



Best New Horror 15

Stephen Jones (Editor), Ramsey Campbell (Contributor), Michael Marshall Smith (Contributor), John Farris (Contributor), Gene Wolfe (Contributor), Scott Emerson Bull (Contributor), Steve Rasnic Tem (Contributor), Gemma Files (Contributor), more... Mark Samuels (Contributor), Caitlín R. Kiernan (Contributor), C.C. Finlay (Contributor), Christopher Barzac (Contributor), Steve Nagy (Contributor), Joyce Carol Oates (Contributor), Glen Hirshberg (Contributor), Neil Gaiman (Contributor), Paul McAuley (Contributor), Mike O'Driscoll (Contributor), Simon Clark (Contributor), Tim Lebbon (Contributor), Michael Chislett (Contributor), Marc Laidlaw (Contributor), Pauline E. Dungate (Contributor), Dale Bailey (Contributor), Christopher Fowler (Contributor), Susan Davis (Contributor), Jay Lake (Contributor) ...less

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This edition of *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror* comes with another generous sampling of the past year's best horror fiction, earning acclamations from the likes of *Kirkus Reviews* and *Publishers Weekly*. With contributions from such favorites as Ramsey Campbell and Kim Newman, along with the talented likes of Neil Gaiman, China Mieville, Graham Joyce, Paul McCauley, Stephen Gallagher, Caitlin R. Kiernan, Jay Russell, Glen Hirshberg and many more, the hair-raising tales in this edition hold nightmares for travelers in alien lands, unveil the mystery and menace lurking in our everyday reality, explore the terrors of the supernatural, and honor horror's classic tradition. Like all of the other volumes in this series, award-winning editor Stephen Jones once again brings us the best new horror, revisiting momentous events and chilling achievements on the dark side of fantasy in 2004.

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From Reader Review Best New Horror 15 for online ebook

bluetyson says

The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror: v. 15 (2004)

Kevin Lucia says

It only took me a long time to read this because I got bogged down with Real Life stuff. Anyway, this was an excellent collection of stories, a contemporary counterpart to the Year's Best Horror under Karl Edward Wagner's run. And the bulk of the stories were quiet, atmospheric, and character driven. Definitely worth the while.

Greg Kerestan says

This was the first volume of Best New Horror I ever read, picked up from an outlet bookstore on an Ocean City vacation. While it doesn't have any of my all-time favorite stories in it, most of the best authors are well represented, and stories like "The Goat Cutter" and "The Hanged Man of Oz" are certainly worth pursuing this volume. Plus, it includes stories like "The Haunting" and "The Bereavement Photographer" which, though not exactly unsettling, linger well in the mind.

Adam King says

Exorcizing Angels is a perfect story to end this collection. This is a goldmine!

Malloryk0422 says

There were some VERY strange stories in here, this time. Some kept me up at night, and some just gave me body chills (The bone machine). There were a couple good ghost stories that Im a sucker for. All in all a good quick read.

Alex Goiran says

Yet another fine collection from The Mammoth Book. As a horror fan, it is hard to find well-written horror that is truly scary. Of course, there are the classics such as The Exorcist and Ghost Story. But in pinch, these stories can satiate a hunger for horror.

Olivia "Don't Blame Me I Voted for Hillary" says

Good assortment of horror stories by British and American authors. I enjoyed most of them.

Dystopian says

I do not scare easily. In fact, it is very hard to scare me, but the short story "The Goat Cutter" in this anthology did it. Worth reading for that story alone...simply an amazing short story.

Pam says

You won't like every story in every anthology, but nobody picks them better than Stephen Jones, except maybe Ellen Datlow in her Year's Best Fantasy and Horror collections. These books are a bargain, and the cover art alone is usually worth the price.

Jess says

VERY good. This is definitely my favorite series of short-story collections, and this one in particular is great. "Hunger: A Confession" is hands-down one of the best horror stories I've ever read. "Kissing Carrion" and "The White Hands" are also great.

