



Best New Horror 7

Stephen Jones (Editor) , Ian R. MacLeod (Contributor) , Christopher Fowler (Contributor) , Brian Hodge (Contributor) , Lisa Tuttle (Contributor) , Michael Marshall Smith (Contributor) , Ramsey Campbell (Contributor) , Dave Smeds (Contributor) , more... Patrick Thompson (Contributor) , Cherry Wilder (Contributor) , Steve Rasnic Tem (Contributor) , Manly Wade Wellman (Contributor) , Terry Lamsley (Contributor) , Stephen Gallagher (Contributor) , Thomas Ligotti (Contributor) , Alan Brennert (Contributor) , Jane Dixon Rice (Contributor) , Terry Dowling (Contributor) , David Sutton (Contributor) , Norman Partridge (Contributor) , Jeff VanderMeer (Contributor) , Neil Gaiman (Contributor) , Paul McAuley (Contributor) , Graham Masterton (Contributor) , Douglas E. Winter (Contributor) , Brian Stableford (Contributor) , Nicholas Royle (Contributor) , Kim Newman (Contributor) ...less

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The internationally acclaimed annual collection of the bloodcurdling best in horror and dark fantasy, showcasing the very best writers working in the genre today.

Contents:

Introduction: Horror in 1995 by Stephen Jones
Tirkiluk by Ian R. MacLeod
The Most Boring Woman in the World by Christopher Fowler
Extinctions in Paradise by Brian Hodge
Food Man by Lisa Tuttle
More Tomorrow by Michael Marshall Smith
Going Under by Ramsey Campbell
Survivor by Dave Smeds
The Stones by Patrick Thompson
Back of Beyond by Cherry Wilder
A Hundred Wicked Little Witches by Steve Rasnic Tem
The Finger of Halugra by Manly Wade Wellman
The Toddler by Terry Lamsley
Not Here, Not Now by Stephen Gallagher
The Bungalow House by Thomas Ligotti
Cradle by Alan Brennert
The Sixth Dog by Jane Rice
Scaring the Train by Terry Dowling
La Serenissima by David Sutton
The Bars on Satan's Jailhouse by Norman Partridge
The Bone-Carver's Tale by Jeff VanderMeer
Queen of Knives by Neil Gaiman
The True History of Doctor Pretorius by Paul J. McAuley

The Grey Madonna by Graham Masterton
Loop by Douglas E. Winter
The Hunger and Ecstasy of Vampires (novella version) by Brian Stableford
Lacuna by Nicholas Royle
Necrology: 1995 (essay) by Stephen Jones and Kim Newman
Useful Addresses (essay) by Stephen Jones

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From Reader Review Best New Horror 7 for online ebook

Missy (myweereads) says

Ive just finished this Mammoth Best New Horror Volume 7 edited by Stephen Jones. There are many collections which have been edited by Jones for years now. In this particular volume the focus is on horror of all kinds with monsters, humans, ghosts, demons and anything else you can possibly imagine.

What I love about this book is that you're given an introduction to horror in the particular decade in which the book was published. Before each story there is also some information about the author and their works. I have definitely accumulated a list of authors I want to look into. Some of these include Ramsay Campbell, Neil Gaiman, Stephen Gallagher, Graham Masterton, Lisa Tuttle, Manly Wade Mellman, Jane Rice, Terry Dowling and many more.

There were some stand out stories for me which included "The Most Boring Woman In The World", "Survivor", "Back Of Beyond", "The Finger Of Halugra", "The Toddler", "Cradle", "Scaring The Train", "The Bone Carver's Tale", "Queen Of Knives" and "The Gray Madonna".

This book for me was a good warm up to the kind of creepy horror stories I want to read this Autumn/Winter. Its a great way of discovering authors I haven't heard of before and stories which have a chilling and lasting effect, there are several I won't forget in a hurry. So if you're looking for an array of disturbing, haunting, thrilling and macabre stories then I would highly recommend picking up this volume or one of many which are available.

