



Fearsome Magics

Jonathan Strahan (Editor) , K.J. Parker (Contributor) , Karin Tidbeck (Contributor) , Justina Robson (Contributor) , Nina Kiriki Hoffman (Contributor) , James Bradley (Contributor) , Frances Hardinge (Contributor) , Kaaron Warren (Contributor) , more... Genevieve Valentine (Contributor) , Robert Shearman (Contributor) , Garth Nix (Contributor) , Isobelle Carmody (Contributor) , Tony Ballantyne (Contributor) , Ellen Klages (Contributor) , Christopher Rowe (Contributor) ...less

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A cabinet of magic! A cavalcade of wonder! A collection of stories both strange and wondrous, of tales filled with wild adventure and strange imaginings. Fearsome Magics, the second New Solaris Book of Fantasy, is all these things and more. It is, we think, one of the best books you will read all year.

Award-winning editor Jonathan Strahan has invited some of the best and most exciting writers working in fantasy today to let their imaginations run wild and to deliver stories that will thrill and awe, delight and amuse. And above all, stories that are filled with fearsome magic! Authors set to take part in Fearsome Magics include Christopher Priest, Garth Nix, Catherynne M. Valente, Ellen Klages, Isobelle Carmody, Nalo Hopkinson, Frances Hardinge, Scott Lynch, Robert Shearman, Justina Robson, Christopher Rowe, Karin Tidbeck, K J Parker, and Justina Robson.

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From Reader Review Fearsome Magics for online ebook

Mike says

After I finished (or mostly finished) reading this anthology, I realised what I didn't like about it: many, in fact most, of the stories are arguably horror, and I don't enjoy horror as a genre. I went in hoping for a book that was entirely fantasy, though the "Fearsome" part of the title probably should have warned me.

I did have my hesitations, because having read the same editor's Best of the Year picks, I knew that his taste and mine were very different. I decided, though, based on the names of the authors (particularly K.J. Parker and Garth Nix), that there would probably be some stories I liked, and indeed there were. They were in the minority, though, or close to it; the stories I liked even somewhat only account for half of the total, hence the three-star rating.

The collection starts out well, with "The Dun Letter" by Christopher Rowe. Like several other stories in the volume, it takes the idea of the changeling or the lost elf princess and plays with it. I particularly appreciated how the protagonist wasn't depicted as perfect; she isn't a good student or unusually diligent, and yet she takes care of her grandmother in a matter-of-fact way that suggests she thinks that's just what you do.

What tipped me over into requesting the book from Netgalley (who provided a copy for purposes of review) was seeing that there was a new Garth Nix story of Sir Hereward and Mister Fitz ("Home is the Haunter"). Unfortunately, I was disappointed by it. I've read the previous three stories with these characters, and reading this one brought me to the realisation that each one is basically the same story with new furniture. Sir Hereward is generally the viewpoint character, and because of his background, his sense of honour and his commitments, he has very little in the way of protagonism; he makes choices, but you know what they're going to be ahead of time. His companion, the self-willed puppet Mister Fitz, is indeed self-willed, more so than Sir Hereward. In this uncorrected proof, there were also several basic editing errors in this story, more than in the others in the collection, and that probably reduced my enjoyment. I did enjoy it - Mister Fitz is a wonderful character, and it's an interesting world - but I felt I was reading a story I'd already read.

Isabelle Carmody's "Grigori's Solution" I didn't enjoy. It's told in a stiff, distant style, and starts out with a long justification of why it's a story about magic, despite how it appears, which I thought should have been unnecessary. It persistently refers to an equation as a "sum". It describes the solution of the equation as somehow (in a way which didn't succeed in suspending my disbelief) causing the end of the universe or at least the world; I'm fairly sure there's a classic story somewhere that's already done this. I know there's a classic story that does what the rest of the story does, describes people's reaction to the end, and does it much better although coming to many of the same conclusions (it's by Bradbury or Silverberg or one of those guys, and I think it was published in the 70s). In other words, nothing new, not enjoyably told, the central conceit is weak, and the author also misses an opportunity to reference climate change skepticism. In fact, because climate change skepticism exists, I found the idea that the population at large would believe that the end was coming to be unconvincing.

Tony Ballantyne's "Dream London Hospital" is distinctly horror, and there's not much in the way of magic except in its surrealism. Not a favourite.

As I expected, I enjoyed the K.J. Parker story, "Safe House". It's told in the humourous, world-weary style that Parker does so well, it's a clever idea well worked out, and this was enough for me not to mind the dark and tragic aspects to it.

I also enjoyed Ellen Klages' "Hey, Presto!", an adventure story (a schoolgirl adventure story, no less, though set in the holidays) with no actual magic and not much fearsomeness, but a strong young female protagonist.

James Bradley's "The Changeling" is one of those stories that walks a fine line, so you're never sure whether the magical explanation is the true one, or if the "changeling" is just what we would these days call autistic. It's well done, but darker than I personally prefer.

Karin Tidbeck's "Migration", like other Tidbeck stories I've read, never resolves into anything that makes straightforward sense; it's strange and surreal throughout. I don't have a problem with that, though, and she does it well. However, it didn't give me much to hold onto.

