



Ugly Little Things: Collected Horrors

Todd Keisling , Mercedes M. Yardley (Foreword) , Luke Spooner (Illustrator)

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THIS IS GOING TO HURT.

The eleven stories in *Ugly Little Things* explore the depths of human suffering and ugliness, charting a course to the dark, horrific heart of the human condition. The terrors of everyday existence are laid bare in this eerie collection of short fiction from the twisted mind of Todd Keisling, author of the critically-acclaimed novels *A Life Transparent* and *The Liminal Man*.

Travel between the highways of America in “The Otherland Express,” where a tribe of the forsaken and forlorn meet to exchange identities. Witness the cold vacuum of space manifest in the flesh in “The Darkness Between Dead Stars.” Step into the scrub of rural Arizona and join Karen Singleton’s struggle to save her husband from a cult of religious fanatics in “When Karen Met Her Mountain.” Visit the small town of Dalton in “The Harbinger” and join Felix Proust as he uncovers the vile secrets rooted at the heart of Dalton Dollworks. And in the critically-acclaimed novella “The Final Reconciliation,” learn the horrifying truth behind the demise of the rock band The Yellow Kings.

With an introduction by Bram Stoker Award-winner Mercedes M. Yardley and illustrations by Luke Spooner, *Ugly Little Things* will be your atlas, guiding you along a lonely road of sorrow, loss, and regret. This is going to hurt—and you’re going to like it.

Ugly Little Things: Collected Horrors Details

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From Reader Review Ugly Little Things: Collected Horrors for online ebook

Frank Errington says

Review copy

Earlier this year, I read Todd Keisling's novella, *The Final Reconciliation*. It's still one of my favorite reads from 2017. *Ugly Little Things* is Keisling's first collection and if you didn't get to read *The Final Reconciliation*, I've got good news on a couple of counts. Not only is his new book a chance to be introduced to his work through ten of his shorter pieces, but it also includes his critically acclaimed novella.

A Man In Your Garden - Ever see something out of the corner of your eye and then question whether it was really there? Take that premise, add a delightfully creepy twist and you have *A Man In Your Garden*. And one of my favorite lines in the entire book. "...you tell yourself it was your imagination, a phantom conjured from the tomb of sleep, given life by the bourbon soaking into your liver."

Show Me Where the Waters Fill Your Grave - A well-constructed and bittersweet tale of never-ending love with a healthy dose of horror.

Radio Free Nowhere - A road trip, a radio dead zone, the song of a siren...and oh, the horror.

The Otherland Express - A terrific story with a *Twilight Zone* vibe. "I'm a genuine Nobody. I help all the other Nobodies get from here to there, and sometimes I find Nobodies who don't realize they're Nobodies. Sometimes, I find people who want to become Nobodies just like the rest of us."

Saving Granny from the Devil - A totally enjoyable story about choices. One that shows the man in black in a new light.

The Darkness Between Dead Stars - A mission to Mars, a single volunteer, a familiar trope with a fresh look.

Human Resources - Lovecraftian mythos in the age of technology and one of the best opening lines I've read this year. "It is with deep regret and sorrow that I must bid you farewell. Effective immediately, I am resigning from my duties as HR manager on account of having just murdered my assistant and misleading others at the company."

House of Nettle and Thorn - A story with mutant plant girls. Whats not to like?

When Karen Met Her Mountain - Is it ironic that I'm reading a story about Karen meeting her mountain at the same time I met a mountain of my own? In a single week, I nearly had a kidney transplant, but the kidney was damaged and we had to pass, I fell down a flight of stairs, and was hospitalized with Congestive Heart Failure. The following week I began dialysis. As Karen Singleton's Daddy would say, "...sometimes things just happen and there's nothin' to be done about it...when there's a mountain in your way, you either climb other it, or you find a way around it. There ain't no in-between."

The Harbinger - Some people are afraid of clowns, for me, it's dolls. In this short, Keisling takes a familiar trope and delivers an effectively scary tale.

The Final Reconciliation - In this novella Todd Keisling introduces readers to the fictional heavy metal band The Yellow Kings. It's been years since that fateful show at a small L.A. nightclub. Miles Hargrove and his producer are interviewing Aidan Cross, looking for the true story of their one and only performance of The Final Reconciliation.

Todd Keisling is a wonderful story-teller. As I read the diverse tales in Ugly Little Things I found the only common thread to be the horror. It's there in every story, and I couldn't wait to see where the author would take me next.

