



## Martyrs and Monsters

*Robert Dunbar, Greg F. Gifune (Introduction)*

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## **Martyrs and Monsters** Robert Dunbar , Greg F. Gifune (Introduction)

Robert Dunbar has been called one of the "saviors of contemporary dark fiction" and an "avatar of literary horror." *Martyrs & Monsters* runs the gamut of this extraordinary author's narrative range, embracing vampires and sea serpents, werewolves and swamp creatures... as well as a host of nightmares for which no names exist. Whether set on an orbiting space station or within a haunted tenement, these terrifying tales are steeped in a passionate intensity that renders them all but unique within the genre, and all boast a sophistication that qualifies them as that rarest of rare commodities: horror for intelligent adults.

## **Martyrs and Monsters Details**

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## From Reader Review Martyrs and Monsters for online ebook

### James Everington says

This is the third book by this author I've read, and probably the best - but then I do have liking for a good, literate horror short story collection. Which is delivered in spades here. The author has a remarkable capacity to combine a variety of story styles & genres that still cohere into a consistent world view. Partly this is down to his taut & lyrical turns of phrase. Dunbar can use language to make you feel and see what he wants; in a book of chillers he even managed to make me laugh out loud in 'Explanations'.

Many of the stories take a basic horror story trope and run with it, twisting it into new directions - 'Getting Wet', 'Folly'. Others, such as the superlative 'Mal De Mer' are true one offs (the image of the wheelchair in the bottom of the swimming pool will haunt me for days).

As with all collections, there was the odd one that didn't hit quite as hard, but none weak enough to drag my rating down to anything less than a full-fat five-stars. Consistently impressive, and I hope the author does some more work in the short story form soon.

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### mark monday says

in this excellent collection of short stories, Dunbar mines both horror tropes and, more interestingly, the inevitable degradation of self within a varied range of vividly depicted and toxic closed circles. the breadth of these stories - from tenement to moldering southern 'mansion' to space station (maybe) to killing fields of the distant past - is impressive. as is the verve and finesse in which Dunbar approaches his topics and paints his imagery. he really knows how to bring the *literary* to literary horror. there is an abundance of dread and melancholy and creepiness, and a good number of squalid squirm scenarios, but not much in the way of gore or viscera. if you want the pornographic detail of torture porn, this is not for you. but if you want thoughtfulness and ambiguity and to be forced to think a bit, then this is an interesting and rewarding book to pick up.

one caveat: i fucken hate the tacky cover.

the companion stories "**Gray Soil**" and "**Red Soil**" are worth the price of admission alone. these take place sometime long ago, on a field that that is a post-battle graveyard in one and in the other, the site of forced labor on some strange folly at the behest of some strange nobleman. we see a mother and her children forced to deal with the horrible scavenger that haunts the battlefield and we see a brave lad trying to look out for his sister as a host of these scavengers attack his camp. the creatures are fascinating; what happens to these characters is even more compelling. the prose in these stories is spare and resonant, as suits a myth or fable. haunting and disturbing and, best of all, leaving the reader to figure out on their own what comes next.

the very amusing and enjoyable "**The Folly**" takes place in a very oddly-shaped home on an isolated swamp island in the South. Dunbar revisits the Jersey Devil of his novels *The Pines* & *The Shore* but does so in a very different manner. the creature is fully recontextualized as a worldwide phenomena (although that was present, a bit, in the novels) and is also made somehow less mysterious - yet still quite threatening. a creature that is described as looking like a giant muskrat is indeed still scary if it wants to tear you to pieces! but the creature is not really the best part. i liked the bizarre home (and actually wanted more of it), i enjoyed the

nascent lesbian affair on the horizon, and i really loved the wonderfully arch and wry tone of the story. charm + slaughter, a lovely combo.

**"Saturday Night Fights"** is a fun ticket to an old-fashioned monster battle, this one featuring a punk rock about-to-be-a-couple fighting a disgusting beast in some repulsive apartment building somewhere. some sharp characterization - the subtlety of which really sticks out, in a good way, when taken in context with the broadness of the story itself. plus kittens and a feel-good ending! awww.