Justina Robson's "On Skybolt Mountain" gave me the feeling that the author was pantsing her way through without knowing what came next, and changed her mind several times about what kind of story it was and what was happening. The names at the beginning, and a few other details, give a nineteenth-century American frontier feel, but then we're in some kind of a sword-and-sorcery setting, and at the very end the witch becomes something else entirely with no foreshadowing that I could see.

I usually enjoy Nina Kiriki Hoffman's lyrical fantastica, and "Where Our Edges Lie" is no exception. It's similar, in many ways, to "The Dun Letter" earlier in the collection, and plays again with the "changeling" idea. Both stories make a similar point about holding onto relationships being the most important thing.

The same point is present in Frances Hardinge's "Devil's Bridge", an original idea well executed, again with a strong young female protagonist (I like those).

Kaaron Warren's "The Nursery Corner" is one of several stories by Australian authors in the volume (the editor is also Australian), but the only one with an Australian setting. I'd call it light horror. Well done, but not really to my personal taste.

I didn't read all of the last two stories in the volume, since they took a horror or dark direction so early on and it seemed clear that they wouldn't be ones I'd enjoy. They are "Aberration" by Genevieve Valentine and "Ice in the Bedroom" by Robert Shearman.

So, out of the 14 stories in this volume, there were five that I straightforwardly enjoyed. There was one that I somewhat enjoyed but felt wasn't taking a fresh direction with the characters (the Nix), one that I quite liked but didn't love because the surrealism didn't give me enough to identify with (the Tidbeck), three that I considered well done but that were darker than I like, two that I thought weren't very well done, and two that lost my interest or willingness to follow along relatively early.

This collection confirms for me what I thought about the earlier Strahan anthology I reviewed: it's by an editor whose taste doesn't have a lot of overlap with mine, and I probably shouldn't pick up other anthologies which he edits. I'll miss out on a few good stories that way, but too few to make it worth wading through the others.

Michael Dodd says

Magic can mean a great many things, and take endless forms; from legerdemain to magic rings, from hidden worlds to hiding in plain sight, a system of magic is a stock tool for many a writer, fantasy or otherwise. In

Fearsome Magics, the latest Solaris Book of Fantasy, Jonathan Strahan collects together stories from fourteen authors, each dealing with magic in their own way. Given free reign to incorporate the theme into their stories however they wish, the authors involved here have contributed tales ranging right across the spectrum of styles and settings, showcasing breathtaking variety in the resulting collection.

Read the rest of the review at <http://trackofwords.wordpress.com/201...>

Ian Fellows says

Some gems of stories in here, but the quality was very uneven. Be prepared because many of them don't have any magic, and few are actually centered around the magic.

DoodlePanda says

Received from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

1. The Dun Letter by Christopher Rowe - Rated 4/5

Tansie, abandoned by her mother and left to live with her poorly (and poor) grandmother, one day opens a letter addressed to her mother that might change her life forever.

I found this story fairly good, and written well. I liked the ending and the way Tansie won't let anyone tell her what she can or can't do.

2. Home is the Haunter by Garth Nix - Rated 3/5

This is about a knight travelling with his companion - a self-willed puppet that can do magic. They come to a convent and seeks refuge here from a creature called the Hag of Shadows.

This story was ok, it seemed like it was a little too long, and dragged on a bit in places. I didn't find it particularly interesting, though I did like the Puppet Mr. Fitz.

3. Grigori's Solution by Isobelle Carmody - Rated 2/5

A mathematical sum of unmaking is discovered and threatens to erase the entire universe.

Although an interesting concept, I did not really enjoy this story. It wasn't bad, just not very exciting. Even though the world is based on mathematical formulas, I just didn't buy the fact that the solution of a maths problem would unravel the world.

4. Dream London Hospital by Tony Ballantyne - Rated 2/5

A strange man (?) goes into the Dream London Hospital looking for a woman (?).

This seemed completely random to me, I have no idea what the point of the story was. It was well written, but that's pretty much it.

5. Safe House by K.J. Parker - Rated 4/5

A sorcerer from the Studium is out on a mission looking for a untrained natural magic user that the Studium

wants to recruit.

I really enjoyed this story, it was funny with a nice twist at the end. One of my favorites in this collection!

6. Hey, Presto! by Ellen Klages - Rated 3/5

Polly comes from a long line of magicians, but she has always wanted to lead a more normal life. One summer she is staying with her dad, but when his assistant quits Polly has to step in.

It was a good story, about the relationship between father and daughter and how that starts developing when they 'have to' spend the summer together practicing the magic trick.

7. The Changeling by James Bradley - Rated 2/5

Hannah lives in a house in the forest with her baby. Her husband has died, and now baby Connor starts acting strange. Hannah starts wondering if he is a changeling.

This story was well written, but very dark. I felt really sorry for Hannah that is basically all alone in the world with a tiny baby to look after. And I really didn't like the ending.

8. Migration by Karin Tidbeck - Rated 3/5

Edith lives in a tall building, but she doesn't know how she or all the other people got there. Their whole lives are in the building, they never go outside. One day she wakes up and everybody has disappeared.

I found this story to be both interesting and confusing. I still don't have any idea what really happened, but it was well written and I enjoyed reading it.

