

TRUE **Review**

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Atlantic City Smile

I've been there/done that, a lot, and yet Atlantic City still shocks the hell out of me. The city can be depressing but, yes, always amusing. Really, the post-gambling era (sans the unimaginative, original Steel Pier amusement rides of long ago) still offers an experience different from anything in rural Pennsylvania.

As a kid, my parents would tow me from the rural heartland of Amish Country along with my sister Karen, sometimes brother Rob, always brother Rick, to settle in the deep gray sand.

(Of course, little did they know what made the sand so weirdly gray was detritus and the collective flush of many of the city environs. Not to mention, at one time or another, a combination of either used condoms and/or intravenous equipment. From time to time.)

I've gotten little joy out of the city. I can think of only two times I've been happy in A-C: once, in 1969, when Marilyn McCoo brought her powerful voice singing "The Age of Aquarius" along with the rest of the Fifth Dimension (out of the five, anybody remember anyone but Marilyn?), singing "Wedding Bell Blues" (though I never got to hear her sing my favorite, which still gets to me, "One Less Bell To Answer") to the Steel Pier. The original Pier, of course, with the diving horse - not the cookie-carved, southern-King-of-Prussia-Mall blandness that it is nowadays. (Though they still have James, their "Superior Seashore Candies Since 1880," and the best maple nut fudge in the universe on the mall-Pier.)

And whatever happened to the Playboy Club, which became the Trump? Changing the Playboy Club to the Trump - that is, getting rid of the bunnies, one of the only delights a decent man has anymore in the known universe - was equivalent to replacing "Star Trek" on NBC in the late '60s with "Laugh In." (Don't we have a "Laugh In" Network? Strings of multi-blockbuster "Laugh In" movies? "Laugh In" conventions?)

And nobody smiles. On all my treks through the casinos lo these many, I catch no one with a glint of glee. All I see are robot bus bats and clinging honey-do's ceremoniously yanking levers, doing the ever-compulsive chant of "one more quarter, just one more, then I'll hit it good, Herb."

Oh, yes. Well, until recently.

It all started when, during a recent business venture to A-C, I made a nighttime trek through 5-above wind chills to find some decent boardwalk fudge for my ever-ungrateful 19-year-old son, Kevin. Frahlinger's wasn't open, so I had to opt for anything I could find in mid-February (the day after Valentine's, and happy birthday, Tara).

I ended up on the Boardwalk at Trump Taj Mahal, simply to rekindle my frost-bitten earlobes.

I saw not a happy person at the slots or the tables.

I returned outside, walked to Resorts, and that's when it got interesting.

At Resorts, a street hustler was yelling at a cop about how he was getting

f&\$@*ng abused. Almost immediately a police cruiser came up the boardwalk (didn't know they drove cars on the walk). Afraid of potential bullets flying, I hurried through the bone-chill air back to the midway, where Sands stood in 18-story darkness while in its death throes (after 26 years or so going out of business). Near there, a very osteoporosis-evident old lady with a gentleman cart-pusher were banging on the steel curtain to a boardwalk storefront. The skeletal woman asked for some help in pulling up the bullet-proof curtain, and I asked her if she was trying to break in. She said no, and showed me a bungled set of keys. I helped her, thinking the cops are too busy checking out the commotion near Resorts that I didn't think I'd get arrested for breaking and entering. Anyway, what was I going to tell them? That I was looking for fudge for my 19-year-old son?

Along the way, all sorts of pretty Asian women were trying to lure me in for a massage, "it's so cold - we'll treat you nice." Tempting . . . for a couple of seconds, anyway. I wonder as you mellow in fragrant rubbing oil what these businesses do to your wallet and credit cards. . . .

Then, along about Bally's, well, near enough to the closed Frahlinger's store but not close enough to Caesar's, a street-walker with a sore-looking paper cup asked me if I had a few quarters to spare, buddy, because I'm in bad shape and could use some help. I didn't respond, and he said he was just trying to get out

Continued back cover

This Ain't The Internet

Book Reviews
By Andrew Andrews

THE TERROR, by Dan Simmons. Little, Brown and Company, 2007, 769 pp., \$25.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-316-01744-2

Slowness, pain, and then drudgery. Then more slowness, then more drudgery, then more excruciating, exacting, attention-defying pain, detailed in heaps. Then more detail. Then more drudgery. Your eyes blur. You need an ice pick to clear off the glaze. You need Ibuprofen, because this reading - 769 pages! - ughh! - is going to be hard on your soul.

How many books have YOU read that were 769 pages?

What, you thought I was reading MOBY DICK?

Remember MOBY DICK? We tackled THAT in college. About 1,000 pages, of which 42 pages were story, the rest nothing but whales, whale fishing, whale history, whale philosophy, whale anatomy, whale hunting history, then more whale geo- and biology.

