



Year's Best Weird Fiction, Vol. 1

Laird Barron (Editor), Michael Blumlein, Kristi DeMeester, Jeffrey Ford, Richard Gavin, Maria Dahvana Headley, A.C. Wise, Chen Qiufan, more... Anne-Sylvie Salzman, Sofia Samatar, Simon Strantzas, Livia Llewellyn, Scott Nicolay, W.H. Pugmire, Karin Tidbeck, John Langan, Joseph S. Pulver Sr. ...less

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Welcome to the weird! Acclaimed author and editor Laird Barron, one of weird fiction's brightest exponents, brings his expert eye and editorial sense to the inaugural volume of the *Year's Best Weird Fiction*.

No longer the purview of esoteric readers, weird fiction is enjoying wide popularity. Chiefly derived from early 20th-century pulp fiction, its remit includes ghost stories, the strange and macabre, the supernatural, fantasy, myth, philosophical ontology, ambiguity, and a healthy helping of the outre. At its best, weird fiction is an intersecting of themes and ideas that explore and subvert the Laws of Nature. It is not confined to one genre, but is the most diverse and welcoming of all genres. Hence, in this initial showcase of weird fiction you will discover tales of horror, fantasy, science fiction, the supernatural, and the macabre.

Contributing authors include Jeffrey Ford, Sofia Samatar, Joseph S. Pulver Sr, John Langan, Richard Gavin, and W. H. Pugmire.

Year's Best Weird Fiction, Vol. 1 Details

Date : Published August 26th 2014 by Undertow

ISBN : 9780981317762

Author : Laird Barron (Editor) , Michael Blumlein , Kristi DeMeester , Jeffrey Ford , Richard Gavin , Maria Dahvana Headley , A.C. Wise , Chen Qiufan , more... Anne-Sylvie Salzman , Sofia Samatar , Simon Strantzas , Livia Llewellyn , Scott Nicolay , W.H. Pugmire , Karin Tidbeck , John Langan , Joseph S. Pulver Sr. ...less

Format : Paperback 350 pages

Genre : Horror, Short Stories, Anthologies, Fantasy, Weird Fiction, Fiction, Speculative Fiction

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From Reader Review Year's Best Weird Fiction, Vol. 1 for online ebook

Joe Gola says

A solid collection of short stories, mostly in a strange, spooky and haunting mode but also including forays into science fiction, steampunk, and humor. The unifying element is good storytelling, and even if some of the tales aren't precisely Weird Fiction with capitals W and F, they are all very well-told. The list of standouts, for me, is quite long: "Swim Wants to Know If It's as Bad as Swim Thinks" by Paul Tremblay, in which a fragmented consciousness encounters something monstrous; "Year of the Rat" by Chen Qiufan, a futuristic war story with a twist; the Kafkaesque "Furnace" by Livia Llewellyn, which is just generally bonkers, but in a good way; "The Krakatoan" by Maria Dahvana Headley, which could be described as black-magic realism, "A Cavern of Redbrick" by Richard Gavin, a good-old-fashioned lock-your-doors ghost story; "A Terror" by Jeffrey Ford, in which a famous literary personage meets Death; and "No Breather in the World but Thee" by Jeff VanderMeer, in which many terrible things happen (much worse than last year).

Readers who are just looking for Lovecraftian rehashes might be disappointed—only "A Quest of Dream" by W.H. Pugmire evokes the spirit of the man from Providence—but for anyone who has been longing for a diverse, entertaining, and even challenging collection of weird fiction, this first volume of a year's best could be the start of something big.

Andrew says

I'm a big fan of Laird's writing so I was intrigued to see what he chose for this volume. Well, it's certainly an esoteric collection and hard to rate. I gave it five stars despite not wanting to finish couple of stories. Highlights for me were the works by Paul Tremblay, Chen Qiufan, Livia Llewellyn, John Langan, Maria Headley, Anna Taborska, Jeffrey Thomas, Karin Tidbeck and John R Fultz. All of whom I will definitely be reading further.

Fredösphere says

I'm not sure I've ever read a satisfying anthology. Maybe I'd make an exception for Harlan Ellison's Dangerous Visions; I can't think of another one. Anthologies, in my experience, mix too many duds in with the winners.

This book is no exception. I'd say about a third of the stories left me scratching my head--and it wasn't so much of the "what did that story mean" scratching, although there was plenty of that, but more of the "what the heck was the editor thinking, selecting this piece of crap?" scratching.

I hate to blame industry politics, but that's where the evidence takes me. If an author was someone I've already heard of, or had an especially impressive bio, you could (usually) count on a story that felt like a dusty old trunk story or something dashed-off. In most cases, these stories suffer from meandering endlessness; you get to the last page and wonder how on earth it's going to get wrapped up, and then you find out: oh, there is no wrap-up.

