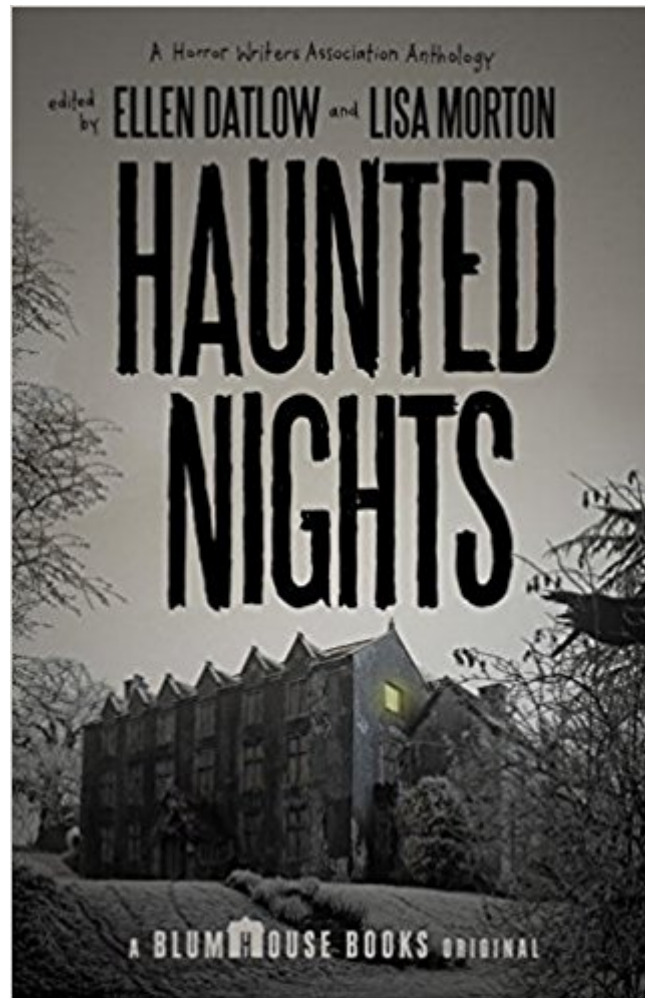




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Haunted Nights



Synopsis

Sixteen never-before-published chilling tales that explore every aspect of our darkest holiday, Halloween, co-edited by Ellen Datlow, one of the most successful and respected genre editors, and Lisa Morton, a leading authority on Halloween. In addition to stories about scheming jack-o'-lanterns, vengeful ghosts, otherworldly changelings, disturbingly realistic haunted attractions, masks that cover terrifying faces, murderous urban legends, parties gone bad, cult Halloween movies, and trick or treating in the future, *Haunted Nights* also offers terrifying and mind-bending explorations of related holidays like All Souls' Day, Dia de los Muertos, and Devil's Night. "With Graveyard Weeds and Wolfbane Seeds" by Seanan McGuire "Dirtmouth" by Stephen Graham Jones "A Small Taste of the Old Countr" by Jonathan Maberry "Wick" by Joanna Parypinski "The Seventeen Year Itch" by Garth Nix "A Flicker of Light on Devil's Night" by Kate Jones "Witch-Hazel" by Jeffrey Ford "Nos Galen Gaeaf" by Kelley Armstrong "We're Never Inviting Amber Again" by S. P. Miskowski "Sisters" by Brian Evenson "All Through the Night" by Elise Forier Edie "A Kingdom of Sugar Skulls and Marigolds" by Eric J. Guignard "The Turn" by Paul Kane "Jack" by Pat Cadigan "Lost in the Dark" by John Langan "The First Lunar Halloween" by John R. Little

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Customer Reviews

"Halloween brings out the best in horror writers, as this fright-packed anthology of 15 new stories with Halloween themes demonstrates...Editors Datlow and Morton have filled this book with an assortment of Halloween treats whose horrors transcend their Holiday setting."--Publishers Weekly

(starred)"The authors skillfully address the Halloween theme with a great variety of tones and styles, exploring the unholy holiday from any possible angle, thus providing a very enjoyable book for horror lovers...Intriguing and creepy. In short, a "must-have" book."--HellNotes

