



## The Mammoth Book of Monsters

*Stephen Jones (Editor) , David J. Schow (Contributor) , Sydney J. Bounds (Contributor) , Jay Lake (Contributor) , Brian Lumley (Contributor) , Tanith Lee (Contributor) , Joe R. Lansdale (Contributor) , Karl Edward Wagner (Contributor) , more... Robert Silverberg (Contributor) , Basil Copper (Contributor) , Robert Holdstock (Contributor) , Michael Marshall Smith (Contributor) , Ramsey Campbell (Contributor) , Clive Barker (Contributor) , Kim Newman (Contributor) , Scott Edelman (Contributor) , Dennis Etchison (Contributor) , R. Chetwynd-Hayes (Contributor) , Christopher Fowler (Contributor) , Nancy Holder (Contributor) , Thomas Ligotti (Contributor) , Gemma Files (Contributor) ...less*

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Everybody knows the most memorable monsters--vampires, werewolves, zombies, mad scientists' creations--and you will find all of those classic creatures suitably featured in this monsterrific new anthology from multiple award-winning editor Stephen Jones.

But other monstrosities are also ably represented within these pages...

An academic goes in search of a mythological creature in Thomas Ligotti's *The Medusa*, a stone gargoyle is brought to life in *Downmarket* by Sydney J. Bounds, and a reclusive islander shares his world with shape-changing selkies in Robert Holdstock's haunting tale *The Silvering*.

Late-night office workers are menaced by hungry horrors in Ramsey Campbell's claustrophobic *Down There*, while the monsters of both Brian Lumley's *The Thin People* and Basil Copper's *The Flabby Men* share only a semblance of humanity. The King of the Monsters himself turns up in *Godzilla's Twelve Step Program* by Joe R. Lansdale, R. Chetwynd-Hayes' *The Shadmock* and Clive Barker's *Rawhead Rex* are genuinely new monsters, and the last monster-fighter and the last classic monster confront each other in Kim Newman's *The Chill Clutch of the Unseen*.

If you like monsters, then there are plenty to choose from in this creature-filled collection boasting some of the biggest names in horror, fantasy and science fiction.

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The Chill Clutch of the Unseen by Kim Newman

## **The Mammoth Book of Monsters Details**

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## From Reader Review The Mammoth Book of Monsters for online ebook

### Kristine says

I love a good monster story, and this novel is full of them. Usually in an anthology there's always, either, a few stories that aren't as good as the others or completely stink; or, there's only a few mediocre to excellent stories and the rest are trash. But this collection is one of the few exceptions to the rule. All the stories in this novel are great or better.

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### Graham says

A late addition to the Stephen Jones anthologies that were popular some twenty years ago, **THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF MONSTERS** gathers together a number of monstrous short stories from mostly modern authors. It's a mixed bag for sure, but one with a high number of gems contained within.

David J. Schow's **VISITATION** is a full-blooded opener, snappy and brief and with Grand Guignol-style goings-on. It couldn't get more over the top if it tried, but it's a barnstorming entrance to the anthology. This is followed up by Ramsey Campbell's superlative ghost effort **DOWN THERE**, in which the bowels of an office block harbour some very unpleasant creatures indeed. The atmosphere is second to none and this rivals M.R. James in the fear stakes. Scott Edelman's **THE MAN HE HAD BEEN BEFORE**, a pseudo-sequel to Matheson's **I AM LEGEND**, starts out well as a post-apocalyptic action story but descends into familial tedium.

Dennis Etchison's **CALLING ALL MONSTERS** is a first-person account of pain that I didn't get on with too well; it's attempts to bring a new twist on genre tropes never really works. R. Chetwynd-Hayes contributes **THE SHADMOCK**, which is best known for being filmed as part of **THE MONSTER CLUB** back in 1980. I prefer the film version, but this story is different enough to be worth a look, and there's a lot of originality here. **THE SPIDER KISS** sees Christopher Fowler tackling hard-boiled crime, but his brief story doesn't have the character of his London-set tales. **CAFE ENDLESS: SPRING RAIN**, by Nancy Holder, is one of those arty efforts that I don't get on with.