And yet, I have to give this collection 4 stars, to honor the several stories I really loved. Paul Tremblay's "Swim Wants to Know if it's as Bad as Swim Thinks" gets inside the head of a madwoman, a tricky thing, which Tremblay pulls off with aplomb. John Langan's "Bor Urus" tells of glimpsing an alternate, numinous world through a storm. I loved this story, with its inscrutable Greek monster-gods; it would be perfect for the weird-numinous podcast I keep threatening to start. Richard Gavin's "A Cavern of Redbrick" was the mirror image of Langan's, a young boy's glimpse of the numinous realm's demonic side, and the evil it tempts him to unleash, unwittingly. Jeffery Thomas shares a dark vision of a man spiraling downward into isolated, uncombed and unshaven despair in a grim story called "In Limbo" that turns shockingly hopeful and tender in the very last sentence. Kristi Demeester's "Like Feather, Like Bone" disgusted me, with its opening paragraph of a little girl retreating underneath a porch to eat a dead bird, but I have to admit it achieved, in just three pages, exactly the effect its author manifestly intended. In a similar vein, I felt like I was left out of the target audience of Karin Tidbeck's "Moonstruck," about a girl's first period and its power to move the moon off its course (or was the moon acting on her?), but I can't deny the story's impact.

Jeffrey Ford pulls together details from the life of Emily Dickinson and Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" in an almost-too- but not-quite-too-clever, mashup he calls "A Terror." By the end, it had convinced me of its genius. This contrasts with another lit-referenced story by Sophia Samatar, which didn't work for me. Was it because I wasn't in on the inside joke? I've actually read the referenced sandman story by Hoffmann, so I'm not sure how I was left out.

I would also like to single out for rebuke the story "A Quest of Dream" by the Lovecraftian dandy W.H. Pugmire. Based on the story's decadent content, for example the author describing a boy's "tender kiss upon my eyes" and his fingers combing through the author's hair, I'm guessing the attraction of the dreamworld described, from the author's point of view, is its lax enforcement of statutory rape laws.

For my money, the masterpiece of the collection comes right near the end. It's "The Key to your Heart Is Made of Brass" by John R. Fultz. The title is quite literal; the protagonist is a clockwork man desperate to find his stolen key before he winds down and dies. He's one of a creepy race of people who discarded their fleshly bodies (except their brains), exchanging them for exquisitely beautiful mechanical ones. This is weird fiction operating at its highest level.

Sara Mazzoni says

L'antologia annuale del racconto di genere è una tradizione utilissima all'appassionato, che la può usare per conoscere nuovi autori e tendenze. Il weird è un genere tra la fantascienza, l'horror e qualcos'altro, difficile da definire e, forse per questo, meno conosciuto rispetto alle declinazioni più note del fantastico. L'idea di Michael Kelly di lanciare una selezione annuale esclusivamente dedicata al weird è quindi una bella novità.

IL WEIRD

Kelly sceglie un curatore diverso per ogni edizione della sua raccolta. La prima, sui racconti del 2013 e pubblicata in Italia da Hypnos nel 2015, è curata da Laird Barron, un bravo autore di weird-horror contemporaneo. Il ricambio del curatore dà modo alla raccolta di presentare punti di vista diversi su un genere sfuggente come il weird. Le prefazioni di Kelly e Barron si avventurano proprio nel territorio impervio della definizione di *weird*. Dice Kelly: «La letteratura weird non è specificatamente horror o fantasy. E non è una novità. È sempre stata presente. Questo perché in realtà non si tratta di un genere, in senso stretto. Questo rende la sua definizione alquanto difficile, e forse imprudente. La letteratura weird è un

tipo di letteratura che è presente all'interno di altri generi. I racconti weird furono scritti ben prima che gli editori iniziassero a codificare ed etichettare i generi letterari. Potete trovare infatti esempi di letteratura weird nei giornali letterari, nelle pubblicazioni horror, nei periodici di fantasy e fantascienza, e in vari altri giornali e antologie di genere e non, preannunciano l'avvento della narrativa speculativa del fantastico».

Per spiegare il significato di weird, Barron fa l'esempio del racconto *I salici* di Algernon Blackwood: «In poche pagine, Blackwood trasforma la campagna bucolica e banale in un ambiente ostile e alieno. [...] Lentamente, inesorabilmente, e inevitabilmente, la facciata della normalità viene strappata per rivelare l'argento del nudo universo. Il protagonista e il suo compagno si interrogano sulla provenienza della maligna presenza, o presenze, nel fiume e nei salici. Ma essi non possono comprenderne la natura, poiché è ben oltre le loro possibilità. Tutto ciò che sanno è che per loro la realtà è completamente cambiata. Hanno intravisto qualcosa che è molto più grande di loro, e che è spaventoso. Spaventoso perché incomprensibile e anche perché l'uomo è un animale che è da poco uscito dalle caverne. Il cervello umano, con tutta la sua capacità di adattamento, non reagisce bene quando i suoi codificati punti di riferimento vengono messi in discussione».

