. And I loved how Sanderson completely rewrote the ending of his story so that the reader left feeling satisfied. Folks, these changes are remarkable because we as readers NEVER SEE THEM!

I often tell my students that being a new writer is particularly challenging because you never get to witness a book being made and so you don't know what to expect. You don't know if the troubles you're having are the same troubles someone else is having, too. You can watch the Extras on a DVD to see how movies are made; you can watch Martha Stewart to see how meals are made; you can drive down the street and watch construction workers to see how buildings are made; you can even tour a brewery to see how beer is made - but you never get to see how books are made. Writing is a very mysterious process. This book seeks to demystify the process a bit and takes the reader on a tour of brainstorming, drafts, discussions, revisions, and final stories.

For anyone who wants to know what the writing process is like for successful authors, here it is. Personally, I'll be using this book with my high school Creative Writing class. Writers, teachers, readers who want a peek at the writing mystery, this book is a must read and re-read. Spread the word - more people need to read this book.

Kaitlin says

So I didn't actually know anything about this book prior to its release as I didn't know about the Writing Excuses Podcasts (although now that I do know it sounds super interesting). Basically this is an anthology which contains 4 different novellas by the 4 hosts of the Podcast, Brandon Sanderson (the main reason that I purchased the book) with 'Sixth of the Dusk', Mary Robinette Kowal with 'A Fire in the Heavens', Dan Wells with 'I.E.Demon' and finally Howard Tayler with 'An Honest Death'.

Each story is unique to the style of the author and so they don't share themes or even genres, however the things which are shared between them are the writing group critiques which are all included at the back of this story. We get to have a peek at the first draft of each story, a transcript from the brainstorming session (which must have been my favourite added extra for the background that it helped to form as a backdrop for the stories) and the edits which were made to each story. I loved the inclusion of the transcribed podcast brainstorming and critiquing episodes for the pure fact that when I initially read some of the stories I felt that they were left too open and too broad, but after reading the transcriptions of the ideas I now see 'why' it was left in that way and the decisions which led up to that, and that gives each story a much clearer ending.

I think that the publication of edits and brainstorming sessions and also sometimes essays about why each author planned this or that for their own story, really helps to give an insight into the way that a novel or novella is planned and how it evolves over time, and with more and more people giving their opinion. I loved the behind the scenes feeling which I got from reading these sections and the major reason that I gave this anthology 4.5*s was for those sections as without them some of the novellas would have not been to my tastes enough for me to consider the deeper tones and meaning behind them.

I would love to see a future version of this book layout done by some other authors as I think it's so interesting and as Sanderson is one of my favourite authors reading what he said about each story and the reasoning he put behind each point or idea that he gave really showed more of his personality and made me

feel a lot more connected as a reader to him as a person rather than just an obscure author.

Imagine being able to see the behind the scenes of all of your favourite authors and books? It would be impressive for sure, and this is just the right sort of setting when you have shorter stories which can be analysed in this way.

One thing I did love was that in the brainstorming sessions Mary and Howard both gave multiple ideas for different stories that they were considering in a short paragraph and this really interested me as all of the stories which they suggested seemed like they could have been very thought-provoking and intriguing if they had been the chosen one.

Another thing I need to mention just before I go into analysing each novella individually is the illustrations which were included as I really do love it when art is put in and each story had it's own unique feel which I gleaned just from that one painting or drawing at the start of each. I particularly enjoyed the one for Mary and Sanderson's stories. Mary's story begins with a silhouetted ship flying many sails and sailing towards the moon which was both enchanting and enticing in one glance.

The comic-book feeling of the image for I.E.Demon seemed to fit the crazy story whilst the Death pencil image seemed humorous for the 'An Honest Death Story' and was a clear, clean cut image.

The image which is before Sanderson's story really gives a feeling of a deep, dark island with a strong and courageous character about to embark on an adventure. I also love the mystical looking birds which are a key part of the storyline that follows.

