

LOCUS LOOKS AT BOOKS: GABINO IGLESIAS

I Know a Place, Nat Cassidy (Shortwave Publishing 979-8-89732-016-5, \$21.99, 512pp, tp) May 2026. Cover by Alan Lastufka.

Sauúti Terrors, Eugen Bacon, Cheryl Ntumi & Stephen Embleton, eds. (Flame Tree Collections 978-1-83562-640-5, \$26.99, 416pp, hc) March 2026. Cover by Akintoba Kalejaye.

I Was Alive Here Once: Ghost Stories, Sarah Coolidge, ed. (Two Lines Press 978-1-94964-193-6, \$17, 216pp, tp) March 2026. Cover by Crisis.

Nat Cassidy's **I Know a Place: Rest Stop and Other Dark Detours**, the author's first collection, brings together **Rest Stop**, a novella also published by Shortwave Publishing a couple of years ago (and which I reviewed for *Locus*), and 11 other horror stories to deliver a wildly entertaining showcase of Cassidy's storytelling chops. The dozen stories here, along with the intro and the author's notes at the end, add up to more than 500 pages, so discussing every tale would be impossible, but some deserve a moment in the spotlight.

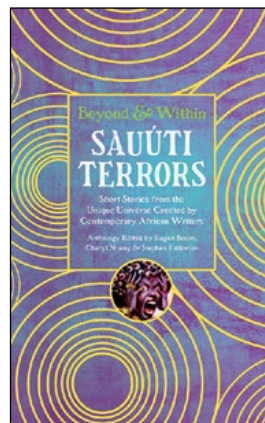
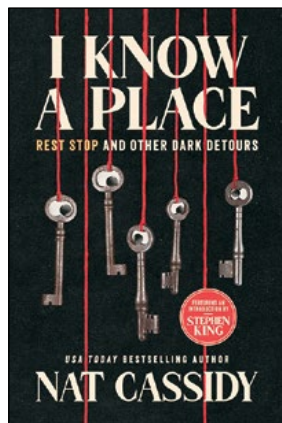
"Rest Stop" kicks things off here (after a nice introduction from the legendary Stephen King). The novella follows Abe, a young vocalist and bass player, who stops at a gas station to use the bathroom and soon finds himself trapped in the bathroom while nightmare after nightmare comes his way, courtesy of a serial killer wearing a mask covered in googly eyes who has already killed everyone else in the vicinity and then decorated the place with their innards. I'll stop there, but there's much more to this one, including an exploration of Abe's tense relationships with his grandmother and the way it has affected him, a failed romance threatening to pull friends apart, and brief discussions about being Jewish. Taken together, the elements of this story make it a perfect place to start the collection.

"Meet-Cute #1: The Unluckiest Girl" and "Meet-Cute #2: The Scariest Thing" are spiritual siblings; short romance stories, but Nat Cassidy style, which means darkness, unpleasant surprises, and a cameo from of the most (in)famous serial killers of all time.

"Generation" has a touch of dark SF at its heart and proves Cassidy can shock you by revealing all the gory details in some stories but also by holding back crucial things readers want to know. A tense tale about a regular couple in a regular, boring office having a very unregular conversation about something you definitely will want to know more about. Or maybe not.

"The Art of What You Want" is another story of psychological horror in which Cassidy dips his foot up to the ankle in romance – "I just want you. I just want you. I just want you" – but does so using horror and grief to ruin everything in the best way possible.

The crown jewel here is "Run for Your Life." The tale – again full of music; something that makes it even better for us horror lovers who are also musicians – follows a very talented man who grows up obsessed with, and playing nothing but, The Beatles. When he finds a way to travel in time after a gig, he goes straight to where history took place and puts himself in the place of The Beatles,



using their own material to achieve immense, worldwide success just like the Fab Four would have. This is a story about time-traveling, jealousy, and murder, but it's also a brilliant piece of fiction that discusses originality, merit, the power of ideas, and the importance of an artist's voice in their work. Yeah, this is a story about AI, and a great one at that.

I could go on and on – "Laughlines" is creepy, playful (it does something cool with an emoji), and one of those rare stories where reading a bunch of emails actually works; "Nice" shows that Christmas horror can work at any time – but this is already long, so I won't. Cassidy is one of the most entertaining contemporary horror authors, and this is one hell of an impressive, diverse collection. Go read it.

When I'm not writing novels, reading, or teaching, I'm editing, and that includes editing a few anthologies. This means I understand how hard it is to find a group of stories from very different authors that fit well together and flow nicely when read one after the other. Oh, and add the challenge that the narratives take place in a shared universe, and then there is a monumental task to ensure that there's cohesion to the whole thing. When it comes to **Sauúti Terrors: Short Stories from the Unique Universe Created by Contemporary African Writers**, editors Eugen Bacon, Cheryl Ntumi, and Stephen Embleton managed to do all of that while also putting together a sampler of what some of the best contemporary African and African diaspora authors have to offer.

Sauúti Terrors is part of the Sauútiiverse, a shared world created by a group of African writers and creators, that extends to a novel, short fiction, and now two anthologies. **Sauúti Terrors** is a follow up to **Mothersound: The Sauútiiverse Anthology**, published in 2023. However, readers don't need to read that one to enjoy this one. The clarity is great: every story both contains and is preceded by a short intro that provides context, and there is a glossary at the end of the book. The stories all take place in the Sauútiiverse, sharing its atmosphere, known history, and magic system, though they transpire in different places and feature different characters, voices, practices, challenges, or rituals, which makes this an immersive, enjoyable read.

With 18 stories and poems full of action, history, sound, and magic, there is a lot going on here, so I'll stick to some favorites. Xan van Rooyen's

"Kyi'yaji" delves deep into the horror of sound, which is one of the basic elements of this universe. The story has the classic found-footage vibes I love (found audio, in this case), and doesn't shy away from brutality. Also, it has some timely commentary about purging "the world of lifeless art, of imitation sound, of social artifice, of conformity, of obedience" that took the tale to the next level.

Cheryl S. Ntumi's "Where Daylight Bows to Darkness," another story full of dangerous sound, explores faith in a very different context but in ways that feel universal. It also contains some truly beautiful writing.

Chaos, magic, and horror collide in a military base in Kofi Nyameye's "The Unspoken." Besides being very entertaining, this is one of those stories that offers something new while also giving readers big looks at how the Mothersound works and how it created the universe. "The science is complicated," says Nyameye, but readers won't care because the science fiction is gripping.

In Shingai Njeri Kagunda's "The Wound Asks for Air," the author explores collective trauma and the power of memory while also expanding on the Sauúti mythology and history. It's also a story that contains some of the most interesting names in the anthology and a very clear invitation to remember that bad things can happen when we let ourselves forget the past.

I find it hard to review poetry in this context, but I think including some here worked really well. Also, having legends like Linda D. Addison next to newer voices I love like Jamal Hodge's next to new voices (for me!) like Ishola Abdulwasii Ayodele is not only a testament to the editors' taste but also a recognition that a universe where sound and rhythm are at the center of everything, not including poetry simply wouldn't work.

Sauúti Terrors is a great addition to what I hope is the growing Sauúti universe. A sampler of great talent and celebration of African and African diaspora talent, this anthology is one more reason readers should open their ears and listen to the Mothersound.

I Was Alive Here Once: Ghost Stories is the latest from Two Lines Press's Calico Series, which focuses on translated work from across the world. In this edition, authors from countries like Japan, Tanzania, Korea, Yemen, Iceland, and Poland, to name a few, offer a different, culture-focused approach to the ghost story.

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