9. On Skybolt Mountain by Justina Robson - Rated 4/5

The witch Lettice tries to live a quiet life, but when it is discovered that she can do magic she has to make a choice - achieve an impossible magical task or hang.

I liked this story, it was well written and with a great twist at the end that made me increase my rating.

10. Where Our Edges Lie by Nina Kiriki Hoffman - Rated 4/5

This story is about twins that have been really close to each other since they were born. But one day something happens that will make them slowly grow apart.

I enjoyed reading about how the bond between the twins were changing, and was curious to see how it would end. Not going to spoil it for you, but I found it to be bittersweet which I liked. In real life the choices that we make aren't always just 'good' or 'bad', there is a lot in between.

11. Devil's Bridge by Frances Hardinge - Rated 4/5

Petra is a Bridgekin, which means she can make bridges to anywhere, but it comes with a price. One day she reluctantly agrees to make a bridge for a stranger, but will she come to regret it?

I really enjoyed reading this, it is quite short but this somehow fits perfectly with the story. It is really well written and one of my favorites in the collection.

12. The Nursery Corner by Kaaron Warven - Rated 2.5/5

An old woman looks back on her childhood and growing up in the 'old peoples home' that her mother works in. One day a magician comes to perform and makes a "Nursery Corner" with a rocking chair that calms you

down when you sit in it. But does it come with a price?

I enjoyed reading this, and was curious to find out more about what happened when people sat in the chair. I found the ending to be really good.

13. Aberration by Genevieve Valentine - Rated 1.5/5

A woman? ghost? travels through space and time to find where she belongs.

I have no idea what this story was about. I just felt confused while I was reading it.

14. Ice in the Bedroom by Robert Shearman - Rated 2/5

After his wife commits suicide Simon gets depressed and starts having dreams/hallucinations about a different version of Hell, where there is ice instead of fire.

This story didn't really do much for me to be honest, other than make me feel sorry for poor Simon.

My view of the book in general

All in all an average collection. Like most of these anthologies there are some great stories and some that aren't really that interesting.

In some of the stories I can't really see where the magic comes in, considering the name of the book: Fearsome Magics.

So the feeling I'm left with is that it doesn't feel like I've wasted my time reading this, but it hasn't blown my mind either...

Joseph says

Another fantasy anthology, sequel of sorts to Fearsome Journeys: The New Solaris Book of Fantasy. This one, as per the title, is all about the magic. As always, it's an anthology and some stories I liked better than others, but not a clinker in the bunch.

Personal favorites: Another Sir Hereford & Mr. Finch piece by Garth Nix, and stories by K.J. Parker, Nina Kiriki Hoffman and Kaaron Warren. But if you ask me again, I might choose others.

Carly says

~3.5

In his introduction, Strahan notes that,

"Magic is about rules. [...] Magic without limitations, without consequences, unbinds the story, lets events run amok, and undermines dramatic power."

In general, I agree wholeheartedly. As a reader, I don't necessarily need to understand the underlying logic, but I have to have a sense that it is actually there. If actions do not have consequences, the story devolves into that sense of trite unreality that we denigrate as the "fairy tale effect." There are, of course, exceptions. Dreamlike fantasies often have ever-changing and unreliable rules that merely enhance their unsettled, often almost hallucinogenic effect. However, given this introduction, I was a little surprised by how much of the collection seemed to consist of the dreamlike and rule-less variety. I've read several of Strahan's other anthologies, and I'm usually a little taken aback by how broadly he defines fantasy and speculative fiction. This collection is no different; many of the stories probably fit more neatly into "horror," and at least one contains no magic at all. I enjoy this aspect of these collections as it allows me to widen my reading horizons, but it is worth noting for fans of purer fantasy.

As always, I found **K J Parker's** contribution to be utterly enjoyable. I really need to get around to reading his series. In "**Safe House**," the narrator finds himself about to be hanged as a sorcerer. Again. Even though he tries to explain the pointlessness of hanging a sorcerer capable of dematerializing into a cloud of smoke, his hangman is intractable. Which is why our narrator finds himself rematerializing somewhere out in the boondocks of BocFlemen, cold, shaky, utterly lacking in garb, and still needing to rescue an unknown novice sorcerer somewhere in hostile country. As always, one of my favourite aspects of the story is the almost Woosterish voice that Parker bestows upon his first person narrator. One of the many enjoyable quotes:

"It's a sort of assumption you make; that the enemy is never scared. The enemy, as we imagine him, is a sort of ice-cool, nerves-of-steel super-predator, every fibre of whose being is concentrated with absolute intensity on killing you. So, you tell yourself, if the voice sounds petrified with fear, it can't be the enemy.

Bullshit, of course. I've been the enemy loads of times, and I'm permanently terrified."

Yet for all the humour, the story manages to shoehorn in a few trenchant yet amusing observations about war and conflict:

"Victory almost always goes to the side that keeps its nerve longest and is prepared to tolerate the most damage. Which probably explains why we tend to fight our wars in other people's countries. It's so much easier to keep one's nerve when the villages and fields getting burnt into glass belong to some stranger.

[...] Our wars never end. We tell them to, but they rarely listen."

Even if I'm not sure I really grasped what was going on, "Safe House" was definitely one of my favourite stories in the collection.

