

## "NIGHT TERRORS: AN ANTHOLOGY OF HORROR" (Book Review)

Written by Clay McLeod Chapman  
Sunday, 27 June 2010 09:22

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Ever remember having night terrors as a child? Those somnambulistic panic attacks that sent you bolting upright, eyes wide open, screaming in your sleep? Pediatricians estimate that about 30 percent of all boys and girls experience pavor nocturnus at some point in their childhood—which, truth be told, is just about the same percentage of stories in Blood Bound Books' new anthology NIGHT TERRORS that kept this reviewer up last night.

These 31 stories, edited by Theresa Dillon, attempt to tap into that inner recess of primordial fear all readers have at the back of their kiddie-lizard brains, conjuring up tales of bogeymen, decrepit carnie barkers, even Cthulhu-inspired spider beasties. And yet, there is a whiff of familiarity rising off of these stories that keeps them from ultimately resonating with the reader beyond closing the book. You've already had a lot of these nightmares yourself when you were younger—and frankly, they were probably far scarier back then.

Too many of these tales stick to a one-two joke structure, such as Stephanie Kincaid's "The Stripper," riffing on a singular "man walks into a bar" scenario that is more interested in its own punchline than its characters. Piper Morgan's slim vignette "Are You the Fairest" seems a little too content with its unconventional narrator to do anything interesting.

The standard fumble amongst novice horror writers is an inability to develop interesting people to maneuver through their storylines—and these tales are no exception. Concepts tend to eclipse character far too often in the pieces found here, including Robert Essig's "Only Three Dead Presidents" and David Bernstein's boilerplate kick-starter "From Under the Bed."

But what fresh nightmare is this? Not all is lost for NIGHT TERRORS. Harper Hull's shocker "Amy Lou's Ice Cream Parlor" is an absolute sucker punch to the gut. The tenderness of Hull's text is a trap that catches the reader in a swift six pages. By beginning with the all-too-familiar, painting a portrait of a pleasant ice-cream shop, Hull drags us down into the spectral depths of his protagonist's heartbreaking depravity—and never brings us back. Discovering this story at the tail end of the collection is just about enough to justify the entire purchase price.

Hull is not alone. Rather than rest on the laurels of an interesting idea, Desmond Warzel's "The Elephant in the Marble" allows the reader to rubberneck through his narrator's own compellingly

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hazy drug-induced demise. Craig Saunders' "The Hole in the Fence" strikes its own confident balance between character and concept, while the sheer dissoluteness of Barry Napier's "Lunatic Mile" deserves mention for tapping the reader's gag reflex rather than just settling for a simple gag.

Anthologies always tend to be a mixed bag, regardless of the pedigrees of their writers. Dillon does do a commendable job of discovering the internal threads of each story and stringing them together as best she can, permitting the reader to journey fluidly from one piece to the next with some sense of forward motion. A thinner volume comprised of a stronger cross-section of stories would have made this book a true collection of nightmares—but as it stands, too many unsatisfying pieces make NIGHT TERRORS more of a burp during a catnap.



{comments on}