OK, I thought I had it, I was done, with TERROR, at about page 450 or so. Up

to that point: Sir John Franklin, leader of an expedition to find the ultimate Northwest Passage for His Majesty's England, is killed horribly, leaving the brahman, rakishly stubborn Captain Francis Crozier to maintain life in temperatures so bitter, so cold, they feel like fire (that's what 55-degree-below zero wind chill temperatures feel like - we had them in Pennsylvania in mid-January of 1994, and let me tell you, they are hell). In May of 1845, two ships, the HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, with 129 men, depart England, and by the winter of 1845, the ships are frozen in - and they cannot escape - near the North Pole. Eventually, Erebus is abandoned and Terror is nothing more than a hulk that could sail only if - and it isn't happening - the weather could get warmer. A lot warmer.

All the while, Crozier tries to maintain professional order and stability in deteriorating conditions (the canned food is spoiled, coal and other rations are disintegrating, his men are going mad, and - to add strong alcohol to the wounds -

there is some kind of abomination of a creature stalking them and killing them at will).

All the while, they harbor a stowaway Eskimo lady, Silence, who is just that.

The story progresses. Simmons leaves out absolutely no detail about anything - he explains to you the clothing, the arms, the storage compartments, the rations, the seafaring ways and wonders of the time, all the while, making you wonder, when next is that creature going to attack?

But the story is more than that. I suspected so, thinking, here I am staring at another 300 pages, and I look ahead, and see that it ends. How? Who survives?

The book has one of the most wondrous, troubling, and dramatic endings you will ever read. Bet on it.

But I saw Simmons' point, and like the Bible says, the end will be swift and will not disappoint.

The end told me this: here was a man, Crozier, captain of his majesty's vessel, who lost everything and the only way he was going to survive was NOT to try to

TRUE
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Publisher/Editor
Andrew M. Andrews

Contributors
Kevin Andrews

E-mail aandrews@ptd.net

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work on things he knew, but the things he didn't. To survive, sometimes you have to transform yourself into something different - someone different. Because he was in a world that was so remote from what he knew, there was no choice.

Stay with this book. Though at times you wonder if Simmons actually enjoyed *MOBY DICK*, what he was doing was setting you up. Drawing you away from all that was familiar - and all that was familiar was an illusion to a character that loses it all. You will think about this book long after you put it down.

TO BE CONTINUED, The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg, Vol. 1. Subterranean Press, 2006, 392 pp., \$35.00. ISBN 978-1-5960606-16

What marks the "beginning"? To Silverberg, perhaps in his mind, there are many ways to look at his own "beginning" as an SF writer.

First, some questions.

Q: OK, what was the "actual" first short story Silverberg saw published?

A: Silverberg points out the first short story he sold for publication, "Gorgon Planet," the initial story in this collection, appeared in *Nebula Science Fiction*, the seventh edition, February 1954, in Scotland (resold in 1958 to an American magazine, *Super-Science Fiction*).

Q: Right. But what does Silverberg REALLY believe was his career-launching point, the story which really put him on the map, which began his career as a noted SF author?

A: The May, 1956 issue of *Astounding* magazine, edited by the legendary John W. Campbell Jr., featured "To Be Continued," what Silverberg considered his springboard work of fiction and what set him on the path toward becoming the consummate SF professional.

Q: But Silverberg digresses. In volume two, *TO THE DARK STAR* (June 2007), the just-announced follow-up to *TO BE CONTINUED*, Silverberg seems recalcitrant. He views much of the fiction he wrote, I think, in the beginning as journeyman material, worthy of historical record, but not linked to the artist of a high nature that he would soon, eventually, become. Why?

A: Here is a description of "To See the Invisible Man," an introduction he wrote for volume 2, which I selected from the publisher's Website:

"This story, 'To See the Invisible Man,' written in June of 1962, marks the beginning of my real career as a science-fiction writer, I think. The 1953-58 stories collected in *To Be Continued*, the first of this series of volumes, are respectable professional work, some better than others but all of them at least minimally acceptable—but most of them could have been written by just about anyone. Aside from a few particularly ambitious items, they were designed to slip unobtrusively into the magazines of their time, efficiently providing me with regular paychecks."

Q: So Silverberg unabashedly admits he was nothing more than a hack, in the beginning. He realized there was more dimension, more meaning, to what he could accomplish as an artist, rather than what some would call a "creative typist."

A: Exactly. Which is why he went on to become my favorite SF author, with such works as *DYING INSIDE* and *TOWER OF GLASS* and Hugo-award winning author of "Nightwings," and many, many other genre classics.