Thomas Burchfield says

Another good collection from a top anthologist in the genre. Highlights include "Tirkiluk" by Ian Macleod; "The Most Boring Woman in the World," Christopher Fowler; "Going Under" by Ramsay Campbell; "Survivor," Dave Smeds (best of the bunch); and Neil Gaiman's narrative poem, "The Queen of Knives." The stories seem to slump off at the end, though.

Lucian Poll says

After the rather slim volume 6 comes a significantly chunkier entry in Stephen Jones's Best New Horror series. While previous entries had been a tad uneven in terms of quality, volume 7 is pretty good throughout, with only a handful of stories I'd skip through on a reread. As you will see below, a number of stories suffer from weak or unsatisfying endings, but these are often due to the ending being overshadowed by an interesting premise or strong opening. So, predictably, this is another 4/5 from me.

Best New Horror 7 comprises twenty-five stories and a poem which mark the best horror shorts published during 1995, and runs as follows:

Tirkiluk – Ian R. MacLeod (3/5 – Science Officer Seymour takes his stint manning an Arctic weather station. As winter takes hold he finds a scavenger nearby. Her name is Tirkiluk, and she is an outcast from a nearby eskimo settlement. When Seymour discovers Tirkiluk is heavily pregnant he lets her stay with him in the

rather cramped confines of his hut. Things go south, however, when Seymour accidentally starts a fire that endangers all their lives. This was okay, but the diary format of the story made me little more than a witness to a sequence of events, which robbed the story of emotional impact. Also, unless I missed a paragraph somewhere, no reason is given or intimated for Seymour's decline. Was it supernatural? Was Seymour merely going a bit doolally? It's as if the story says, "Ehhhh, who cares? Move along, please." So I will.)

The Most Boring Woman In The World – Christopher Fowler (4/5 – The ever-reliable Fowler scores another winner. If you only know Fowler through his Bryant & May books then stop right now and seek out a collection or two of his short fiction. You won't be disappointed. Anyway, here a housewife tells us of her crushingly boring existence, and how she's having to perk things up here and there to keep herself from going mad; little acts of rebellion to begin with, but then oh my do things escalate! It's interesting how Jones opens the book with a story that keeps the reader at arm's length and then juxtaposes it with one that directly engages the reader.)

Extinctions In Paradise – Brian Hodge (4/5 – Hodge follows up his excellent "The Alchemy Of The Throat" (Best New Horror 6) with a very good story which sees Robert, a former journalist, trying to rebuild his life in Mexico following the horrific loss of his wife and children. Now, in his adopted homeland, Robert has a new family of sorts in the numerous street kids scraping a living in the neighbourhood. His kindness towards them stands him in good stead too, because it seems these kids have developed a novel – some would say murderous – way to survive on the streets. Dammit this story was so close to a 5/5, but was let down by a final act that felt a little tacked on and... well, let's just say it didn't have quite the impact on me that the author intended.)

Food Man – Lisa Tuttle (4/5 – An anorexic girl hides food under her bed, much preferring to live with the stench of rotting food in her room than to risk putting on weight. Things take a turn for the bizarre when, late one night, a figure emerges from under her bed. It's a man, made of food. What's a girl to do? Get jiggy with it, of course! I would love to know what was in Tuttle's head when she wrote this. "Okay, yeah, we've got this girl, right, and... er... she... er... well, she gets fucked by food." That Tuttle not only makes this work, but also manages to steer things toward a spine-tingling climax (ahem) is rather impressive.)

More Tomorrow – Michael Marshall Smith (5/5 – An IT contractor gets chummy with a young woman called Jeanette, alongside whom he works, but finds his hopes of blossoming romance gutter and die when he meets Jeanette's boyfriend. Straight away our man knows something is off, and his suspicions are all-but confirmed when he finds a recent image of Jeanette posted online. Then another. And another. Each image more disturbing than the last. Smith absolutely nails it in this British Fantasy Award winner; a story that puts an arm over your shoulder, has a laugh and a joke with you and then stabs you in the gut. This story also perfectly illustrates how we have always had a dark side to the internet, as we have had with any creative technology. Finally, as this story was written shortly before the advent of search engines and web browsers, there's also a certain nostalgic quality for ageing nerds to enjoy. Ah, the days!)