**"Full"** is ingenius. it takes the whole paranormal subgenre - hey, vampires & werewolves & zombies walk amongst us and we have to deal with it! - and boils it down to one hopeful walk in the dark by our moody protagonist as he goes to meet his boyfriend. the story does really amusing things with zombies and a vampire and a horny Frankenstein's monster type creature. and it does an awesome thing with the werewolf - simultaneously illustrating why that creature is such a pervasive erotic fantasy while not forgetting that making love to such a creature may be a bit... problematic.

other folks seem to really enjoy **"Explanations"** but, sad to say, this was my least favorite story. it is witty and the characterizations were full of depth and humor, but there was also an unpleasant veneer of sneering condescension that reminded me too much of John Shirley's Black Butterflies (a book i loathed).

and speaking of other folks, readers also appear to really enjoy the connected **"Getting Wet"** and **"Are We Dead Yet?"**. they weren't my favorite tales in the collection, but there is no denying the sheer artistry on display in these stories about sociopathic boyfriends living in a very dirty world and making it dirtier. Dunbar's ability to get into the head of our twitchy protagonist and to make the protagonist's boyfriend threateningly opaque yet still very real - to make these two human cockroaches come alive even as they turn on others and each other... very, very well-done. and the dark, watery, empty world he creates for them to live in is just as impressive.

**"Away"** is one of those rare stories that made me feel sort of dimwitted and confused when reading it, as if i should be understanding what was going on but some lack in me made that nearly impossible. the story of a paranoid outsider who may actually be right all along really left me mystified and unsure about what i had just read. was it too subtle? no, there is no such thing. that story is going to force me to re-read it. and when a story can do that: Like!

there are several other worthy stories, but i'll close on my favorite - perhaps even one of my new all-time favorite horror stories - the strange, haunting, tense, sorta sexy and sorta disgusting, eerily evocative, wonderfully understated **"Mal de Mer"**. a cold-blooded lady taking care of an old woman about to die. a house near a beach. a mysterious and violently sexual man. two exceedingly creepy children. something big and monstrous that manages to be, somehow, disappointed and scornful as well. lacerating self-analysis and lonely contemplation and needle-sharp teeth and bloodstains on the floor. in a word, brilliant.

*cross-posted on hypnos.*

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**Paul Jr. says**

If Alfred Hitchcock were alive today and desired to “re-imagine” his 1948 classic “Rope,” he’d want Robert Dunbar to write the screenplay. Guaranteed.

Dunbar starts his impressive collection off with “Getting Wet,” a moody, tension-filled piece that does indeed measure up to my all time Hitch film, with Dunbar’s Con and Tim evoking the controlling Brandon and the nervous, needy Phillip. But this isn’t some re-tread of familiar material as, really, the two stories share little in common other than two fascinating lead characters and the realistic and dangerous relationship between them. Quite frankly, if anything, this is “Rope” with crack heads, and is completely and utterly engrossing.

When I finished this first story I knew I was in for a great ride with this collection and I wasn’t disappointed. Throughout the book, Dunbar maintains the tension, and creates some really wonderful characters that you want to visit with again. And that’s good, because in some cases the characters do come back to haunt you in other stories. Personally, I was happy to see Con and Tim reappear in “Are We Dead Yet?” which gives us even more insight into their characters and relationship. It serves as a prequel of sorts, but stands beautifully on its own.

Dunbar masterfully creates emotional reality just as well as he creates atmosphere, and each character in each story is brimming with emotion. Whether it’s a young man who deeply needs to protect his abusive brother in “High Rise,” or a Mother who will do anything to protect her children in “Gray Soil,” these are very real, human beings (even when they’re not) in extraordinary circumstances. In fact, if I could narrow it down to one theme that seems to run through this entire collection it is the overwhelming sense of need that appears to drive each character. There is something that they don’t just simply want or desire. There is an insistent need that drills into their bones and it is so palpable that it becomes almost an additional character in each of the stories. This is especially true with the boys in “Like a Story,” characters that indelibly etched in my mind. For me, the collection works the best when Dunbar sticks closest the the realistic emotional core of the characters. Lucky for us, he does that consistently.

Dunbar also gives us some nice moments of dark humor with “The Folly,” an out and out laugh from me in “Saturday Night Fights,” and anyone who has ever attended a comic book/sci-fi/horror convention will surely see some familiar faces (perhaps even their own?) in “Explanations,” which had me smiling all the way through despite the very dark center of it.

What I also appreciate about Dunbar’s work is that it is challenging. Dunbar doesn’t talk down to his readers, nor is he going to hold their hands through the stories. There may be times when the reader goes “wait, what the hell is going on?” but that has a wonderful effect of keeping the reader slightly off kilter as all the pieces come together in a satisfying conclusion.

