



Human Tales

Jennifer Brozek (Editor) , Sara M. Harvey , Spencer Ellsworth , Ryan Macklin , Jess Hartley , Shannon Page , Dylan Birtolo , Deborah J. Branoon , more... Alma Alexander , Renee Stern , David Lee Summers , James Sutter , Nathan Crowder , Ivan Ewert , Matthew McFarland , Seanan McGuire , Ari Marmell , Chuck Wendig ...less

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Be Wary and Beware....

There are tales that every parent knows and must pass on to their child...

Tales of warning and terror...of those who break their vows and kill for no reason other than malice.

Tales of saving the lovely princess from a prince that is much less than charming...and what it takes to bring her home, of rescuing babes from parents not fit to raise them, and the reason no supernatural can truly win a bargain with such vile creatures.

These are Human Tales.

Tales by: Ivan Ewert, Matthew McFarland, Seanan McGuire, Ari Marmell, Chuck Wendig, Sara M. Harvey, Spencer Ellsworth, Ryan Macklin, Jess Hartley, Shannon Page, Dylan Birtolo, Deborah Brannon, Alma Alexander, Renee Stern, David Lee Summers, James Sutter, Nathan Crowder.

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From Reader Review Human Tales for online ebook

Lucy Busker says

An enjoyable anthology filled with engaging, quick-read stories. A lot of fun, but not *quite* as clever they think they are.

Ambrosia says

I have a love-hate relationship with anthologies. On the one hand, they provide unique opportunities: the chance to sample work from a broad spectrum of authors, the option to enjoy a story or two at a time without committing to a novel-length journey. On the other, consistency is their cold iron - a weak point inherent to their multi-authorial construction. It was with some trepidation, therefore, that I started reading the copy of *Human Tales* kindly provided to me by Jennifer Brozek; I loved the premise, but was uncertain how the individual stories would hold together.

I'm pleased to report that this collection contains some truly excellent stories. The opening yarn - Ivan Ewert's "Bloody Spindle", a sexualized version of a classic fairy tale - might seem overwrought enough to be a parody; but it never winks at its audience, only amps up the energy and emotional stakes until any reader with a pulse will find themselves caught up in its sensuality. Matthew McFarland's "Caleb", while somewhat quieter, views a heartbreaking family situation through the innocent eyes of the Fae, and leaves you wondering which of the worlds is truly the more barbaric. And Jess Hartley's "Hunger's Child", another retelling of a classic, spins a universal human foible out into a nearly Shakespearean tragedy, where the best of intentions on all sides cannot keep human (and faerie) nature from taking its course.

Unfortunately, there were the inevitable few stories that could have used more work. "The Human and the Sea Sprite" and "The Price of Cream" seemed to be aiming for a tragic angle, but ultimately were about annoyingly passive characters who end up miserable for no real reason other than their unwillingness to fight back. "Color" and "The Griffin's Tail" both take place in potentially interesting worlds, but the implications of those worlds are never really explored, and their respective conflicts suffer from similar underdevelopment.

The problems with these stories are made all the more frustrating by their obvious potential; on the whole, this is a skilled group of writers Brozek has gathered, and several of their tales feel only a revision or two away from "amazing". In addition, the quality generally declines over the course of the book; which, while it doesn't detract from the good-to-excellent work, does leave the reader feeling a little frustrated that the later stories don't live up to the standards of the earlier ones. And nitpicky as it is, my PDF version had a slightly higher incidence of typos than one would expect from a published book.

All that said, I still very much recommend this anthology - the caliber of writing on the whole is above par and the concept irresistible to those of us who enjoy peeking behind the curtain of a story to see what it looks like from behind. And it doesn't hurt that the typesetting is lovely, too.

Dana says

Interesting take on flipping fairy tales around to "human tales" that the fairy creatures tell their own children

about the dangers of humans. As with most anthologies, some stories were stronger than others, but overall definitely enjoyable.

Steven says

Human Tales attempts to take "fairy tales" - the stories of all the bad things the mystical world perpetrates upon humans - and turn the concept on its head. These are the stories that the magical and mystical world tells to warn their children about humans.

Short version:

Graded as a solid B. Some really good stories, and a lot of pretty good ones. It's a bit uneven at times, and probably should not be read straight through. Several stories have small missteps, either because of the method of telling the story or because they don't have enough of a punch at the end. Despite these small flaws, it's a good anthology and worth the price of admission. A few potential triggers exist for child abuse and those who have dealt with attachment disorders.

Long version:

I like fairy tales. I like subversion of fairy tales. Rewritten fairy tales. Expanded fairy tales. But I also like modern storytelling techniques, and that might be where Human Tales and I didn't entirely mesh.

If you've read the original - and I mean the original, not the cleaned-up versions - of fairy tales, there's often a disconcerting lack of resolution to them. Things happen, there's consequences, but ... that's it. I have a strong negative reaction to that - it's a taste and style thing.

Some of the stories in Human Tales seem to draw on this tradition, and so I think that had something to do with why I didn't give this anthology full marks. I really enjoy short stories that hit you with a gut-wrenching punch of an ending, and as I was making up notes for this review, I noticed how many times I'd written something like "great story except not enough of a resolution at the very end".

Because nearly all the writing in this anthology is very good, little stumbles (or things I don't care for personally) stood out for me. Regardless, the quality of storytelling overall makes this a volume worth picking up and reading.

