

# Hummingbird Don't Fly Away

In January this year, my son Kevin turned 20.

I think the favorite age for a boy has to be about 10 years old. That's when they are old enough to finally behave in public and walk without having to hold your hand, but young enough that they still listen to you and behave accordingly. As children, they look up to what you say and do. They believe in you. They trust you.

I don't know where that trust goes. Along about 13-14 or so, everything you seem to say and do, as parents, becomes almost meaningless to them. As parents, we're wrong, they say to us – we're just wrong in so many ways.

I've heard stories told where parents say to their children that they were "accidents."

Absolutely not so with Kevin.

His mother tried with great difficultly to conceive a child seven years before he was born. Kevin was very much planned and very much wanted.

When arrived in January 1988, Kevin was a big, strapping kid, 10 pounds 2 ounces. He should have been delivered C-section about 20 hours before he was naturally delivered. And hell hath no boundaries when you are a woman trying to give natural birth to a boy that big. (And about three weeks late, to boot.)

Kevin was a bright, energetic child, filled with lots of enthusiasm. I miss those years, from about 7 to 11 – when he believed in us, listened to us, trusted us. I would give anything to get that back.

I taught him how to play ball, swim, ride bike, cook, and lots of other things.

I would give just about anything to see him develop a career. That was part of our plan, too. We wanted to ensure his success – for all that we endured trying to bring him into the world and helping him through life.

It wasn't so long ago that the time came to make a decision: Kevin needs to go it alone. Time to snap the apron strings. Time for him to be on his own and take charge of his own life.

Kevin began his career as a reviewer with True Review with Issue 36 in January 1998, right before he turned 10. One of his reviews was of a book, THE BEST WAY TO PLAY, by Bill Cosby. In it, Kevin wrote, "BEST WAY TO PLAY teaches you don't have to have a video game to have fun." He also wrote that it "teaches you that it's better to have friends than to have video games." The story was about Little Bill and his friends who play Space Explorers instead of watching TV, and showing kids "more ways to play with each other."

He also reviewed TO MARKET, TO MARKET, by Anne Miranda, a "zany story about a lady who goes to the market to buy a fat pig."

Kev reviewed Bill Maynard's IN-CREDIBLE NET, about "Ned's time at school." There's a picture, Kev wrote, that appears next to Ned every time "he thinks about something." Kevin reviewed books until he was 13, the last being a review of ANIMORPHS, by K.A. Applegate.

Today, at 20, he particularly loves Harry Harrison's DEATHWORLD trilogy.

He does await "written in the tradition of" books by Harrison, but hasn't submitted a review.

Maybe when he has time, I hear from him.

Well, time passes.

I used to hear that phrase, "empty nest syndrome," when I was a kid, from my own mother, who used to talk about that all the time. Her two sisters had kids who were going on their own. Mom used to worry about that herself, since she gave everything to her children. Her children were the center and end-all, be-all of her life. When most of her kids went on their own, she suffered from that empty nest syndrome. Before Rick, the youngest of us all, left the house in 1986, Mom passed away.

So, going through my own empty nest syndrome feels strange in a way. I have come to accept the inevitable – that Kevin must "go it alone."

I've done most of what I could as a father to Kev. I hope I have provided a fighting chance for him to make it – but as a parent, you don't stop worrying about your child. You hope his judgment is good and that he makes the right decisions about taking care of himself, all the time.

So the other day I said goodbye to the "Gooch." He still comes over from time to time, mostly to work on our household computer, sometimes to make calls, almost always to grab a bite to eat. The nest, I suppose, is a comfort. It should be.

-- Andrew Andrews Publisher

# The Unfortunate Internet

# Book Reviews By Andrew Andrews

THE GARDEN OF LAST DAYS, by Andre Dubus III. W. W. Norton and Company, 2008, 537 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-393-04165-1

Even in the midst of prosperity, even during the best of times, at least in this tale told to us by Dubus, happiness can seem so elusive. And the point Dubus tries to make throughout GARDEN OF LAST DAYS doesn't come clear until the end, with the cat trying to catch its prey through a garden, when you realize, the search can forever be elusive, no matter how much we try to convince ourselves it isn't.