For me, Thomas Ligotti is one of the most interesting horror writers working today, and his **THE MEDUSA** is worth a look. It's a psychological exercise set in dusty old bookshops and the like; I don't normally like stories this abstract, but this is a thing of beauty in Ligotti's capable hands. **IN THE POOR GIRL TAKEN BY SURPRISE** sees Gemma Files updating the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale to mixed effect, while Sydney J. Bounds' **DOWNMARKET** is a slick set-piece effort in which a down-on-his-luck young man is assailed by something ancient and terrible.

Robert E. Howard has long been one of my very favourite authors, and **THE HORROR FROM THE MOUND** sees him unearthing an ancient Indian burial mound to excellent effect, superbly mixing atmosphere with action, his descriptions second to none. Jay Lake's **FAT MAN** comes up with a novel explanation for America's Bigfoot legend, while Brian Lumley's **THE THIN PEOPLE** is a lesser effort from the popular **NECROSCOPE** novelist. Next up, Tanith Lee's **THE HILL** is a stand-out here, a delightfully old-fashioned effort about a woman who takes up a position as a librarian for an eccentric employer. What follows is novel, surprising, hugely atmospheric, and contains one particular passage - an incident on a

staircase - that actually chilled me, something that happens very rarely when I read.

Joe Lansdale's *GODZILLA'S TWELVE STEP PROGRAM* is a snappy, jokey effort for those of us who are kaiju fans. Karl Edgar Wagner's *.220 SWIFT* is an addition to the subterranean horror cycle and an excellent read that reminded me of *THE DESCENT* et al. There's a bit of everything here. *OUR LADY OF THE SAUROPODS* sees Robert Silverberg telling of a lady trapped on a planet with dinosaurs, but I didn't buy the twist for a moment. Basil Copper's *THE FLABBY MEN* is an excellent scientific horror/thriller with Lovecraftian overtones, a wonderfully creepy yarn in which a remote island is assailed by hostile beasties. It reminded me of the old British sci-fi effort *ISLAND OF TERROR* quite a bit.

Robert Holdstock's *THE SILVERING* offers a fresh spin on the Selkie legend, but I found the writing a bit obtuse and muddled, too much about feelings with not enough concrete plotting. *SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM* is a brief, blackly comic yarn by Michael Marshall Smith about a guy encountering some weird creatures on a typical commuter journey, and Kim Newman's closing story, *THE CHILL CLUTCH OF THE UNSEEN*, explores what happens when an old-time monster hunter meets the last of the old-time monsters. Penultimate to Newman's coda is Clive Barker's excellent and lengthy short, *RAWHEAD REX*, best known for being filmed back in the 1980s. It's a ferocious and compelling monster-on-the-loose effort in which an ancient being is unearthed in Kent and goes on an extraordinarily violent rampage. Splendid stuff, and quite unputdownable.

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### **Shawn says**

With this *MAMMOTH BOOK OF MONSTERS*, there's an interesting case to be made for a definition of the specific sub-genre of "the monster story". While the monster story can, and usually is, a subset of horror fiction, it can also be subset of science fiction or fantasy. In any case, the point is the same - the monster itself and its presentation is the main focus of the text. Oh there's still usually a plot, conflict, etc., but an effective creature feature makes it obvious that the nefarious being itself, its description, its actions, its mind (if it has one), its \*presence\* is really the point of the exercise and everything else takes a back seat. This is usually easy to see in tales of odd and singular creatures like prehistoric survivors, or mythological monsters. One could make a case that many vampire and werewolf stories are automatically "monster stories", but I'd argue that these creatures have become too familiar in the common mind for that cover-all to work in most cases. As usual with me, it comes down not to general content but to authorial choices of focus and emphasis. There might also be a lesser argument for the creature usually having to have a \*physical\* presence: demons, ghosts and spirits are technically "monsters" (in the ghost's case, if they act with or manifest malevolence) but something about their ephemerality, in general, makes their existence less monstrous unless they take a visible and effectual (if not completely solid) form. But that's a fairly debatable point.