"**The Dun Letter**" by **Christopher Rowe** is a nice little take on the half-fae child tale. In the midst of a collection of last notices and unpaid bills, Tansie receives a letter that proclaims her a child of the fey. I loved how the story played with the trope of the unknown parent. I found it an enjoyable melding of contemporary life and faerie incursion, a brief but solid urban fantasy with a satisfying little kick at the end. My favourite quote:

"For some reason, this reminded Tansie of the stories she had heard about foster care from some of the kids on the at-risk track. It was always advertised as going someplace better by the people taking you away from your home. Gothwiddion the Primrose Knight sounded like he worked for Child Protective Services."

I've been a fan of **Garth Nix** for years, and I admire both his imagination and his ability to tell a story.

"**Home is the Haunter**" is no exception. Sir Hereward and his companion, an ancient being that apparently

uses a puppet as his avatar, find themselves on the edge of a sweetwater sea whose legendary inhabitant apparently dines annually upon the spirits of any men who are crossing at the time. As one might expect, Sir Hereward has arrived on the eve of the spirit's night out, so they seek refuge at the local house of The Sacred Order of the Sisters of Mercantile Fairness of the Goddess Lanith-Eremot. Unfortunately, things aren't precisely as they seem with the sisters, and it's definitely turning out to be an interesting evening. The story is humorous and imaginative and utterly enjoyable.

"Devil's Bridge" by Francis Hardinge contains one of the most tantalizing magical constructs in the collection. Petra is Bridgekin, able to construct a bridge to any place in any world. However, the bridge magic exacts a toll upon the wisher. The price can be anything: a memory, one's singing voice, the colour from one's skin or hair. But the price will always be steep. And yet desperate men keep coming, keep forcing Petra by gunpoint to use her gift. I found the story sweet and evocative, even if the end was just a little too pat. Favourite quote:

"We all make choices like that, and mostly we don't even notice. Picking which dreams we give up."

"Dream London Hospital" by Tony Ballantyne is reminiscent of those peculiarly vivid dreams that seem frighteningly reasonable until one tries to explain them the next day. The first person narrator is trying to find an unnamed woman who is somewhere in the bowels of the Dream London Hospital. As he travels deeper into the hospital's mazelike corridors, he passes footless men (don't try the fish pedicures, especially when performed by pirhanas), signs with cheery announcements such as, *"Abandon all bodily fluids, all those who enter here,"* soul scanners, carrionmen, and more. The story is hallucinogenic and strange and memorable, as illogical and nonsensical as a dream.

There are plenty of other stories. Some, like **"Aberration" by Genevieve Valentine** or **"Migration" by Karin Tidbeck**, are haunting and obscure. Others, like **James Bradley's "The Changeling"** and **Nina Kiriki Hoffman's "Where Our Edges Lie,"** explore interesting twists in the old changeling tale. Several of the tales contain only minimal magic; for example, **"Ice in the Bedroom" by Robert Shearman** uses metaphorical dreams to explore themes of loss and grief, and while **"Hey, Presto!" by Ellen Klages** is a sweet little story about a father and daughter, it is utterly lacking in any magic other than the magician's variety of illusion and trickery. Not every story was a good fit. My least favourite was **"Grigori's Solution" by Isabelle Carmody**, in which solving a math formula inexplicably brings about the end of the world. In my opinion, if magic is about rules, then "scientific magic" such as math is doubly so, and it is important for an author to learn those rules. Unfortunately, I don't think that happened in Carmody's story.

Overall, while I don't think the collection contains as many gems as Strahan's "Year's Best" collections, it does contain a variety of solid stories. I also think that although the stories often stretch the traditional boundaries of fantasy, most fit neatly into the horror-fantasy theme suggested by the title. For me, the sheer enjoyment of fantasy adventures such as Parker's "Safe House" and Hardinge's "Devil's Bridge" made the collection a worthwhile read.

Excerpted from my review on Booklikes, in which I actually review every single story in the collection. It may also contain spoilers and quotes that I was too lazy to copy over.

~~I received this ebook through NetGalley from the publisher, Solaris, in exchange for my honest review. ~~

***Note: All quotes are taken from an uncorrected proof. While they may not precisely reflect the final*

*versions, I feel that they give an accurate portrait of the spirit and styles of the different stories.***

Jim says

This started out as a 3 star collection of fantasy stories, but the last 4 or 5 weren't very good at all. One in the middle was the most shocking, really good in a very horrible way. (The one with the threshing machine in it.) Most were longer than they needed to be &/or didn't have very good points. Definitely not one of Strahan's better anthologies.

Yagiz Erkan says

I really liked this anthology. There are some great stories in it.
A more-detailed review will follow soon...

Katharine (Ventureadlaxre) says

This anthology is in the same 'series' of sorts - before we had Fearsome Journeys, and now we have Fearsome Magics. As one may guess, we go from an anthology of journeys to one of magic, whether it's about different worlds joined by bridges or what consequences great power can bring, we have an anthology that investigates the many paths and questions magic itself can raise.

Jonathan Strahan is well known in the anthologies sense world-wide, so one can expect, when picking up one of his works, to settle in for an excellent, engaging read.