Justin says

This volume includes 25 stories sandwiched between a lengthy introduction and necrology that I tend to skip.

"Fear the Dead" by Ramsey Campbell

A boy tries to cope with his grandmother's death. It was alright, but again I expected more from Campbell. 3/5

"The Hanged Man of Oz" by Steve Nagy

I read this in Datlow's anthology The Cutting Room. A behind the scenes look at The Wizard of Oz concerning a hanged man and haunting dreams. Although I'm not familiar with the movie, I enjoyed the originality of the concept. 4/5

"Mara" by Michael Chislett

A Gothic vampire story set in London, atmospheric and surreal with a twist edging on supernatural which didn't fit my tastes. 3/5

"Cell Call" by Marc Laidlaw

A man gets lost and his cell phone is his only connection to his wife. It was a simple, yet effective ghost story. 4/5

“In the Tunnels” by Pauline E. Dungate

A former schoolmate appears and lives with his people underground. It seemed an interesting idea, though it lacked direction. 2/5

“Hunger: A Confession” by Dale Bailey

An older brother torments his younger brother with scary stories until one of them might be real. I read this in Datlow’s Hauntings and enjoyed it. 4/5

“Seven Feet” by Christopher Fowler

A rat infestation brings a plague, and shatters a family. I’m not one for widespread horror, but the ending left a good impression. 3/5

“The Centipede” by Susan Davis

Centipedes bite a woman staying with her husband and sister-in-law in Spain—nothing notable. 2/5

“The Goat Cutter” by Jay Lake

A Texan boy’s encounter with the Devil, visceral and supernatural, but not my thing. 2/5

“Maybe Next Time” by Michael Marshall Smith

An existential look at a man’s life—floating through dreams and daily routines which bring him to a point of realization. Another strong, and introspective piece from Smith like his past stories I’ve read. 5/5

“Story Time with the Bluefield Strangler” by John Farris

A psychological story following a six year old girl and her imaginary friend; I enjoyed how the blurring of reality happened with the perspective shifts between the girl and the other woman and the police. This captured my attention. 5/5

“Hunter Lake” by Gene Wolfe

A mother and daughter look for a lake claimed to be haunted, and it has an original twist on the deadliness of the water itself—decent. 3/5

“Mr Sly Stops for a Cup of Joe” by Scott Emerson Bull

On a trip to the convenience store, Mr. Sly gets caught up in a robbery. I don’t know much about this character, but this was a treat and delight of fun to read. 4/5

“The Bereavement Photographer” by Steve Rasnic Tem

Like the author, I find the idea of post-mortem photography interesting, though this story wasn’t much more than an interesting idea. 3/5

“Kissing Carrion” by Gemma Files

A different take on necrophilia—not my kind of story. 2/5

“The White Hands” by Mark Samuels

A man researching an obscure horror writer, tracks down an authority on her work. It started slow, academic, then unfolded into a Gothic mystery. 3/5

“Waycross” by Caitlin R. Kiernan

I’m uncertain what to say about this fantasy-like story revolving around Kiernan’s character Dancy. I found it a bit difficult to follow, though I enjoyed the dreamlike feel of it. 3/5

“Lucy, In Her Splendor” by Charles Coleman Finlay

A husband and wife are on a vacation, though most of it is ambiguous, and it didn’t seem to go anywhere.