Going Under – Ramsey Campbell (2/5 – Blythe is queueing for a rare chance to walk through the Mersey Tunnels, along with half of Merseyside it seems. Blythe is one of those fellas who is welded to his mobile phone, much to the annoyance of those around him. (This was 1995, kids. People were weird.) Blythe calls home repeatedly, keen to speak to his partner, Val, but only gets his answerphone. When he enters the tunnel he finds an even more urgent need to make a phone call. Good grief, this was a chore to read. Nearly everything about it got up my nose, from the premise (hopelessly engineered) and the writing (reeked of a first draft), through to the characters (fake, annoying and unfunny). Surprisingly, despite my gripes, "Going Under" isn't a total bust. Campbell creates a palpable and sweaty sense of claustrophobia once the story gets going, but that's about it. In my review of Best New Horror 6, I criticised his story "The Alternative" for trying too hard, coming across a little fake as a result – this tries so hard it damn near breaks in two.)

Survivor – Dave Smeds (4/5 – It's 1967 and Troy Chesley is due to return to Vietnam for another tour of

duty. He gets a tattoo to commemorate this, and asks the artist to draw him a seriously ripped unicorn. Yes, a unicorn. The artist agrees, but only if Troy has the tattoo over his heart. When Troy returns to the conflict he finds his tattoo is somehow keeping him from harm, but at what cost? This is a really good story that explores a few interesting themes, from living someone else's life to the effects of time-dilation on Troy and those around him, and just when you start wondering where Smeds is going with all this, he pulls out a superb ending. Recommended.)

The Stones – Patrick Thompson (3/5 – Neil and Jane are holidaying in Cornwall, attempting to find sites of ancient standing stones. While Cornwall is very nice and all, it seems Jane isn't getting much of a mystical tingle from anything they've found so far. An old man they meet suggests a nearby beach, but there doesn't seem to be much there, least of all signs of life. This was okay. I often like stories that have an Aickmanesque feel about them, which we have here, and Thompson does generate a decent chill down the spine, but there was just something about this story that didn't gel with me. Your mileage may vary.)

Back Of Beyond – Cherry Wilder (3/5 – The Mandevilles are tempted out of retirement to help Mary Boyd, a wealthy woman who is desperate to locate her missing son. Vivien Mandeville is a sensitive, capable of reading an incredible amount of detail and history from the objects she handles, while Albert is her straight-man. When the Mandevilles reach the Boyd residence they find themselves stalked from afar, and are warned by an old Aboriginal to let sleeping dogs lie. This was okay, with Wilder creating a great double act in the Mandevilles, but the ending disappointed.)

A Hundred Little Wicked Witches – Steve Rasnic Tem (4/5 – Jack sees witches everywhere. They judge him, criticise him, mock him. When they are not expressing seemingly every aspect of his life, they are controlling it. When Jack meets Marsha, he is astonished that she wants to get to know him and seems willing look past the witches. But can he? This is a playful short from SRT witches spoiled only by an ending that felt abrupt and over-harsh.)

The Finger Of Halugra – Manly Wade Wellman (4/5 – A posthumous entry from an author who had passed away nearly a decade earlier, but who cares about such trifling technicalities when the story is this good? The improbably-named Sugg Harpole is hired by an unsavoury sort called The Greek to locate and retrieve the finger of Halugra. The statue of Halugra is to be found somewhere up in the mountains, and the Native Americans believe its finger has remarkable healing qualities. Turns out it does, but it seems the statue is rather attached to it. This story is predictable, yes, but also a lot of fun. A gem from a bygone era.)