***"The Dun Letter"* by Christopher Rowe**

Tansie lives in a house that looks like one young children or teens would bet each other to creep into or even spend a night on on a dare. She lives there with her grandmother. Her grandfather is long gone, and her mother somewhere unknown (but could perhaps drop by for Thanksgiving), so Tansie is left alone to struggle to pay the bills, and care for her ailing grandmother.

This is quite a good start to an anthology of magic, because it contains receiving a letter, letting the protagonist know that there may be a lot more to her than she's ever known. Like anyone who's loved Harry Potter and wished they'd received their own letter at age 11, this story fills you with a touch of excitement.

Sadly it has a bit of a lacklustre ending. Amusing, to be sure, but...

***"Home is the Hunter"* by Garth Nix**

A Sir Hereward and Master Fitz tale once again. Though I love Nix's writing in general, I'm not really a fan

of these two characters, one being a magical puppet, and both who have a way of getting into strife at all times. This is one that relies on humour, so if it misses you then there's a bit too much world building in this to be interesting as a short story.

Really, it was just a little too long for the plot and ability to hold your attention.

***"Grigori's Solution"* by Isobelle Carmody**

Straight up - I'm not a maths person. As such, this one was a little boring whilst it was an interesting concept - I just couldn't grasp how magic would have the ability to do such a thing - erase the world - and so I couldn't get invested in the danger. This anthology shows a lot of discussion on the rules that set magic up in each world, yet in this piece it seemed to be a bit wobbly.

The use of language in the writing itself is excellent though - it's Carmody after all. I just couldn't identify with the self-important narrator, though I did like how he presented his findings to the reader. I also found the 'resolution' a bit underwhelming.

***"Dream London Hospital"* by Tony Ballantyne**

Unfortunately the anthology continues to spiral into weaker plots. This one had the feel of horror to it, and the magic was quite lacking. It's effective in how illogical it is - keeping you reading to try to figure out what on earth is going on and how it'll all tie in at the end with the big reveal. This was all a bit like a nightmare, and would probably work better as a novella. In a short story format it didn't really get to set the tone and draw the reader in.

***"Safe House"* by K.J. Parker**

This brought us back to some better reading - though the use of 'hung' rather than 'hanged' was a bit jarring. Yes, it may seem odd but 'hanged' is the correct term. An item can be hung, a person is always hanged.

That aside - this was good. I always love pieces that show the consequences and balance of magic when used, and this showed the results in fine form. We see the struggle that one would still have even if they had magical ability, but it wasn't over-the-top like a comedy; this felt well thought-out.

This makes me certain that I need to pick up a book by K. J. Parker sometime. I'm sure I've said that before, too... I need to just make it happen!

***"Hey, Presto!"* by Ellen Klages**

A daughter of a world-famous magician who attends boarding school, and has no interest in having any attention at all. This is another brilliant piece that lifts the anthology up a little, the writing is encouraging and reassuring, and the little hints we see of London in war around this piece give it something a bit extra.

This one had excellent plot and characters, excellent idea seen safely through to the end, and a fitting and dramatic conclusion. Easily my favourite piece in the anthology so far.

***"The Changeling"* by James Bradley**

The anthology swings towards horror with this one once again. A mother's fears about their young child hits home with such deep instincts in most people - you read on, but you're so wary for what will happen. This didn't really have much of a magic-sense to it, but remained well written and gripping.

***"Migration"* by Karin Tidbeck**

This one was a little odd and disjointed - saying one thing, but I'm sure it was hinting at something deeper in a bizarre kind of way - it didn't really hold my attention, and I found myself skimming through - but the ending grabbed me back, as it certainly packs a punch.

***"On Skybolt Mountain"* by Justina Robson**

I found the writing style on this one a little jerky, and seemed to jump around a bit, skipping bits of logic which would have made it all so much smoother - almost like it had been edited down for length, but lost a bit of depth which would have made it more readable along the way. I just couldn't get why she didn't escape in the first place, which made the story a bit confusing throughout and kept throwing me from the narrative.

It was all just a bit confusing.

***"Where Our Edges Lie"* by Nina Kiriki Hoffman**

An interesting twist on the usual magic and twins story at play, though I found at times one of the twins was acting a bit unreasonably. Being that close, sure you can be prone to outbursts but surely you'd still listen and talk things through a bit more than we saw.

This had the same idea that the first story did, but I found the resolution much more reasonable and satisfying.

***"Devil's Bridge"* by Frances Hardinge**

This piece was excellent. Crisp, with wifts of magic akin to Laini Taylor's *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* series, with excellent lines in it about what magic costs such as the protagonists loss of colour from her hair, her ability to lie, her singing voice, an hour of sleep each night, and so on. These were the things that build this short up to be one of my favourites,

***"The Nursery Corner"* by Kaaron Warren**

Hurrah for Kaaron Warren! You can always depend on Kaaron to set things straight. This was another surreal piece, but the wonder it keeps you in, along with the characters and the setting that most of us are far too acquainted with, makes it hit home rather well. This is horror done well, where it creeps along, almost up upon you unsuspecting, with the little bits of plot it drops on you from afar to build the scene.

This takes things that can usually be so normal, and manages to twist them into something a bit uncanny and unsettling. While I can't say this was my favourite piece in the anthology (because I can't ever enjoy being creeped out!) this was one of the most effective and most readable. Kaaron is just too awesome.