Ellen Datlow has been editing science fiction, fantasy, and horror short fiction for over thirty-five years. She currently acquires short fiction for Tor.com. In addition, she has edited more than fifty anthologies, including The Best Horror of the Year series, Fearful Symmetries, The Doll Collection, The Monstrous, and Black Feathers. A multiple award-winner for her work, Datlow is a recipient of the Karl Edward Wagner Award, given at the British Fantasy Convention for "outstanding contribution to the genre," and has been honored with Life Achievement Awards by both the Horror Writers Association and the World Fantasy Convention. She lives in New York and co-hosts the monthly Fantastic Fiction Reading Series at KGB Bar. More information can be found at www.datlow.com, on Facebook, and on twitter as @EllenDatlow. Lisa Morton is a screenwriter, author of non-fiction books, Bram Stoker Award-winning prose writer, editor, and Halloween expert whose work was described by the American Library Association's Readers' Advisory Guide to Horror as "consistently dark, unsettling, and frightening." As a Halloween expert, she has appeared on The History Channel and BBC Radio and in the pages of Real Simple Magazine and The Wall Street Journal, and she served as consultant on the first official U.S. Postal Halloween stamps. Her most recent releases include Ghosts: A Haunted History and Cemetery Dance Select: Lisa Morton. She lives in the San Fernando Valley, and can be found online at www.lisamorton.com.

Haunted Nights is a collection of 16 original stories, all of which take place on Halloween or a similar holiday, such as the Day of the Dead. They are all urban horror with traditional folk themes such as wandering Jack and his turnip (or pumpkin) lantern but in a modern setting. Like urban fantasy, only you know, horror. "With Graveyard Weeds and Wolfsbane Seeds," by Seanan McGuire, is the closest to a traditional ghost story. Teenagers vandalizing an empty Victorian mansion discover dark secrets about not only the mansion but their very nice community. In "Dirtmouth," by Stephen Graham Jones, a bereaved man tells the police exactly how his wife and twin toddlers disappeared. But can the police or the reader believe his story? Author Jonathan Maberry, together with his baker protagonist, gives two Germans who have emigrated to Argentina a rich, and richly deserved, "Small Taste of the Old Country." In

Wick's End, Joanna Parypinski adopts the style of a folk tale. Jack and a sexy woman meet at a roadside tavern and trade stories and tricks. In "The Seventeen-Year Itch," Garth Nix mercilessly describes what happens to a kindly attendant in a mental hospital when a patient feels he is just like family. Author Kate Jones takes the desperation of a broke single mother to its limits in the relentlessly grim "Flicker of Light on Devil Night." In "Witch Hazel," Jeffrey Ford adds welcome touches of the historical and the mysterious to the story of middle-aged twin sisters who go berserk in an almost deserted village in the Pine Barrens (New Jersey). As with all Ford's work, the language is beautiful. To fully understand "Nos Galen Gaeaf," it is well to first do an Internet search on that Welsh holiday. In this story by Kelley Armstrong, traditionalists in an American town celebrate the old way. In "We're Never Inviting Amber Again," the narrator's sister-in-law is crazy or genuinely psychic. Author S. P. Miskowski deftly weaves in the story of a disintegrating marriage. Brian Evenson describes how space aliens? get into the spirit of Halloween in "Sisters." "All Through the Night," by Elise Forier Edie, is a very moving story of immigrant hardship and female solidarity and possibly of the intersection of the faerie and human worlds. Unlike the other stories, it has a Victorian setting. "A Kingdom of Sugar Skulls and Marigolds," by Eric J. Guignard, is an overly hip story of The Day of the Dead in a barrio. It's hard to see how its narrator could possibly survive even a short time without supernatural intervention. "The Turn," by Paul Kane, ends with a twist that makes it somewhat less warped than it was shaping up to be. "Jack," by Pat Cadigan, is one of those urban fantasy stories where it's supposed to be really clever that modern witches constantly use slang and cell phone apps. Except it isn't. Author John Langan's "Lost in the Dark" is a long, tediously self-referential story where the narrator interviews the director of a cult horror movie. The director tells the narrator about a real-life incident the movie was based on, then the local legends that sprang up around the incident, then we get the narrator's in-depth research on the incident (complete with interviews with other people), then there's a long IMDb synopsis of the movie, then there's the director's

account of making the movie, then there's the narrator's description of an early, deleted version of the movie, then there are the director's comments on that version. All this isn't just an imitation of a dry documentary style--it's genuinely boring. Well before the end, I quit caring what really happened. John R. Little's description of "The First Lunar Halloween" is a brief story that ends with a twist. Ellen Datlow is one of my favorite SF editors, but I do prefer her fantasy and dark fantasy collections to her horror. And this collection is mostly true horror. I think *Haunted Nights* is a mixed bag, but the stories I really liked made it worth reading.