I RACCONTI

La collezione di racconti scelta da Barron rispecchia quest'immagine di weird, permeata da una vena apocalittica che ritroviamo in quasi ogni storia. Le declinazioni di questo weird sono tante e variegate. Ci sono quelle nei canoni della ghost story, spesso però poco convenzionali: in *Dovrei sussurrarti del chiaro di luna, del dolore, di pezzi di noi?* di Damien Angelica Walters il fantasma che perseguita il protagonista forse è temuto, forse è desiderato; in *La ragazza con il cappotto azzurro* di Anna Taborska il contesto da cui nasce l'orrore è la persecuzione degli ebrei in Polonia durante la l'Olocausto; in *Una caverna di mattoni rossi* di Richard Gavin permane l'ambiguità sulle vere cause dell'orrore, aggiungendo il dubbio al terrore del protagonista.

In altri racconti, si esce dalla dimensione spettrale del weird, per entrare in una strana terra di nessuno, a volte popolata da mostri, come in *Nei meandri del sogno* di W.H. Pugmire, che parla di un mostruoso verso cui tendere, a costo dell'annichilimento, o come in *Bor Urus* di John Langan, in cui l'incontro col mostruoso è una sfida attesa dal protagonista per tutta la vita.

Poi ci sono dimensioni in cui il mostruoso e l'ordinario si fondono portandoci in mondi grotteschi, come nei bellissimi *Fornace* di Livia Llewellyn e in *Il krakatoano* di Maria Dahvana Headley, in cui il weird è lo schiudersi dell'universo che si rivela incomprensibile, maestoso, terribile. Ci sono incubi conturbanti, dove il weird si fa strada nei corpi delle donne collocandole in un punto cieco tra vita e morte, come in *Fox into Lady* di Anne-Sylvie Salzman e *Come piuma, come osso* di Kristi DeMeester.

Ci sono i racconti in cui il weird filtra in una realtà che si rivela soggetta a nuove leggi aliene all'umano. Tra questi, abbiamo il bel racconto, più canonicamente di fantascienza, di Chen Qiufan, *L'Anno del Ratto*, e due esempi strepitosi di come la pulsione weird possa manifestarsi nel genere fantascientifico: *Success* di Michael Blumlein, decisamente New Weird, e il più surreale *Colpo di luna* di Karin Tidbeck. Merita una menzione anche *La chiave del tuo cuore è fatta d'ottone* di John R. Fultz, stravaganza postumana e steampunk.

È una raccolta dove il livello rimane sempre alto, soprattutto quello della scrittura. Troviamo stili diversi, prose più liriche e altre più asciutte, ma le autrici e gli autori scelti da Barron hanno sempre una caratteristica in comune: scrivono tutti benissimo.

Tradotto bene da Elena Furlan.

La lista completa dei racconti:

Simon Strantzas - Il diciannovesimo gradino

Paul Tremblay - Swim vuole sapere se va così male come pensa SWIM

A.C. Wise - Il Dottor Blood e l'Ultra Favoloso Squadrone Glitterato

Chen Qiufan - L'Anno del Ratto

Sofia Samatar - Il fantasma di Olimpia

Livia Llewellyn - Fornace

Damien Angelica Walters - Dovrei sussurrarti del chiaro di luna, del dolore, di pezzi di noi?