Eugh, old people.

"Aberration" by Genevieve Valentine

This one was again surreal, but didn't have the readability that Kaaron has, perfectly juxtaposing the two by being one right after the other. This one is all about mood and if it doesn't hit you right, the whole piece will be lost.

The idea is interesting, don't get me wrong. Just sadly didn't connect with me in the slightest.

"Ice in the Bedroom" by Robert Shearman

Fingers crossed to end on a high note at least. Sadly, this wasn't really a magic or speculative fiction piece really - which is a shame, as I love Shearman's work. This is a sad and low piece to end on, as we see the protagonist try to cope with his wife's suicide.

~

I would recommend this anthology to those who want a dependable anthology that is certainly readable. This isn't my favourite of Strahan's anthologies, and overall I found it too easy to leave between each short story - nothing wrong with that for the casual reader, who is more than happy to pick it up every so often to read one short story before bed, then putting it down. I thank Rebellion for offering me a copy to review.

To continue reading this review, or to see others, please [click here](#).

Althea Ann says

I've come to have very high expectations of Strahan's anthologies. This is, perhaps, not the strongest of his collections, and the title seems more random than actually indicating a theme - but it's still a solid book with some good-to-very-good stories in it.

**** The Dun Letter, Christopher Rowe**

It's what we've all dreamed of, isn't it? A letter arrives from Elfland, letting us know that we are lost royalty and that soon we are to be whisked away to marvels untold?

The execution here is fine - but sometimes a trope is a trope for a reason, and turning it on its head makes it less powerful, not more.

***** Home is the Haunter (A Sir Hereward and Mr Fitz story), Garth Nix**

This is the first of Nix's Hereward & Fitz stories that I've read, and it's distinctly different than the works of his I've been familiar with. It felt very 1970's - I was reminded of Fritz Leiber or L. Sprague deCamp. A magical pumpkin-headed puppet is accompanied on a journey by a hulking knight. In the midst of a barren waste, they encounter a convent of priestesses who may hide an ominous secret. Action ensues...

***** Grigori's Solution, Isobelle Carmody**

The kernel of many conceptions of magic is that the description of a thing may be the thing itself. This story

plays with that idea, giving us a contemporary situation: the solving of a thorny mathematical theorem leads to the literal unraveling of the universe. Logical? No, but many things are not, and more than anything, I feel the the main focus here is the voice of the narrator: a self-important elderly man.

**** Dream London Hospital, Tony Ballantyne

This was not the one to pick to read during lunch! Not so much a dream, but a nightmare hospital. A strange bird-man wanders the corridors, searching for an enigmatic 'her.' Surreal scenes and horrific events confront him as he wanders past, staying detached. Captures dream-logic very nicely, and ends up being genuinely unsettling.

(I see, though, that this is a tie-in to a full-length novel. While I very much enjoyed the style of this for a short piece, I don't think it would work in an extended format...)

*****Safe House, K J Parker

I really have to get around to reading KJ Parker's novels. I keep encountering (her?) short stories, and have loved every one that I've read. I'm impressed by how fully and completely characters and settings are conjured up in an economy of words...

Speaking of conjuring... the wizard we meet here certainly does some of that. He's on a mission; sent by his Studium to locate and rescue an untrained magical Talent in a country that's hostile to all of their kind (not without reason). When we meet him, that hostility is fully on view: he's on a gallows, with a noose around his neck. And things progress from there...

*** Hey Presto!, Ellen Klages

Well, that was unexpected - there's no fantasy element to this one at all. There is, however, magic. I was won over by this tale of a young girl who's won over by her stage-magician father. After her mother's death, she found herself emotionally distant from him - as well as physically distant, at boarding school. Her attitude toward his profession is a combination of embarrassment and disdain. But during a summer vacation, she finds that perhaps she and her father have more in common than she realized.

**** The Changeling, James Bradley

Emotionally difficult, but very well-crafted story. Again, this is not a fantasy piece. Rather, it's an exploration of the mindset of a young woman who has had far more misfortune in her life than anyone could be expected to bear alone.

**** Migration, Karin Tidbeck

Extremely well-written, but emotionally... odd. In a surreal setting, with a post-apocalyptic feel, groups of humans (?) enact strange, insect-like rituals. Definitely gives the opportunity for the reader to interpret the whole thing as an extended metaphor for human civilization... perhaps as observed by an alien that thinks humans are decidedly strange.

**** On Skybolt Mountain, Justina Robson

This is one that I read... and then read again, going back over it to check all the little details for clues... I'm still not sure that all the answers are in the story - but I really liked it.

An elderly village woman is thought to be a witch. She's not, we're told... but what we see sure makes it seem like she might be, even if her charms are small things, aimed toward comfort and a sense of fairness.

This is one of those places where witchery is a burning offense... but when rumors come to the ears of the local lord, she's summoned with a notification that she may be able to evade a death sentence if she uses her powers to do as he asks...

*** Where Our Edges Lie, Nina Kiriki Hoffman

A changeling story, with the added twist that the changeling is one of a pair of twins. This is a nearly-identical theme to 'The Dun Letter,' found earlier in this volume - but it's handled near-infinitely better, here.