Ugly Little Things is available from Crystal Lake Publishing If you subscribe to Kindle Unlimited you can read it at no additional charge. Also, if you are an Amazon Prime member you can read it for FREE using the Kindle Owners Lending Library.

Todd Keisling is the author of A Life Transparent, The Liminal Man (a 2013 Indie Book Award Finalist), and the critically-acclaimed novella, The Final Reconciliation. He lives somewhere in the wilds of Pennsylvania with his wife, son, and a trio of unruly cats.

Jon says

Todd Keisling's Ugly Little Things contains 11 tales that sing with lyricism while they move the reader with suspenseful, clever, humorous and often wonderfully elegiac developments. The author has a keen, lucid understanding of suffering, which lends each plot-line extra heft and depth. These stories contain tenderly and humanely rendered characters who are drawn towards various forms of uncanny annihilation. After reading this excellent collection, I'm eagerly awaiting whatever Keisling produces next.

Renee Young Decamillis says

"Ugly Little Things: Collected Horrors": A book that will Not help you sleep better at night
~~Written 9/14/2017; Edited 9/29/2017

Renee Young DeCamillis September 14, 2017

I received an ARC of this dreadfully scrumptious collection of horror stories, and I'm thankful to Crystal Lake Publishing for giving me the opportunity to be one of the first to read this book.

Are you ready to shed your skin, confront your shadow, or remove your mask? "Ugly Little Things: Collected Horrors," Todd Keisling's first collection of horror stories, will leave you questioning who you are underneath the surface. But even more horrifying than looking within yourself—once you've read this unputdownable collection, you'll start wondering who the people around you really are.

From the first story to the last, Todd Keisling's remarkable storytelling will hold your attention with a death grip. And once you've read through the very last track of "The Final Reconciliation," you'll realize you're out of breath from the exhilarating Hellride you've just finished.

Both "Radio Free Nowhere" and "The Final Reconciliation" will bring you into the depths of music, to fully

take in every nuance of the mesmerizing ability of sound. You will see what those infectious notes can do to transform a person, though these transformations will chill you to your core. In “The Final Reconciliation” (my absolute favorite in this collection)—the way Keisling describes music and its overpowering ability to bring the listener, and especially the players, to unseen and unknown places makes it sound as though he wrote the songs within this story himself. He has a keen sense of the true power of music, and he writes about it like a seasoned musician. As I read, it was as though I had The Yellow Kings soundtrack playing on the stereo in my mind. (And I must mention that I love all the references to bands that are on my favorites list. Maybe Keisling and I should start a band together.) The characters and their world are so real and their dark and maddening plight is one that will leave you breathless. From Aiden with his facial scars to Camilla the traveling seductress, the desire to follow these characters no matter what hell ensues is so strong that putting down the story before it is finished is not an option.

“When Karen Met her Mountain,” my second favorite piece in this collection, shows the blurred line between sanity and insanity. What is it that can push a person to their breaking point? Or, maybe a much more fitting question with this story—what will it take for a person to finally find their inner strength? Maybe they never will. For some people it may take life shattering occurrences to show them what they are truly capable of. Sanity and insanity can mean different things to different people, and the two can often wear the same face. Once you’ve finish reading through the final scene, Keisling will leave you asking yourself—“What will you do when you meet your mountain?” The answer may terrify you.

You know the saying about walking in another man’s shoes? Well, what about walking in another man’s skin? Never tried it? Have a little stroll through Keisling’s fictional world and you can have a look-see. Don’t be surprised when that stroll turns into a race to find out what happens when Gregory Simmons gets to his destination. When you are lost and looking to get away from your troubles, take a trip on “The Otherland Express”.

The tasty breadcrumb trail that leads you through this collection will leave you hungry for more. I know I’m hungry, and I can’t wait to read more from this writer who is here to stay.

Todd Keisling’s words take the reader by the hand and pull them along through grief and torment, through the melancholy and the macabre, through horrors that will make you leave your lights on after you turn the last page. Though you may want to think twice about those lights, or “A Man in Your Garden” will have a clear view through your window, but I have a creeping suspicion he can see you with or without the lights on.

Sleep tight.

Kimberly says

4.5 stars, rounded up on the strength of the 5-star stories!

UGLY LITTLE THINGS: Collected Horrors, is a collection of eleven stories--including one novella--written by Todd Keisling.