So what you have here is another Stephen Jones edited anthology, but with a much more specific focus than the more catholic *BEST NEW HORROR* volumes. The point here is monsters, and Jones does a good job ranging far and wide, while avoiding the overly familiar, to reign in a variety of types. And while I rarely like \*everything\* in an anthology (different strokes and all that), this volume had many more hits than misses (a minor note - the description in the Goodreads entry mentions Harlan Ellison, but he's nowhere to be found here)

The misses? Christopher Fowler's "The Spider Kiss" (in which two Miami cops try to discover the cause of increasingly violent madness occurring in normally sane individuals) just didn't work for me. The story was

sound but it felt like the sketch of an idea (if the author's intro didn't spell the main concept out enough, the info dump near the end of the story does the same, fairly artlessly in my opinion). It's not terrible, it just felt like an idea for a longer story or novel jammed into a short tale. "The Silvering", Robert Holdstock's tale of selkies (folkloric were-seals) has a lot going for it: the setting (a barren, windswept island), the characters (a mysterious man and the equally mysterious selkie that shows up in place of a previous one he had loved/enslaved) and some of the description (he's quite good at sketching the icy, grey beach setting and the pain of physical transformations). Unfortunately, the folkloric tone is undermined by the author's insistence on thoroughly delving into the hows and whys of Selkie transformation, turning something magical into something complicated and cumbersome that eventually drains the story of necessary vitality. When I began reading genre fiction with a critical eye, I was delighted to discover how much I liked Tanith Lee's dark fantasy work, considering how she usually writes in genres that don't hold much interest for me. So it's a shame that I have to say that I found her longish piece here, "The Hill", rather tedious. It has an intriguing set up (in Edwardian times, a female librarian is hired by an absent zoologist to get his personal library, located on his rural estate, into order. The house proves to have a menagerie of exotic animals in the garden, superstitious servants and a collection of tribal African fetish dolls. Then someone digs up the local graveyard and removes the bodies...) but the period voice, while generally effective, felt clumsy at times and, even worse, the story revolves around a rather unlikely "rational" explanation for the eventual monsters. That resolution, thematic though it may be, was unsatisfying and not something I wanted. So...eh.

Scott Edelman can't help that I read his quasi-zombpocalypse tale, "The Man He Had Been Before" (they act like zombies but are inert during the daytime like vampires - so it's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD meets I AM LEGEND, really), after a flood of similar stories in the marketplace. So I'll just focus on what I liked about it - the specific character dynamic of family surviving day to day and how that's complicated by the fact that, pre-apocalypse, the father was an abusive, angry jerk. In "Downmarket" by Sydney J. Bounds, a gargoyle thing preys on a young man chained to a railing overnight in a open-air market. It's fairly straightforward story, without much thought in its head other than delivering the monster goods, but still a brisk, enjoyable read. An overworked businessman takes the early train home for the weekend, only to find it sparsely populated by commuters and, unaccountably, odd little monkey-like creatures in the unbalanced "Someone Else's Problem" by Michael Marshall Smith. Of course explanations aren't always needed in a scary story (in fact, sometimes they ruin it, see "The Silvering" above) but the lack of any resolution in this piece, even if that was the point, came across as lazy, especially considering how well executed the general weird scenario is. There's ambiguous and then there's "here's a cool idea but, sorry, I got nothing for the resolution". A bit disappointing. Basil Copper (another author whose short fiction I'd like to read more of) is represented here with the long tale "The Flabby Men". I'm a bit on the fence about this one. The setting (a debilitated, poisonous, sterile future) is effectively sketched - you really do feel immersed in this gloomy, wound-down world of toxic corrosion. Copper's style is a bit like J.G. Ballard, dry and descriptive, featuring intellectual, hermetic characters whose minds and emotions seem abstracted (or maybe that's the setting again). The story itself, though, is a bit long-winded in telling what is essentially a 1950s B-monster movie plot as scientists and villagers are menaced by gelid, fungoid things from the sea caves. Fine for what it is, but I doubt I could see much of a reason to re-read it.