So, now moving on to the individual novellas. I should point out that prior to reading this I had never heard of, much less read anything by, any of the authors other than Sanderson (whom I admire greatly and have read a lot from). So, starting out I read 'A Fire in the Heavens' which was the order that the book went and which Sanderson actually recommended in the same blog post where he announced the book to his readers in the first place. Due to this encouragement and praise of her story I was hoping to go into it and really enjoy it, but although I did like it for some elements there were certain aspects that did irritate me somewhat and thus it was not as wonderful as I had hoped.

The story itself is a beautifully realised world where we follow our leading lady on a voyage from one side of the shadowy Earth over to the other side which is constantly lit by the light of the moon.

Katin is the main character and she is travelling to the other side of the world in the hopes of finding the sacred homeland which is believed to be there and which is mentioned in her religion as a fervent belief held by all. She has hired a crew to take her there in the hope of learning more about her ancestors and the life that led them to flee their home.

I must say that the writing itself was very beautiful when describing the moon and the sailing of the ship. Once they reach this 'land' I felt that the descriptions helped me to imagine it well, but I did feel like everything that happened whilst they were there felt a bit too rushed and wasn't explained as much as I had hoped it would be, therefore leaving what felt like a somewhat unresolved story.

I ended up rating the first novella a 3.5*s out of 5*s as it just felt too open and free to really be called resolved and I know that maybe I am just being picky, but I felt like a beautifully written story deserved a little bit more finality and certainty surrounding the ending. I do like the style though and I see why Sanderson recommended her for that alone.

Moving on to the next story I then read I.E.Demon by Dan Wells which is a sort of military sci-fi story and is the shortest one in the anthology by far.

This is the story of a military man who is fighting against the Taliban with his team when he is suddenly recruited for a machinery test. He is a fairly low down officer so he;s not even given the full details of what

the weaponry is or how it works, he's just told to follow orders and get on with the test. Of course things end up going wrong and when there's also some supernatural sic-fi thrown in and Demons start appearing it spells a bit of trouble for our main man.

Unfortunately I would have to say that this is the one that I just didn't like out of the whole novella and I think that that is mainly for the fact that I don't particularly enjoy very short, underdeveloped stories, or military stories so it just wasn't a good combo for me. I ended up giving this one a 1.5* rating which isn't very good, but whilst I didn't personally like it, after reading the Transcripts for the brainstorm sessions and so on I felt like I at least understood the story better and that was a good thing, so even though I didn't like it the background made me enjoy the whole book a lot more than I otherwise would have.

The next novella was 'An Honest Death' by Howard Tayler which was actually a really good story in my opinion (considering that it was pretty short overall) and I would have to say that following Sanderson's this was the next best one for me.

This story is told from the point of view of a fairly syndical and witty bodyguard who works for a big-shot CEO at a Pharmaceutical company. He is a very engaging and amusing character who plans for all sorts of eventualities and whom we can rely on to engage us in the story, but when Death himself decides to pay the CEO a visit things get a little bit crazy and our main character - Cole - has to rethink and reapply his training in new ways to ensure that the company secrets aren't just destroyed and lost forever.

There is more I could say on this but I don't want to spoil it as, like I say, I thought that this was a well written and well conceived idea and I am sure that Tayler is a very amusing writer in his other works too. I would say that this one is certainly worth the read and I gave it a 3.5* rating and I felt like it seemed like the start of a promising series (which maybe it could be in the future, who knows).

Finally I moved on to the Sanderson novella which was the main reason I even bought this book, and let me just say that for this story alone I am very glad that I did buy it, because I ended up really enjoying it.

This is the story of Dusk who is a Trapper. Trappers each have their own island where they work and hunt and trap to earn a living and Dusk has chosen Patji (the biggest, scariest and most risky father island) as his territory. In the world that he is a part of there are magical creatures called Aviar which are like birds with special abilities. These birds are the way that the Trappers can survive the harsh conditions on the island and they help to avoid danger and ensure that close attention is always paid to anything suspicious.