The aspect I found most impressing in this collection was by far the versatility Keisling shows with his

stories. In many single-author collections, I find a certain *"style"* emerges after reading a number of tales. In the setup of **UGLY LITTLE THINGS**, however, this had not been the case. The situation, point-of-view, and even the prevailing atmosphere differ so widely in each selection, that it's difficult to believe one person is behind all of these. The one constant being that Keisling has the ability to suck the reader right into a story--no matter what the subject--and leave them stranded there until the final page.

These tales varied in length, as much as they varied in theme. However, that isn't to assume that the shorter works had less of an impact than the longer ones. The very first story in this collection, **"A Man in Your Garden"**, was extremely effective at conveying the sense of confusion and fearful uncertainty the narrator goes through--all in just a few pages.

"... This impossible phantom, this formless beast, it wants you to come outside. To come and play..."

Rather than go into the details of every story--I'll leave that pleasure to the individual readers--I'll just highlight a few of my personal favorites.

"Radio Free Nowhere" is one of those that starts out so simply, that you don't even sense the nature of the horror until it's already upon you. (I loved that last line!)

"The Otherland Express": This tale was one that hit me emotionally right from the start. However, as with so many of Keisling's stories, it morphed into something so unusual and unique that I never saw it coming. The descriptions throughout painted concrete images firmly in my mind as I read through it.

"... Heartache was something he couldn't shed, something he couldn't throw away. Can anyone?"

"The Harbinger": A story centered around a reporter sent to interview the woman who made a name for her small town, with a unique brand of *'time-out'* dolls. Creepy dolls that look like children . . . besides a clown, is there anything more menacing?

"... little bundles of putrescent joy..."

"The Darkness Between Dead Stars": This particular story was told from a unique "unbiased" point-of-view, and I felt it really helped convey a sinister, mounting dread to the reader, without the need to go into long, detailed descriptions. Maxwell Foster is a citizen chosen--from among many volunteers--to embark on a *Deep Space Shuttle* to Mars. There isn't much I can say without giving everything away here, so I'll just add that you do **NOT** want to skip over this one!

"When Karen Met Her Mountain": is my absolute favorite here, aside from the novella. Karen is the "narrator", and she is unquestionably perfect in this role. She is a loving wife, brought up by her pious, yet adoring Father. The story begins with her thoughts as her husband drives them back from her Father's funeral. The events and pacing in this selection couldn't have been any more ideal, in my opinion. Seeing things through Karen's eyes makes all the difference here.

"... What would you do when you met your mountain?"

"I'll climb over it if I have to, Daddy..."

The last piece in this collection is the novella, **"The Final Reconciliation"**. I first read this individual story earlier this year. As of this review (mid-September), I still believe it will have a place in my *"Top Reads of*

2017" list. Since I've already written a full review on this title, alone, I'll simply say that the blending of an aging Rocker, combined with elements from Robert W. Chambers', "**The King in Yellow**", merge to form a "*masterpiece*" all of Keisling's own. This is a story that will hold you spellbound from first to last page.

Overall, I can honestly say that there was not a single story here that I didn't like, if not outright *love*. Todd Keisling is a name I will be watching out for in the future. His collection **UGLY LITTLE THINGS** is a book that I definitely want showcased on my bookshelves.

Highly recommended!

Mike Thorn says

"For the most part, the stories in Todd Keisling's Ugly Little Things occupy the space and language of middle-class Somewhere, USA (sci-fi 'The Darkness Between Dead Stars' excepted). Keisling's narration often reads very much like the voices of his characters; these stories are as much about the routine and the quotidian as they are about their eventual diversions into terror."

Read the full review in "Thorn's Thoughts," a book review column on *Unnerving Magazine's* website.

Jen (Book Den) says

After reading and loving Todd Keisling's The Final Reconciliation earlier this year, I was excited to have the opportunity to read more stories by Keisling in Ugly Little Things.

The first thing I want to mention is The Final Reconciliation is included in this collection. You can read my full review for that here. It's my favorite novella I've read so far this year.

I didn't realize that several of the stories in Ugly Little Things had been previously published. This was fine for me as I hadn't read any of the other tales, but your mileage could vary on that.

I was pleasantly surprised to find a few of the tales fell into the novelette/novella range. I'm a big fan of that format when it comes to horror, and I think these longer works are also the best of this collection.