Which is a good time to engage the first example of the book's ranks of solid stories - "The Medusa" by Thomas Ligotti. As I've said, I keep extensive notes on what I've read so as not to waste my time rereading stories I wasn't too fond of. On the other hand, I entertain the possibility of rereading stories by authors I respect and think highly of, even if I didn't like the particular story. And Ligotti fits that definition to a "t". I made the mistake of reading The Nightmare Factory from cover to cover (and enjoyed it immensely) without realizing how intensive Ligotti's style is (he's much like Robert Aickman in that regard). As such, I've always felt it likely that a number of Ligotti's stories were disliked by me at the time simply due to my exhaustion at engaging his particular prose style (and also by my lack of understanding of his approach to the horror story

and bleakly absurd worldview, which takes some getting used to). This is all in service of saying I reread "The Medusa" and enjoyed it much more this time. It's probably the most challenging, abstract story in this book (the titular "monster" barely appears - but if it did the reader would have turned to stone, right?), and yet the cumulative effect of Ligotti's choked, airless prose is suffocating and profound, evoking a sterile fatalism and all-impinging gloom (the story \*feels\* gloomy from the start, but it's quite a few pages in before the weather is described as such). There's a heaviness to the prose as well, perhaps bordering on being a bit stiff at times, but it's an interesting experiment of a horror story where the main concept or creature the narrator quests after appears only as a gap or lack in the text, and petrification follows the realization that we're attracted to the thing we fear the most. Well done (but maybe not to everyone's tastes).

David J. Schow starts the book off with "Visitation", in which a former occult debunker turned occult detective falls into the ultimate metaphysical trap. It's a good choice for an opener, supplying a supernatural/physics explanation for its myriad hauntings. "Cafe Endless: Spring Rain" is an example of that much abused and bloated sub-subgenre, the "erotic vampire story" - not something I have much time for. But, surprisingly, this delicate tale of a Japanese man enslaved to a Kabuki-styled vampire is beautiful, erotic, poetic and horrifying in equal measure. Not usually my cup of tea, but Nancy Holder steeps a heady brew! The famed Robert E. Howard, creator of Conan, is represented here with a classic vampire tale, "The Horror From The Mound". It's a rough and gritty tale of the old Southwest, Conquistador-era evils and Indian mound builders - only the ending is a bit underwhelming. In "Fat Man" by Jay Lake, a pair of hunters finally bag Bigfoot and store him in a meat locker at the local greasy spoon, only for things to get much worse from there. The story is, perhaps, a bit too long for its too-busy/eventually very traditional ending, but the modern rural characters and setting are believably sketched. The monsters of "The Thin People" are suitably bizarre and yet they live amongst us in urban areas, hiding in plain sight. Brian Lumley's crisp writing and creepy atmospherics make this a memorable little gem. The most famous Kaiju (or "Japanese Giant Monster") gets a humorous updating in "Godzilla's Twelve Step Program" by Joe R. Lansdale. I'm not a big fan of horror-comedy but this is amiable, funny and surprisingly poignant when Godzilla finally falls off the "city smashing" wagon (plus, "oh, those Tivoli nights!", Reptilicus gets a mention!). Speaking of giant monsters, dinosaurs are cloned and placed aboard an orbiting jungle satellite habitat in "Our Lady of the Sauropods" by Robert Silverberg. However, when a scientist crash lands in the habitat and has to survive for a month, she finds out that there was more to dinosaurs than fossils could ever reveal.

There are quite a few excellent stories here, which really help round out the anthology. Dennis Etchison has a bit of a rep for impenetrability and his story, "Calling All Monsters", may seem exactly that to the casual reader. But I really liked this stream-of-consciousness channeling of old horror films (FRANKENSTEIN, ISLAND OF LOST SOULS and THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE - yes, MST3K fans, the movie that gave you "Jan in the pan"!) rattling through the mind of a man undergoing a horrific experience, especially at the point when these memories become almost hysterical evocations of power. Lit-Horror at its finest.