The collection ends with “The Moon (Upside Down),” a wonderfully quiet piece of work, that evokes Armistead Maupin’s “Tales of the City” had those Barbary Lane characters been infused with a little darkness, a smidge of tarot, and an almost fatalistic outlook on life.

In the end, this collection will challenge you, move you, and make you hold your breath. It’s dark fiction, it’s horror, it’s character study, it’s literary fiction. And it’s damn good.

Originally posted at Outlaw Reviews.

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### **Matthew Hunter says**

I asked Dunbar which book he’d recommend as a starting point for readers new to his work. He didn’t

hesitate in suggesting *Martyrs & Monsters*. After reading it myself, I understand his enthusiasm. *Martyrs & Monsters* is absolutely beautiful.

The diversity of the stories in this collection is impressive. There's humor and deep despair, isolation and codependent relationships. Monsters live here, as do swamp dwellers, punk rockers, zombies, hoarders, forced laborers, battlefield scavengers, space travelers, and not-so-secret lovers. But alongside this diversity is the consistent theme of water as thirst quencher, killer, and concealer of the unknown. And there's consistency in Dunbar's picture perfect setting of situation and place. Check out the beginning of "Are We Dead Yet?":

"Wind rasped along the pavement like a saw striking bone. Soundless as a ghost, Tim passed through shadows so dense they made him feel part of the night. Pausing to claw grit from his eyes, he peered at trees touched by random flickers. Thickly bent as ancient slaves, they heaved through concrete to engulf encircling iron rails."

And the picturesque language in "Mal de Mer" isn't too shabby either: "Waves slid with an oily crunch; each grating hiss marked the extinguishment of time she could never regain. Soon there'd be no time left. None." Examples of Dunbar's skillful use of language can be found throughout *Martyrs & Monsters*.

I appreciate that Dunbar doesn't fill in all the blanks. He left room for my imagination to run wild. And is there anyone better at saying more with one well placed word or sentence? "High Rise" ends with four words that sent my mind into contortions, the simple sentence "Motherhood was like that." In "Explanation", Dunbar takes only one closing word - "Psycho" - to get me cranking through various scenarios for what exactly happened. I loved it!

I cannot recommend *Martyrs & Monsters* highly enough. It's creepy, scary, beautiful in the grotesque sense, and extremely well written. My personal favorites are "Getting Wet", "Gray Soil", "Mal de Mer" (the perfect short story?), "Red Soil", and "Explanations". Give it a try!

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### **Robert Dunbar says**

So many of my colleagues have been very supportive of this collection. I am deeply grateful.

"Robert Dunbar has the unique personal vision, command of language, and atmospheric style to enrapture you in the wildest, deepest nightmare."

**TOM PICCIRILLI**

author of SHADOW SEASON and THE COLDEST MILE

"Robert Dunbar is not just a writer's writer, he's also a reader's writer (as all writers should be): his brilliance with characters and the thorny, nightmarish situations in which they find themselves makes me squirm, as all dark fiction should. When I find myself squirming as I read, I know I'm in the hands of a master."

**T. M. WRIGHT**

author of A MANHATTAN GHOST STORY and LITTLE BOY LOST

"Intimate and terrifying, Dunbar's short fiction confidently and skillfully draws the reader in ... closer .... closer ...."

**ELIZABETH MASSIE**

author of **HOMEPLACE** and **WIRE MESH MOTHERS**

“Robert Dunbar is a masterful writer: intelligent, controlled, stylish, and honest. He knows where to steer readers, and when to leave them to finish their dark journeys alone.”

**TIM LEBBON**

author of **THE ISLAND** and **FALLEN**

“Robert Dunbar is among the saviors of contemporary dark fiction. Literary and deliciously fierce – each story possesses its own unique flavor of decadence, color and depth ... a feast for those who crave horror at its finest.”

**SANDY DELUCA**

author of **DESCENT** and **MANHATTAN GRIMOIRE**

“A must read for any serious connoisseur – Robert Dunbar has become a contemporary avatar of literary horror.”

**P. D. CACEK**

author of **NIGHT PRAYERS** and **CANYONS**

“One of my favorite storytellers, Robert Dunbar is a true craftsman – a master of the genre. His writing is rich with style and substance.”

**BRIAN KEENE**

author of **DEAD SEA** and **ALONE**

From the Introduction by Greg F. Gifune:

“Gritty and savage ... profound and quietly devastating ... this is dark fiction as it should be – chilling, entertaining, and intelligent.”