I highly recommended The Final Reconciliation earlier this year, and with Ugly Little Things you get that novella and more. It's kind of a no brainer if you are interested in checking out Todd Keisling's work. He's an author I keep on my radar, and I look forward to reading more of his work in the future.

Stephanie says

This collection was received free from Crystal Lake Publishing in return for an honest review.

These stories are dark. From the good old-fashioned creepiness of *A Man In Your Garden*, to the murderous madness of Karen in *When Karen Met Her Mountain* and the unsettling dolls in *The Harbinger*, in *Ugly Little Things* Todd Keisling brings you horror in all its many different and wonderful guises. Some are

subtle, others – like *The House of Nettle and Thorn* – will make you wince, particularly if you are of the male persuasion. The sheer variety and scope of imagination to be found in these tales is amazing. Overall though, Keisling's novella *The Final Reconciliation* is my hands down favourite. He won me over by referencing some of my favourite bands (Slipknot, Ministry – via Uncle Al Jourgensen) and kept my interest going with his well-paced take on The King in Yellow. Revolving around a band, The Yellow Kings, its lead guitarist Aidan Cross recounts the tale of how their first—and only—album, came to be and the deadly consequences of its first—and only—live performance. I loved this tale even though it ended on a note of inevitable doom and the knowledge that it is about to happen all over again. In *Ugly Little Things*, Todd Keisling has produced a great collection of stories to read as the season of mists and shadow takes hold.

Lydian Faust says

Wonderful collection of horror shorts. I especially loved THE OTHER LAND EXPRESS- such a sad, magical, gruesome tale- like a modern episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE.

Andi Rawson says

If you aren't in love with Todd Keisling, it's only because you haven't read him yet. To say that this man can write is an understatement. Ugly Little Things is hands down my favorite anthology this year and perhaps ever. There wasn't a single story that I didn't love. I was reading a book by an author whom I was told was "the best in the business" and barely mucking through the first two stories. I put it down and picked up my ARC of ULT and was hooked on the first page. Unfortunately for me, Mr. Keisling doesn't have a lot of work out at this point, but fortunately for everyone, sources say he's working on more as we speak.

I did get an e-ARC of this early thanks to Hook of a Book Marketing and Crystal Lake. I also bought a copy of it myself yesterday after it launched but won't be happy until I have a signed copy of this on my bookshelf.

Matthew Rogers says

It's five-thirty in the morning, I just finished doing inventory for work, and I'm hyped up on caffeine. Screw it, let's do a book review!

I'll admit right now, the major reason I did the Lover Her Wild poetry review was because of this review. You see, I was given a digital ARC of Ugly Little Things from Crystal Lake Publishing if I were to give them a review in return. But since my last review before I did the poetry review was another one for Todd, I didn't want to come back doing back-to-back reviews of his work, hence the middle review of poetry. But, with the deadline of the publication approaching, I think it's bout time I fulfilled on the latter part, huh?

...

I'm gonna include the link to the rest of the review here:

Ken McKinley says

Ugly Little Things - Todd Keisling

A Man in Your Garden - A clever telling of seeing something out the window through the raindrop while fighting off the effects of a hard night of drinking. What's real and what's not?

4 out of 5 stars

Show Me Where The Water Fills Your Grave - Losing your spouse after all of those years together is the hardest thing Jonathan has ever had to endure. That is, unless she comes back.

4 out of 5 stars

Radio Free Nowhere - When couples can't agree on what to listen to on the radio, beware of the road trip.

4 1/2 out of 5 stars

The Otherland Express - Gregory is running away from home and his abusive father. When his destination suddenly becomes no longer viable, where will Gregory go? Luckily for him, he crosses paths with John Doe who offers him the option to become someone else. All he has to do is take a ride with him on the Otherland Express. Very Twilight Zone-y and a fun read.

4 1/2 out of 5 stars

Saving Granny From The Devil - A child makes a deal with the devil to save his beloved Granny. What he gains is more than his Granny's soul. A very engaging story.

4 1/2 out of 5 stars

The Darkness Between Dead Stars - Maxwell Foster volunteers for a one-way mission to Mars. Half of the way there, he starts hearing knocking and strange voices from outside the space capsule. What's out there? What if we're not meant to know? An excellent, EXCELLENT short story. One of the best I've read in years!

5 out of 5 stars

Human Resources - You don't see an email like that from HR every day. A fun, little read.