A story that impresses me everytime I re-read it, Karl Edward Wagner's ".220 Swift" is the crowning jewel of his attempts in the 1970s to revitalize the pulp horror model. The story starts as a rural, folklore-based horror yarn in the vein of Manly Wade Wellman and ends up as a dark fantasy, "weird hero" origin story. The North Carolina setting, myths of an underground pygmy race, albino main character and claustrophobic exploration of lost mines: all merge powerfully together in a long, strong story.

I previously pegged R. Chetwynd-Hayes as something like a British Robert Bloch - both tend towards a lighter, humorous tone in most of their horror tales. It's not a style I particularly like very much, but Chetwynd-Hayes really showed me something with his story here, "The Shadmock". First of all, I expected I'd know the story itself from the adaption in the Chetwynd-Hayes anthology film THE MONSTER CLUB. First surprise - this story has some of the film segment's details (particularly a fanciful genealogy of

monster crossbreedings) but the plot is significantly different in this long tale. Secondly, while there is humor here (usually in acerbic character dialogue and droll descriptions) the overall effect actually amplifies the ghoulish horror. The scenario is like something from a gothic horror comic book - an arrogant, nouveau rich putz and his trophy girlfriend arrive at his newly purchased country-seat mansion (his family toiled as groundskeepers there in his youth), only to discover the original servant staff still alive and installed, because they are inhuman creatures. This story really impressed me - yes, it's cartoonish while also, somehow, maintaining a strong aura of grotesque threat.

Speaking of grotesque threats, Clive Barker's tale of a resurrected pagan forest-god/monster rampaging through a rural English village, "Rawhead Rex", is another great choice for the compilation. What makes the story work (besides Barker's impressively lucid and sometimes luminous writing that sketches both effective characters and nightmare scenes) is the character of Rawhead himself. Not *\*just\** a ravening, baby-eating monster, Rawhead (once colorfully described in a review as "a 9 foot tall rampaging penis with teeth") has a mind; his disorientation with modern times, and his arrogant desire to constantly test himself against technological threats (in service of defeating humanity and regaining his empire), make the story just crack along. A great read, they really should consider re-making the failed movie.

"Down There", an early Ramsey Campbell piece about two workers staying late in an office building that houses nasty, doughy horrors in the basement, is also great - it's more event-filled than his current storytelling, and features a well-done "fleeing horror into prosaic safety" ending. Gemma Files' "In The Poor Girl Taken By Surprise" strides confidently on the fairy-tale/folklore stylistic grounds of Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. Told in monologue form, it deftly combines aspects of Little Red Riding Hood, Werewolf myth and the lore surrounding American settler-era serial killer clan The Bloody Benders. Deeply mythic, wonderfully charming, it's a powerful story that I liked so much I bought the rights to have it read on PSEUDOPOD - the episode is free to download or listen to here.

The book ends with a perfectly appropriate tale: "The Chill Clutch of the Unseen" by Kim Newman. Written for a Charles L. Grant tribute, the story ostensibly takes place in Grant's created town, Oxrun Station, as an aging monster hunter, who's seen all the classic monsters come down the pike only to go down in defeat, awaits the last of them. It's a wistful tribute to the Universal film monsters of old and Horror's Golden Age in general (think of the movie THE MONSTER SQUAD, but for old men). The last monster isn't one of the biggies, but quite fitting and well-characterized by Newman. It's bittersweet, but truly a perfect ending for the anthology.

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### **Snigdha says**

This collection of stories about monsters includes appearances of some all time favourites such as vampires and werewolves, the Medusa and Godzilla and a bundle of strange creatures such as Shadmocks, Flabby Men and Flat Men.

