



Yellow Cake

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It is a rare pleasure to find a set of short stories aimed at young adults, particularly all from one author, and Margo Lanagan's collection of previously published short stories is bursting at the seams with the fantastical.

Like much of Lanagan's other work, many of these stories are quite dark, but otherwise they are clear and distinct from one another, as Lanagan builds worlds or inserts fantasy into the every day. This darkness, and the language used, does mean that this collection wavers on the line between young adult and adult, but mature teenagers will devour these stories.

As always in collections, the quality of the stories can vary, particularly in this case where the tales were written for different publications before being collated here. From the Biblical escape from Egypt told through the viewpoint of one particular family in **Night of the Firstlings**, to children surviving in a war zone in **Heads** and the daughter of Charon taking up the mantle in **Ferryman**, each story catapults the reader into a new set of circumstances. Particularly enjoyable are **The Golden Shroud**, in which Rapunzel's lover traces her through the sentience of her discarded hair, and **An Honest Day's Work** where the protagonist joins the rest of his village helping dismember the gigantic beast that feeds the population, despite the reader never really knowing exactly what the beast is.

This is a strength but also weakness, in places, of Lanagan's writing. Rarely does one of her stories give the reader all of the information they need, allowing for speculation and provoking the imagination. Mostly this is a delight as the reader takes more control of their conclusions, but occasionally it can be a little wearing. Overall though, this is a refreshing collection of tales.

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