But wait, let's back up a bit. It was Stephen King who recommended this novel (by the author of HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG and BLUESMAN) with effusive praise in a recent edition of Entertainment Weekly Magazine. I read King only rarely these days but I love his column in EW. Stevie was so congratulatory that I thought, either Stevie has seen/written too much . . . or maybe he really has something here.

What's GARDEN about?

It's a story about April (who calls herself Spring), an exotic dancer at the Puma Club for Men in south Florida. April's babysitter, Jean, is in the hospital and can't watch April's daughter, Franny. So April brings Franny to the club. Of course, that's a disaster waiting to happen, because Franny wanders off and into the life of A.J., a heavy equipment operator who was bounced out of the club (in the process getting his hand broken). and who finds Franny wandering outside. Meanwhile, A.J. can't stand the thought of not being with his wife, Deena, and their son Cole, whom A.J. is not allowed to see (restraining order firmly in place). A.J. wonders, who the heck would bring their 3-year-old to a strip joint?

(At this point my logic meter took effect, thinking about the point SF critic Damon Knight once made about plotting. He said some books get written and everything happens in them because of the Idiot Plot – the story advances because characters are idiots. It still makes no

sense why A.J. wouldn't have simply taken the girl back inside and said, hey, did somebody lose a little girl? In a way, A.J. is made to act like he misses his own son so badly, maybe he can be pretend-Dad to the girl. I don't know; I feel the effects of Idiot Plot at work. . . .)

And A.J. is also plotting to make it look as if the hand was broken at the job site, thinking of the litigation money he would be able to lavish on little Cole and Deena. Meanwhile, he has to deal with the little girl.

Importantly, the story is also about the 911 Islamic terrorists, particularly Mansoor Bassam Al-Jizani, who also visits Puma that fateful night, paying big bucks to watch April dance. Or not so much dance as simply to counsel a man who, in his own mind entirely, thinks he is about to perform a Great Deed, thinking of the pure virgins waiting for him by the calming river as a result of the intentions of his gang of brothers, but who is drawn by Satan to the dreadful pleasures of the flesh, dealing with the difficulty of what



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he soon must do . . . and wondering about the rest of the infidels. At times, he is almost reasoning himself away from the performance of his duties as a potential Islamic martyr – all the while coming to grips that he is about to die, and for what?

Their stubborn, ill-drawn pursuit for happiness - April, who is stowing lots of money away to spend on a real-estate career and won't give into the big money she makes at the strip club; A.J., plotting for insurance money; Lonnie, club bouncer who finds himself falling in love with April, but whose affections she scorns; and Bassam and his co-horts, convinced of the act of violence they are about to perform, righteous and glorified, immersed in their beliefs, like the cat, following the only belief system it knows (CATCH THE LIZARD), destined to do so no matter what, throwing judgment to the wind, as if catching a lizard and mucking up the garden is actually the right thing to do . . . never once stepping back and thinking these things through. Never once doubting. Or if doubting, finding it too immersed in the momentum of the catch to stop what it's doing and let well enough alone.

A good novel? Fairly so, more so from the way Dubus makes no judgment about the "last days" leading up to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The day is a last one for so many, in so many ways.

MYSTERY DATE, ed. by Denise Little. DAW, 2008, 308 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 978-0-7564-0469-7

There's no end in sight for themed anthologies. MYSTERY DATE explores those common folk who think they are on a date gone bad, or good, with something from another planet, dimension, or whathave-you.

In "Subtle Interpretations" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, a beautiful and brilliant Faerie, serving as a multilingual translator, has come to face the fact that life in the post-World War II resistance is over. Like a soldier used to battle, the one-time high-level assassin has to come back from the war - and, the Faerie wonders, to what?

