



Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction

Kenneth W. Cain

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Where darkness dwells, embers light the way.

From the author of the short story collections *These Old Tales* and *Fresh Cut Tales* comes his latest effort, *Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction*. In his youth Cain developed a sense of wonderment owed in part to TV shows like *The Twilight Zone*, *The Outer Limits*, *One Step Beyond* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Now Cain seeks the same dark overtones in his writing.

There's a little something for every reader. These 25 short speculative stories represent the smoldering remains of a blaze, the fiery bits meant to ignite the mind with slow-burning imagery and smoky twists and turns. These are the very embers of Cain's soul.

In this collection, Cain features stories of troubled men and women, both living and dead. Themes of loss and the afterlife take on many forms, as he explores the unknown. For instance, "The Chamber" focuses on a hardened veteran of World War II who has committed heinous crimes. He seeks only to find peace from his conscience, but sometimes that comes at a great loss. "Valerie's Window" visits a small town amid a tragic end to humanity. Only things are not as they seem, and the more Valerie comes to know herself, the more her reality is revealed. "The Benefit of Being Weighty" has a humorous side, but the theme of this story revolves around fat shaming and the price one must pay for being so ignorant. Hopefully, these three short descriptions have increased your curiosity.

When the dark comes, light a match. Let the fire burn bright and hot. So that when it dies the embers warm you.

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- “Parasite”
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- “The Benefit of Being Weighty”

Interview with the author:

So what makes this collection of Dark Fiction so special?

Cain: There are many qualities that go into making a book special for someone, which makes it hard to define. I've put my all into this collection of dark fiction, as I do each and every story I write. For me, it's all about growth, and hopefully that continues to show in my work—that I'm growing as an author.

Which short story is your favorite and why?

Cain: I'm quite fond of “Valerie’s Window,” which is a bit of an urban fantasy. I like her internal conflict, what horrors she must overcome in order to set herself free. Without giving too much away, Valerie’s is a personal struggle, which often best reflects actual life.

Why should readers give your short fiction a try?

Cain: I think many readers will enjoy the stories, maybe even see a part of themselves battling evil forces. As I stated before, my primary goal in writing has always been growth, but I also strive to connect with my readers. I want to take them on an adventure. In this case, many short voyages, the sort you can go on during your lunch break or while you eat dinner. And I think readers will enjoy the wide variety of journeys I've set up for them in this collection.

How would you classify your writing style?

Cain: For short stories, I like them lean. I want my stories to move at a certain pace and voice, depending on the feel. I often refer to my work as being dark fiction, but it's really a mix of genres: horror, suspense, thriller, noir, fantasy, dark fiction, urban fantasy, science fiction, or even weird fiction. I like to mash genres together, to blend them and see where that leads my characters, but there's almost always a dark tone to each story.

Categories for Embers:

- Monster fiction
- Supernatural stories
- Dark fiction short stories
- Single author short stories collection
- Psychological horror and suspense
- Horror short stories
- Occult horror books
- Short stories collections
- Classic short stories
- Scary short stories
- Dark fantasy horror
- Speculative fiction anthology

“Not a squall, not a blizzard ... It's a pulp horror AVALANCHE! That's Kenneth W. Cain's new collection, Embers.”—Mort Castle, Bram Stoker Award® winner

“Collections such as this are the reason that, even after 45 years, I still enjoy reading horror!”—Douglas Draa, Editor of *Weirdbook Magazine*

“Kenneth W. Cain’s imagination is on full display here. He will take you by the hand, lead you into the darkest places, and you’ll be thanking him every harrowing step of the way. A bright new talent in horror.”—Ben Eads, author of *CRACKED SKY*

“With prose that is sometimes poignant, sometimes unsettling, but always incredibly dark, Kenneth W. Cain takes readers on a macabre journey with the smouldering burn of ‘Embers.’ A master of weaving tales around seemingly simple premises and ordinary situations with every day folk, Cain never fails to turn a story on its head and deliver a long-lasting sting. You’ll need some genuine embers to warm you after this, for some of these tales will chill you to the core.”—JIM GOFORTH, author of *PLEBS* and *THE SLEEP*

Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction Details

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From Reader Review Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction for online ebook

Pouting Always says

I'm not going to summarize each of the short stories because there were quite a few and I'm lazy. I did really enjoy this collection of short stories more than I usually enjoy short stories though. I really liked Pirouette, Valerie's Window, Breathing Cave, and Blackbird's Breath. The rest of the stories were good also but those stood out the most. My favorite is definitely Valerie's Window and it reminded me of 10 Cloverfield Lane. I don't think I even really disliked any of the stories, there was a lot of tentacles and zombies though.

Eddie Generous says

Unnerving Magazine Review

It's never easy to roll a collection in a single review. Possibly, it's even more difficult when the collected is by a single author and includes more than twenty stories.

Here goes. Like any collection of this size, there's bound to be some that just didn't work for the reader, in this, Embers was the no different. However, the weights of the two were far from fifty-fifty. For the most part, Embers is horror on a rollercoaster. The thrills are frequent and often Cain stretched the climax along for multiple pages. At times, this collection is bloody, at times grim, at times heart wrenching and at its best, it brings forth a fine tact in jarring finales.

There were some standouts amid these pages: Valerie's Window used a few tools of the horror kit to convey something that works with equal parts psychological and physical. Gone is the classic lost family member and supernatural odds stacked against a parent, done so perfectly. Closer is a slow burn, with a hell of an ending. Water Snake was a monstrous thrill ride. The Benefit of Being Weighty is pure ghastly fun.

Embers is a collection that strolls into every corner of horror to gather bits before running them through the spin cycle, dial set to dread.

Jeremy Hepler says

This was my first time reading Kenneth's stories, and now I'll definitely keep an eye out for his future works. All around, "Embers" was a great collection of stories. In nearly every tale, the characters have heart and are relatable, and his writing style is inviting and easy to get lost in. Among my favorite stories in the collection were Valerie's Window, Closer, and Flocking birds.

S.J. Budd says

I have to say I was really impressed at the size of this collection, 25 short stories, you are definitely getting your moneys worth.

I first discovered Embers by Kenneth W.Cain as I'm a really big fan of Crystal Lake Publishing. Previously they have release some great horror short story anthologies such as Gutted which contains stories from Neil

Gaiman, Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell and Kevin Lucia. Crystal Lake have also released some really great original novels such as Pretty Little Dead Girls by Mercedes M. Yardley. They have also branched out into non-fiction with horror writing guides which have been incredibly helpful over the years.

So when I saw this I was eager to take a look. Looking at the beginning pages it is clear this is no novice writer he's had countless other things published in various genres.

The first tale, The Chamber, was just so dark and chilling I knew this would be a great read. A very strong story to open the collection with.

What makes his work scary is that he takes normal everyday situations with characters just like you and me and twists them into something horrific. These are tales that really could happen to anyone.

There is a lot of depth to these tales, such as Final Breath, there's an extraordinary range of genres and topics used, some are like love stories with a dark twist, some are psychological, some are gory, there's plenty of monsters thrown in as well as those less known. Some are just downright scary and there's some very clever takes on familiar tropes. These are tales that will scare everyone, they're not all about monsters but some of the more real life down to earth horrors we will all face, such as loss of a loved one, beginning your life again, falling in love with the wrong person.

As there are 25 stories I'll just highlight my favourite ones.

Valerie's Window - A really dark sinister tale amplified from the perspective of the young naive girl, Valerie.

A window to dream by - I just thought this was a really clever tale, particularly with the connection of the homeless guys who watch Seth looking up into the sky. It's only right until the end where you get the whole hit of the story and it's a great ending.

Closer - Travis goes hunting with his estranged father in a bid to win his approval but he's never been able to pull the trigger. Killing just isn't in his nature.

Breathing Cave - Kelly goes on a trip with her new boyfriend and his friends. They pass a cave, Kelly doesn't want to enter but doesn't want to lose face in front of her new friends.