I love reading and consider it to be my favorite pastime. Even though I am now retired, I rarely get much time to read anymore. When I lived in NYC and was working, I did all my reading on the subway while commuting. Now that I live more rurally, reading takes a back seat in my very busy life. I recently vowed to remedy that, and set aside more time for my reading pleasure. And from O. Henry to Ray Bradbury, short stories have always been my favorite form of fiction. In particular, I have always loved stories of suspense and especially stories of the supernatural. Just in time, *Vine* offered me *Haunted Nights*, an anthology of sixteen creepy tales, all centered around Halloween. The editors have a long list of accomplishments in both fiction and the history of Halloween. The bottom line is that I have enjoyed this book thoroughly, and offer my individual ratings and comments on each of the sixteen stories as follows:

- 1) *With Graveyard Weeds and Wolfbane Seeds*, by Seanan McGuire is a well-crafted Haunted House story; definitely chilling. 4.5 stars out of 5.
- 2) *Dirtmouth*, by Stephen Graham Jones is a highly readable ghost story about a young postpartum suicide come back to life. 5 stars.
- 3) *A Small Taste of the Old Country*, by Jonathan Maberry is possibly the best revenge story of its kind I have ever read. 5 stars.
- 4) *Wick's End*, by Joanna Parypinski is always give the devil his due. 5 stars.
- 5) *The Seventeen-Year Itch*, by Garth Nix is delightfully done, but not quite as scary. 4 stars.
- 6) *A Flicker of Light on Devil Night*, by Kate Jones is a depressing tale of an overstressed welfare mother with two little handfuls. An ending I did not see coming. 4.5 stars.
- 7) *Witch Hazel*, by Jeffrey Ford is a confusing tale of murderous twin sisters, with a hole in the plot big enough to drive a truck through. 4 stars.
- 8) *Nos Galen Gaeaf*, by Kelley Armstrong is a somewhat satisfying tale of Welsh rituals, carried over to modern times with a sprinkling of teenage imagination. 4.5 stars.
- 9) *We're Never Inviting Amber Again*, by S. P. Miskowski

9) *Psychic sister-in-law ruins everything, all the time.* Well written and spooky. 4.5 stars.
 10) *Sisters* by Brian Evenson A very clever tale of goblins on the loose. 5 stars.
 11) *All Through the Night*, by Elise Forier Edie A tale of an immigrant Irish girl in the tenements of New York. Well told; no real chills. 5 stars.
 12) *A Kingdom of Sugar Skulls and Marigolds*, by Eric J. Guignard Absolutely wonderful tale of ghostly gang fights in East L.A. on La Dia de los Muertos. A little knowledge of Spanish makes it all the better. 5 stars.
 13) *The Turn*, by Paul Kern When something is pursuing you on October 31, do not turn around, no matter how close the footsteps get. Creepy. 4.5 stars.
 14) *Jack*, by Pat Cadigan Tricking the original Jack-O-Lantern isn't easy, but someone's got to do it. Fun story. 4.5 stars.
 15) *Lost in the Dark*, by John Langan An overlong backstory concerning a famous horror film franchise, which was originally supposed to be a documentary. Not terribly scary; my least favorite in the collection. 3.5 stars.
 16) *The First Lunar Halloween*, by John R. Little It's the year 2204. Earth has been abandoned to aliens, and what's left of mankind lives below the surface of the moon. A group of school kids are going to celebrate the first Halloween on the moon. Somewhat scary. 4 stars.

All in all, this collection rates a total of 4.5 stars. The editors have chosen the stories well, and I was thoroughly entertained. Parental guidance is suggested, more for language than scary content. Highly recommended.

Out of the 16 stories included in this collection, I only found 3 or 4 that I would read again, with another couple that weren't bad. Unfortunately most were just meh and rather forgettable. I really wanted to like this anthology, so it's disappointing that so few stories were attention grabbing. By far the best were *Dirt Mouth*, *The Seventeen Year Itch* and *All Though the Night*, although the last wasn't really scary in the traditional sense. Worth reading the collection once, but not sure I'll pick it up again to reread in the future.

I'm a huge fan of the horrific short story, and over the years I've read many collections. *Haunted Nights* is a great collection of stories. While not all are to my taste (not every story in a collection will appeal to every reader), some are just horrific. All take place around Halloween, and some act as partial history lessons -- things I didn't know. Things I had to look up and verify! A great collection that has earned a place in my small library of "real" books. Those made of paper. :)

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