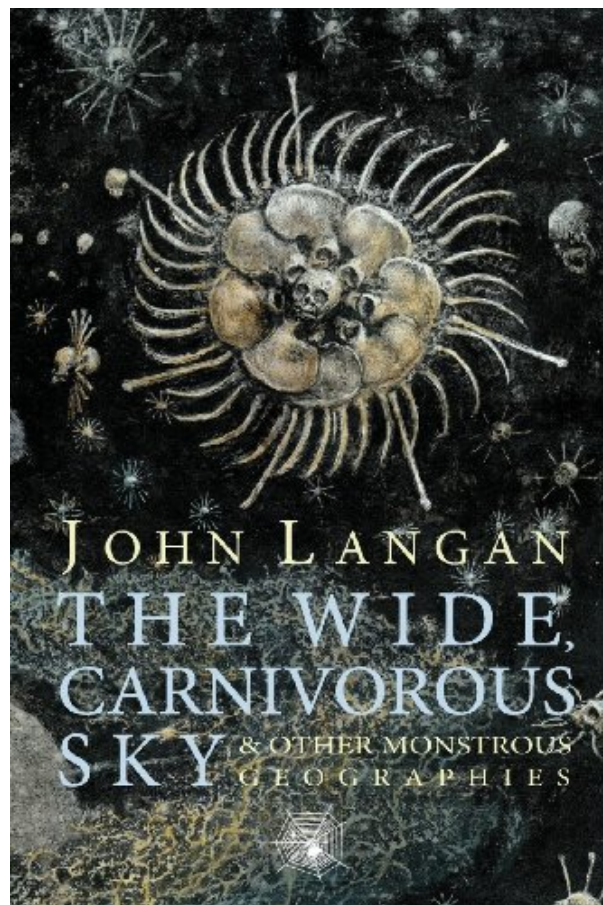
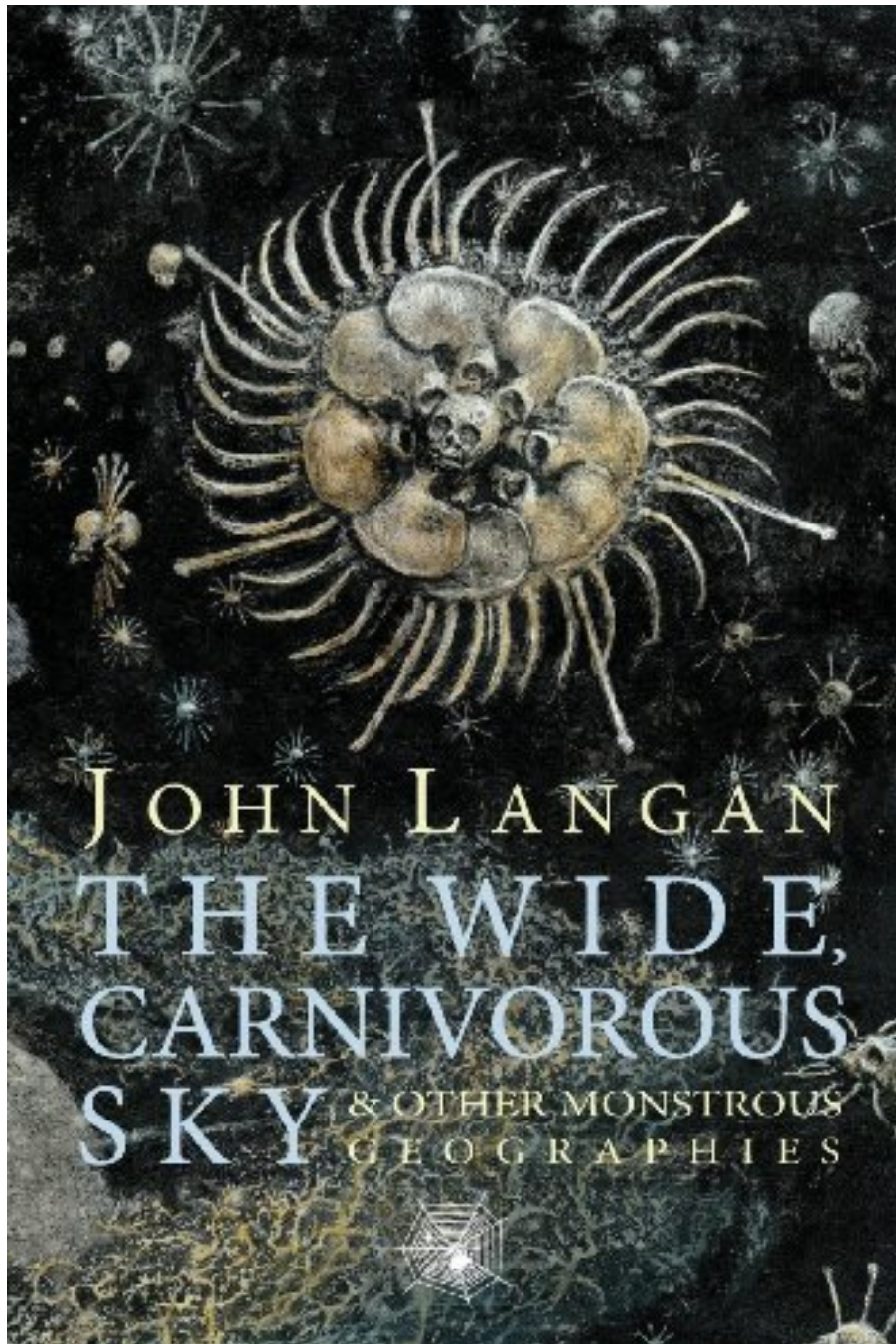


