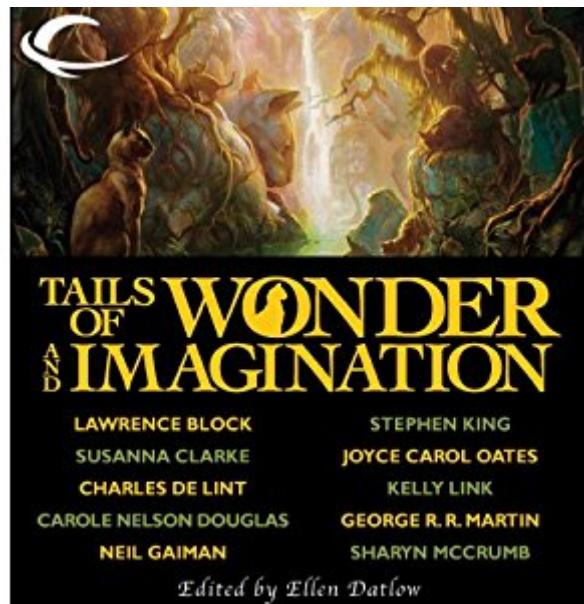


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# Tails Of Wonder And Imagination



## Synopsis

What is it about the cat that captivates the creative imagination? No other creature has inspired so many authors to take pen to page. Mystery, horror, science fiction, and fantasy stories have all been written about cats. From legendary editor Ellen Datlow comes *Tails of Wonder and Imagination*, showcasing 40 cat tales by some of today's most popular authors. With uncollected stories by Stephen King, Carol Emshwiller, Tanith Lee, Peter S. Beagle, Elizabeth Hand, Dennis Danvers, and Theodora Goss and a previously unpublished story by Susanna Clarke, plus feline-centric fiction by Neil Gaiman, Kelly Link, George R. R. Martin, Lucius Shepard, Joyce Carol Oates, Graham Joyce, Catherynne M. Valente, Michael Marshall Smith, and many others. *Tails of Wonder and Imagination* features more than 200,000 words of stories in which cats are heroes and stories in which they're villains; tales of domestic cats, tigers, lions, mythical part-cat beings, people transformed into cats, cats transformed into people. And yes, even a few cute cats.

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

What is it about cats that captures our hearts and enslaves us through their furry charm?

Award-winning anthologist Ellen Datlow showcases that unanswerable question with an assortment of 41 stories devoted to felines of myriad sorts—where cats are both the heroes and the villains, mythical and domestic, feral and cuddly, and so forth. Enclosed in this anthology christened *Tails of Wonder and Imagination* are works by some of the most accomplished writers of the last century, both known and new, from literary giants like Stephen King, Joyce Carol Oates, Neil Gaiman, and George R.R. Martin, to obscure writers from as far across the pond as Australia and the U.K. Each selected tail—er, rather tale—comes with a respective author bio and brief background info. In *Tails of Wonder and Imagination*, Datlow has rather broadly defined the term "cat", bestowing readers with everything from saber-toothed tigers resurrected by crazed scientists, to mythical manticores, jaguars, tigers, sphinxes, and of course, your common housecats. Peppered throughout this thick book are some magical realist tales, many of which explore the strange, mystical bonds that form between humans and animals; namely, A.R. Morlan's evocative "No Heaven Will Not Ever Heaven Be" and Neil Gaiman's "The Price". In the latter tale, a father learns that the stray cat his family has adopted is protecting their home from something demonic, and that his family's happiness is somehow directly dependent on the cat's ability to defend them from it. This ghost story of sorts is both wrenching and eerily wonderful; readers' hearts will bleed for the altruistic feline enduring such heavy responsibility and punishment. David Sandner's "Old Foss is the Name of His Cat" is another fine example. Inspired by "The Jumblies", a classic nursery rhyme from Edward Lear, Sandner aptly depicts the story of an elderly Englishman who has lost his Jumbly love, as told from the perspective of his exasperated and obese cat. Although it sounds surreal and is, this story succeeds as a meditation on forms of consciousness, the