Blackbird's Breath - Henry is trying to come to terms with his loss until a blackbird gets stuck behind his fireplace.

Scarlett R Algee says

There are recurring themes in this collection: deteriorated relationships are a big one, and bird motifs are another (and in "Flocking Birds," you get both). There are a few weak spots as with any story collection--a few soft or abrupt endings--but by and large, Cain has a solid body of work here. I dislike spoiling any story, so I'll just list a few of my favorites:

- "Gone": a lost child is every parent's worst nightmare, and this one has a really great Twilight Zone vibe.
- "Blackbird's Breath": one of several bird-themed stories, this one is sad and frustrating and disturbing all at

once.

- "Valerie's Window": just what does Valerie see outside? Monsters, or simply the normal world? It's never clear, but if you're familiar with some of the past decade's kidnapping-related news stories, this is especially creepy.
- "Closer": a man attempts to reconcile with his father, even though he detests what he's doing. Terrific twist ending!
- "A Window To Dream By": possibly the story I like best, because every man needs a Lovecraftian romantic obsession in his life. Even if she has tentacles. Especially if she has tentacles.

Altogether, these stories made for a good unsettling read. Highly recommended!

(Review copy.)

Yvonne Davies says

As a fan of short stories, I jumped at the chance to read this book. As usual when I read a collection of short stories I have my favourites, so for this review I will mention the ones that stood out for me.

To Save One Life: This short story is about a serial killer. Due to this being written from the Hero's POV, you can really imagine being in the room whilst the killer does the deed. I can guarantee that you will be as surprised as me when you find out who the hero is.

Final Breath: Glenda is sitting by her dying daughter's bed and makes a statement that she tries to keep. This is a story about a mother's grief and as a mom myself, my heart was with Glenda. I can understand why she did what she did and the fear of the chase makes this story a page turner.

Pirouette: Like the majority of young girls Maddie wants to be a ballerina and spends all her time at home practising. Unfortunately, unlike other girls Maddie's home is not a happy one. This story tackles domestic violence, which is always a difficult subject to tackle and although some of the scenes were harrowing, this story went to show how brave Maddie and her mom were.

A Window to Dream by: Seth is staying in a hotel whilst working away from home and comes obsessed with a mysterious woman. As she is not your stereotypical beautiful woman I could not understand why he had such a fascination. However, as the story progressed and the scenes got more descriptive, showed how obsessed Seth was and what he was willing to lose. A good twist at the end involving the group of homeless men.

Water Snake. This is one of the creepiest stories in this book. If you have a fear of swimming in open water than do not read this. This story was intense and you knew something was going to happen, but even I was surprised how the story progressed. A fast pace story with so much action, it puts some full-length stories to shame.

Not having read anything before by Kenneth W Cain, I did not know what to expect, but from page 1 I enjoyed reading each and every word. Each story is individual and you will not find two stories the same, whether it is a widower grieving for his lost wife or an ancient hermit hiding in his cave. With 25 stories, this book will keep you entertained for hours. A great read that lets your imagination run wild.

GracieKat says

A very nice cover. The art work is excellent. It fits the Embers title well and is creepy looking. The Table of Contents is linked very nicely.

The Chamber - 3 Stars

Started well with a nice blending of past and present. I had a little trouble with the realism of the ending but it was well-written.

Valerie's Window - 5 Stars

Started out in a typical way but as the story progresses and more and more of Valerie's life is revealed it takes strange and disturbing twists that I did not see coming. It was also realistic in her thoughts and actions.

A Window to Dream By - 3 Stars

A solid story but it felt like it needed more. Just something a bit more to understand what exactly is going on with that particular hotel and why. It's very Lovecraftian in tone, for the most part.

Each New Day Unknown - 3 Stars

Summons up the horror of recurring nightmares. But are they really nightmares. It's well-written but lacks much punch, at least in my opinion.

Gone - 3 Stars

Another solid tale and every parent's worst nightmare. You can definitely see the Twilight Zone influence at work here as it reminds me greatly of the episode 'Little Girl Lost' but slanted more toward horror than science fiction.