The Toddler – Terry Lamsley (4/5 – Haddon Hall is a place with a dark history. Centuries ago the monstrous Sir Rufford De Quintz resided there, and took delight in abusing the staff in every terrible way. He sired a daughter by one of the young maids and, unusually for De Quintz, let the child live. The toddler was tolerated but despised throughout the house. Fast forward to 1995 and Myra Cooper is spearheading the renovation of Haddon Hall. She is called to investigate a gruesome discovery bricked up in one of the walls. Another winner from Lamsley, who is somehow able to document the most horrific things with an astonishing lightness of touch. This is the mirror opposite of his previous entry, "Blade And Bone" (Best New Horror 6) in that the build-up throughout this story is terrific, but is let down a touch by the ending.)

Not Here, Not Now – Stephen Gallagher (4/5 – A quick in-and-out from Gallagher which sees a hit-and-run driver get his comeuppance in a suitably ironic way. There's no messing about with this one.)

The Bungalow House – Thomas Ligotti (4/5 – A return to form for Ligotti in a Stoker-nominated story where a man is enchanted by an installation at his local grotty art gallery. The artwork takes the form of an audio recording describing in striking detail a dream of the artist in which he is trapped inside an unlit bungalow house in the dead of night while all kinds of weird and horrible vermin lie dead or dying at his feet. The imagery the recording creates in our man is so vivid that he simply must know more about the artist responsible, as much as it may bother the gallery owner. The prose is as lush and the plot is as weird as ever,

and while the repetition Ligotti employed in an earlier story, “The Glamour” (Best New Horror 4) is present here, it doesn’t niggle as much. The story is only really let down by two things: first, the gallery owner, Dalha, often spills over caricature and into parody; second, I saw the twist coming. Still a good ‘un, though.)

Cradle – Alan Brennert (4/5 – Marguerite wants to have a baby but her vampirism has made her sterile. She uses the wealth she has accrued over the years (and years and years) to hire a surrogate, Sondra, and a team of doctors to handle all the fiddly DNA-imprinting science stuff. The pregnancy starts out like any other, but once junior develops a heartbeat Sondra finds her body is having a hard time keeping up with the little bugger’s demands. This is an interesting what-if story but I suspect the ending will divide opinion between those who consider it a neat twist on vampire myth and those who will groan and move on. I’m in the “neat twist” camp.)

The Sixth Dog – Jane Rice (3/5 – A veterinarian is creeped out by the Clanton brothers living next door. They mostly keep themselves to themselves, which creates fertile ground for the town’s rumourmongers. It is suggested the brothers are attempting to create something that could replace food. Our man isn’t convinced about that. All he knows is that the Clantons are dwindling one by one, and the burial plots out the back of their house are increasing in number. This was okay, but it’s one of those stories where the protagonist is almost entirely passive, which made him a hard person to get behind. There were other niggles too, but are probably down to personal taste: dialog written as it is spoken (which I find rarely works), quirkiness replacing humour rather than complementing it, etc.)

Scaring The Train – Terry Dowling (3/5 – It’s 1962 and Paul and Max spend their school holidays creating and executing ever more elaborate stunts to scare the living crap out of train drivers. They observe the fruits of their endeavours each time from a safe enough distance to avoid detection. After a particularly daring prank the pair witness a man examining the trackside area. The man homes in on their position with uncanny speed and precision and offers them a wave. Paul and Max are spooked, but decide to press on with their most daring stunt yet – a final hurrah before the school holidays are through. Big mistake. This is another okay story, but it goes off the rails the moment we leave Paul and Max’s childhood behind.)