recognition of the unreal, and the spurning of painful truths. "Not Waving" by Michael Marshall Smith features a contemporary London setting and a cat-friendly narrator, Mark, a work-at-home computer graphics designer unhappily married to Nancy, a dynamic go-getter corporate-climber who hates cats. Events come to a crisis when Mark falls in love with responding-in-kind Alice, a motorbike messenger with a tremendous interest in computers and a mysterious, mystical connection to the local stray feline population and one in particular whose presence near the protagonist's house makes Nancy exceedingly nervous and irritated. With wit and irony, the development of Mark and Alice's relationship gets beautifully described, as does the parallel deterioration of Mark's marriage to Nancy. A sense of foreboding builds effectively, leading to the fate of this triangle, the resolution of Mark and Nancy's difficulties coming at a cost made more shockingly gruesome by hints and indirection in the story's powerful and gut-wrenching conclusion. "The White Cat" by Joyce Carol Oates which revolves around an elderly bourgeoisie man, his younger wife, and their evil white cat is one of those terrific stories where the plot may not be as it seems, and its interpretation can be adapted to the reader's suppositions. Mr. Julius Muir, a newlywed struggling with feelings of distance with his new bride, is convinced their Persian cat, Miranda, is to blame for the discord. Mr. Muir finally comes up with a plan to get rid of Miranda, forgetting that age-old proverb about cats and nine lives. It's a tale in the same tradition of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" but with notable differences. Fair warning: many of these tales are not for cozy cat lovers seeking a literary stroll down Ragamuffin Lane. Take for instance, Ray Vukcevich's two-page vignette, "Catch," in which a pair of scientists resoles their ailing marriage even as they torture cats to death by repeatedly throwing them around the lab. And that's merely the beginning. Upon reaching the final page of this book, readers will have encountered stories wherein cats are strangled, skinned, burned alive, gassed, struck down by cars, and slaughtered in a dozen horrific ways. Some of these short tales have little or nothing to do with furry felines. In Jeffrey Ford's "The Manticore Spell," a wizard's apprentice glimpses eternity in the form of a legendary creature. In "Candia," a brilliantly eerie tale eloquently penned by the late Graham Joyce, a young narrator on holiday in Candia (Greece) reconnects with a former colleague outside a bar only to learn what it means to be literally trapped in a town. If West Nile and Zika weren't bad enough, Nicholas Royle's "Mbo" will give you yet another reason to be wary of mosquitoes. Lastly, "Something Better Than Death" by Australian writer Lucy Sussex is a modern retelling and amusing analysis of the Grimm fairy tale about The Musicians of Bremen. Many of the unspooled yarns comprising Tails of Wonder and

Imagination are haunting, bleak, jarring, and at times unpleasant; still, this collection isn't without its duds. In Michael Bishop's "Life Regarded as a Jigsaw Puzzle of Highly Lustrous Cats", written in second-person, we're invited to consider the level of responsibility we concede for maintaining relationships. Feline style is redefined in Peter S. Beagle's gentle allegory, "Gordon, the Self-Made Cat", wherein a mouse with no desire to play the traditional role of bait attends cat school and earns the respect of his fellow cat peers. Consequences reign for many—whether it's the rather obvious result of rescuing a genetically cloned sabertooth tiger in Mary A. Turzillo's "Pride", of not letting your girlfriend down easily in Reggie Oliver's "Puss-Cat", or the less obvious consequence of owning a priceless glass sculpture that's been imbued with madness in Nancy Etchemendy's "Cat in Glass". Most of Datlow's selections possess supernatural undertones, which is fitting since cats have long been endowed with a sense of mysticism. Shape-shifting, for instance, is a recurring motif in this volume featuring stories of otherworldly beings that morph between animal and human not always of their own free will, that are transformed as a result of a curse or enchantment, or that are both human and animal yet wholly neither. For example, in Lucius Shepard's "The Jaguar Hunter", a disenfranchised Honduran man reluctantly agrees to hunt a notorious man-killing jaguar in order to settle a debt; but when he encounters a mysterious woman whom he perceives to be a soul mate, he soon realizes that she and the black jaguar are one and the same. In a rare, uncollected short story by Stephen King titled "The Night of the Tiger", wherein a circus roustabout finds himself caught in the middle of a mysterious feud between a pair of big-cat trainers, King insinuates real animals into the texture of the macabre. John Kessel's "Every Angel Is Terrifying", a sequel of sorts to Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find", is a realistic tale of escaped murderers but with a mildly fantastic twist, stands on its own as a brilliant meditation on botched redemption. The final story, "The Puma" by Theodora Goss, is a fascinating spin on H.G. Wells' classic *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Compelling and well-wrought, the narrative flows smoothly from a conversation between Edward Pendrick and the now-civilized Puma-Woman amidst an English garden to the foregone savagery of men and beasts on the island, and back again. Alive with sensory detail, riveting tension, and social commentary, this derivative tale is thought-provoking in its own right as well as a fitting homage to one of Wells' timeless masterpieces. Goss' seamless prose captures a deeper meaning of the original story that hints at our own bleak future. As can be expected from any anthology of this size, not all of the stories are winners and some are markedly more engrossing

and well-written than others. Despite the uneven quality of the stories, Datlow succeeds in bringing together a vibrant array of stories, but *Tails of Wonder and Imagination* isn't meant to be consumed in one sitting. Reading this book in one go would be too disjointed and overwhelming—but the contents are worth dipping into here and there, perhaps in between helpings of other books (this reviewer took three months to finish the book and in that time had read 6 or 7 books). The presented tales are strong and varied enough in genre, setting, and writing style to keep this 460-page tome from feeling one-dimensional; and there's something in here for everyone, even if you don't consider yourself a cat-person. •

Wish I had read the reviews before I started the book. Excellent writing but some of the most twisted vile treatment of cats and frankly, humans as well. This stuff will give me nightmares for weeks.

Cats tales in fantasy and sci fi are thin so to find a delightful collection like this made me curl up and purr with delight! From fanciful retellings of fairy tales, imagined thoughts of famous cats, classics retold or futuristic stories I enjoyed them all and so will you. From haunting to sweet these tales leave a mark on the psyche like no other. Datlow out did herself again.

Loved this compilation. Some made me cry, some made me shiver & look over my shoulder. Love my cats & these also!

A lovely and fun book. Surprisingly good for a very specific story line. I was not disappointed.

This is a collection of cat stories - some better than others. I enjoyed most of them.

Excellent selection of some interesting and bizarre stories. Very Enjoyable.

Really good collection of short stories about cats of all kinds.

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