These birds are a rare commodity which has recently caught the attention of the mainlanders and they all desire the magical powers that the birds possess so of course they decide to do something about it and they turn up uninvited one day on the island of Patji - Not a good idea!

Of course being untrained as they are their arrival causes all sorts of problems for Dusk and the island and from then on it's up to Dusk to try and help to keep the island sacred and free from these people.

As always I loved the writing style which Sanderson displays and I felt like it was a beautiful setting and a beautiful story to fit into that serene (if slightly deathly) setting. I admire the different magics which Sanderson always manages to so convincingly create and I felt like this story was a very entertaining, yet stunningly captivating one. It was a lot longer than the other novellas which allowed more development, and I felt like that was certainly a bonus from my POV, and I am very glad that I bought this book for this story! 4.5*s as the ending was a big open for my liking, but it was hinting at more to maybe one day come, and that's something at least!

On the whole I think it was a really interesting and different experience to be able to read the finished stories and then go back and see how they were made as it gave a much deeper understanding and a better insight

into the minds of the authors and the craft of creating a good story. I would certainly recommend Sanderson's and Tayler's stories the most, but I would say that they're all worth reading so that you can compare the behind the scenes to them as, let's be honest, that's the real gem of this book. Highly recommended if any of this sneaky behind the scenes appeals to you!

Ashley says

I think we can consider this experiment a success. I would definitely read more anthologies with insights into the writing and editing process. It's fascinating.

Writing Excuses is a podcast hosted normally by writers Brandon Sanderson, Mary Robinette Kowal, Dan Wells and Howard Tayler. (Sometimes they have other guests.) It's a pretty cool podcast. They give writing advice, talk about all the different processes of writing, and even workshop stories on air. Some of the excerpts in this book were podcast segments. I haven't listened to them yet. What's cool about this anthology is that for each of the four stories, we get to see the skeleton of the creative process: the initial brainstorming session, the first draft, maybe the second, workshoping the story, and a version of the story showing what was added and cut to make the final draft. And of course, the final draft as well. The more versions and info and writing notes in there, the better.

I know there were only four stories/novellas in this collection, but this is probably the first time I've genuinely enjoyed every story in an anthology.

Mary Robinette Kowal's "A Fire in the Heavens" is about a woman on a tidally locked planet* who pays a ship to take her across the ocean to the lands her ancestors came from. Only, once she gets there, she experiences a culture clash of epic proportions. It was really interesting seeing the escalation from fun discovery to horrifying realization.

**To be honest, I have no idea what this really means.*

Dan Wells' "I.E.Demon" was a short story that's better left unspoiled, but it's got supernatural elements and the military thrown together and it was really fun.

Howard Tayler's "An Honest Death" was a surprise. I've never heard of him before reading this anthology and it looks like he mainly only writes comics, but I hope he keeps writing other more traditional stories, because he seems really good at it. I'm not going to say anything at all about the plot of the story because the twists are half the fun.

Brandon Sanderson's novella "Sixth of the Dusk" was my favorite. It's part of what he calls the cosmere (a large universe where a lot of his books take place, and eventually all of them are going to come together somehow and it is SO COOL), but you don't have to have read any of the other cosmere stories to understand it. It would probably have been my favorite anyway--it's about a trapper who takes place on a dangerous island that produces magical bird companions that grant their owners special powers--but his story also had the most behind-the-scenes stuff. He included brainstorming with his, as well as a first draft, an edited draft, and an afterword noting why he'd made the changes he made.

This is a good anthology just for the stories it contains, but if you're a writer (or are just interested in the writing process) this is definitely something you should check out.

Adam Collings says

Watch a video version of this review at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6r3J...