2/5

“Dead Boy Found” by Christopher Barzak

A teenage boy tries to make sense of death. I enjoyed the realism and the ghost element of the story. 4/5

“The Haunting” by Joyce Carol Oates

The six year old girl narrator didn't work for me in this story of ghostly rabbits and her dead father. 2/5

“Dancing Men” by Glen Hirshberg

A teacher taking his students on a trip to visit Holocaust sites, recalls a Jewish ritual he did for his grandfather as a child. It's ambiguous, but held enough mystery to keep reading. 3/5

“Bitter Grounds” by Neil Gaiman

Although I'm not a zombie fan, this was an interesting take on zombies, with Haitian and New Orleans influence. 3/5

“Child of the Stones” by Paul McAuley

A supernatural detective meets a young girl with a rare gift. Along with protecting a dangerous book, this provided a plot-driven dark fantasy, though it wasn't my kind of thing. 3/5

“The Silence of the Falling Stars” by Mike O'Driscoll

A park ranger working in Death Valley deals with longing and loneliness—themes with resonance—except this one became a bit too ambiguous for me. 3/5

“Exorcizing Angels” by Simon Clark & Tim Lebbon

A historical piece taking place during WWII and revolves around a lieutenant who claims a miracle saved him from the Great War which is related to a story written by an author. As the longest story, it dragged, but had blips of interesting moments. 3/5

Overall, this was a typical anthology full of gems here or there, but mostly average stories which cater towards different tastes. 3.1/5

Shawn says

Another long one - these are big books - but not as long as usual.

And so, with this volume, I achieved my goal of reading (or re-reading) and reviewing 3 previous volumes of THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF BEST NEW HORROR before reading the newest installment recently released. This approach, designed to retroactively shore up my reviews of the series while also allowing myself ample opportunity to sample at least one expert's opinion on the best crop of recent fiction in the genre (with an eye towards plucking gems for the PSEUDOPOD podcast), will continue but is likely to be altered somewhat with the significant restructuring of my reading list that will occur roughly at the beginning of 2015 and the end of the previous list's cycle. More on this as it develops but, as it looks now, I would likely be achieving the same amount of retroactive reads but in a longer time span - two years to the one just passed, by my estimation. We will see. Perhaps I have to jigger the list further.

Anyway, this was another volume that I'd already read just a short time before discovering Goodreads. So while there have been some small shifts in my critical faculties, I was still fairly well-enough along in

carving out a sense of what works and doesn't work for me that, as a time saver, I did not re-read every piece in this collection. Stories I originally noted as either not liking or finding just "okay" did not get re-read unless they were by a name author or someone whose work I'd later been impressed by (in this case, Gemma Files). And so, as usual, we start with the Horror in 2003 essay/roundup, the soapbox moment of which notes (in 2003!) that there is just too much stuff being published! And of course, Jones is right in this but what can we do? Nothing has changed - and one can argue things have gotten worse - since 2003. I always read the HORROR IN essays all the way through (albeit piecemeal) because I find the capsule book plot notes and (especially) the horror radio/audio sections useful. I always find it a daunting task and, this time, I can honestly say that due to timing it triggered a massive depression in me and made me start reconsidering just what purpose I feel genre fiction, and even fiction, actually achieves in this world (besides the endless production of more stuff). But, ah well, such is the way...

Not reviewed here are: Christopher Fowler's "Seven Feet", John Farris' "Storytime With The Bluefield Strangler", Steve Rasnic Tem's "The Bereavement Photographer" (which I distinctly remember originally being disappointed with after a great set-up), Caitlín R. Kiernan's "Waycross", Charles Coleman Finlay's "Lucy In Her Splendor", Christopher Barzak's "Dead Boy Found", Paul McAuley's "Child Of The Stones" and Mike O'Driscoll's "The Silence Of The Falling Stars" - I either originally disliked them or felt "meh" about them and no more need be said. Overall summation of the book as a whole following the individual reviews...

Let's start with the two stories I originally noted as just "okay" but chose to reread anyway. In Ramsey Campbell's "Fear The Dead", a young boy, worried about the state of his recently deceased Grandmother and haunted by the axiom "speak no ill of the dead", must navigate his dysfunctional family's dynamic, convinced the old woman needs placating. While Campbell has a very strong lock on childhood anxiety (and how, and how much, children grasp of adult conversations), this still strikes me as an abstract, stuttering story - jumbled and clunky. Not terrible by any means but my opinion did not change. Meanwhile, Joyce Carol Oates limply titled "The Haunting" went up a bit in my estimation. It features a young child whose abusive father may have been murdered by her mother and said child's fixation on the idea that ghosts of rabbits haunt the rusty cages in the basement of their new home. It's a solid and direct story wherein the fixation may be read as a metaphor for the child's slip into insanity due to the stress and fear of her situation. A good story.