In "Choop" by Nancy Springer, a divorced woman's date from hell is not an experienced dancer but a dog-eating creature - and it takes her "dog skills" to deal with the date.

Some can be clever enough not to let a date take advantage of them, as evidenced in Janet Deaver-Pack's "You've Got Male." In "The Mansion of Ghoulish Delight," a theme park can go a little overboard sometimes. In Jean Rabe's "Anne of the One Gable," a woman's simple wish fulfillment is do draw a date from the dead. In this case, Clark Gable, of course.

Scott William Carter addresses the old standby of a stereo system that captures a soul, in "Motivational Speaker." In this, a man listens to the voice of a woman trapped in her comatose body. Is she for real, trying to find a way back? Or his he simply hallucinating?

And what about that first date? Could the guy be simply nice, or hiding darker intentions? Those kinds of questions are explored in "Dessert" by Rita Haag.

And is the woman of this one man's dreams too much to ask for, who has a great body, hates beans, and loves a good beer along with Hamburger Helper at a football game? Check out "Me and Beans and Great Big Melons" by Dean Wesley Smith.

FUTURE AMERICAS, ed. by John Helfers and Martin H. Greenberg. DAW, 2008, 312 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 978-0-7564-0508-3

What will America represent in the future? These tales, original to this anthology, explore what becomes of the the U.S.

# "A Souvenir to Remember" by Brendan DuBois. Armand, on his journey to Tomac, and its surrounding territory, Prez Thomas III, comes across a coin featuring a man he remembers from a large statue near a vast pool - a man by the name of Father Abram, a man who freed the slaves. This was back when slavery was illegal – and just think of how much the world had changed in the hundreds of years in the world's passing.

# "Better Guns" by Jean Rabe. In an alternative America where assassins from the South have taken out North leaders, and the capitol moves to Memphis, Tennessee, only the best guns can win the

war.

# "The Rotator" by Pamela Sargent. An embattled president, with an unpopular war, faces impeachment and possible jail time, until his techno-cronies find a way to "shift" him to an alternative universe in which the public withstands his shenanigans. However, there is one catch. He has to kill his alternate-universe counterpart to make the shift successful.

# "Family Photos" by S. Andrew Swann. A mother's concern for her son's safety, in the custody of her granddaughter, takes on cruel dimensions. This is a brutal story of an America that is quite readily already here.

# "The Last Actor" by Mike Resnick and Linda Donohue. This story examines a future Broadway in which The Great White Way is home not to the classics of stage as we know them, present-day, but as constant low-brain rehashes of the dreck America grew up with on generations of TV. Until one actor defines the trend and tries to set the tastes of America straight.

# "The Great Chain of Being" by Brian Stableford. Sarah Whitney, dying of cancer, decides to join the real of Human Forestry – essentially people who have opted to transfigure themselves into an ecological entity called a Human Tree. Carbon atoms and the "great chain of being" come heavily into play.

# "Switching Off the Lights" by Peter Crowther. In this Bradburyesque tale, the last family to leave earth on a rocket ship prepares for launch, to escape an Earth decimated by wormhole-like "funnels" that have destroyed a good deal of the planet. Where there's faith in mankind,

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and technology, and good old-fashioned pioneering spirit, there is hope.

THE DIMENSION NEXT DOOR, ed. by Martin H. Greenberg and Kerrie Hughes. DAW, 2008, 291 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 978-0-7564-0509-0

The subtitle of DIMENSION should be, simply, "portals to other worlds." This collection represents a few stories I find interesting:

# "Shadows In the Mirrors" by Bradley P. Beaulieu. Julie believes, in her heart, that she has a daughter, Adelaide, who was abducted. Just like in the Jodie Foster movie, no one remembers her daughter. There is no record of Julie having a daughter. But Julie is certain she does - and her fears are confirmed the day she sees her daughter's ashen face in a street artist's rendering. The artist, Kane Reynolds, uses the ashes of the deceased in his charcoal drawings, or so it is rumored. And he draws children lots of them. Is Kane an abductor? Or is there something in his work that is crucial to the children's mysterious disappearance and perhaps their eventual fate?