Some of the stories which were particularly noteworthy:

"Bloody Spindle" by Ivan Ewart. This story fits the bill of the anthology perfectly. Well told, it lets us see the other side of the story nearly without any alteration of the story we already know.

"Riddles" by Seanan McGuire. We only know part of the story of the Sphinxes; Ms. McGuire weaves the bits we know together into a coherent whole. The sphinxes are truly not human, yet she keeps us at a place where we can empathize with them.

"Skin Deep" by Sarah Harvey. This story does an excellent job of showing that all the actors are flawed, illustrating how different motivations and personal weakness can give rise to the stylized morality tales that come much later.

"The Ifrit's Trial" by Spencer Ellworth. A positively delightful story in voice and tone - even though it's a

darkish topic - up until the last two sentences. While necessary (and I can't think of a better way to do it), they clunk a bit. In many other tales I wouldn't have noticed, but it's such a contrast with the smooth as silk wordsmithing through the rest of the story that it was noticeable.

"Hunger's Child" by Jess Hartley. I had a very hard time with this story; this is the one that might trigger those who have dealt with children with attachment disorders. Due to my own life history, that ended up upsetting me. Aside from that, this is a very good story that again has the complexity of motivation that you see in "Skin Deep".

"A Tithe for Homecoming" by Deborah J. Brannon. Dark, mysterious, and twists a few concepts together into a nice interaction of the modern world and the ancient tales. Tree spirits, changlings, and revenge all fall naturally together like leaves on the forest floor. Potential trigger warnings for child abuse.

"Color" by Alma Alexander. I want to like this story more, and perhaps if it were not in this volume, I would. It's not so much a cautionary tale for non-humans as an inspirational tale *for* humans. It focuses on what we humans have and don't appreciate. It's a good story on it's own, but I'd suggest reading it separately from the rest of this anthology because it seemed like such a change-up for me.

Additionally, the stories by James L. Sutter, Dylan Birtolo, and Nathan Crowder were quite good, but I would end up repeating myself even more.

Emily says

DNF. Found the first few tales too depressing and, frankly, kind of unimaginative to continue.

Devann says

As with most anthologies there were some good stories, some boring stories, and some that were just somewhere in the middle. Overall this was a fairly enjoyable collection - I especially liked the stories that flipped well-known fairytales - with a very interesting premise. If I had to make one overall complaint though it seemed like instead of 'human terrorizing monster' several of the stories were just 'everyone is equally horrible' so after awhile I was thinking 'does this really fit in with the theme??' but they were still pretty good stories.

Dana says

I love books by Seanan McGuire. A delightful writing style and wonderful quirky characters. Definitely a writer who will lift your mood with the stories she tells.

OXBastetXO says

Check out my review on this book here: <http://www.thegeekgirlproject.com/201...>

Emily says

I liked it, but at the moment, I can't really see myself coming back to this book to read any of the stories again. I've also come around to John Joseph Adams way of thinking. He chooses to pair the author information with the story. Not only does this help make a stronger mental connection between the author and the story (and therefore make it more likely for me to pick up something else by them), it also provides a good break between stories, which makes it easier to read more than one in a sitting. As it was, I had to put the book down and come back later, so that I could clear the previous tale out of my head.

As with any anthology, some stories are stronger than others, and some had more resonance with me personally.

"Bloody Spindle" by Ivan Ewert was an excellent introduction to how much fun looking at the back side of a story can be.

"Caleb" by Matthew McFarland is a painful rendering of how the fae might assist our unwanted children.

"The Ifrit's Trial" by Spencer Ellsworth is a deliciously wicked and very fun.

"Hunger's Child" by by Jess Hartley holds up a very ugly mirror to human desire and how it may twist not only the taker but the giver as well.

"Holding the Line" by James Sutter is a sweet and sad tale about how a fairy contract might go wrong and yet still be honored.

I would say this is a solid, but imperfect collection, and definitely worth reading.

September '12 Kindle Lending Library Selection. Little late in the month, but I wanted to finish my other short story collection first.

Leigh Kimmel says

JRR Tolkien once said that the human tales of the elves would tell of the escape from deathlessness. He was referring to his characterization (through elven eyes) of death as the Gift of Man, but it's pricked the imaginations of many a writer. What sort of stories would such entities tell about their dealings with humanity?

Some of the stories in this anthologies are familiar fairy tales rewritten from the point of view of the faerie characters, while others seem to be original to the authors, drawing upon the traditional tropes and themes of the fairy tale genre without being a retelling of any specific tale. Some of them are really strong, while some are workmanlike, but I don't think there were any real clunkers in the batch.

Rachel says

First, final two story mini-reviews:

Holding the Line: One of my favorites in the book, this was a sweet, fierce story of goblins protecting children from dangers of the dark, and really quite lovely.

The Price of Cream: This was a well-done story of cobbler elves, little brownies that fix shoes. Showed the abuses of human greed quite well, and a nice allegory to sweat shop workers.

The collection as a whole was quite well-done, though not always perfect in its idea of humans being the thing the fae and creatures of myth are scared of. It strayed from this message at times, and at least a couple of times in the first half of the book, the "Telling the Tale" section, it didn't quite hold on theme. Still, enjoyable short stories, for sure.