John Langan - Bor Urus

W.H. Pugmire - Nei meandri del sogno

Maria Dahvana Headley - Il krakatoano

Anna Taborska - La ragazza con il cappotto azzurro

Joseph S. Pulver Sr.- (lui) Sogna di orrori lovecraftiani

Jeffrey Thomas - Nel Limbo

Richard Gavin - Una caverna di mattoni rossi

Anne-Sylvie Salzman - Fox into Lady

Kristi DeMeester - Come piuma, come osso

Jeffrey Ford - Un piccolo demone

Michael Blumlein - Success

Karin Tidbeck - Colpo di luna

John R. Fultz - La chiave del tuo cuore è fatta d'ottone

Jeff VanderMeer - Nessun altro al mondo all'infuori di te

House Hendry says

Last year saw two major publishing events in the field of Weird Fiction. The first, and the one that garnered the most mainstream column inches, was the publication of Jeff Vandermeer's Southern Reach Trilogy - Annihilation, Authority, and Acceptance, which saw The Weird being thrust into the mainstream as it never has before. The second major event was the publishing of Michael Kelly and Laird Barron's 'The Year's Best Weird Fiction'. This is the first, to my knowledge, explicitly Weird Fiction anthology* to be released since the Vandermeer's tome 'The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories' was released in 2011 (following on from their 2008 anthology 'The New Weird'). The reason that this release is so important is that it pushes the literary experimentation with the weird to the forefront without focussing on the work of any particular author. We have seen a glut of anthologies of work based on the Cthulhu mythos over the last 10 years or so, with their number increasing seemingly exponentially as time goes on, and anthologies based on the work of weird writers R.W. Chambers, Arthur Machen, Thomas Ligotti, Laird Barron, and a forthcoming collection based on the work of Robert Aickman. All of which is utterly fantastic but can not expose the reader to the wild experimental creativity that defines(?) the weird. This anthology does just that and it does it brilliantly. Another reason that this publication is so important is that a book that contains a wide variety of works, some of which are at the very edges of the weird, has sold enough copies within but a few short months of release that volume two has already been put together. Viva la weird!

*There is of course the wonderful 'Women Writing the Weird' anthology from Deb Hoag, also released in 2011, but that -as the name implies, only featured female authors and therefore couldn't represent all of the best weird writing of that year.

Full review here

Bogdan says

The first read of this year wasn't quite what I was expecting.

I liked :

Swim wants to know if it's as bad as Swim thinks – Paul Tremblay. Some kind of gigantic creatures from the Sea are upon us.

The Year of the rat – Chen Qiufan and translated by Ken Liu – This was one of the most beautiful and strange story of this Anthology. In an Asian country there is a problem with genetic modified rats. To fight them the Government has build the Rodent –Control Force...and I will stop here .Very well written.

The girl in the blue coat – Anna Taborska – A story set in the second World War with small elements of weirdness, if you consider that a phantom could be in this kind of category. But, still, good writing.

In limbo – Jeffrey Thomas – Some kind of darkness it's terrorizing the tenants of a building. Good characterization and the story flows well toward a creepy end.

Eyes Exchange Bank – Scott Nicolay- Not so great story, kind of long, but in the end it has some strange things lurking in there.

Like feather, like bone – Kristi DeMeester – A story about loosing a child converted in some kind of fantasy text...

Moonstruck – Karin Tidbeck – was the only story that I read it before this Anthology. A short and good one about the bad influence of the Moon on some of the people of the Earth.

The Key to your hart is made of brass – John R. Fultz – An excellent steampunk story about love and what our future could look like.

From the total of 22 stories I kinda liked only 8 of them. But the real problem was that I was expecting real weird texts not some fantastic or ghost stories.

Who are they kidding here?

Valancourt Books says

If it takes me a long time to get through an anthology, it's because I'm enjoying it. I like to let each one sink in before moving on to the next. In this case there were many authors I was completely unfamiliar with so I had the pleasure of learning more about them. This is an excellent collection with a very wide range of "weird" fiction. My top three stories (in no particular order): "Bor Urus" by John Langan, "Success" by

Zach says

Abridged from <https://doomsdayer.wordpress.com/2015...>

So we all love weird fiction now, right? *The Weird* got a lot of attention, *True Detective* (and, by extension, Chambers and Ligotti) was everywhere, the *Southern Reach* trilogy (which are weird, genre-specific books, marketing be damned) is huge, and now we have the first-ever annual year's best series devoted to the field. I think that an argument could probably be made tracing this explosion back to the success of *Lost*... but actually making that argument would require a re-engagement with *Lost*, which I'm not willing to do.

Of course, a helpful part of this renaissance is the fact that basically anything can be classified as weird if you squint and look at it from the right angle. In the foreword here, for example, Series Editor Michael Kelly tells us that the weird "*includes ghost stories, the strange and macabre, the supernatural, fantasy, myth, philosophical ontology, ambiguity, and featuring a helping of the outré. Weird fiction, at its best, is an intersecting of themes and ideas that explore and subvert the laws of Nature.*" While that first sentence supports the idea that pretty much anything goes (and it doesn't even mention science fiction, which is nonetheless present in this anthology), that second sentence seems more useful in delineating what's going on here. Along those same lines, Laird Barron, the Guest Editor for this volume (there will be a new one every year, with Kathe Koja taking up the reigns for the imminent Volume 2), writes in his introduction that a weird tale "*contravenes reality in some essential manner; that it possesses at least a hint of the alien; and that it emanates disquiet or disorientation.*" I wouldn't disagree with any of that, but I think it has to be possible to pin down the genre a bit more.

...