4 out of 5 stars

House of Nettle and Thorn - If a bunch of hot girls are coming onto you and your chucklehead friend like you've never experienced, there probably is a good reason for it. A sorority party like none other. Another fun one.

4 out of 5 stars

When Karen Met Her Mountain - Karen would do anything for her husband, Martin. He's been there for her during her darkest times. But beware, if you cross Karen, you may not live to regret it. I loved the twists and turns in this one.

4 1/2 out of 5 stars

The Harbinger - Felix is assigned to meet and interview the CEO of a doll making company in West Virginia. The town seemed odd from the moment he set foot in it. Little did he know how right he was...and they were waiting for him. A cross between Children of the Corn, Stuart Gorden's Dolls, and one F'd up episode of the Twilight Zone. A great story!

5 out of 5 stars

The Final Reconciliation - So, as a fellow metal-head, I feel a kindred spirit with Todd as he unfurls The Final Reconciliation, a story about a journalist who is interviewing Aidan Cross. Cross is an aging guitarist who is institutionalized for going off his nut over the tragic show his band played 30 years ago. Aidan was the guitarist of the prog-metal band, The Yellow Kings. After hardcore touring in support of their EP, the band lands a two-album deal and head to Los Angeles to record their official first record. After a show in Texas, they pick up a groupie named Camille, who was waiting behind the club for the band. She immediately takes a shine to their lead singer, Johnny. Soon, the band learns that Camille is not your ordinary groupie trying to sponge off the band in hopes that they'll be famous. No, she has a different agenda and the band are simply pawns in her evil plan.

The Final Reconciliation pulls out it's inner Lovecraft and marries it with story about a heavy metal band. Metal bands have been influenced by all things macabre and Lovecraft is a favorite of many, i.e. Metallica. Keisling has done his homework. As someone who knows a thing or two, not much more, but a thing or two about metal bands, touring, and recording, he executes the story flawlessly. This is where so many writers can go astray - writing about something that they don't know enough about and the cracks show. This isn't the case here. Kudos to Keisling. Not only did he get his facts right, but he delivered one hell of a story, in the process.

5 Guitar Solos out of 5

Keisling is such a force to be reckoned with. There wasn't a clunker in the bunch. All were 4-5 star reads. When was the last time you came across a collection of that caliber? Exactly. The thing I like most about this collection is Keisling's voice. He has such a smooth and easy writing style. You get lost in his words way too easily. On more than one story, I found that I had been reading for an hour and it felt like only 10 minutes had passed. Grab this collection and make sure you set your alarm, so you don't miss your appointments.

Overall - 4 1/2 stars out of 5

This ARC was provided by Crystal Lake Publishing in exchange for an honest review.

You can also follow my reviews at the following links:

<https://kenmckinley.wordpress.com>

<http://intothemacabre.booklikes.com>

<https://www.goodreads.com/user/show/5...>

Cats of Ulthar February Weird Fiction says

Review: UGLY LITTLE THINGS by Todd Keisling

When commencing an anthology or a single-author collection, a reader often doesn't know quite what to expect in terms of quantity. Some single-author collections are of such high quality, consistently, that the discerning reader wishes to read, savor, reread, ponder. This year I have been immensely privileged and gratified to discover two magnificent authors new to me, via the venue of their collections: Paul F. Olson, WHISPERED ECHOES, and now Todd Keisling, in UGLY LITTLE THINGS.

Oh my oh my. When I am in the presence of a master, I am rendered speechless. I had requested to review UGLY LITTLE THINGS in advance of release, and from page one was awestruck. A review copy was not enough; I rushed to purchase. There is no single story, no single page, in this collection that is not extraordinarily perfect. I don't know from whence Mr. Keisling derives such a gift; I am satisfied to bask in his application of it.

Glenn Rolfe says

Todd Keisling's short fiction is damn near perfect. He's a writer that cares about his productions, each and every creepy little one. He has a knack for crafting short, explosive, mind-bending, heart-wrenching, and downright frightening stories. If you like dark fiction or love great writing, you need to read this collection.

I give it an overall rating of 4.5 stars.

*Note: I read most of these stories in their original, singular release.

Here are some notes about a few particular stories in the batch...