The two classiest stories in the collection were The Hill by Tanith Lee and The Shadmock by R. Chetwynd-Hayes. And I say classy because these stories were written with a flair, as opposed to the numerous tales written to give cheap thrills. Some tales in this collection about 'monsters' were disgusting- and not in the sort of mind-blowing way you'd expect a book to me- they were plain gruesome for the provision of gory details meant to raise bile. Maybe I am just not a sort of 'Monster Story' person or maybe I should try a better collection, but the aftertaste that lingered in my mind when I plundered through Rawhead made me give this collection a two star rating, much as I had earlier decided on a three. Don't get me wrong, some stories are amusing and entertaining until the others just aren't.

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## **Frederic Van Laere says**

Ongelijke kwaliteit tussen de verschillende kortverhalen.

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## **Rahul says**

It seems the focus here was to keep the definition of a monster as flexible as possible, going beyond the usual vampires, werewolves and ghouls to even weirder creations of the human imagination. Worry not, fans of the good old monsters; Vampires and werewolves and even Godzilla himself are here, just not in the form you would expect.

The quality of stories here is usually first-rate, and you can be sure some of the newer monsters are going to stick with you for a long time. We start with *Visitation* by David J Schow. Incidentally, the author wrote the screenplay for cult film *The Crow*. *Visitation* is a fantastically vivid story based on the idea that as long as we truly don't believe in ghosts, monsters or demons, we are safe, but if we are tricked by our imagination into planting the smallest seed of doubt in our minds, our fears might manifest themselves in the worst way possible. The monster outside is the same as the monster within.

From the charmingly rustic setting of *Visitation* we come to the familiar claustrophobia of tight cubicles in cramped office-spaces of big-city high rises. *Down There* by Ramsey Campbell exploits that fear that niggles amid the sickly white lighting of deserted corridors and elevators. A high point is the charmingly funny but realistic descriptions of the mundane reflections of the female protagonist as she bides her time together with the one other colleague still in the office at that late hour. Surely it is no small task to paint a convincing character sketch in the space of 8 pages.

Possibly my favourite story here is *The Shadmock* by R Chetwynd-Hayes. If you have chanced to watch the 1981 film *The Monster Club*, featuring Vincent Price, you might recall the episode loosely based on this story. It is really a remarkable piece, an alchemy of fear, baleful and disturbing, provocative imagery, black humour, melancholy and mournfulness, as wildly imaginative as could be. And what a novel idea!

*The Spider Kiss* is marred by plainly bad writing. The idea is somewhat original but the exposition of it here is so inane it completely ruins it for me. *Cafe Endless – Spring Rain* is one weird story, set in Tokyo, Japan, in which nothing really interesting happens. Did not work for me. *The Medusa* by Thomas Ligotti has an academic researching the Medusa myth. It creates a delicious atmosphere and is extremely well-written, though the conclusion could have been better. It is that kind of horror which concentrates more on the fear itself and the sense of foreboding rather than on a concrete embodiment/realization of the fear.

*The Thin People* by Brian Lumley is another highlight, an ingenious yarn about a kind of people that-, well, let's just say that if you read this you'll never look at a street lamp-post the same way again. Horror at its best. Joe R Lansdale's *Godzilla's Twelve Step Program* is a hilarious story which proves that you can inject poignancy into something so obviously absurd. *The Hill* and *.220 Swift* are novellas – The former makes an interesting point about supernatural beliefs while telling a story about the dead come back to life, or so it appears.

One of my favourite SF authors Robert Silverberg contributes with Our Lady of the Sauropods, that asks the tantalizing question-Can we really be so sure about our knowledge of dinosaurs, seeing as it is based on fossils alone? Could it be that dinosaurs were...different from what we imagine?

Someone Else's Problem by Michael Marshall Smith is one of the more offbeat and creative stories here. Brilliantly funny and absurdist in tone, it hits you like a nail on the head. I'm willing to bet it came to the author's mind as he sat in a sparsely populated train carriage, trying to read a book but eyes inevitable rising above the pages, ears attuned to the rhythmic hum of the locomotive. At some point in time haven't we all felt like we are unjustly stuck in someone else's problem, when we should just walk away...

Other writers of note featured here include Basil Copper, Clive Barker and Robert E. Howard. Overall a fine-to-middling collection to spook and stimulate, brought down a notch by a few unremarkable stories which just don't match up to the standard of the rest. But these are just a few bad apples, and then, I could be wrong.