# "God Pays" by Paul Genesse. Antonina Maria Carreno, professor of archeology at the Mesoamerican Studies Department at Vanderbilt University, accompanies a dig near an abandoned city, Lamonai, Mexico, on the eve of the Dec. 21, 2012 winter solstice – the Mayan predicted end of the world. Nina stumbles into a portal to the past – back to a place of human sacrifice. The thousands of denizens in the ancient Mayan city - after they see her surgical scar to remove a cancerous uterus - believe she is the moon goddess Ixchel, and they come to believe she IS the daughter of Ixchel, the Mother Bridge, back to the Fifth World – in other words, their redeemer queen. Does she give her body to them to save the people? And does the Yucateca Mayan phrase, Diosbo'otik, "God pays," really mean anything?

THE BAUM PLAN FOR FINAN-CIAL INDEPENDENCE, And Other Stories, by John Kessel. Small Beer Press, 2008, 346 pp., \$16.00. ISBN 978-193-152-050-8

BAUM PLAN is a fun single author 4 TRUE REVIEW

collection, particularly these stories:

# "It's All True." A time traveler ventures back to retrieve one valuable item – a man named Orson Welles. The traveler's mission: bring the famed Hollywood director away from a past which will be bleak and almost meaningless to a very talented director and, instead, into a creatively impoverished future Hollywood that desperately needs Welles' talent. But the ornery and cantankerous Welles isn't going to go calmly into a good night for a future that could be too out of place for him – and after all, Mr. Welles would rather dictate his own future, thank you very much.

# "The Baum Plan" title story focuses on the exploits of an ex-lap dancer from Mebane, Dot (Dorothy Gale) and sidekick Sid (short for Sidney Xavier Dubose) - sort of another Bonnie and Clyde burglar combination.

THE REEL STUFF, ed. by Brian Thomsen and Martin H. Greenberg. DAW, 1998, 2008, 460 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-0-7564-0522-9

The stories that went to the movies – ah, the good old stuff, stuff like "Minority Report" by Philip K. Dick, MILLE-NIUM by John Varley, "Enemy Mine" by Barry Longyear – stories many of us read for the first time in magazines or elsewhere (like the Varley story, in the very first issue of ISAAC ASIMOV'S SF MAGAZINE, as "Air Raid"). You can read them here in their original version – unscrambled by Hollywood.

ZOMBIE CSU, by Jonathan Maberry. Citadel Press/Kensington Publishing Co., 2008, 409 pp., \$16.95. ISBN 978-0-8065-2877-9

The one and only book for Zombie fans, either Zombie's in literature or film, ZOMBIE CSU will keep you awake at night. Filled with references galore to all we have learned to love and hate about the zombie in all its forms. Cool artwork, too. Check out www.kensingtonbooks.com.

THE MUMMY, Tomb of the Dragon Emperor, introduction by Rob Cohen. Newmarket Pictorial Moviebook, 2008,176 pp., \$19.95. ISBN

978-1-55704-805-9

Fans of THE MUMMY series of movies can only appreciate this coffee-table collectible, with page after page of great photos, SFX, renderings, and what have you. What a craft.