So then what is weird fiction? I'm not entirely sure anymore that that is a question that is worth answering, but it's hardly fair to critique other people's definitions without offering one of my own, so:

Stories wherein an irruption (the two definitions of which I'm kind of mushing together here: "*to rush in forcibly or violently*" and "*to undergo a sudden upsurge in numbers especially when natural ecological balances and checks are disturbed*") of otherworldly/supernatural/contranatural/uncanny Weirdness provides a liminal threshold between the rational world and wherever else the protagonist finds herself.

Unpacking that a bit gives us some tendencies, at least some of which must be present but not necessarily all (weird fiction being a fuzzy set, of course):

1. Tonally dark, often increasingly-so as the work progresses
2. Brings about an epistemological shift in the protagonist and/or narrator (and reader?) that decenters humanity, and perhaps especially reveals the modern/rational worldview to be fundamentally flawed.
 - I wrote elsewhere that this liminality makes sense "both in its larger sense of a threshold, and its more esoteric/academic sense: the middle stage of a ritual, after the previous relationship with the world has been dissolved but before the new one has been put into place."
3. An intrusion of supernatural/uncanny/irrational/Wrongness
 - This is the opposite of Clute's thinning - the larger, richer reality is intruding rather than receding, and its

absence would not be mourned.

4. At the end of the story, the status quo remains upended
5. Lacks a good/evil binary
6. Curiosity lands the protagonist in hot water (so the binary tends toward knowledge/ignorance)
7. Narrated from within our world
8. Not sure about this one, but: rarely weird (unusual/innovative/outlandish) in a narrative or structural sense?

Where that leaves me, I'm afraid, is more and more convinced that weird fiction is simply fantastic/supernatural horror that is perhaps just a bit more intellectually-inclined. Horror is, with the possible exception of romance, probably the most reviled of the lowbrow genre world, and weird fiction is now, I think, possibly a just way to recapture some cultural capital for its exponents - which means we've come a long way from its roots in the pulps. This would account for the subsuming of the uncanny and for the claim that it is genre-fiction-without-genre.

I know most weird fiction partisans will disagree with me here, but it's where I've ended up. It's also entirely likely that all I've accomplished here is defining the brand of weird fiction that I personally find most enjoyable. So be it.

[Note: the below was written months before the “introduction” above, and while I wish the two sections were more integrated more effectively... they aren’t.]

As for the stories here: unusually for a generic anthology, almost all are well-written and effectively structured and paced, and we even have a (relatively) even gender spread, although it could have used more selections from non-white and non-Anglo authors.

The standouts, for me, were the four that seemed most Ligottian in flavor - “Furnace,” “Eyes Exchange Bank” (both of which first appeared in a Ligotti tribute collection), “Swim Wants to Know If It’s as Bad as Swim Thinks,” and “In Limbo” - in which down-on-their-luck protagonists in down-on-their-luck communities suffer under an encroaching and unknowable weirdness. I need to read more from those four authors, but I also need to read more Ligotti.

Also of note were the Samatar and Ford stories, both authors whose work I consistently enjoy but whose stories here were in conversation with previous works I don’t know (Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” and the poetry of Emily Dickinson, respectively). The Pugmire and Pulver stories also explicitly engage with previous Weird works, although less successfully, and all of the stories here reflect and converse with their generic predecessors to some degree or another. There was a surprising lack of cosmic horror, but I suppose that’s an accurate reflection of the state of the field today - these stories tend more toward the insular (families are a recurring theme), and the evil/indifference of the universe isn’t even personified in the form of Old Ones or somesuch.

The Nineteenth Step by Simon Strantzas

A couple find that sometimes there’s an extra stair in a house they’re renovating. Spatial impossibilities and epistemological collapse echoing *House of Leaves* and Madeline Yale Wynn’s “The Little Room” (1895). I’m not sure that the ending is entirely earned - like Jack Ketchum’s “The Box” (1994), it takes the irruption (inexplicable, as in most weird stories) and makes it a winking, glaringly explicit hole in the story. This might be an intentional “fuck you” to the reader.

Swim Wants to Know If It's as Bad as Swim Thinks by Paul G. Tremblay

Swim, from Someone Who Isn't Me, from the nomenclature of an online User Forum (ha ha) frequented by our meth-addicted narrator. Swim has lost custody of her daughter, who has been sent to live with Swim's own abusive mother. Her attempt to rescue the daughter from the mother's house while some sort of monsters invade from the sea is interspersed with flashbacks to a previous time she kidnapped said daughter and farther back to her own childhood suffering at her mother's hands. A fractured and masterfully dissociative fugue.