La Serenissima – David Sutton (4/5 – Euphrosyne and Polyhymnia are identical twins who have been trusted into the care of their guardians, the Fortescues, in Venice; their parents being much too rich to be bothering with such piffling inconveniences as parenthood. Polyhymnia is horrified to find Rudolf Fortescue laying a hand on Euphrosyne in a most inappropriate manner, and is further sickened to see not only Miranda Fortescue turning a blind eye to it, but that her sister is quite enjoying his attentions. To top it all, things are not as they seem in this crumbling rotting Venice, and a clue to it all may be found in a painting called La Serenissima. This is a very nicely written story, certainly an improvement on Sutton’s previous entry, “Those of Rhenea” (Best New Horror 2). E & P are engaging characters, identical twins yet polar opposites, and we get a good sense of the sights, sounds and smells of Venice and its grotty underbelly. And yet, in keeping with several stories in this volume, it’s the ending that disappoints, feeling a tad throwaway.)

The Bars On Satan’s Jailhouse – Norman Partridge (4/5 – Partridge serves up a meaty slab of Wild West gothic in a tale which sees a Chinese girl, Lie, being sold by her father to a brutal and notorious criminal, Midas Gerlach. Midas’ ranch sits within a large amount of land, and he isn’t above slaughtering any government officials that come sniffing around his patch. Lie is being delivered to Midas courtesy of a large black man wearing strange boots of fur, bone and razor sharp teeth. Perhaps the both of them should have heeded the warnings of the strange gun-toting coyote-man they met along the way. This weird western nabbed the International Horror Critics Guild long fiction gong back in the day. It’s a bit grubby and clearly off its nut, but certainly worth a read. If you liked this, check out his “Guignoir” (Best New Horror 3), which is another gritty treat.)

The Bone-Carver’s Tale – Jeff Vandermeer (3/5 – Sajit, an ageing bone carver of great renown, is captivated by the music of a serunai player he hears drifting from a nearby village. The serunai player is a woman called

Prei Chen, and the two accomplished artists meet when she seeks Sajit at his home. But the artist can never hope to match the beauty of their art and so Sajit sends Prei away weeping, a decision he comes to regret. This was okay – Vandermeer really knows his stuff when it comes to Southeast Asian history – but the richness and sense of place he gives this story is undermined by its linearity. This was probably intentional, an attempt to give it an ancient legend kind of vibe, but this meant the story didn't grab me quite as much as I'd hoped it would.)

Queen Of Knives – Neil Gaiman (3/5 – In this poem a child and his grandparents attend a variety show. The star act is a magician and Grandad, thinking he knows it all, attempts to explain (often incorrectly) how each trick is done. For his next trick, the magician picks Grandma from the crowd and rolls out a large cabinet. Once Grandma is secured inside of the cabinet, out come the knives. This does the business, but doesn't cover any new ground.

Also, if poems
with seemingly random line
breaks leave you cold and bemused,
this probably isn't going to turn you a
round.)

The True History Of Dr Pretorius – Paul J. McAuley (3/5 – Larry Cochrane is a celebrated journalist of the attack dog variety, and he's got Dr Pretorius in his sights. Cochrane knows Pretorius possesses the secret to near-immortality and is determined to coerce it from him, no matter what it takes. The only problem is Pretorius seems quite comfortable admitting to the misdeeds of his past – well, most of them anyway. This was okay, but not as good as "The Temptation of Dr Stein", McAuley's previous Pretorius story from Best New Horror 6. It's hard to know what McAuley was trying to achieve here. I'm willing to believe he's merely having a lot of fun with the mad scientist genre, but by name-dropping nearly every fictional mad scientist in literature as either a friend or understudy of Pretorius, the story comes across a bit "me too". Cochrane is also too much of a bad guy, bordering on pantomime.)

The Grey Madonna – Graham Masterton (4/5 – Shades of "Don't Look Now" abound as Dean, a wealthy American tourist, returns to Bruges three years after his wife, Karen, was found dead there with a broken neck. A sole witness suggests that shortly before her death Karen was arguing with a nun who was wearing a light grey habit. Dean is determined to find the nun, but doesn't have to look far. This is predictable, but still delivers a satisfying tingle down the spine.)

