

TRUE **Review**

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Losing That Sense of Center

Not so long ago I read in one of the daily papers that Wal-Mart will no longer prosecute those who steal less than \$10 worth of merchandise from their stores. Apparently, the cost of prosecuting, along with gas and AAA membership, has gone skyward, so instead of doing the moral thing, they are “cost accounting” and letting the little burglars go.

Why do I find this so strange?

You know, it's funny, but I was examining my resume the other day and discovered some interesting things about losing our center. We're not only losing our center, we're losing our gravity AND our history.

While many of the SF editors today are dealing with an increasingly ignorant generation of younger readers, who have no sense of the classics, who think Clarke, that denizen of Far Future Time, is nothing but a candy bar. Who think that Ellison is a name that somehow belongs with Ralph Waldo. Who thinks Asimov – well, they wonder, who the hell is Asimov?

Not only our SF history is being lost to Manga and comix and video games based on characters that were created by pre-video game era authors of somewhere back in the lost and lonely 1960s or '70s, but our actual history – the one we deal with everyday – is starting to perish.

I kid you not, I will give you a brief

list from my own resume which I update from time to time and show you how businesses have been lost, literally.

My first real job was at Wenger's Restaurant, when I was a teenager, about 32 years ago. Wenger's Restaurant in New Holland, Pa., no longer exists, because it was replaced by Joey's Restaurant, which is now the New Holland Family Restaurant.

My second real job was at Erb's Supermarket, across the street from Joey's/New Holland Family Restaurant. That became a Weis Supermarket. Now it is a discount restaurant named Amelia's.

I worked for a time while I was in college at Science Press in Ephrata. Which is now Cadmus. I don't know how many owners it has had since.

I began my career in 1982 at what was then the Chilton Company in Radnor, Pa., working for Electronic Component News (ECN). It was then owned by ABC Publishing, who sold it a few times, once to Cahners. Now Chilton resides as Cengage Learning in Clifton Park, N.Y. As for ECN? Still published by Advantage Business Media, Rockaway, N.J.

I moved from there to Chilton's Automotive Industries (AI). Where is AI now? It's published by Automotive Industries Ltd., Versailles, Ky.

From there, I worked for a Navy contractor in Warminster, Pa., known as

SEMCOR. That company no longer exists.

Soon after I joined Lukens Steel in Coatesville, Pa., which was sold to Bethlehem Steel and which, subsequently, went bankrupt.

For quite some time, about 16 and a half years, I worked for Lancaster Farming Newspaper as editor, owned by Steinman Enterprises, and which continues to operate as such.

Who can keep track of the changes? Who can keep the history of SF vibrant and in the minds of today's readers, who are reading derivatives of derivatives in most of the stuff being published?

As for Wal-Mart, there will come a time when nobody under the age of 50 will remember a country hardware store (like Kauffman's in my home town) or the bike shop (we had one on Jackson Street) or the Mom and Pop grocery store (Eby's in our town). They will think there was always Wal-Mart. Always.

As long as publishing houses keep the classic works out there, maybe that center will stay centered . . . maybe then SF history, and our own, will shine brightly.

Andrew Andrews
Publisher

This Ain't The Internet

Book Reviews
By Andrew Andrews

THE WINDS OF MARBLE ARCH AND OTHER STORIES, by Connie Willis. Subterranean Press, 2007, 700 pp., \$40.00. ISBN 978-1-59606-110-1

A reviewer can be affected, at the time of the review, by many things. Could be something like the weather. That always affects me. Could be simply that I get tired of the typical SF-nal "ideas" story – you know, the ones where the Hugo-winning editors insist that the greatest SF short fiction is ripe and bursting with "ideas," even though the language is dense, the characters are even more dense, and the care I have for anything going on in the story, as a reader, is categorically nonexistent.

So it becomes refreshing to stumble upon WINDS OF MARBLE ARCH, and it was so good to many of you that, early this year, the publisher came out with the second edition, of which I am a proud

owner:

At heart, it's easy to recognize that Willis is a tourist, loves to travel, and immerses characters in situations in which they must – well, navigate. Whether it is backward and forward through a time portal in DOOMSDAY BOOK or in a death-state to the year of the Titanic sinking in PASSAGE, her characters must travel – and work out the emotional logistics of such in the story. In the title story to the collection, tourists battle transportation logistics when they use the London Underground and find themselves exposed to strange winds and sounds. Speculation is that the winds and sounds could be some kind of "inversion layer" created by the air raids of World War II. Could the winds and sounds also be the ghosts of those who died in the horrendous Blitz?