Shadows beneath is an anthology of speculative short stories by the crew behind the Writing Excuses podcast, with a bunch of impressive special features for writers. I've been listening to the podcast for a couple of years now. I heard them brainstorm the ideas behind these stories. I remember thinking how much I'd like to read the final products of each. Well now we all can.

The stories themselves are creative and highly entertaining. Even if you're not a writer, this collection is worth buying just for that.

If you're a writer, the special features is where this book really becomes a treasure. The book includes transcripts of the brainstorming sessions, first drafts, critique transcripts, edits (showing what was removed, and added from first draft to final) and essays on the writing of the stories.

I highly recommend this collection, firstly to enjoy some awesome speculative stories, and secondly for a fascinating behind-the-scenes look into the work of some of today's great storytellers.

Sunil says

The Writing Excuses team have put together the sort of anthology I've always wanted, providing a unique look into the creative process by walking the reader through the creation of four very different stories. For each story, you get a brainstorming session, a first draft, a workshopping session, and then a track-changes version to show everything that changed from the first draft to the final draft.

While I generally love Mary Robinette Kowal's stories, I didn't connect with "A Fire in the Heavens," set on a tidally locked planet and focusing on a woman who sees the moon for the first time and experiences a huge culture clash on returning to her homeland. I found the worldbuilding interesting, especially the issues with language, but it didn't seem to have a strong plot until near the end, which does have a nice "Oh shit" moment. Funnily enough, during the initial brainstorming session, Mary's problem was that she had the world and setting but couldn't come up with a story for it. It's fascinating to read the session and see how all four of them work together to devise a story that would be compelling with the world she's set up, some suggesting wildly different directions that aren't explored, and together, they come up with that "Oh shit" moment that I loved. Reading the first draft is also instructive, as it's very clear there's a huge chunk missing in the middle, and then with the workshopping session, we see how the story comes to be in its final form.

Dan Wells presents "I.E. Demon," a fun military sci-fi story about a gremlin causing trouble on the battlefield. It's cute and clever, though the protagonist is fairly generic. Again, the brainstorming sessions are some of the best bits of the book to read because it's a peek into the imaginations and creative juices of these writers, and an indication to writers that even if you have a *lot* of ideas relating to your story, it doesn't mean you have to use them all in that story. With Dan's story, we get a first, unfinished draft as well as an interim draft, in addition to a write-up from Dan about how the story changed throughout its iterations.

Howard Tayler's "An Honest Death" gives a fresh take on the Grim Reaper set in a pharmaceutical company, told from the perspective of a security agent with a preternatural lie-detector ability. It's a neat perspective, made even better once you discover that Howard originally wanted to tell the story from the perspective of the CEO until he quickly realized it was too boring that way. Again, the brainstorming session is full of ideas, some of which are only hinted at in the final version, which slowly reveals secret after secret regarding

whatever Our Heroes are facing. With this story, we don't even get a complete early draft, only an aborted first draft and a second draft without an ending! The workshoping session helps concoct a suitable ending, in addition to fixing other issues, and, as always, comparing the final draft to the early draft is a wonderful way to learn about what goes into revising a story.

Brandon Sanderson's "Sixth of the Dusk" is an exciting jungle adventure with an irritating male protagonist who meets a much cooler woman on a dangerous island, and also the seed of this story was PSYCHIC BIRDS. It packs a lot into its length, perhaps too much, but the story does track in the end. In the final draft, at least: the first draft's ending is not satisfying, and Brandon knows it, so the workshoping session is largely focused on how to fix it. Once again, it's interesting to see the large chunks that are added in the final draft to make the story work and be cohesive, in addition to the minor things like wordsmithing and tightening the prose. Plus, he includes additional workshoping notes to illustrate that you don't have to incorporate *all* feedback.

I would love to see more anthologies in this fashion. *Shadows Beneath* offers a peek behind the curtain of the creative process of four professional writers; it's an invaluable resource for any writer wanting to learn how to brainstorm, workshop, and revise a story into publishable quality.