**GREG F. GIFUNE**

author of **GARDENS OF NIGHT** and **JUDAS GOAT**

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## **Maria says**

**MARTYRS AND MONSTERS**

This is a dark short story collection that presents you with new takes on classical monsters, as well as psychological and supernatural scares. Some stories I liked better than others, but that's almost inevitable with short story collections. All in all, this is the best short story collection I have read in a long time, and the quality was high throughout.

Some of the stories used telling, but most of them leaned towards showing. These often gave me a cinematic experience that I really enjoyed. We are often thrown into the story - in medias res - and it takes a little while for the reader to get her bearings (at least it did for me). Being disoriented, in dark places, only seeing glimpses of your surroundings, was a recurring thing in these stories. And that is a big part of the collection's strength. Sounds and sights were described especially well. The visual aspect really impressed me. Action sequences played out like scenes in a movie. The descriptions of light and shadow built up the atmosphere and the sense of unease and not being in control. The main character was often stumbling around in shadows,

not being able to see enough to make complete sense of their surroundings. And more often than not, there was something monstrous close by.

I think it is really well done to have this level of description and still not have the plot lag at all. The stories often has a certain intensity, but at the same time the descriptions makes them very atmospheric. The variety of stories were good, characters and dialogue were good, but mostly the atmosphere and visual descriptions (even when they were sparse) were impressive and gave most of the stories a strong sense of place. Well done.

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## **Nancy says**

### **Posted at Shelf Inflicted**

I loved *Martyrs & Monsters* for its variety of rich, intense stories, and its diverse cast of characters, many of whom are troubled people who struggle through life and live on the edge.

These disturbing and unsettling stories are not graphic, but they will creep up on you and won't let go.

Though each story in this collection will linger on in my memory, a few favorites stand out:

*Getting Wet* – Very murky, damp and unsettling. Tim and Conrad were extremely well developed considering the short length of this story. They were not especially likable, but their life experiences and the tragic events in the story made me feel very deeply for them. The ending left me breathless and managed to be sexy and revolting at the same time.

*High Rise* – It's a contemporary ghost story. It's also about the relationship between two brothers and the sacrifice one makes. The ending shattered me.

*Mal de Mer* – A beautifully written, evocative story that left me shaken. I love the sea - its mysteries, turmoil, tranquility, and lack of consciousness. This haunting, disturbing and erotic story explored aging, loneliness, and the emotional toll of being a caregiver.

*Explanations* – Wagner and Jimmy love comics and old movies. Wagner owns a comic book store. When Jimmy gets a job at Wagner's store, their friendship deepens and obsession grows. Wagner's wife has had enough. Dark, sad, and humorous.

I would recommend this collection of stories to those who love thoughtful and intelligent horror.

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## **Bandit says**

Two thoughts after finishing this book...what was that? and why do so many good authors like it? Greg Gifune loved it, he practically gushed all over it in his foreword. Didn't do a thing for me. It passed or really wasted some time, I read it in one afternoon, but not because I couldn't put it down, more like I couldn't wait

to be done with it. Years ago I read Dunbar's *Pines* and I thought that was ok, but this anthology...it was a fine example of style over substance. Hyper stylized prose telling unpleasant stories about unpleasant individuals, the sort you couldn't relate to or give a cr\*p about. The writing wasn't bad by any means, but the writing shouldn't be the star of the show. The stories were original plot wise, credit there. And a few of them were actually decent, but too few. A lot of the stories were connected, but inexplicable interspersed throughout the book instead of going together. The book was also very heavy in male homosexual context, so if that's not your thing, there is really no getting away from it in these stories. Personally I don't care, not with so many other detractors at work here. I guess the cover should have been a giveaway, but it isn't the same as on the book I borrowed from the library. Great title, but what an overwhelmingly underwhelming hyped up waste of a tree.

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### **David says**

Rich and dark, this collection of stories does what every "horror" story of collection should do...give a face to life altering events and phases and represent the horror of each through the monsters we create for ourselves. It's as if each story provides a tangible representation of our deepest fears and worries.

I also appreciate how Dunbar mostly portrays homosexual characters, but in a way that doesn't necessarily distinguish them as such. In a way, the fears of all people are reflected here...but it was refreshing to have gay characters that weren't necessarily written to prove a point or even stand out as gay.

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### **Gerhard says**

It took me forever to finish this collection of short stories by Robert Dunbar. The opener, 'Getting Wet', was so disquieting I stopped reading after that. Then when had I recovered sufficiently from its eerie creepiness, I returned again to the bloody, haunted pages of *Martyrs & Monsters*. And again, and again.