Next we come to the pieces which I felt were good but had some kind of flaw or problem that marred my appreciation to some extent. Steve Nagy's "The Hanged Man Of Oz" turns on a piece of media folklore (the supposed captured image of a hanging in the classic film THE WIZARD OF OZ) and while I probably liked it a bit better the second time around (it succeeds in generating a weird atmosphere and thus selling its climactic scenario), it still strikes me as slightly unbalanced (Oz-centric, but more about the cultural artifact of the film than the books) and somewhat overwritten (but not florid). Also weird is "Hunter Lake" by Gene Wolfe, a strangely dream-like narrative about a mother and daughter in search of a fabled cursed lake, actually a fib told by the daughter which somehow comes true anyway. I liked the imagery in the ending but also found it kind of thin on the whole. I'm not sure I'd class Michael Marshall Smith's interesting "Maybe Next Time" as "horror" - it's well-written and engaging and weird, certainly: a middle-aged man is plagued by loss of attention, evocative dreams and a persistent feeling of "lack" in his life as his birthday approaches, until a trip home sets him on the trail to an explanation. But it also struck me as unwilling to mine its conceit for anything but the vaguest chills (I know Smith has some opinions on that kind of critique, but hey, them's the breaks...). Two stories center around children as main characters - Dale Bailey's "Hunger: A Confession" and "The Goat Cutter" by Jay Lake. The Lake tale is in the chicken-fried mode of Lansdale, a story of boy finding out that his neighbor's goat-killing practices (and derelict school bus) conceal a devilish truth - cute in a grotty kind of way but also all over the place. Bailey's story of a kid with a prank-pulling older brother and what the discovery of rusted butcher's tools in the basement of their new home really means, has a nightmarish climax and makes a valiant stab at capturing a scared young boy's fearful mind-state along with the dynamics of fraternal conflict. The story itself may be a little familiar. Glen Hirshberg's "Dancing Men"

has an adolescent boy undergo a strange coming-of-age ritual in the desert, at the direction of his Concentration-Camp survivor Grandfather. It's an odd story - heartfelt, obviously, and I kind of liked where it eventually got to (a different take on an aspect of Jewish mysticism) but I also found that to sit uneasily with the Native American trappings (which dominate the majority of the story and aren't especially well-introduced or integrated). "Mara" by Michael Chislett takes place in Victorian London and has a moody man with a secret encounter vampires - not really my kind of thing, florid in its excesses, there's exposition aplenty but not much actual story (nice descriptions though). Finally, Mark Samuels gives us an "insider" horror story in which a fan of weird literature makes contact with a retired scholar in the field, an unlikeable misanthrope who has holdings of obscure writings by a forgotten figure (the fictional "Lilith Blake"). As our narrator's obsession with the deceased author begin to join with his mentor's, he finds himself clashing with the scholar's presumptions and sardonic worldview. I liked the build-up to this piece (some keen observation about supernatural lit fan "types") but the payoff not as much - for such portentous pronouncements about the import of the weird tale (even when delivered by a pompous blowhard), the story seemed to settle for the usual ending.