Nathanael says

Prior to reading this anthology, I wasn't familiar with three of the four contributing authors or the podcast that inspired the book. I was intrigued by the premise and I'm also a fan of Brandon Sanderson, so I decided to give it a try. Plus I'm a sucker for anthologies. While I greatly preferred the first and last stories in the anthology, the information about the actual nuts and bolts of writing was fascinating enough to make the entire volume a great read.

Sanderson's "Sixth of the Dusk" was my favorite of the four stories and I thought the best fleshed-out. The world was incredibly compelling and I'd really like another story or novel set in this particular world. Kowal's "A Fire in the Heavens" was my next favorite and also had really excellent worldbuilding. I especially enjoyed the fact that so much of the conflict in the story was derived from the drastic changes in the main character's ancestral tongue after her people left her homeland. Fantasy novels are so full of static languages that stay the same over thousands of years that it's nice to come across an author who actually acknowledges how language works.

Wells' "I.E. Demon" was amusing and a bit cute, but fairly thin. I enjoyed the concept, but I feel like it could have been fleshed out a bit more. Tayler's "An Honest Death" was my least favorite, though not actually a bad story. It just felt a bit too much like a Doctor Who episode that ended without an actual ending.

The bulk of the volume is devoted to transcripts of brainstorming and critique sessions, and multiple drafts of each story. For anyone who fancies themselves an author or is interested in the mechanics of story creation, this is the really appealing part of the volume. If you don't fall into either one of those categories, you'll probably find it a bit dull.

I'm really glad to have read this and I'm hoping that there might be another volume coming sometime in the future. In the meantime, I've got some podcast archives to binge through.

Eduardo Schmitt says

Otimo livro, 4 contos muito bons escritos por quatro autores excelentes. Além disso, o livro contém todo o processo de escrita dos contos desde o Brainstorm realizado no (ótimo) podcast Writing Excuses passando pelas criticas feitas também no podcast.

Contido no livro também estão os diversos drafts dos contos além da explicação por parte dos autores sobre o processo de escrita deles - nesse ponto o Brandon dá uma aula.

Realmente muito bom.

Matthew says

One of the most interesting insights into the writing process that I've come across. The short stories were great, the process fascinating, and the inclusion of edits etc enlightening. Well worth the money I paid. For anyone interested in writing and/or a fan of the writing excuses podcast.

A.E. Marling says

If there's one thing I can't resist, it's a sea infested with toothy darkness. Not like I had much of a choice anyway when it came to an anthology featuring stories from every author of Writing Excuses. I bought the book to support the podcast. It is a novel dedicated to craft. After the final drafts of each story, we can discover the earlier versions including underlined corrections and brainstorming sessions, the dialog that went into the critique group. Shadows Beneath is both entertainment and writing enrichment.

I came to listen to Writing Excuses because of Brandon Sanderson, and his story *Sixth of the Dusk* featured everything I hoped for: birds with magical auras, a jungle setting alive with danger, and shrieking terror birds. Except sea monsters. It didn't have nearly enough of those, considering the novel's cover. No bonanza of underwater monstrosities means no fifth star. That's the deal.

If Brandon Sanderson's story entertained, Howard Taylor's amazed. In *An Honest Death*, an ex-military security guard captures Death on camera, prowling the office of the boss. The book has internal illustrations, and the one for this story is superb and true to every nuance of the story. And what a tale! I read gobs of short, speculative fiction, and I believe this one should be nominated for a Nebula, a Hugo---no, for all of them---give it all the awards.

Mary Robinette Kowal wrote a story about sea travelers. Their struggle does not involve sea monsters but differences in culture and language in the civilization they meet.

In the story, *I.E. Demon* by Dan Wells, biological warfare is taken to a magical level as the US military tests an imp prototype whose lifeforce is anathema to technology. Many of us may have had similar latent powers, or at least so I believe when handling my home computer.
