Inferno: New Tales of Terror and the Supernatural

More, Please.

As stated in her introduction to Inferno, Ellen Datlow asked her favorite authors for stories that would “provide the reader with a frisson of shock, or a moment of dread so powerful it might cause the reader outright physical discomfort; or a sensation of fear so palpable that the reader feels compelled to turn on the bright lights and play music or seek the company of others to dispel the fear.”

Mission accomplished. Datlow has produced a collection filled with some of the most powerful voices in the field: Pat Cadigan, Terry Dowling, Jeffrey Ford, Christopher Fowler, Glen Hirshberg, K. W. Jeter, Joyce Carol Oates, and Lucius Shepard, to name a few. Each author approaches fear in a different way, but all of the stories’ characters toil within their own hell. An aptly titled anthology, Inferno will scare the pants off readers and further secure Ellen Datlow’s standing as a preeminent editor of modern horror.

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My Personal Review:
In Stephen King's Danse Macabre, King compared Ramsey Campbell's prose to a low level acid trip. I was thinking of that description many times throughout this anthology, were most of the stories take place in this world but something's not right. Not just the horror portion of the stories but everything about these characters and their world is off-kilter in some way or fashion.

Take for example "Riding Bitch" by K.W. Jeter where the protagonist is a loser biker who takes corpses to the funeral home to pick up extra money. By this time we've all seen the tropes from the tough biker to the seedy
bar, but add in a dead girlfriend who won't quite stay dead or is dead but he hears it - you can never tell - and it's a story that won't let you go.

Similarly "Monsters of Heaven" being reminiscent of Marquez's "Man with Wings" (sic?) doesn't just let the characters get by with ignoring the angels. Even as they are embroiled in a lost child tragedy, they still have time to do some truly horrific things to each other and finally an innocent.

Not all of the stories work, but the stories that don't work for me are the ones that appear to be trying too hard like Laird Barron's "The Forest" or Lee Thomas's "An Apiary of White Bees." They are strange but I never get the sense of being taken along for a ride. More like I'm being told about someone's acid trip laden vacation.

Ultimately these stories are disturbing because human beings are disturbing. Vampires, werewolves and ghosts have nothing on Basra militias or Serbian death squads. These stories reflect the evil that humans do to each other on a constant basis and they are much more powerful for that.

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