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## Stacey says

As is the case with most anthologies, this was a mixed bag so 3 stars is an average for the collection as a whole. There were stories that were brilliant, others that were pretty good, a handful that were mediocre, and the almost obligatory one or two that were just solid nopes. The monsters of the title were a pleasantly varied mix with classics like vampires and zombies, some fun new inventions like the Shadmock, and even one or two "monsters" of non-supernatural origin.

### Individual story ratings:

*Visitation* by David J Schow - 2.5 stars, kind of weird and confusing.

*Down There* by Ramsey Campbell - 3.5 stars, creepy af, spent most of it willing the main character to run the hell away.

*The Man He Was Before* by Scott Edelman - 4 stars, excellent look at domestic abuse and also zombies.

*Calling All Monsters* by Dennis Etchison - 2 stars, whut?

*The Shadmock* by R Chetwynd-Hayes - 3.5 stars, very inventive ideas and very enjoyable though the reveal of what the whistle did was pretty anticlimactic.

*The Spider Kiss* by Christopher Fowler - 1 star, NOPE. Had to skip a page. There were spiders. Nope. Not here for that.

*Cafe Endless: Spring Rain* by Nancy Holder - 2.5 stars, partly great, partly hugely disappointing.

*The Medusa* by Thomas Ligotti - 2 stars, boring and kind of pretentious.

*In The Poor Girl Taken By Surprise* by Gemma Files - 3.5 stars, this felt like it's meant to be read aloud to really get the impact, a monologue designed to be heard.

*Downmarket* by Sydney J Bounds - 3.5 stars, atmospheric and punchy.

*The Horror From The Mound* by Robert E Howard - 2.5 stars, eh, was alright.

*Fat Man* by Jay Lake - 3 stars, weird but interesting take on Big Foot with one part that really confused me.

*The Thin People* by Brian Lumley - 4 stars, deliciously creepy little story.

*The Hill* by Tanith Lee - 4.5 stars, my favourite, loved it, loved everything about it from the main character to the atmosphere and the reveal was kind of perfect.

*Godzilla's Twelve Step Program* by Joe R Lansdale - 3 stars, a fun concept.

*.220 Swift* by Karl Edward Wagner - 3 stars, the beginning super dragged but second half was great once they actually went off to the caves.

*Our Lady Of The Sauropods* by Robert Silverberg - 4 stars, there were dinosaurs, twas great.

*The Flabby Men* by Basil Copper - 1 star, NOPE NOPE NOPE I DO NOT LIKE YOU. Once I read the first paragraph about the female character I had a bad taste in my mouth and just couldn't enjoy it. Nope.

*The Silvering* by Robert Holdstock - 3 stars, a different and sinister selkie story.

*Someone Else's Problem* by Michael Marshall Smith - 4.25 stars, kind of loved this one, creepy train monsters, excellent.

*Rawhead Rex* by Clive Barker - 3.5 stars, one of the more graphic but then it is Clive Barker, some of it was just gross, what's with the peeing?

*The Chill Clutch Of The Unseen* by Kim Newman - 3 stars, took me a moment to get into but a really great premise and a fun origin story more than anything. I want to hear what happened next.

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### **Ahimsa says**

As with many anthologies, the stories here vary to taste. I found many more misses than hits, personally, but that is a personal assessment of course.

Most disappointing to me is that the monsters really aren't very new or interesting at all. There are zombies and vampires and demons and at least one story where "humans are the real monsters!" In terms of creativity, this book gets low marks.

But there are enough well-written stories to make this worth reading, if only once.

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### **Katie Cat Books says**

If you are tired of reading horror stories that leave you bored and unsatisfied, then read this book! Full of thrilling, scary, nightmare-inducing monsters, read this one in the dark!

Pacing: This Mammoth collection has more longer tales than other Mammoth collections. While there are a few short ones, be prepared to either read a long story or put down the book multiple times in the middle of a tale.