For example, I cried at the end of 'The Moon (Upside Down)', and don't really know why. It was such a beautiful, sad, inexplicable story.

Some stories were laugh-out loud funny, while quite a few disgusted me. Some were pretty grim and depressing. And then there were those shimmering with love and sensuousness.

Dunbar is a writer of great nuance, who knows exactly when to let the reader's imagination do the work. To call this a 'horror' collection does not reflect the depth or quality of the writing here – this is psychological fiction at its finest and most insightful.

And if you are a horror fan like I am, you will be amazed at what he does with some of the genre's fondest tropes: ghosts, zombies, werewolves, vampires. They become alive, frightening, powerful ... and desirable.

This is a superb collection that takes you well out of your comfort zone into an eerie realm of wonder and terror, which Dunbar knows very well are two sides of the same coin.

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## Robert Dunbar says

It's a little hard to explain really -- what this book has meant to me, how important it's been in my life. Over the years, I'd grown so dispirited, so frustrated with reviews for my previous books, not that they weren't excellent. But a critic would rave that *The Pines* was a "masterpiece of *genre fiction*" or that *The Shore* was "surprisingly good for a *horror novel*." With **MARTYRS & MONSTERS** -- for the first time -- reviewers began to discuss my work purely in terms of its literary significance. That made all the difference. (Artists are such sensitive creatures.) Without this level of support, I'm not sure I would have had the courage to attempt a novel as complex as *Willy*. I'm very grateful.

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## GUD Magazine says

*Martyrs & Monsters*, by Robert Dunbar, is a motley collection of short stories that address almost all manner of the supernatural and fantastical, from vampires to sea serpents. And, of course, the Jersey Devil is figured in, being a staple figure of curiosity in Dunbar's other works.

I tend to prefer Dunbar in this format, as opposed to a full-blown novel. The stories are the right length, and you feel less like you were caught up in a movie and more as if you are watching an episode of 'The Twilight Zone'. The characters and plots he tackles are well-suited to short story form, and in many ways this collection reminds me of early Stephen King efforts, like *Different Seasons*.

Because this is a collection, there is a common theme among the stories, primarily one of love and loss, forcing us to re-examine our inborn notions that these creatures of horror are detached, loveless, or incapable of forming bonds among themselves or with humans. Dunbar also discusses some of these mythical creatures as having a common ancestry, specifically in how they are born. It's an interesting take on some familiar creatures we feel we have come to know intimately and repeatedly, and he demonstrates with skill that it's an aspect worthy of investigation.

As a big fan of Flannery O'Connor and of Southern gothic writing style, I enjoyed 'The Folly' immensely. Yes, it's another telling of the Jersey Devil myth he visited twice before in *The Pines* (reviewed by GUD here) and *The Shore* (which I have not yet read). However, this has a new flavor. There's a tongue-in-cheek element that wiggles its tongue at you, in both humorous and haunting ways.

Dunbar writes fairly clean prose, but some editing and spelling errors were there when they shouldn't be (just as in *The Pines*), which is a bit annoying from a reader's standpoint. He seems to enjoy writing the horror genre, but resists the temptation to go too far. He's provocative, but not grotesque. His imagery is vivid and visceral without being off-putting, or noxious. Rather, he tends toward descriptions that involve most of the senses - taste, smell, sound and, lastly, sight, and these attempts are appreciated as they involve the reader in the deepest possible way.

*Martyrs & Monsters* has a wide variety of characters, from varied backgrounds - minorities, criminals, the alienated, and the misfits. I believe most fans of the horror genre will find a character that they recognize or can identify with. These characters give Dunbar's work some texture, and they tend to resist being 'cookie-cutter' or forgettable types. Their vulnerability and 'humanity' give another dimension to this collection.

With 'Gray Soil' and 'Red Soil', Dunbar explores zombies in all their savagery and chilling murderousness. A

mother zombie who protects her undead child to death...how twisted is that? It forces us to re-examine what we believe about the undead, and their relationships with each other and with us; we are supremely and alternately shocked and entertained, and strangely touched, but recognize in them elements of what it means to be human, or formerly human.

All in all, this is a very well-done collection. I would recommend *Martyrs & Monsters* as a good Halloween read, perhaps on a dark, stormy night while the kids are out trick-or-treating.

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### **Chris says**

Robert Dunbar's book is my 666th rated book..... I am sure that this will make him smile and give off an evil laugh.