"Just Like The Ones We Used To Know" shows the horror of something as simple as snow. In this case, on Christmas Eve, it begins to snow everywhere,

including places that had never seen snow before. Has global warming exacted some terrible vengeance? Is the massive, global-spanning snow some kind of a "discontinuity" that scientists had predicted?

In "Nonstop to Portales," a visitor on a career interview junket travels with a bunch of very strange tourists on a bus to the revered home of an SF Grand Master – a science fiction writer who has made the town famous. Could these instead be no ordinary tourists but travelers from a future envisioned by the Master himself?

With "Inn," a church Christmas play is the centerpiece for the question – how, exactly, did Mary and Joseph make it to Bethlehem? Could they have instead experienced a "detour" in time, as world churchgoers in 2,000 years ahead of them expertly pointed the way?

In "Samaritan," Esau, resident of the Cheyenne Mountain Primate Research

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Facility, adept in American Sign Language, old and mature, student of the Bible, simply wants to be baptized for his belief and dedication to God. Trouble is, a Presbyterian minister – Reverend Hoyt – must make that decision, about baptizing an ape. Who – or what – constitutes a child of God?

In “Jack,” the character Jack Settle is a “body snifter” in World War II England. He works marvels, able to find bodies, dead or alive, in the rubble after the Blitz. Some of his co-workers wonder: who, or what, exactly, is he?

In “Service for the Burial of the Dead,” a loved one lost in a river mishap returns as a ghost to comment on his own funeral, his life, and the ones he is leaving. Not to mention frightening and bewildering his own true love.

“The Soul Selects Her Own Society” is a documented account of how Emily Dickinson thwarted the much-ballyhooed Mars invasion envisioned by H.G. Wells.

In “Chance,” Elizabeth returns, graduate-student style, with her tenure-seeking husband, on a job quest with her alma mater college. She realizes, looking back, the overtures made long ago, in her early life, by a man named “Tupper,” and what part he played in her fate. The question begs: like the worm after a rain, splashed and left to drown, could a single simple action of placing it on the grass save its life? Do our actions – maybe even inactions – place us in jeopardy of being happy?

In “Epiphany,” a Pennsylvania Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Mel Abrams, has an epiphany – a vision of a Second Coming. Like any true believer, Abrams heads West on the interstate, where he picks up a traveling carnival worker hitchhiker who, in the story anyway, is like one of the Magi. Could the carnival be like the Star of Bethlehem – leading the way, in its own way, for all believers?

SOMETHING MAGIC THIS WAY COMES, ed. by Martin H. Greenberg and Sarah A. Hoyt. DAW, 2008, 311 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 13: 978-

0-7564-0472-7

I suppose the believers of astrology, UFO-logy, the NFL draft pick, President Bush, and the rest can be assured: despite our technology, magic not only still exists, but prevails.

(Isn't it magical the way Philadelphia, the country's fourth or fifth largest city, depending on your point of view, has not had a championship team since 1983? That's the only “magic” I believe in, because, you know, as a Philly fan, that's downright magical – maybe in a dark way . . .)

When I come to an anthology, I am looking for good storytelling, strong characters, a sense of conviction on the part of the writer . . . whether it's about unicorns, dragons, wizards, spells, etc. I don't care.

Well, maybe I do about the dragons and wizards and all that. . . .

I enjoyed these tales the most:

“The Thing In the Woods” by Harry Turtledove. Young imagination prevails when best friends Tim and Geoffrey play together, despite the howling of what they believe to be dark wolves in the forest. Tim's mother is there to assure her son the sound is just a coyote. Even a dark prank by Geoffrey doesn't dispel the strange mysteries of the woods.

“Lighthouse Surfer” by Daniel M. Hoyt. Tourists to the Oregon Coast, Sea Cove, from the OTHER coast, North Carolina, learn to keep their eye on the ocean, because a tsunami is about to hit, and when it does, their quick action can save their lives.

“Something Virtual This Way Comes” by Laura Resnick. In this story, an appliance gremlin becomes the voice in an elevator, talking to and trapping the main character, whom the gremlin becomes obsessed with. Those appliance gremlins can pervade any electronic device, even a GPS system.

“Tears of Gold” by Paul Crilley. This story examines the ways a character deals with the slow death of a loved one and how to transcend the despair.

“Houdini's Mirror” by Russell Davis.

A man slowly sinking into old age, and eventual death, was once a great magician. But even his best magic may not have the power to cheat death.