Characters: Monsters! These are for the most part, the monsters of nightmares. Invented, fangs, hooves, tusks, sharp teeth, but with no name you have heard before. The originality of these tales makes the book worthwhile.

Language: Dark but not deep. Anyone could read these tales and not need a dictionary. There are even a variety of accents and dialects from UK to southern US.

Frame: Dark and chilling. Full of shadows and not knowing what lurks around the corner, these stories are meant to be read in the dark.

One of the more enjoyable Mammoth books I have read. I enjoyed the time span of the book-stories from the 1930's, 1970's, and 2000's. I wish some of the stories had been shorter, but still a worthwhile read for horror fans.

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### **Jim Black says**

This is a pretty good anthology with strong stories throughout with "The Medusa" by Thomas Ligotti, "Fat Man" by the late Jay Lake, and "Godzilla's Twelve Step Program" by Joe R. Lansdale being standouts. I did find R. Chetwynd-Hayes' classic story "The Shadmock" far too silly to finish. Perhaps it's just personal taste.

I would recommend this anthology to anyone interested in the monster horror sub-genre. The writing overall is very strong, the ideas potent, and the atmospheres dark and compelling.

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### **Luke Allen says**

As with any short story comp, there are some tales here that are better than others, but for the first time since reading *Night Shift* by Stephen King, I've found a compilation book without a single flat out stinker. Rather than just reading one story then leaving the book for another rainy day, I found myself taking in four or five before putting it down. Whilst there are some on here I've read before (like the excellent *Rawhead Rex* by Clive Barker), the best is *The Man He Had Been Before* by Scott Edelman, a haunting post-apocalyptic tale of a family surviving the aftermath of a zombie outbreak. Seek it out.

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### **D.M. Dutcher says**

Large collection of somewhat atypical or random monster stories. All of them are decently written, with no real stinkers or padding in the anthology, but it's a wide enough range where you will only like some of the tales. I liked Robert Holdstock's *Silverling* best of all, because he is a very unappreciated, mythic author. This tale was about a man who fell in love with a Selkie, a seal-like mermaid. Very mythic, while still managing to be both creative and chilling.

The worst story in the lot is Clive Barker's *Rawhead Rex*. It was both pointless and scatlogical in that way Barker has, where all he can do is shock and sicken to disguise a very pedestrian story. His fans will eat it up, but I disliked it.

Still, a decent if quirky anthology, albeit one that focuses on a lot of lesser or unknown works due to its theme.

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### **Joshua Hair says**

It was...decent. However, overall, this is the first Stephen Jones collection I have been disappointed in. It just seemed as if a majority of the stories were merely lackluster. One could argue that most did not in fact even involve a monster per say. I had intended to review each story individually, but the book was so uninspiring that I've already donated it others to read. This is sad, because I am a monster maniac and generally eat up anything involving this subject matter.

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### **Shane says**

Reading it piecemeal but so far I'm impressed. A couple of my all time favourite stories have come from this anthology. Ramsey Campbell's 'Down There', and Brian Lumley's, 'The Thin People' are real stand-out stories so far.

Edit: Have read all that I can remember, may have missed one or two since it's a while since I picked it up again, but I can honestly say it was a very enjoyable read with some absolutely wonderful stories. Another one to add to the stand-out stories list above is the final story about the invisible man by Kim Newman, 'The Chill Clutch of the Unseen'. Very good anthology.

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### **Galo says**

Cutting to the chase, the stand-out stories are: Ramsey Campbell's *Down There*, R. Chetwynd-Hayes' *The Shadmock*, Nancy Holder's *Cafe Endless: Spring Rain*, Sydney J. Bounds' *Downmarket*, Robert E. Howard's *The Horror from the Mound*, Jay Lake's *Fat Man*, Brian Lumley's *The Thin People*, Basil Copper's *The Flabby Men*, Robert Holdstock's *The Silvering*, Michael Marshall Smith's *Someone Else's Problem*, Clive Barker's *Rawhead Rex*, and Kim Newman's *The Chill Clutch of the Unseen*.

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