I believe he was right - absolutely correct - when he admits his best work began with "To See The Invisible Man." I have often quoted the phrase from the story often, "For the crime of insensitivity, you are hereby sentenced to invisibility." Gosh, that packs a lot of wow, wonder, and emotion in just one phrase. His short work is what this genre, really, is all about. If you, as a reader, are discovering Silverberg right now, are you in for a treat!

THINGS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME, Selected Short Fiction: 1980-2005, by Howard Waldrop. Old Earth Books, 2007, 316 pp., \$15.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-882968-36-7

Sixteen stories comprise *THINGS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME*, Waldrop's second retrospective collection (the first was *DREAM FACTORIES AND RADIO PICTURES* - and *True Review* featured that some time ago). I have a fondness for several stories, many of which I read in their original publication:

"Heirs of the Perisphere" (*Playboy*, July 1985), and what if Disney robots inherited the earth?; "Do Ya, Do Ya, Wanna Dance?" (*Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine*, August 1988), about high school reunions and the special relationships that may entail; "Mr. Goober's Show," which appeared in *Omni Online*, March 1998 but which I remember reading, and still hold a copy of, from the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* September 1998. (Was there a "Mr. Goober's Show"? A brother and sister try to find the historical attributes to a memory of a children's TV show they share - or was it the work of some wacko in a basement, broadcasting the show everywhere?)

Capping this collection is "The King of Where-I-Go" about a brother and sister who are carted off one summer to relatives, all the while the sister catches polio, which the poor brother blames on a fight they had . . . it's about growing up in Texas and Alabama and the dynamics of broken family relationships . . . and about secret test projects . . . you know, all those kind of weird and wonderful items that make up so much of Waldrop's wonderful fiction. And I have reviewed all of his collections for *TRUE REVIEW* over the years and have them all in my collection. This one's going there, too.

THE BEST OF THE BEST: Vol. 2, ed. by Gardner Dozois. St. Martin's Griffin, 2007, 645 pp., \$19.95. ISBN 13: 978-0-312-36342-0.

BEST has 13 novellas, what appears to be Dozois' favorite story length. I read many of these in their original magazine publications, including "Sailing to Byzantium" by Robert Silverberg and "The

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Hemingway Hoax” by Joe Haldeman.

VOICES FROM THE STREET, by Philip K Dick. TOR, 2007, 301 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 13: 978-0-765-31692-9

In VOICES, one of the early mainstream novels penned by Dick but, like a huge canon of works early on, was mainstream by a recognized SF talent, and Dick couldn't find a market for, Stuart Wilson Hadley, salesman for Modern TV Sales and Service in Oakland, California, begins his descent into the madness of the cookie-cutter, gonzo Republican early 1950s - a time filled with its own particular types of horror.

THE SOLARIS BOOK OF NEW SCIENCE FICTION, ed. by George Mann. Solaris/BL Publishing, 2007, 415 pp., \$7.99. ISBN 13: 978-1-84416-448-6

I enjoyed one story in this collection: “Personal Jesus” by Paul Di Filippo. Shepherd Crooks is blessed to live in a world where God is real and talks to him every day through a quantum device called a godPod. Humanity's collective multibillion-plus individual consciousness has drawn God's attention - until the world is assimilated. Well, at least most of it. He learns why from the aliens that arrive shortly after Rapture

RECOMMENDED

STRANGE CANDY, by Laurell K. Hamilton. Berkley Books, 2006, 2007, 287 pp., \$14.00. ISBN 978-0-425-21521-0

STRANGE CANDY, a collection of 13 (how appropriate) stories, provides some horror extra lite for those who enjoy all those sexy Anita Blake novels. For those who, after a tired day, don't want a reading experience on the order of thousand-page plus WAR AND PEACE, a five- or six-page story is a real treat. I especially enjoyed the tongue-in-cheek “A Clean Sweep,” originally published in SUPERHEROES, Ace, 1995. In her introduction, Hamilton writes, “My unwritten short ideas are vacations of the mind. The last thing you want to do on vacation is your

normal job. So how does a girl get to a point where normal is vampire hunting, fairie princesses and private detectives, and some of the most erotic relationships on paper?” With this one, I suppose.

FOREVER WILL YOU SUFFER, by Gary Frank. Medallion Press, 2006, 418 pp., \$6.99. ISBN-13: 978-1-93-281569-6

A man who visits relatives buried in a cemetery comes back to a cab chauffeured by a reanimated corpse. The drive into hell begins - and what a thrill.

THE SKULL OF TRUTH, by Bruce Coville. Illustrated by Gary A. Lippincott. Magic Carpet/Harcourt, 1997, 2002, 2007, 194 pp., \$5.95. ISBN 978-0-15-206084-8

Charlie Eggleston returns home from a magic shop with a spooky skull, which can talk - but which forces the wayward Charlie to always tell the truth.