SAVING GRANNY FROM THE DEVIL 5/5

Little Toddy loves his Grandma. And he should have listened to her when she said not to play down the street. He should have listened to her when she warned him of the devil's trickery. When Toddy roams too far from Grandma's yard and runs into the bullies down the street it's a curiously dead dog that comes to his rescue. If he saves your life, he's gotta be your friend, right? And so it begins.

Keisling spills a lot of his own blood on the pages of this tale. Toddy and Grandma, and later on, Toddy's girl, Erica, all come from a place not so untouchable, but from the author's life. To incorporate such truths with such seamless ease into a fantastically dark vision is both scary and quite honestly, inspiring.

The fact that Keisling's dark walk with the devil is as full and heavy hitting in such a relatively small piece is yet another testament to his storytelling ability.

He hit it out of the park with his last piece, *When Karen Met Her Mountain*, and he does so again with *Saving Granny from the Devil*. I absolutely loved this story.

RADIO FREE NOWHERE 3/5

Nice short piece here. I always like a good siren story. I know it's a short story, but boy I wanted more. I didn't get enough here to love it, but the fact that I want more tells you that what is there is pretty fun.

THE HARBINGER 4/5

This is the new story in Todd Keisling's fantastic *Ugly Little Things* short story series. "The Harbinger" bleeds creepiness. Shades of *Halloween III* and *Village of the Damned* (a great mix IMHO), stirred with Keisling's own demented imagination, bring this frightful tale of a strange little town to life.

WHEN KAREN MET HER MOUNTAIN 5/5

You want a prime example of how a short story should go? "When Karen Met Her Mountain" is what you're looking for. Todd Keisling spins this little number like a seasoned pro (that's right, your King's, your Silva's). Creating a complex character like Karen is not something every writer can do. From the pain of her past—her mistake, and her miscarriage—to the strained relationship with her husband, Martin, to her intertwined therapy sessions, Keisling's "Karen" is one powerful package.

All of this and I haven't even gotten to cult and the killings!

Building on the promise of the first story in his *Ugly Little Things* short story collection "Radio Free Nowhere", Todd Keisling hammers it home with "When Karen Met Her Mountain".

Seriously, if you dig the short fiction of King, David Silva, or Robert McCammon, Mr. Keisling's "Mountain" is waiting to be your next great discovery.

THE OTHER LAND EXPRESS 4/5

The Other Land Express (*Ugly Little Things* # 5) by Todd Keisling is a fantastic little piece. Keisling builds a portrait of a boy (Gregory) who can't be comfortable in his own skin. After his abusive father catches Gregory with his pants down during a video chat with another boy, Gregory takes a beating that serves as the last straw. Gregory packs up and heads west. He is leaving his father in his rear-view mirror. But is Gregory also leaving himself?

Enter John Doe. Enter the tribe of the Nobodies.

Welcome to the Other Land Express.

Shed your skin. You can be anyone you'd like.

Keisling's tale takes a turn here, and I dare say it felt a bit like a Clive Barker joint.

I won't give away anything, but you should definitely give this short story a read.

Keisling's ability to inject such depth into his short fiction work is inspiring. My only gripe was that it ended before I was ready. I wanted to see more of the Other Land.

All in all, I give The Other Land Express a strong 4 stars

THE FINAL RECONCILIATION 4/5

Todd Keisling's THE FINAL RECONCILIATION is a rock and roll nightmare set to the soundtrack of the end time. Take off your mask and rejoice!

This novella is strange, creepy, and filled with rock n'roll. What's not to love?

Another feather in the cap for Mr. Keisling.

Joe Zito says

Some great novelette length stories! I really dug The Harbinger.

Dave-Brendon Burgh says

Every good collection begins with a suitable foreword, and in this case the tradition not only continues but does so wonderfully – I have yet to read Mercedes M, Yardley's work (I know, right? I've got so much to catch up on!), but she does a great job of intro-ing the collection because she doesn't give anything away and made me excited to read it. She evokes the emotions the tales made her feel and, like a good bookseller, convinced me to begin reading. ?

The first tale, A Man in Your Garden, is an absolute corker – trust me, you'll go through this thinking that it's nothing special, nothing notable -but like all good word-wizards, that's exactly what Todd wants you to think- and then the end hits you like a sucker-punch in pitch darkness. Excellent stuff!

The next tale, Show Me Where the Waters Fill Your Grave, is one of those quietly building horrors... It lulls you into thinking that the main character is an idiot for making the choices he does, even though you can understand why he's making those choices, and I was left wondering at the end of the tale what his final choice would be: give in, or fight? It'll probably leave you with the same questions.