Under the Drift of Snow - 2 Stars leaning toward 3

It starts out excellently and is very emotionally moving. The end, however, isn't really set-up at all so it just turns into a big "Huh. That came out of nowhere." It also has an implication that I thought was a little...manipulative. (view spoiler) At least that's the impression I got from it.

Blackbird's Breath - 2 Stars

I'm not sure what the blackbird is supposed to represent, exactly. It reminds me a bit of Poe's celebrated Raven (although this bird doesn't speak, just chirps). If it's a punishment of some sort there doesn't seem to be much cause for it.

Desolate - 4 Stars

A creepy story about a particularly nasty form of addiction.

Lost in the Woods - 3 Stars

The emotional parts are very successful. They felt so real and touching. I also liked the idea of it. Lost in the Woods had a very 'Orpheus' feel to it. At the end it devolves into a rather disappointing typical horror tale. It could have been so much more.

Final Breaths - 4 Stars

Another parent's worst nightmare. If you have a hard time reading about prolonged hospital scenes this story will cut you to the heart. Again the emotions and realism are done so well that the supernatural elements almost seem out of place. I actually think the story would work just as well without them, if not better.

Closer - 2 Stars

I could see where it was going very early on. That's not exactly a flaw but so much of it just doesn't make sense. The character's inner monologue is very realistic and again, the emotions, thoughts and feelings of the character are well done. My issues with it are the total 180 flip in the character's inner morals which seems a bit extreme to be believable. The end is also a bit confusing. It seems throughout that they're in the woods, then it's revealed they're in a city or perhaps suburb ad it destroys the credibility the story had.

Flocking Birds - 3 1/2 Stars

Again, the family drama takes center stage to the rest of the plot. I was really torn whether to give this a 3 or a 4. I did like it. It's very realism was horrific but the end was abrupt and incomplete. It left me feeling dissatisfied because again, it could have been so much more and I think the author has the talent to bring it to a satisfactory end.

Pirouette - 4 Stars

Another excellently portrayed glimpse of a fractured family unit and not marred by any forced supernatural trappings. It is what it is and it is a great story.

To Save One Life - 4 Stars

I really liked the story. It had an interesting point of view on a serial killer. I would have given it 5 stars but for one flaw. It may seem harsh but it's huge to me. (view spoiler) At least this Boris ends up a little better off than the one in the song. Yes, you sneaky little author, I caught it.

Of Both Worlds - 5 Stars

Very Lovecraftian in tone, quite intentionally I presume. A very good story and also a little sad.

Breathing Cave - 4 Stars

I almost get the feeling that perhaps this started out as a different story and evolved into what it became. Which is still a very good horror tale. There is one small blooper that I can't help but mention because the author may want to fix it. I'm not going to hide it because it's not integral to the plot. The lead female character's boyfriend is using his phone for light. He says it's barely charged and shortly after blacks out, going dead. Yet, somehow, a moment later she finds it in the dark...and turns it on. If I somehow misunderstood the author's intentions there I will gladly correct my interpretation of it.

Soul Tapped - 2 Stars

I really wanted to like it as I love a good ghost story. However, the entity was easy to guess and there were quite a few things that just seemed improbable in the real world.

The Water People - 3 Stars

Could have been much better if it were a shade longer. It would give a bit more background on the creatures and their motivations.

Water Snake - 4 Stars

Water Snake had a SyFy Monster Movie feel to it and it was great. There was also a nice bit of snake physiology in there that a lot of authors overlook.

Evolved - 3 Stars

It was a good story but again, a bit more detail would have been helpful. It reminded me a bit of a Lovecraft story mixed with a Robert E. Howard story.

Buried Beneath the Old Chicago Swamps - 2 1/2 - 3 Stars

I liked it and the premise was good but at the same time I had no clue what exactly was going on. Not in the larger story, that was pretty clear but with the 'witch' and her house. It reminded me a bit of a more evil Howl's Moving Castle.

