

★ **First-Person Singularities****Robert Silverberg****John Scalzi, Contributor**

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Silverberg's science fiction stands head and shoulders above other works in the genre.

The short stories in Robert Silverberg's *First-Person Singularities* are inventive, sublime, and endlessly entertaining.

All eighteen pieces are narrated in the first person—though “person” is somewhat misleading, as the cast of narrators includes Greek gods, sentient animals, aliens, computers, and time travelers twenty thousand years out of their element. Silverberg, one of science fiction's literary giants, has a sixty-year career to draw from, yet even stories written decades ago feel fresh.

Though all the stories could be classified as science fiction or fantasy, there is nothing gimmicky or repetitive about them. Each piece begins with an imaginative setup, and is set head and shoulders above others in the genre by quickly evolving into a drama that is believably human.

In the Nebula Award-winning story “Passengers,” a man whose body has been temporarily taken over by an alien awakes with a terrible hangover and no recollection of what went on the night before. In the outstanding “The Reality Trip,” an insect-like alien living in a manufactured human body seeks to deter a would-be lover by showing her his true form. One catch: it's the 1960s, and the setting is New York's Chelsea Hotel, and in the age of acid-washed brains, the aspiring lover is unfazed by—but slightly unsure of—what she's seen.

All characters are well developed and convincing in their roles, and the varied tone of the stories makes for lively reading. Playful references to Greek myths and literary classics abound, as in a story that takes the form of a diary kept by Henry James. Other pieces turn familiar sci-fi plots upside down: “To See the Invisible Man” is not about physical invisibility, but about a government's power to convince people not to see what's right before their eyes.

Author introductions to each piece add fascinating insights into the business craft of writing and the random influences that shape storytelling. By any measure, *First-Person Singularities* is grade-A reading fodder.

SUSAN WAGGONER (November/December 2017)

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