Radio Free Nowhere works well as cautionary tale and plays with the city-folk-in-the-country trope – I kind of new where it was heading, but I still enjoyed the trip, as Todd manages to evoke that road-trip/desert-crossing/driving-into-the-unknown feeling amazingly well with his tight descriptions and fully-realized characters. Even the petrol-station attendant is given layers, instead of being the caricature most movies make that kind of character into.

The Otherland Express is one of the real stand-out tales, both a parable for our time and the kind of Horror tale starring a character we can understand and sympathize with – as Stephen King likes to do, this tale also reveals the hidden, uniquely strange things which might be hiding out there and humanizes them, forcing the

reader to think about what they would do, if they were ever placed in a similar situation.

Saving Granny from the Devil is a wonderful tale and showcases Todd's character-creation talents – we follow the life and decisions of the main character from when he's a little boy until he's an adult, charting the events in his life and the decisions he's seemingly forced to make. Todd also gives us a new, almost perfect look at 'the Devil', one which upends some conventional ideas and revels in creating a new, interesting take on the ultimate bad guy. Really good stuff!

The Darkness Between Dead Stars is superb cosmic Horror – the kind of Horror which leaves you with more questions than answers; the story is tight and small, is written from an interesting angle (instead of the expected POV), and features some truly creepy visuals. It's visceral and memorable and I'm pretty sure you'll agree.

Human Resources is perfect. Just perfect. Corporate Culture meets Cultist Insanity. Love it!

House of Nettle and Thorn plays with what I believe to be one of the ultimate formative tropes teenagers in the US have to deal with – Sorority Houses. Being a South African, and not having had to deal with anything similar in high school, it still surprises me that these places exist. ? I'm very glad that Todd didn't go the way many other writers have, concerning Sorority's, i.e. not crafting a tale in which members of different SH's go up against each other. This is something cool and twisted and dark, explicit in places and disturbing in others, but damned good. There's also an incredible quote-worthy passage in the tale, regarding what some men are meant to do with their lives, which made me laugh out loud it was so nail-on-the-head, but I'll leave you to discover that passage for yourself. ?

When Karen Met Her Mountain is brutal, the kind of tale which hits you over and over again without letting up. In it you'll meet Karen and her husband, road-tripping and trying to find their way back to each other after a tragic loss. In it, you'll meet Karen's therapist and a group of strange, violent, mask-wearing cultists. And in it, you'll witness Karen's descent (or is it an ascent) into madness. Not for the faint of heart, but brilliantly written.

In The Harbinger, a journalist in need of redemption and a career-saving story travels to a town famous for pigs and dolls. How those two (pigs and dolls) are connected, and what Felix Proust discovers as he digs deeper into the town of Dalton and it's mysterious celebrity (the doll-maker), make this a truly memorable, creepy tale, which works on all the senses, too. Dolls have long had a unique creep-factor; Todd adds the that creep-factor while doing something unique, yet, terrible (in the terror-sense of the word) with dolls.

My favourite of the lot: The Final Reconciliation. I became of fan of Robert Chamber's 'The King in Yellow' without knowing it, thanks to the first incredible season of True Detective. Fast-forward a couple of years and I've been reading 'The King in Yellow' for a while now; I'm honestly obsessed with it. I'll explain that when I post my review, but suffice it to say that I haven't read anything resembling 'The King in Yellow'. It's utterly unique.

Which makes what Todd did with 'The Final Reconciliation' that much more incredible. Todd takes a metal band (The Yellow Kings), an evocative yet utterly unsettling track list, a self-proclaimed gypsy, and the creation of a new album, and marries them with what reads like the true-life account of this band's rise and fall. The tale is full of weird imagery and lyrical brilliance, and positively sings with the strange, unsettling aspects of what makes 'The King in Yellow' so strange - yet Todd pulls it off in a way that adds to the mythos Chambers created, putting everything that makes that strange book stand out in a modern context, yet also not explaining anything. You'll have to read it to understand what I mean. What's terrible about this tale

(terrible, yet utterly creepy) is that now, more than ever, I want to delve deeper into 'The King in Yellow', and even though I probably won't survive it, I need to hear The Final Reconciliation in all it's mind-breaking brilliance.

This is, for damned sure, one of those must-have collections. 10/10