The Bad Men - 4 Stars

This one had a very dark Twilight Zone feel to it. Intrepid space explorers run into non-alien lifeforms n another planet.

Parasite - 3 Stars (4 Stars for those of you that like bugs in the body)

It was well-written and gross. Gross in a good way for those people that like creatures in the body stories.

Strip Poker, Crabs and Blue Women - 2 Stars

I didn't really care for this story. It tried a bit too hard for the humor and was just blah.

The Benefit of Being Weighty - 2 Stars

I really did not get this one. What did the ring have to do with anything? Would everyone really be such jerks about the guy's weight? Also, I think an easier way to take a ring off would be to get a jeweler to cut it off, but that's just me.

It also has an afterword at the end by the author about how he got the ideas. I didn't want to read it until I had done the reviews. I didn't want them to color my opinions. The comments on 'Final Breaths' and 'Lost in the Woods' were very touching. From the emotional depth in those stories I wondered if the author was drawing on personal experience. I would also like to say that his original idea for Soul Tapped sounds like it would be a funny idea for a story, please, please make it!

The book had no typos or grammar issues. I thought it was a great collection. The stories I thought were excellent more than made up for the few I didn't like. And other people might like those more than I do.

Received from the author for an honest review

Noelle Kelly says

Embers, A collection of Dark Fiction is a dark and twisted selection of smouldering tales.

Best way to read Embers: Curled up by a dying fire, sipping a glass of red or tea!

Recently, I've become a big fan of short story collections, so I jumped at the chance to review this ARC from Crystal Lake Publishing. Horror collections work especially well. A short pacy story can pack just as heavy a punch as a longer, more developed one. Gutted : Beautiful Horror Stories (also published by Crystal Lake Publishing) re-awakened my love of horrific short stories.

Embers reminded me of shows from my childhood like Tales of the Dark Side and The Twilight Zone (why I was allowed to watch this as a child, I still don't know!) Each story is connected by a little thread to the next one. Kenneth created a web of weird, sometimes gory, sometimes psychological and always scary threads.

My favourite story is The Chamber, it made me feel clammy and uncomfortable for all the right/ wrong reasons, was the first one. In The Chamber, an old war veteran visits an old war site with his family and encounters horrors from the past and present. The imagery and sense of dread is excellently portrayed.

Of Both Worlds and Breathing Cave, two slightly connected stories freaked me out! The environment and the character's emotions are so vivid, the reader feels like they are part of the story. The stories based largely in caves, reminded me of The Descent (an excellent horror movie from 2005).

To conclude, this well written selection is perfect for dipping into. I love discovering new horror fiction authors and I will be reading more of Kenneth's work.

Cats of Ulthar February Weird Fiction says

Review of EMBERS by Kenneth W. Cain

A sterling single-author collection, EMBERS is the third short story collection by prolific author Kenneth W. Cain. For readers who haven't encountered Mr. Cain, here is a wonderful introduction. Prepare for the stretching of your mind and the expansion of your imagination as Kenneth W. Cain boldly goes into unexplored territory, sometimes speculative, other times horrific, but always enlightening. My recommendation is sample one story at a time, taking time to savor the enjoyment or to reel from the horror; then let the story sink in.

Arielle says

I gave this book a 5 star rating, which I hardly ever do. Almost every short story in this book was great! I love short stories because if one isn't good, chances are the next one might be. But in this case I didn't look at each next story with hope it would be better, but with excitement that it would be just as good as the previous one.

The Grim Reader says

I've read many, many short story collections over these past few years. Some good, some great and some that are just okay. So, where does Embers by Kenneth W. Cain sit? Well, Crystal Lake Publishing very rarely drop the ball with their releases. They are one such publisher I know I am going to get a quality read from more often than not. Their books always have great cover art and are presented in a professional manner with good editing and formatting. I am not familiar with Mr Cain's work, but of the many short tales on offer here, I found myself really enjoying most of them.