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## **About the Author**

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John Langan has, in the last few years, established himself as one of the leading voices in contemporary horror literature. Gifted with a supple and mellifluous prose style, an imagination that can conjure up clutching terrors with seeming effortless, and a thorough knowledge of the rich heritage of weird fiction, Langan has already garnered his share of accolades. This new collection of nine substantial stories includes such masterworks as “Technicolor,” an ingenious riff on Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death”; “How the Day Runs Down,” a gripping tale of the undead; and “The Shallows,” a powerful tale of the Cthulhu Mythos. The capstone to the collection is a previously unpublished novella of supernatural terror, “Mother of Stone.” With an introduction by Jeffrey Ford and an afterword by Laird Barron.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent collection offering a variety of horrors.

By Justin Steele

John Langan's name has been in numerous "year's best" horror anthologies, and for good reason. The man can write, and the more he writes the better he gets. Langan's previous collection, *Mr. Gaunt and Other Uneasy Encounters*, was an astounding set of stories. I've yet to read his novel, *House of Windows*, although I've heard nothing but good things about it.

*The Wide, Carnivorous Sky and Other Monstrous Geographies* has much to offer horror fans of all kinds. Langan enjoys playing with familiar horror tropes, but in a totally unfamiliar way. He is a stylist, and his stories are all fresh and unique.

The collections open with a vignette, Kids, a story from the collection Jack Haringa Must Die! For unfamiliar readers, Jack Haringa is a member of the Board of Advisers for the Shirley Jackson Awards. The collection featured almost thirty short pieces of flash fiction in which Jack Haringa met his untimely doom. Langan's contribution is a short take featuring child zombies. It's really short, and fun, but the weakest of all the stories.

How the Day Runs Down serves as a prime example of Langan's stylistic storytelling. This zombie tale reads like a play, and features a stage manager in a mysterious theater talking about the zombie outbreak. The manager's monologues are broken by appearances of other characters, who tell their own personal stories. This story has a good amount of humor, although at times it tugs at the emotions.

I first read Technicolor in one of Ellen Datlow's Best Horror of the Year anthologies, although it first appeared in her Poe anthology. This story is a brilliant look at one of Poe's famous tales, The Masque of the Red Death. The narrative once again stands out, as the entire story is told in the voice of a professor as he examines Poe's story and the meaning behind it.

The title story, The Wide, Carnivorous Sky, is one of the best vampire tales I've ever read and serves as a perfect example of the way Langan plays with familiar horror tropes. Vampires are typically nocturnal creatures, who spend the daytime sleeping in underground coffins. But Langan's "vampire" instead spends it's days hunting for prey and it's nights resting in a floating "coffin". In the story notes Langan said that as opposed to having his horror in a smaller, claustrophobic setting he wanted to instead embrace the open, and it doing so creates a true "bird (bat) of prey". Add to the mix some army veterans dealing with PTSD and the result is a truly brilliant story.

City of the Dog is another story I first read in one of Datlow's best-of anthologies, and another favorite of mine. Drawing from his own personal experiences, Langan takes readers to an early 90's Albany. The narrator is stuck in a most awkward living situation, with a relationship that is falling apart. Things only get worse when the things living under the city get involved. A great story, fans of Lovecraft's ghouls will have a good time with this one.