“Raining the Wild Hunt” by Kate Paulk. Megan, recently escaped from an abusive relationship, comes across a man escaped from a hunt. She uses all her self-defense skills to protect him and her from the dangers only a mythological realm can bring.

“Firebird and Shadow” by Darwin A. Garrison. Missy is on the run – fleeing back to her grandmother, Gram, for safety – and finding out she has supernatural powers. At only 12 years old, where can she learn to control and refine those powers?

BEST FANTASTIC EROTICA, Vol. 1, ed. by Cecilia Tan. Circlet Press, 2007, 318 pp., \$19.95. ISBN-13: 978-885865-60-1

Tan's plans for her fans: perhaps more volumes in a very eclectic selection. I enjoyed the following from this original anthology:

“Music From My Bones” by Anya Levin. A woman who becomes a performance artist for the rich and decadent finds herself among friends and lovers, discovering a part of her own sensuality that rewards.

“Capture, Courting, and Copulation: Contemporary Human Mating Rituals and the Etiology of Human Aggression” by Carolyn and Steve Vakesh. Human mating rituals are interesting – to dragons, anyway.

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"Opening the Veins of Jade" by Renee M. Charles. A tattoo artist will render her most unusual work on a group of sexual vampires.

WIZARDS, INC., ed. by Martin H. Greenberg and Loren L. Coleman. DAW, 2007, 311 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 13: 978-0-7564-0439-0

So this collection looks at potential CAREERS for the magically inclined. If you had powers, what would you DO with them?

One story stood out: "KidPro" by Laura Anne Gilman. You get to join the corporate world a lot earlier in this tale, and along with it comes the privileges and perks, along with the feeling of utter hopelessness, that even the "big guys" feel.

WASTELANDS: Stories of the Apocalypse, ed. by John Joseph Adams. Night Shade Books, 2008, 333 pp., \$15.95. ISBN 978-1-59780-105-8

The assistant editor at the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction put together some of his favorites in this anthology. I enjoyed two tales the most, among others that many would be familiar with in the field, ones which I have read with interest, but these are surprisingly good:

"And the Deep Blue Sea" by Elizabeth Bear. Angharad Crowther, Harrie for short, is on a medical run in her Connie, a specially equipped Kawasaki motorcycle, through the mountains and wastelands of a post-nuke Colorado to deliver

a medical device with special bio material. She meets up with an old nemesis - who is either part of the voyage or is creating a reality in order to persuade her to turn her cargo over to him.

"Speech Sounds" by Octavia E. Butler. In this world where violence is the only means of communication, one woman learns to survive.

MANGA MANIA: OCCULT AND HORROR, by Christopher Hart. Watson-Guptill Publications, 2007, 144 pp., \$19.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-8230-1422-4

I was caught on page 31 with a description for "bad" characters: the ones with dark circles under their eyes. Wild hairstyles denote nefarious characters. Key female characteristics include large head, long neck, wide shoulders, small upper body length relative to lower body, and extra-long legs.

The book is profusely and colorfully illustrated.

GARDENING WITH HEIRLOOM SEEDS, by Lynn Coulter. University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 316 pp., price? ISBN 0-8078-5680-0

I discovered in this book that, until the 1800s, beets were known as blood turnips (p. 14). Some of the varieties of vegetables and flowers looked pretty good back then - which is why a revival is going on to bring back some of these heirlooms for gardeners throughout the U.S.

RECOMMENDED

FELLOWSHIP FANTASTIC, ed. by Martin H. Greenberg and Kerrie Hughes. DAW, 2008, 307 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 13: 978-0-7564-0465-9

THREE GOOD DEEDS, by Vivian Vande Velde. Magic Carpet/Harcourt Inc., 2005, 2007, 147 pp., \$5.95. ISBN 978-0-15-205455-7

ROLLING THUNDER, by John Varley. Ace, 2008, 344 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-441-01563-4

THE GARDEN OF EVE, by K.L. Going. Harcourt, 2007, 234 pp., \$17.00. ISBN 978-0-15-205986-6

GOD'S DEMON, by Wayne Barlowe. TOR, 2007, 352 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 13: 978-0-7653-0985-3

VICIOUS CIRCLE, by Mike Carey. Grand Central Publishing/Hachette Book Group USA, 2008, 437 pp., \$24.99. ISBN 13: 978-0-446-58031-1

ZAPPED, by Carol Higgins Clark. Scribner, 2008, 226 pp., \$24.00. ISBN 13: 978-1-4165-6215-3

HOST, by Faith Hunter. ROC, 2007, 340 pp., \$14.00. ISBN 978-0-451-46173-5

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