Things get off to a great start with Chamber. This is a story set after the second world war. In this tale, something lurks within the darkness of a gas chamber and a soldier haunted by his past returns and comes face-to-face with an unimaginable, supernatural horror. Second story, Valerie's Window is a zombie story! Oh no, not another zombie story I hear you cry...but, don't worry, Cain's Z's are background to what is happening inside of a house where a woman is being held prisoner. I thought this story was very good. I'm not a zombie fan at all, but this story worked well for me and it was tough work in deciding whether Valerie

was better off inside the house or out!

And so things continue with some good and some excellent short stories. Cain's characters often deal with loss, so there is a grim atmosphere lingering through most of the tales, much to my delight. There are tales with strong Lovecraft influences, a little Ray Bradbury here and there and even a sprinkling of Poe. Cain's stories don't outstay their welcome; they are short and sharp which works well for the most part, though on occasion I did wish for a little more depth. Towards the end of the collection I found myself really enjoying Breathing Cave, a claustrophobic story if ever there was one and The Bad Men, which is a nice mix of science fiction and horror. Overall, most of the stories in the book elicited some sort of positive response from me.

Sadly, the collection ended with a bit of a whimper and I didn't much care for Strip Poker, Crabs and Blue Women or particularly The Benefit of Being Weighty, though after reading the authors notes, I can see why the latter was included and perhaps why it is the final story in the collection, owing to its personal connection with the author. The market is flooded with short story collections and I sincerely hope that Cain's Embers finds an audience as he has a strong voice and an obvious writing ability. A really good collection overall.

4/5 logs for the fire

Nev Murray says

"I think I can safely say that this collection is one of my all-time favourites. There is such a variety of stories in here that there will definitely be something for everyone in it."

See here for the full review:

[Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction](#)

Frank Errington says

Review copy

Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction features twenty-five stories. In any collection of this size, there are bound to be some hits and some misses along the way. Fortunately, there are more of the former leading me to suggest this work be added to your personal TBR list.

The book begins with The Chamber - A visit to a place of unspeakable horror brings back nightmares, but not of what the reader might imagine. A most interesting and somewhat Lovecraftian beginning to the collection.

If you enjoy your horror with a touch of Lovecraft, I believe you'll appreciate this body of work from Kenneth W. Cain more than you would otherwise.

Not all of the stories in Embers have creatures with tentacles. For example. Valerie's Window is a zombie tale where the heroine is dealing with something much worse than the mere undead.

If you miss the tentacles, you don't have to wait long. They're back in A Window To Dream By, a short story with a killer opening line...

Despite her tentacles and lack of human arms and legs, Seth had an inexplicable attraction to the woman.

Rather than doing a synopsis of every story, here are a few of the highlights. I really enjoyed To Save One Life in which a spider named Boris plays a rather important role. Of Both Worlds - If you're perceived as a monster, you might as well be one. And then there's Water Snake - huge snakes capable of swallowing a fully grown human. Well-told and frightening.

I might not have loved every story in this collection, but I would certainly return for a second helping of tales from Kenneth W. Cain.

Embers: A Collection of Dark Fiction is available in both paperback and e-book formats from Crystal Lake Publishing. If you subscribe to Kindle Unlimited you can read it at no additional charge. Also, if you are an Amazon Prime member you can read it for FREE using the Kindle Owners Lending Library.

From the author's bio - Kenneth W. Cain first got the itch for storytelling during his formative years in the suburbs of Chicago, where he got to listen to his grandfather spin tales by the glow of a barrel fire. But it was a reading of Baba Yaga that grew his desire for dark fiction. Shows like The Twilight Zone, The Outer Limits, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, and One Step Beyond furthered that sense of wonder for the unknown, and he's been writing ever since. Writing, reading, fine art, graphic design, and Cardinals baseball are but a few of his passions. Cain now resides in Chester County, Pennsylvania with his wife and two children.

T. Giachetti says

Righteous Read

Horrifying, spine chilling, deathly dark! Everything who love horror craves. When you reach the end of this book, your soul desires more from this author! Recommend read.

Paula says

An outstanding collection of short stories, you can check out my full review here...
<https://horrornovelreviews.com/2017/0...>