*** Devil's Bridge, Frances Hardinge

This reminded me a great deal of another sci-fi short story I read recently, which starts out with a young girl getting into a car with a paying client. There's an assumption of what might be going on - but what's being paid for is not what's expected. I almost felt like this might be the same protagonist, but I'm pretty sure it's not. I've got to figure out what the other story was, now... [Edit: the story is "Call Girl" by Tang Fei] (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>)

*** The Nursery Corner, Kaaron Warren

A young girl has practically been brought up in an old folks' home: her mom runs the place. She's used to the vagaries of the senile. However, when her mom starts dating one of the entertainers that comes in every so often - a seemingly jolly fellow - things start to change. He's got a way of calming down even the most truculent residents... making them seem happier.

A very unsettling horror story. I'm not sure the details at the beginning (view spoiler) really ended up being necessary - or even fitting in - to the work as a whole. However, as the story progressed, it did a really good job of increasing tension and culminating in something much more horrible than the standard horror vision.

**** Aberration, Genevieve Valentine

Some readers might not love the lack of clarity or plot structure here - but I thought it worked exceedingly well as a mood piece. I thought the 'feel' of this was very much like the film, 'The Hunger,' although none of the details are really the same.

A woman, seemingly immortal, travels through time, appearing at the scenes of disasters and at more mundane locations. She seems to - possibly - be caught until there is a death, and then to have to move on. She has a companion, whom she meets only occasionally, but their relationship is fraught, strained by, perhaps, some basic incompatibility of temperament, perhaps something lacking in her... Beautiful writing.

*** Ice in the Bedroom, Robert Shearman

Again, not really a fantasy or speculative fiction piece. This is an exploration of the grieving process, as we see one man dealing with his wife's unexplained suicide. Part of his experience is vivid, hallucinatory dreams in which his bed seems to be transported to some cold, wolf-ridden hell - but while surreal, the dreams are mainly symbolic and metaphorical. It rang very true and felt sincere - but it wasn't my favorite piece.

Many thanks to NetGalley for providing a copy of this book. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

A Reader's Heaven says

(I received a free copy of this book from Net Galley in exchange for an honest review.)

This is a collection of 14 fantasy stories, edited by Jonathan Strahan, filled with tales both strange and wondrous, of tales filled with wild adventure and strange imaginings.

Garth Nix and Isobelle Carmody are absolute standouts for me in this collection. I have always enjoyed their novels and these two stories are no different. Nix's story of Sir Hereward and Mister Fitz was a pleasure to

discover.

Other good stories included in this anthology were by Ellen Klages (who I don't think I had ever read before but will certainly keep an eye out for now), Kaaron Warren (another brilliant story by an author who simply delivers every time) and K.J. Parker (whose Engineer trilogy is a favourite of mine.)

The other stories weren't bad - it is just hard to compare with the awesomeness of the aforementioned stories.

Paul
ARH

Max says

This looked like a fairly promising collection, but sadly I only really liked a few of the stories. I think the big flaw is that while the anthology is called Fearsome Magics, the theme isn't really tight enough. I like Strahan's discussion of how magic has to have consistent rules and not just be able to do anything, and yet there isn't much consistency here. Some of these stories feature magic in only the loosest sense, or even have none at all. Grigori's Solution tries to pass off a math equation as an end-of-the-world spell and succeeds only in telling a story of people reacting to the end of the world that I've seen done much better elsewhere. Aberration is some sort of strange time travel story (or something - it was far too vague and confused), and the only piece of magic is a stone that the character believes is the cause of her wandering through space and time. Ice in the Bedroom is just as explicable as a hallucinatory total break with reality brought on by the protagonist's wife's suicide as it is as an actual magical journey to a surreal ice world.

Hey, Presto! was about a stage magician and his clever, adventurous daughter, but I did at least enjoy the story. The protagonist is the sort of spunky schoolgirl I love reading about, and the look at the backstage of a magic show was fun. My other favorites also had good female characters. The Dun Letter sees a girl pondering whether she wants to take a trip to fairyland or not, and the fairy good Where Our Edges Lie suffers in my eyes only because it treats fairly similar themes - I would have loved it more if it hadn't come in the same collection. Devil's Bridge has a heroine with a really interesting magical power that has a terrible cost - and she has to struggle with it while only being a teenager. Safe House, which sees a wizard dealing with the remnants of a horrible magic war, was also fairly good and manages to be both thought-provoking and funny thanks to the excellent narration.

Home is the Haunter was a fun story, though I feel like I've read better stories in a similar vein elsewhere. I didn't get quite enough of a sense of the characters or world to see whether I'd want to read more about them. Dream London Hospital seemed a bit like Neverwhere at first, but instead it's surreal, horrific, and just not all that good. Migration is similar, while The Nursery Corner had a good protagonist paired with a so-so plot and use of magic.

There really wasn't anything mind-blowing or life changing here. That isn't a problem when an anthology as a whole is entertaining, but when it only has a few good stories, it does become an issue. Over all, there were far too few stories that I really enjoyed, and I'm just not sure I feel that reading the ones I did like was worth the cost of admission.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths Reviews

Fearsome Magics is the follow-up anthology to Jonathan Strahan's *Fearsome Journeys*. Here fourteen tales set out to explore the essential element of all fantasy: MAGIC!