I was amazed by this collection. First of all, the stories didn't seem like they were even from the same author. Did the same guy write the pitch black "Gray Soil" and the laugh out loud humorous southern gothic "The Folly?" A complaint I often have when reading a story collection by one author is that the stories start to sound the same.

Not so here; which means a particular reader might not like every story. I don't think you are supposed to. I don't think Dunbar writes stories that he hopes everyone likes. That is always the case with artistic integrity. He writes. We read.

Some stories hit me as deeply as anything I have ever read. My personal favorites were "Like a Story," "High Rise," "Gray Soil," "Mal de Mer," "Red Soil," "The Folly," and "Explanations." I also enjoyed "Getting Wet" and "Are We Dead Yet" as they told a continuous story.

It is tempting to say that "Like a Story" reminds me of Gifune or "Mal de Mer" is sort of Lovecraftian at least in theme (although certainly not in writing style) but I will resist that temptation. Why compare writers? Dunbar is clearly an original with his own voice.

I can say that if you like dark fiction (because most of these stories are dark, even The Folly which is the lightest of the bunch) that is well written and original; if you are not afraid to go to places that may make you uncomfortable; if you are willing to read an author that is different from anyone else you have read----then try this one out.

By the way, in an age of throw away titles or merely using the title of the best known story, the title of this collection is very appropriate and adds to the understanding. The characters here are martyrs and monsters and sometimes they are both.

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### **Heidi Ward says**

I devoured Robert Dunbar's excellent *Martyrs & Monsters* almost entirely at one sitting. A collection of short works, the stories in this book are so various in terms of tone and style that it almost felt as if I were reading an anthology of tales by different authors. Okay, that's not entirely true, as some of the stories are intended to expand upon or follow others, but the scope is truly impressive. Ranging from simply

melancholy to outright tragic, from splatterpunk to whimsy, the primary commonalities are a graceful economy of language and an uncanny insight into the deepest and strangest parts of the human animal.

The absolute standout of *Martyrs & Monsters* would have to be the creepily lyrical “Mal de Mer,” which reminded me, weirdly, of both Ramsay Campbell’s incredibly disturbing “The Voice of the Beach” and the heartbreakingly beautiful *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. Strange bedfellows, indeed, but this story of repression and release, desire, disappointment, fear and compulsion, contains perhaps my favorite lines in the book, ones which immediately reveal the soul of the protagonist: “In her younger years . . . her essential lack of warmth had discouraged colleagues from bonding with her. It had that effect on most people. Yet she believed herself not to be entirely lacking in empathy, only in its myriad pitying applications and ubiquitous expressions, which she considered both squalid and pointless.” (Maybe this just reminds me a little bit of me.)

On the other hand, the punchy gross-out of “Saturday Night Fights” is all rock & roll, splatterpunk and 50s B-movie, rolled together in one juicy and satisfying package. You’ve got to love a story that begins “By the time the two of them woke up, their friends had already met with disgusting deaths. But then they both slept pretty late that day.” And the monster? Personal phobias notwithstanding, just ew.

“Gray Soil” and “Red Soil,” two of the linking stories, are told in simple, almost mythic language. Together, they uncover the blood-soaked history of a desolate place – the first a story of a mother’s brutal sacrifice, the second a tale of unchecked appetites, human and otherwise, and again of hard choices made for the sake of loved ones.

Other favorites include “The Folly,” a southern gothic almost-spoof which involves an eccentric family, Bigfoot, and a house shaped like an alligator; “High Rise,” the story of a nymphomaniac ghost and her victim(s); and “Killing Billie’s Boys,” an oddball tale of warring witches and their rent-boy catspaws.

And, despite my going on, that’s fewer than half of the stories in *Martyrs & Monsters*, each one unique and haunting. Half a star off for my only complaint (and it’s not that dire), the sometimes distracting typos, of which there were many. Possibly this is just a side-effect of the e-book format, and almost certainly out of the author’s hands, but it’s the kind of thing that can break the spell of an otherwise compelling narrative. At any rate, I look forward to reading more from Robert Dunbar, a truly literary fabulist.

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## Stephen says

4.0 stars. A highly original, extremely well written collection of modern horror short stories. Unlike anything else I have read before. I was very impressed by the atmosphere created for each story and the subtle way the author introduces the horror elements of each story as part of a larger comment on the human condition. All the stories are good but I thought "Explanations," "High Rise" and "Gray Soil" were superb.

Nominee: Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement in a Collection.

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