

Nobody... Can Convince Me That This Anthology Works

By Robert Butterfield

Atlas, Kelly Gunter, ed. *Nobody*. Ward Hill, MA: Darkhart Press, 2006. 247 p.

I have recently had occasion to review a book by a well-known and respected horror author, and I will admit, I did not give the novel a favorable review. I found it lacking in many respects, and not up to the quality of this writer's previous work. But, after reading *Nobody*, a new dark-fiction anthology by the "Essex Writer's Guild," I have come to realize that even the lesser writing of a professional writer will in most cases outpace the most earnest efforts of amateur writers, particularly if the editorial process is lacking.

In the introduction to this book, readers are informed that the group is the brainchild of one Judith Gagnon, who fostered meetings where members could "bring something to read or share, and present it without fear of sharp criticism or censorship." I applaud this process. However, now the group has sent out a commercial release, and I am tasked with reviewing it.

I give them an "A" for effort. There are some truly bright moments in this collection, but in most cases, even these instances of inspired writing do not sustain the stories to their conclusion. The anthology presents a hodge-podge of disparate styles, which, if the writing were truly consistent, would lend variety to the book. In this case, it makes reading from the front cover to the final page of the collection a rather formidable task. While some of the authors included have refined their craft to an extent, others simply leave a lot—and I mean a lot—to be desired. I will not cite particular stories for merit, because then I would have to castigate others, and despite my frustration at having to get through *Nobody*, I do not feel that the less capable authors (who are not, obviously, fulltime professionals) deserve that fate.

I will, however, point out that the editing, as I have stated, is a problem. In short, some editorial decisions sets a general tone for the book with which I am uncomfortable. For example, when I look at the author biographies, I do not wish to be informed that someone is "the Susan Lucci of e-publishing," or that another author wrote "*Mr. Toad and Mr. Frog Go to the Store*" in second grade. I do not care that another author creates jewelry and artwork for her website. And I do not need constant reminders of how "highly talented" the members of the guild are.

I must also confess that even some of the better writing presented here does not conform to my particular sense of what is enjoyable in a piece of fiction. For one thing, supernatural bodice ripper romances do not particularly appeal to me, and neither does R.L. Stine type young adult horror fiction. I like some dark science fiction on occasion, but I found that I was unable to really get into anything presented here. There are,

perhaps, other potential readers who would find a great deal of the material in *Nobody* enjoyable. While I cannot wholeheartedly recommend the book, I hope that it can find a suitable audience.

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