Next we have all the solidly good stories. "Kissing Carrion" by Gemma Files went up a bit in my estimation with a re-read - it may still be a *little* too knowing and self-aware at times but this story of a dysfunctional relationship between a greedy, exploitative sugar-daddy, a "transgressive" puppeteer artist, a necrophile and a corpse - told from the corpse's point of view - has a profoundly evocative ending. A young man recognizes a schoolmate (strangely un-aged) and pursues him "In The Tunnels" under Birmingham in Pauline E. Dungate's creepy (if a little familiar) tale of vast underground passageways and the things that lurk therein. Susan Davis gives a nice slice of psychological horror, the kind that rarely gets written nowadays, in "The Centipede" where a meek Englishwoman finds herself overwhelmed by her brash sister-in-law (think Benson's Mrs. Amsworth - but there are no vampires here) while vacationing in Spain. Nice ending. A punk kid chooses to rob the absolutely wrong all-night market in "Mr. Sly Stops For A Cup Of Joe" by Scott Emerson Bull - I tend to dislike stories about highly functioning sociopaths but this was a cute, short, sharp story that didn't overstay its welcome and a nice overlap with the noir/crime genre. Finally, I'm not exactly sure how I feel about "Exorcising Angels" by Simon Clark & Tim Lebbon. It's a well-written, if longish, piece of dark fantasy in which a WWI soldier tracks down the writer of "The Bowmen" (a famous newspaper story about angelic intervention at the front that was widely, if incorrectly believed to be truthful by a large part of the public) because the soldier actually remembers the events as happening, although he knows they could not have. I generally shy away from stories that feature real-life writers (in this case Arthur Machen) because there always seems to be something both insular and self-congratulatory about the conceit. This doesn't fall into those traps, really, but it does seem a long way to go for a somewhat underwhelming (and thriller-novelesque) ending, out of tune with the featured figure/author's own tone (the ending, not the overall tone of the story, which does do a good job at capturing Machen's visionary prose in its descriptions of London under the Blitz). I liked it - I'll be honest and say that it really didn't strike me as deserving to be in a horror collection, exactly, except for Jones' known penchant for dark fantasy.

There were only two stories I absolutely loved. "Cell Call", Marc Laidlaw's story about a man who gets lost driving home from work, with only his new and unfamiliar phone as a link to normality, was so good I bought it and featured it on Pseudopod here. I like it's TWILIGHT ZONE styled sense of displacement. Finally, while I'm not a very big Neil Gaiman fan (the guy's obviously got chops and is doing something right, don't misunderstand me - I just find him a bit too calculatedly "twee" and slick at times), I very much enjoyed "Bitter Grounds" here - in which a man flees his past, adopts the identity of an academic, and gravitates down to the voodoo sinkhole of New Orleans. There are lots of short, sharp jabs at academia here (although many of them could just as easily be turned on fiction writers), mixed with some solid zombie lore and cultural references. The story has a great fuzzy, burned-out feeling and I appreciated the guest appearance by the Loa.

And that's it - in truth, while all anthologies (and especially "best of" anthologies) are mixed bags if the editor has any kind of "generalist-but-challenging" sense of the genre they're anthologizing, this installment

of TMBONH struck me as slightly weaker than normal, but with a nicer variety. As always, for me at least, a bit too much dark fantasy. And perhaps, it's all due to my cyclical burn-out on modern horror and genre writing. I need to reconnect to the classics and lit soon, I feel, although that might not happen for a bit, regardless. Thanks for reading all this rigmarole!

Chrystal Hays says

Very nice collection with only a few stories that had low impact. "The White Hands" by Mark Samuels has a classic feel to it. Could have been written any time in the last 200 years and stood on its own.

"Bitter Grounds" by Neil Gaiman also very good. One would like for it to go on and on...

"Dancing Men" by Glen Hirschberg brings a rarely discussed incident from history into sharp focus. This would make it great reading for senior high school, but fussy parents would no doubt object to the horrific parts and would want history watered back down.

"The Silence of the falling Stars" by Mike O'Driscoll is a good, creepy tale marred horribly by the steady misuse of the word "nauseous". In case anyone has trouble remembering, a nauseous gas makes you nauseated. Sometimes I feel so let down by editors. There had to be one, once, right?

I'd like to find more collections in this series, but only shop 2nd hand so who knows how long that will take?