GRADISIL, by Adam Roberts. Pyr/Prometheus, 2007, 551 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-538-2

Space entrepreneurs will be the reality in our near future - free to inherit the stars, if they are wealthy enough. But any accidents high above will be scrutinized - because government will always be watching. Waiting. Ready to step in - or can space still remain the final frontier?

THE SAM GUNN OMNIBUS, by Ben Bova. TOR, 2007, 704 pp., \$29.95. ISBN 0-765-31617-X

Wow, does Sam Gunn go way back - I can remember reading these in early 1980 issues of Fantasy and Science Fiction Magazine (why do I think they go back to Analog Magazine sometime in the late 1970s?) I read most of them through the late 1980s, into 1990, then, as other reading material started to pile up, I didn't follow up with his further adventures. I always enjoyed Gunn's “John-Wayne-in-space” attitude, the Heinlein “by-your-bootstraps” approach to space exploration, engineering, and survival. If some of the best (almost hard) SF would be gathered, one of these memorable Sam Gunn tales would have to be included.

FLIGHT RISK, by Kim Baldwin. Bold Strokes Books, 2007, 291 pp., no price listed, ISBN-13: 978-1-933110-68-4

THE WHITE TYGER, by Paul Park. TOR, 2007, 304 pp., \$25.95. ISBN 0-765-31529-7

THE WHITE TYGER is the third book in Park's epic, A PRINCESS OF ROUMANIA (a Sidewise Award nominee).

IN SECRET SERVICE, by Mitch Silver. Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 2007, 327 pp., \$25.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-4165-3794-6

THE DEVIL IN AMBER, by Mark Gatiss. Scribner, 2006, 2007, 245 pp., \$13.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-8396-0

THE HELLFIRE CONSPIRACY, by Will Thomas. Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 2007, 313 pp., \$14.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-7432-9640-3

COLD SKIN, by Albert Sanchez Pinol. Canongate U.S., 2002, 2005, 2006, 233 pp., \$13.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-84195-883-5

Order from Canongate U.S., 841 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

ARIA, by Nassim Assefi. Harcourt, Inc., 2007, 258 pp., \$23.00. ISBN 978-0-15-101293-0

Jasmine, cancer specialist, long separated from her Iranian heritage, faces the accidental death of her five-year-old daughter Aria. The death of one's child - how to cope? How to heal? This is Jasmine's exploration of what she must do, including going to the roots of her heritage, to find the way to redemption.

THE SECRET CITY, by Carol Emshwiller. Tachyon, 2007, 217 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 978-1892391-44-5.

Order from Tachyon Publications, 1459 18th St. #139, San Francisco, CA 94107.

THE MAN WHO MELTED, by Jack Dann. 2007, Pyr/Prometheus, 274 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-487-3

The groundbreaking novel includes an introduction by Robert Silverberg

BRASYL, by Ian McDonald. Pyr/Prometheus, 2007, 358 pp., \$25.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-543-6

Atlantic City Smile (from page 1)

of the place. I kept walking, and he shouted back, hey, do I look like I'm having fun?

Finally, at the Pier, which has a nice few of the beach from the third floor; I found my fudge shop. Expensive, but suitable for Kevin.

On the way through Caesar's (which in the Playboy days had servers dressed in revealing togas, with slippers, a really cool touch), I saw something I thought I'd never see. Ever. In A-C! At the end of a row of slots, dressed nicely, was a lady looking just liked a blissfully aged Marilyn McCoo as she spoke with, across the

aisle, what appeared to be her singing partner and smiling so very delightedly. About what, I don't know, but she looked like she was having a very good time.

I returned to the Sheraton, cold, shivering, exhausted, with fudge in tow, whistling "I love you so," from the speakers of Resorts, right along with Marilyn, thinking of the Age of Aquarius and those wedding bell blues and wondering, in the Fifth Dimension's heyday, how I got so lucky to see her sing, see her smile, and glad to see it again. That A-C smile. Oh so rare.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF TRUE REVIEW:

FAST FORWARD 1, Future Fiction From the Cutting Edge, ed. by Lou Anders. Pyr/Prometheus, 2007, 409 pp., \$15.00. ISBN 978-1-59102-486-6

THE FATE OF MICE, by Susan Palwick. Tachyon, 2007, 218 pp., \$14.95. ISBN 1-892391-42-2

UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS, ed. by Julie E. Czerneda and Jana Paniccia. DAW, 2007, 311 pp., \$7.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-7564-0404-8

WIZARDS, Magical Tales From The Masters of Modern Fantasy, ed. by Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois. Berkley, 2007, 401 pp., \$25.00. ISBN 978-0-425-21518-0

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