### RECOMMENDED

THE SUN OVER BREDA, by Arturo Perez-Reverte. Plume, 2008, 282 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-0-452-28974-1

YELLOW MOON, by Jewell Parker Rhodes. Simon and Schuster/ Atria, 2008, 295 pp., \$24.00. ISBN 978-1-4165-3710-6

### COMING NEXT TIME...

JOHN ADAMS, by David Mc-Cullough. Simon and Schuster, 2001, 2008, 768 pp., \$20.00. ISBN 978-1416575887

FRACTURED TIME, Book One of the Fractured Time Trilogy, by Michael D'Ambrosio. iUniverse, 2001, 2004, 188 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 0-595-30996-8

THE BLACK HAND, by Will Thomas. Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 2008, 295 pp., \$14.00. ISBN 978-1-4165-5895-8

ENCHANTMENT PLACE, ed. by Denise Little. DAW, 2008, 338 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 978-0-7564-0510-6

IMPLIED SPACES, by Walter Jon Williams. Night Shade Books, 2008, 265 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 978-1-59780-125-6

# Balticon GOH Is Clear About ALL CLEAR

By Andrew Andrews

"I hate its guts at this point," remarked SF author Connie Willis.

In fact, she is so fed up with the characters in her six-year novel in progress, ALL CLEAR, that she wishes she could kill all of them in a bus wreck.

At the recent Baltimore Science Fiction Convention (Balticon), Willis spoke about her work on the World War II novel and how her own life is feeling a lot like the world Harold Crick (played by actor Will Ferrell) experiences in the 2006 movie, "Stranger Than Fiction."

Though some originally thought the new novel is an expansion of the story "Winds of Marble Arch" and the London Blitz during World War II, instead, ALL **CLEAR** steers away from all the movies about the battles and the war itself to focus on the evacuation of Dunkirk in June 1940. This is the civilian side of the war, Willis noted, with rescue ships from the annals of history, such as The Lilly Bell, The Darling Sue, the Maid of the Mist – ships that evacuated families of all sorts, including "slum kids and middle-class kids." Willis noted the mix of classes results in some unintended consequences - hence the focus of the book.

The effects of the Blitz were devastating, Willis noted. She said 60,000 civilians were killed by Nazi Germany, like a "9-11 every day," she said.

The book will be two volumes, Willis noted, and will have many of the characters from her time-traveling historian novel, DOOMSDAY BOOK, as well as characters from FIRE WATCH and TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG in the civilian roles.

Willis noted, "We've plenty of the parts of D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge" in many works of literature from the war. But the civilian stories are just "fascinating," she said. About 300,000 soldiers were rescued simply using small fishing

60,000 civilians were killed by Nazi Germany, like a "9-11 every day."

boats and weekend yachts.

Willis dispelled any truth to the rumors about a sequel to THE DOOMSDAY BOOK.

She answered fan questions about her work, noting that her hero is "Agatha Christie," she said. "I just adore her work and I wish I were her." Willis learned how to plot from reading Christie. But she also lists P.G. Wodehouse as a big part of her inspiration, who has "brightened many a dark day." Another hero is H.L. Mencken, whom Willis wishes were alive

in today's political climate - he would have a field day.

Though she is known for a particular brand of storytelling at times – the Christmas story – Willis is working on a story about "a robot that wants to be a Rockette," she said. Willis has been branded as a writer who can incorporate Tupperware into a story – and who else has done that?

Who else, she noted, can write a story about a robot wanting to be a Rockette?

### Willis dispelled any truth to the rumors about a sequel to THE DOOMSDAY BOOK.

Book Reviews by Debra Jackson-Andrews

THE PEMBERLEY CHRONICLES, by Rebecca Ann Collins (Book 1). Sourcebooks Landmark, 2008, 366 pp., \$14.95, ISBN 13:978-1-4022-1153-9

THE WOMEN OF PEMBERLY, by Rebecca Ann Collins (Book 2). Sourcebooks Landmark, 2008, 268 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 13:978-1-4022-1154-6

Long accustomed to stiff, boring black and white television remakes, fans of Jane Austen's classic novel "Pride and Prejudice (P & P)" watched spellbound as Producer Andrew Davies transformed P & P into a stunningly beautiful, spirited 1995 BBC mini-series. As the series ended, the thought most in the minds of viewers (this reviewer included) was "What Might Have Happened Next"? Rebecca Ann Collins' follow-up books, THE PEMBERLEY CHRONICLES and THE WOMEN OF PEMBERLEY, two of 10 by the author who chooses to use that pen name, pick up where the original left off in an attempt to continue the journey, and satisfy Austen's many fans!