Loop – Douglas E. Winter (4/5 – In this International Horror Critics Guild short fiction award winning story (phew!) we observe legal eagle and keen dick-flick enthusiast Delacorte's growing obsession for a porn actress. Initially he sees her only briefly at the end of a looped movie in a pay-as-you-go porn booth. As her porn career takes off, so does Delacorte's and he spunks a lot of time and money collecting her output. Even the bits she didn't intend. This is good, comfortably Winter's best story in the Best New Horror books up to this point, but you'll probably spend the first three-quarters of this wondering when Winter is going to get his hands out of his pants and get on with the story. Also, the regular switching between second and third person is a flimsy attempt to make the reader complicit in Delacorte's hairy-palmed hobby.)

The Hunger And Ecstasy Of Vampires – Brian Stableford (3/5 – Edward Copplestone is an ageing adventurer who gathers an eccentric gaggle of real-life and fictional nineteenth century minds to hear and perchance discuss an in-depth account of his latest expedition: a drug-induced step INTO TIIIIIIIME! Across three separate visions, Copplestone recounts increasingly distant and fantastic futures, but they are all based upon one uncomfortable fact: that it's vampires that take civilisation forward, not mankind. Which is music to the ears of a certain Count Lugard in attendance. This short novel is comfortably the longest story in the book, but doesn't quite earn its page count. It's not a bad story by any means. I liked a good chunk of what it was trying to do, but the moment each guest began rubbing their chin and offering their take upon what they had heard was about when I began wishing the story would end. Interestingly, this story looks to

have fallen victim to an extension of copyright periods in the UK during the mid-90s, in that every mention of a certain consulting detective and sidekick is shown as S*****k H***** and Doctor W*****, while their names are intact in the issues of Interzone in which this story appeared. Hats off to Jones for keeping this in the book, though, when it would have been easier to drop it.)

Lacuna – Nicolas Royle (4/5 – After a 30-odd thousand word monster, we close on a one-pager, and a rare thing indeed: a mood piece that works, and not only that but one told in the second person. If you've ever missed an hour or two while in the house, or have ever sensed there's someone "other" keeping you company, then this is for you.)

Greg Kerestan says

This is one of the best and strongest volumes, with "The Bonecutter's Tale" and "The Most Boring Woman in the World" bringing thrills, and Thomas Ligotti's "The Bungalow House" lending his unique blend of magic realism and surrealist horror. Plus, a new Pretorius tale is always appreciated.

Conal Cochran says

Read this door-stopper years and years ago; the only ones I remember are Tirkiluk (very good, very atmospheric, could have been a teensy bit shorter here or there), the Ligotti (not one of my favorites, but I was much younger then and didn't get the point) and "More Tomorrow" (one of the greatest horror stories ever written.

Darren Nelson says

Some decent stories in here, but nothing exceptional

bluetyson says

The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror (Mammoth Book of Best New Horror) by Stephen Jones (1996)

Bogdan says

I was so disappointed by this Anthology that you could not believe it.

I enjoyed reading only three writers:

Paul J. McAuley - The true History of Doctor Pretorius, a story similiar in many ways with the one of DR. Moreau.

Norman Partridge - The bars on Satan Jailhouse, a text with some fantasy & thrilling things in the Wild Wild

West.

Lisa Tuttle - Food Man - a really creepy story about a girl who doesn't eat and opens up a relationship with the creature under her bed...very good ending & writing.

I get it that it's a matter of tastes but some stories aren't even really scary so what's the point to be in this Anthology?!

I DON'T REALLY GET IT!

PS : Gaiman it's present...but... with a POEM!

Kailey Curless says

admittedly I have not read this whole anthology, but I have read all the authors in it that I wanted to.

Gevera Bert says

It was fun to read this collection from the mid-90s, before cell phones and the internet were all pervasive in the world. In fact there's one story about how horrible cell phones are and the guy who has one is basically a freak. Other than that one, the stories did not seem dated at all.