Dr. Blood and the Ultra Fabulous Glitter Squadron by A. C. Wise

Hedwig and the Angry Inch in space - glamorous genderbending Buck Rodgers types take on a supervillain on Mars. Short and vaguely metafictional (mockingly generic plot/setting, names like Philip Howard Craft the Third, Richard Carnacki Utley, etc). Because I am the way that I am, it is very frustrating that I've only managed to piece together some of the name references, and at some point I'll probably try to sit down and work out the others. I'm not sure that I would have classified this as Weird.

The Year of the Rat by Chen Qiufan

Science fiction - young, underemployed college graduates in a future China are given work hunting down genetically engineered rats. I've wavered in the past on how appropriate SF is for weird fiction because of the doubled layer of removal from the real world, but it works here because the shift from rational to irrational is so pronounced and shocking as hallucinations or eruptions enter the narrative and the line between human and rat becomes increasingly fluid.

Olimpia's Ghost by Sofia Samatar

Epistolary riffing on Hoffman's "The Sandman" - which I haven't read. Beautifully written, of course, but like the Wise story, I'm haunted by the knowledge that I'm missing something. This story never exploded with weirdness the way I expected (hoped?), because her novel has one of the all-time great mind-melting irruption scenes, but that's a feature, not a bug - this is a slow creep of a story. Some day I will read "The Sandman" and then I will reread this story (hopefully once Samatar has a collection of her short work published).

Furnace by Livia Llewellyn

A weird place story about a mother and daughter in a rotting, rust belt town. The association between family relations and a disintegrating world is a well-worn one (see Joyce Carol Oate's "Family" (1989) and particularly Blake Butler's *Scorch Atlas* (2009), where this story would have been right at home and also a standout), and Llewellyn does it one better by tossing in elements of a bildungsroman and somehow still makes it work. One could also relate it to Peter Straub's "A Short Guide to the City" (1990), but peopled with actual characters, and there's something of Anna Kavan's *Ice* (1967), too, but people with relatable characters.

Shall I Whisper to You of Moonlight, of Sorrow, of Pieces of Us? by Damien Walters Grintalis

The narrator's partner has died of cancer, and is now a ghost whose haunting takes the form of strewing around photographs of herself (himself?). I liked the combination of 1st and 2nd person, but did not like the incredibly flowery language, which tried very hard to impress but just did not connect for me.

Bor Urus by John Langan

Weird as midlife crisis. During intense thunderstorms, a man has recurring visions of a monstrous entity. Like "The Willows," this relies on the more-alike-than-you-expect casting of natural weirdness and the weird supernatural. Feels like a typical Lovecraftian declensional confession of a descent into madness, but pulls back at the last minute and veers off into more optimistic territory. The reveal of the monster was a little

underwhelming, but overall I did enjoy this one. My notes tell me that it reminds me of Gene Wolfe's "Procreation" (1985), but I can't remember why off the top of my head.

As far as I can tell "bos urus" means auroch, but I have yet to figure out the switch to "bor" instead. Something to do with the north?

A Quest of Dream by W. H. Pugmire

Even more directly Lovecraft pastiche (the Dreamlands, this time, focusing on nightgaunts), but revisioned through a rather twee, foppish kind of lens. Seems more like dark fantasy than weird to me, but I guess if it's Lovecraft pastiche we all just have to accept it.

The Krakatoan by Maria Dahvana Headley

An ambiguously-gendered child who has lost several mothers falls in with a local malcontent who has lost his wife, and they use the local observatory to look down instead of up, hoping to find their missing loved ones under the Earth. This one never clicked for me, although I can't put my finger on exactly why that was.

The Girl in the Blue Coat by Anna Taborska

I remain unconvinced that the mere presence of a ghost necessarily makes a story Weird - perhaps especially if the ghost fails M. R. James's "malevolent or odious" criteria. This opens and closes with a famous reporter giving his deathbed confession to a ghostwriter working on his autobiography. Within that frame is a rather straight-forward ghost story about a Jewish girl murdered by Polish collaborators during World War II. This idea of the weighing of history on the present is what makes the best horror fiction effective, but we're missing the irruption that makes the best weird fiction effective. Plus, the ending frame is rather silly ("I'm not... that... strong...").

(he) Dreams of Lovecraftian Horror... by Joseph S. Pulver, Sr.

Fractured stream-of-consciousness metafiction about Pugmire writing his Lovecraftian pastiche; Pulver channeling the Beats to write about Pugmire channeling the Decadents. Good god.

In Limbo by Jeffrey Thomas

A member of the precariat has his social isolation literalized as an encroaching darkness devouring the rest of the world. Not particularly similar thematically, but the setting/irruption is similar to that of "The Mist" (1980), which in turn echoed "The Willows" (1907), which I am increasingly convinced is the ur-text of the Weird.