The Shallows first appeared in the anthology Cthulhu's Reign. This book's concept was that all the stories would take place AFTER the stars were right and Cthulhu and the old ones rise. Lovecraftians will know what I'm talking about. The Shallows is a stand out story in that anthology. Langan's approach wasn't as grandiose as some of the others in the book, as he decided to take a look at a rather mundane day in the life of a simple, middle-aged man. The man goes about his daily activities, talking to a crab creature that follows him around like a pet. The bizarre has become commonplace for this fellow, although it's creepy enough for readers. The story's true strength lies in the relationship of the father and his son, and is just as much about what it's like for a father when his son becomes independent. Another excellent story.

Langan's approach to the werewolf in The Revel also succeeds as an attempt to break down horror film. Another stylistic approach, the story reads as meta-fiction, and even breaks the fourth wall. One would think it would be difficult to write a piece of fiction that manages to foster terror in the reader while reading like a detached film study, but Langan more than succeeds. Another story I have to mark as a favorite.

June, 1987. Hitchhiking. Mr. Norris. is a short story much in the same spirit as the earlier kids. This time the target is horror author Laird Barron, who was subject to a literary "roast" when several authors of the weird posted stories from "The Secret Life of Laird Barron" to their blogs. While several of the stories were strictly humorous, Langan's manages to be quite dark as well. The story's plot deals with the danger of hitchhiking, while evoking darker, more ancient horrors.

The collection ends with an original story, which is also my overall favorite, the novella *Mother of Stone*. The story is penned in the risky second-person, a style of narrative which is hard to make work. This time, however, it does work, creating a slight distance that correlates with the protagonists general detachment. The story itself is a series of interviews conducted with several people in a small town pertaining to a mysterious statue unearthed and put on a display at a local Inn, and the bizarre and fatal incidents that followed. The story has some frightening imagery, and so perfectly evokes dread in the reader. I found myself thoroughly creeped out and disturbed, and I mean that as a compliment.

Langan's second collection is, as a whole, astounding. The variety of subject matter paired with his varied stylistic approaches makes for a horror collection that satisfies on many levels. An excellent collection, I highly recommend it to any fan of horror.

Originally appeared on my blog, *The Arkham Digest*.

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

A Tour of Monstrous Geographies

By Orrin Grey

John Langan is one of my favorite living writers. There are people whose writing I love, and people who write about things that I love, in ways that I love. Then there are people who combine all of that. John's one of that latter group.

His first collection and his novel were both pretty great, but it's in the stories that comprise *The Wide Carnivorous Sky & Other Monsterous Geographies* (look at that subtitle, how could I not love this book?) that his full promise begins to really deliver. I'd read about half this book's contents before, in various places, but I gladly read those stories again, and devoured the new ones, and then as soon as I was finished went to reach immediately for his next collection, only to realize with grim sadness that it's probably a year or two away, still.

My favorite of these stories is probably still "Technicolor," which I've loved since I first read it in Ellen Datlow's Poe anthology, but it's got some serious competition from Langan's masterful deconstruction of the werewolf story "The Revel" and the original novella that closes the book, "Mother of Stone," a second-person exorcism tale that kept me up past my bedtime.

The book is rounded out by what is essentially a bonus new story by Laird Barron, and some extensive author notes from John. As a devotee of author notes myself, I can say that John's are always worth the price of admission, and are some of the only ones around that are ever anywhere near as extensive as I would always like them to be.

Now that I'm done reading, I've got to go and hide this book from myself so that it doesn't upset my to-read list once more so I can read it again.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Smart, literary horror worth savoring

By Mr. Anthrope

I loved this book. Lots of lengthy, meaty stories with exquisite sentences and paragraphs that stopped me in my tracks.

I had only read one story before ("The Shallows" in Ross Lockhart's *BOOK OF CTHULHU*) and while happy to read it again, it was a couple of other stories that really knocked my on my ass. "Technicolor" is an ingenious riff on/response to Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," and originally appeared in Ellen

Datlow's anthology of Poe-inspired stories. The final story is original to this collection, and "Mother of Stone" is worth the price of the book by itself.

The two short pieces, "Kids" and "June 1987. Hitchhiking. Mr. Norris" seemed a little incongruous with the rest of the book, but after reading the story notes, they make more stylistic sense. And yes, there are detailed story notes at the end of the book, something I always enjoy reading.

There are four other stories in here, and all of them are well worth reading, slowly. Many of these tales were selected for year's-best anthologies, and that seems right.

Jeffrey Ford provides a short but informative introduction, Laird Barron contributes a fictional (?) afterward, and the remarkable Santiago Caruso created the beautifully macabre cover art. There is pretty much nothing not to like about this book.

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