There are novellas looking at magic in other worlds, magic in the form of mathematical formulas, magic letters, magic superstitions, and even magic chairs. And while there were a few stories that seemed a bit out of place in the anthology, Mr. Strahan generally did a great job of putting together an entertaining anthology, but like every reader, I had my favorites — some that entertained me, some that touched me, some that horrified me, and some that just made me think.

“Home is the Haunter” by Garth Nix is a story that entertained me. The focus here is on Sir Hereward and his magical puppet Master Fitz. These two have been ordered by their liege lord to transport a huge cannon to an allied kingdom by the (supposedly) shorter route of crossing an endless steppes-like plain. Naturally, though, things go awry when they stumble upon a strange tower set beside a shallow sea and discover that they are now the intended victims for a ghostly goddess called the Hag of the Shallows. The tale that follows has lots of world building and spends a great deal of time fleshing out our two protagonists. Sure it could have been more focused, but other than that, “Home of the Haunter” was a fairly entertaining tale.

“Grigori’s Solution” by Isobelle Carmody was a story that touched me. Here an old academic is watching a late night American program when he realizes that the end of the world is announced. As the story progresses, Ms. Carmody deftly crafts a tale where a mathematical equation sets about the end of the universe and explores how a math deficient population would be slow to understand the significance of it all before finally giving into their grief and abandoning civilization and its social norms. Great idea coupled with some excellent writing.

“The Changeling” by James Bradley was a tale that horrified me, not in abject terror but rather in the terrible choices people will make. Here Hannah O’Rourke goes against her family’s wishes and marries the man she loves. When he dies, she finds herself pregnant, ostracized by her family, and her happy life at an end. After her son Connor is born and becomes a strange, almost ethereal creature, the superstition of the village witch and Hannah’s own desire for a better life drives her to a choice that no mother wishes to make. This is definitely a dark tale with a strong horror influence.

“Safe House” by K.J. Parker was a tale that made me think. Here an unlucky wizard is sent to a neighboring country to locate and rescue an untrained magic user. The reason he is selected for the job is that he is more gifted at dying and then magically reforming his body after the locals inevitable catch him, torture him, and execute him as a heretic wizard. The story makes one think about magic, the death of mages, and even has a twisted ending that is a bit humorous.

Overall, *Fearsome Magics* was an entertaining read. Sure, there were a few stories that I personally could not get interested in. And yes, there were a number of them that did not seem to really explore the central idea of the anthology. But there were also several that I really enjoyed for different reasons. So pick it and give it a try. I’m sure, there is something in this book you will enjoy reading and thinking about.

I received this ARC from Netgalley and the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them both for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.

Katie says

A collection of short stories encompassing the many forms of magic. My rating is overall a 4/5 Stars. I gave ratings and some thoughts as I read the stories. The stories start off with light and entertaining reads and ends with heavier subject matter. Not all the stories were alike or wrote about magic the same way which helped with the quality of the experience of reading it. The quality of writing was great and the prose in some of the stories was amazing. I'm glad I went ahead and bought the book after NetGalley let me review it. I recommend it to anyone who loves fantasy and, of course, loves anthologies of short stories. Not all of the stories are light, in fact a good portion of them were pretty dark. I was pleasantly surprised by this anthology since it is my first for fantasy.

My favorite stories:

"Safe House" by K.J. Parker: Loved the POV, was smooth and easy to read.

"Hey, Presto!" by Ellen Klages

"The Nursery Corner" by Kaaron Warren

Metaphorosis says

reviews.metaphorosis.com

3.5 stars

A collection of speculative (though not necessarily 'magical' stories).

It's hard to put together a really outstanding anthology. At least, few people seem to do it, and naturally the editor's tastes often won't match that of all readers. In addition, anthology themes are pretty hit or miss; few stories really fit well unless the parameters are broad.

In this latter sense, *Fearsome Magics* is a pretty standard anthology. The title is vague, and most of the stories fit the theme only vaguely; they could all have fit equally well under any of a hundred titles. If you're looking for stories about really dangerous or scary magic, this isn't it.

Leave aside the thematic quibbles, though, and you'll find that the stories collected here are largely good. Just as important, none of them is really bad, and all but one are above average. I wasn't thunderstruck by any, but I had a good time reading them, and there are one or two new authors I might investigate. A few stories are clearly drawn from the author's existing universes, but in most cases they stand alone reasonably well.

The best stories are:

Safe House by K. J. Parker - a condemned man faces the gallows and worse. If you know K. J. Parker's work, you know exactly what you're getting here. Parker has been doing pretty much the same trick for years now, but doing it so well that it's a pleasure to read in every new incarnation.

Migration by Karin Tidbeck - a group of refugees move from their place of safety only to find themselves lost. This is one of the best kinds of stories - the kind that stick with you and that make you think. It's a bit of a gimmick story, but handled very nicely. There are a couple of missing pieces, but largely Tidbeck does a great job.

Where Our Edges Lie by Nina Kiriki Hoffman - twins begin to draw apart. There's nothing really new about this story, but Hoffman handles it very nicely.

NB: Received free copy from Net Galley.