A Cavern of Redbrick by Richard Gavin

A Bradbury-ish tale where a kid staying with his grandparents for the summer encounters a ghost and stumbles on something that's not quite right. Some unconvincing neologisms (summerland, redbrick), and while it's weirder than the Taborska, I'm still not convinced it slips from "ghost story" territory into "weird tale."

Eyes Exchange Bank by Scott Nicolay

An academic visits an old friend in a decaying Rust Belt town and finds himself in an exceptionally well-drawn oppressive and uncanny situation, increasingly alienated from both his friend and their surroundings. The explosion of horror that closes the story feels almost extraneous after the rest of the story. It's striking how similar and yet how different this and the Llewellyn are.

Fox Into Lady by Anne-Sylvie Salzman

Weird as sexually-charged body horror as the fear/isolation/despair of a new mother. A Japanese woman

gives birth to a fox-monster, which proceeds to terrorize her. What this has to do with David Garnett's seemingly endless "Lady Into Fox" (1922, kind of a rural counterpoint to Kafka's "Metamorphosis") I haven't worked out just yet.

Like Feather, Like Bone by Kristi DeMeester

The climax, but where's the rest of the story? A woman whose child has drowned confronts a goblinish little girl under her porch who is eating birds. In some ways the obverse of the previous story, but flash fiction usually just leaves me wanting more. I am interested in seeing what DeMeester does in the future, though.

A Terror by Jeffrey Ford

Emily Dickinson, notorious weirdo, has an encounter with Death that emphasizes the power of words. I like Ford's writing so much I can even enjoy him doing a story about a poet and the power of words.

Success by Michael Blumlein

A story about a mad scientist and his slightly-less-mad wife. A Weird synchronicity: I have a lot of unfinished reviews of Gene Wolfe books, both because I'm a lazy and slow writer and because they are very hard books to write about, but one of the odd themes of his that I was trying to pick out through all of them is his fixation on Lamarckism. Reborn and rebranded as epigenetics, the same theme pops up here, in a kind of inverted cosmic horror unveiling/mental-illness-as-body-horror story that seems indebted to Machen in some respects. Blumlein, a doctor, writes in a very detached, clinical manner that also brings J. G. Ballard to mind. I respected this story, but I'm not sure that I loved it.

Moonstruck by Karin Tidbeck

Weird as menstruation and as a vector for looking at the relationship between mothers and maturing daughters (this and the Llewellyn approach similar themes in completely disparate manners). Like a gloomier version of *Cosmicomics* (1965), this reads almost like science fiction ideas revisioned as folktale.

The Key to Your Heart is Made of Brass by John R. Fultz

An automaton, having lost the key necessary to wind his clockwork heart, finds himself stuck in a boilerplate blackmail scheme. Somewhere between good steampunk (industrial revolution in fantasyland) and bad steampunk (Victorianish mannerpunk). Great setting, good prose (in second person), unimpressive plot, bad gender politics (to the point that I fruitlessly expected some sort of last minute twist).

No Breather in the World But Thee by Jeff VanderMeer

Well, who knows about this one. Jettisons the anchor of normality entirely, which leaves us more in bizarro territory, I think. A much weirder (and Weirder) prefiguration of the *Area X* books - we have a fixation on repetitions of past intrusions and the Weird Place and reconstituted and weirded human bodies and even a Weird biological tower. It didn't really work for me, but hey, it was definitely weird.

I look forward to Volume 2.

H.L. Nelson says

Overall, I found this first volume of "weird" stories thoroughly enjoyable. Laird Barron has managed to pull together a nice variety of modern day tales of madness and woe (as someone who's reviewing Lovecraft or Poe might pen). I was pleased to see some of my very favorite storytellers in here. Also, the list of other notable stories at the end is an excellent touch. Be forewarned, this volume is best read under a full moon or

by candlelight. :)

Iophil says

[ITA/ENG]

Una raccolta "weird" che non mi è sembrata molto ispirata o originale. È sicuramente anche questione di gusti, ma la maggior parte dei racconti è scivolata via senza accendere particolari emozioni.

Degni di nota, a mio parere:

- "Il diciannovesimo gradino" di Simon Strantzas
- "Nel limbo" di Jeffrey Thomas
- "La chiave del tuo cuore è fatta d'ottone" di John R. Fultz
- "Nessun altro al mondo all'infuori di te" di Jeff VanderMeer

Curiosamente, tra questi sono presenti due dei pochi autori che conoscevo già prima della lettura. Simon Strantzas (scrittore da tenere d'occhio, vi consiglio caldamente il suo Soli carbonizzati, sempre pubblicato da Hypnos) e Jeff VanderMeer (di cui ho letto -e non apprezzato- il primo volume della Trilogia dell'Area X).