Book one, THE PEMBERLEY CHRONICLES, takes up the P & P story as Elizabeth (Lizzy) and Darcy and Jane and Bingley drive off on their honeymoons. Subsequent chapters follow the couples bliss as they settle in as young newlyweds and the women become mistresses of their husband's grand estates. Children arrive on the scene and we also get frequent visits from old favorites from P & P such as Mr. Bennet, Charlotte Collins, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, and even new antics from the terrible twosome "Lydia and Wickham." I found this book to be an entertaining, easy read and a welcome return visit to old friends.

Continued back cover

With the years passing, book two, THE WOMEN OF PEMBERLEY, naturally drifts further from the original novel. Children marry and have children, further complicating an already colorful and people-littered landscape. I frequently found myself stopping to regroup my thoughts and figure out who was who in an attempt to keep people and their positions straight. I also found myself missing the original main characters, Lizzy, Jane, and company, who appear much less frequently in this book. Also, unlike the original P & P which focused mainly on social events and romantic attachments, these follow-up books delve into discussions of the socio-economic events of the time period (heavy on the British monarchy and government issues). To be fair, they do play a part and add some diversion, but given the choice, I much prefer the focus on the foibles of the Bennet's and their related family members.

An admitted visual/audio oriented person, I have to "see and hear the character in my head." My vision may not end up matching the author's when and if the book ever makes it to the big screen. However, the author can help me by roll-

ing out their book's characters one at a time and giving me enough time and color to differentiate one from another. These books are quite good and, overall, I enjoyed both (the first more so). They, like the original, would be well served with a video treatment.

I conclude we are in need of another good old BBC miniseries. Andrew Davies, are you listening?

FIREFLY LANE, by Kristin Hannah. St. Martin's Press, 2008, 479 pp. \$23.95. ISBN 13:978-0-312-36408-3

Kristin Hannah's writing career has spanned two decades and 15 novels. She's a New York Times Bestselling Author (MYSTIC LAKE). Until FIREFLY LANE, I'd never read her work. So what compels us to pick up a book, especially one by a new (to us) author?

I saw this book and the cover colors and image immediately spoke to me. As a woman who came into adulthood at the exact time women cut the apron strings, opting for out-of-the-home career choices, I can relate to this story. As someone

who has often looked at her career and wondered if it was really worth it, I can relate. Did you find yourself in one of the characters?

In my earlier years, I was Tully, sans the smoking and swear words. Driven, career obsessed. As the years wore on, I began to wonder if I was missing something. Somewhere out there is a perfect, 50/50 arrangement. We wonder if we'll ever find it.

Along the way we make (and hopefully hold on to) a few good friends. Sometimes those friends are honest enough to tell us when we are messing up big time. They'll also pat us on the back when we're not.

Kate and Tully were those kinds of friends — until that one thing occurs that threatens to end a longtime friendship. I suppose FIREFLY LANE is SEX AND THE CITY on a smaller, milder scale.

The only thing I didn't like about this book were the swear words. OK, there weren't a lot of swear words, but why must we constantly go to a lower common demominator? Why do books, movies and TV insist on throwing in sex, swearing, and violence when the story could just as easily do without it? The test: take out the garbage and see if the story still flies. If not, your script probably wasn't any good to begin with.

Admittedly, Tully has a rough start in life, but do we really need the "F" word? And Kate seems a little too classy to use it. It's an ugly word, no matter whose mouth it comes from. Other than that, FIREFLY LANE is a good tearjerker, a great summer read.

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