La veste editoriale è di tutto rispetto e si nota la cura che Hypnos ha messo (e mette sempre) nella creazione del volume. Un plauso a questa coraggiosa casa editrice, che continua a proporre al mercato italiano autori vecchi e nuovi che troppo spesso vengono ignorati.

Solo un piccolo appunto. Tradurre "Year's Best Weird Fiction" con "Nuovi incubi" mi è parso un pochino fuorviante: buona parte dei racconti proposti non sono horror (e d'altronde lo stesso Michael Kelly nella prefazione specifica che "weird" non equivale necessariamente a "horror"), ma quell' "incubi" nel titolo italiano mi ha fatto pensare che il tema orrorifico sarebbe stato ben più marcato nei testi.

Avendoli comprati e letti più o meno in contemporanea, mi è venuto naturale il confronto tra questo libro e *Strane visioni*: Il meglio dei racconti del premio Hypnos, altra antologia (tutta italiana!) di Hypnos, che invece mi è piaciuta moltissimo e che vi segnalo!

A "weird" collection not very inspired or original, as far as I'm concerned. Ok, it's a matter of taste, but most of the stories have slipped away without turning on particular emotions in me.

Noteworthy, in my opinion:

- "The Nineteenth Step" by Simon Strantzas
- "In limbo" by Jeffrey Thomas
- "The key to your heart is made of brass" by John R. Fultz
- "No breather in the world but thee" by Jeff VanderMeer

*Curiously, among these there are two of the few authors I knew before reading. Simon Strantzas (a writer to keep an eye on, I strongly recommend his book *Burnt Black Suns* and Jeff VanderMeer (I read-and I didn't like- the first volume of his Area X trilogy).*

You can notice the care that Hypnos has put (and always puts) in creating the volume. My approval goes to this brave publishing house, who continues to propose to the Italian market new and old authors that too

often are ignored.

Just a small note. Translating "Year's Best Weird Fiction" with "New Nightmares" is a bit misleading: most of the tales are not horror (and in the preface Michael Kelly specifically says that "weird" does not necessarily mean "horror") but that "nightmares" in the Italian title made me think that the horror theme would be much more marked in the collection.

Reading them more or less at the same time, I made a comparison between this book and *Strane visioni: Il meglio dei racconti del premio Hypnos*, another Hypnos anthology with just Italian authors. I loved it and I recommend it!

Ctgt says

These stories were good not great and it's probably more about my expectations than anything else. With Barron running the show I anticipated mind bending and spectacular but none of these tales really reached those heights for me.

There were moments here and there;

The Nineteenth Step by Simon Stranzas had a bit of a House of Leaves vibe

In her tired state, she thought she saw the steps move ever so slightly, as though they had settled into place only as she'd turned the corner.

Furnace by Livia Llewellyn had the weirdest feel to it;

-I don't see anything different, my mother said.-Everything looks the same as I remember. This is the way it should be.

-I know, the young man said. -It all looks the same on the outside. It always has. You have to look underneath.

-How can one look underneath? I asked.

-You just do. You just know.

And my favorite story **A Terror** by Jeffrey Ford imagining a weird moment in Emily Dickinson's life.

"Why a poet?"

"The spell has to be undone. I'm not sure how, but word magic, I'm guessing, can best be subdued with words. You know, I almost decided to snatch Walt Whitman instead."

Emily winced. "The man's pen has dysentery."

Eventually she lifted the pen and drew ink. The first line came strong to the paper, and there was a pause-a moment, a day, a year-before she hesitantly began the second line. Slowly, the poem grew.

A solid but undewhelming collection.

Teddy G says

Livia Llewellyn has the best story here.

Jefferson Tesla says

A pretty damn perfect representation of where the Weird's at these days, with an extremely diverse range of styles, but also a fun amount of motif crossover (plenty of mad scientists with telescopes, animate shadows, clockwork lives). My favorite stories were those that kept things phantasmagorical, with plots and perceptions slipping moment by moment between the horrific and the ridiculous. Llewellyn, Headley, Blumlein, and Qiufan did their best work in that mode, Vandermeer tries as well but comes up with more of a bloody mess. Samatar's story is more self-serious, heavy with allusions to Hoffman and Freud, but definitely the standout piece.

Marco Simeoni says

Working progress per i pensieri sui racconti

Randolph says

An outstanding premier collection that seems to not get as high a rating as it deserves. The Emily Dickinson I thought was the weakest of the lot, followed by the Wilum H. Pugmire story and I would have still give them both a strong three stars. Maybe some people were looking for some just wild out there stuff, but Barron favors the weird but comprehensible, sorta, over bizarre experimental writing that at times leaves me cold. It always seems like writers in love with themselves. Not here though.

I'm looking forward to volume 2.
