



# Toybox

*Al Sarrantonio*

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## **Toybox** Al Sarrantonio

Toybox is the first ever collection of stories by horror master Al Sarrantonio, Bram Stoker Award-winning author of more than twenty novels and editor of the landmark horror anthology 999. Toybox itself was nominated for an International Horror Guild Award for best collection.

Little Selene was bored. And then came the mysterious Toyman, carrying a very special toybox, filled with wonders and terrors beyond imagination. As Selene peered into the toybox, the stories tumbled out: a quiet little girl whose horrible secret bursts forth at a Halloween party ... a doll made of corn that hides a very nasty surprise ... a depraved celebration for the last vampire ... All of these and many more awaited Selene - and now they wait for you - inside the toybox. Go ahead, open it, if you dare.

## **Toybox Details**

Date : Published September 1st 2003 by Leisure Books (first published January 1st 1999)

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Author : Al Sarrantonio

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# From Reader Review Toybox for online ebook

## Not Now...Mommy's Reading says

I couldn't finish this book. I made it to through the first (5) short stories before I gave up. The stories were a bit juvenile to me and not the least bit scary or chilling.

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## Sadie says

There are some decent stories, some really good stories, and a few plain old bad stories. It isn't so much his writing, but the ideas behind the stories that make or break them. His writing is good, his plots, not always.

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## Jason says

### Very fun

I had a great time reading this. I will buy more from this author. The. Short stories were well written and fun

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## Ben Nash says

This is my first Sarrantonio collection. I've read some of his anthologies before, and I love his editing. *Toybox* is split in two parts. The first part didn't initially stand out to me. The stories were short and seemingly simple little campfire horror stories, sometimes with predictable endings. Fun, but usually not something that'd stick long in my mind. Reaching the end of the section, though, I started to realize that Sarrantonio had consistently evoked this "wholesome" Americana feel. The more he did it, the more I realized how hard it would be to do, let alone consistently. And some of the stories *did* start to stick in my head.

*The Big House* was a new take on haunted houses, told from the viewpoint of the house. *The Corn Dolly* had a mid-20th century feel while still pulling in elements from earlier centuries. The combination of the real social issues a boy faces combined with the supernatural aspects was good. *The Electric Fat Boy* was probably the most science fictional of all the stories, with a feel like some golden age magazines or maybe a *Twilight Zone* episode (though better than most TZ). *Snow* wrapped up the section. Temps outside while I was reading were 1° F, which made for a better read. When I got to the end, I laughed out loud.

There were a couple more stories before the section ended and the tone changed. It took me a bit by surprise, in a very good way. The language changed from something more suited to telling out loud to something more complex, better read, perhaps, than told. And the tone became darker, more adult.

*Father Dear* had me guessing at the ending. What I thought I could see coming, though, was different. The weirdness of the father and the assumption Sarrantonio made me make worked quite well for the story. *The Children of Cain* was perhaps the most horrific of the stories (such a subjective term). Hank was creepy, and

the empathy I felt for Rudy made it horrific. *Red Eve* is a fun alternate view of history and the future, and is the other science fictional story of the collection. *Pigs* was set in Soviet occupied Poland. This was one of the weirder stories, feeling slightly disjointed, but in a way that worked for the story. Red played a big part of these last two. *Richard's Head* was perhaps the weirdest of all, but didn't work quite as well for it. Still, it's a fun story based on an idea from philosophy.

The linking story which tied the collection together was quite effective in the end. It did set the stories into their own sections, but it didn't foreshadow the earlier split I mentioned. In the end, it stood creepy on its own.

For the stories I didn't mention, check out my brief notes from the reading progress.

I'll be checking out more of AI's stuff.

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### **Deborah says**

This is a mixture of children's and adult short horror stories. Favorite being the first entitled Pumpkin Head.

"My lunch and dinner." "My dinner and breakfast."

Definitely would have been creeped out reading it when I was 10 plus years old. The nuances, however, in many of the stories, would have passed over me.

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### **Kevin Lucia says**

As delightfully strange and wonderfully Bradbury-esque as the first time.

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### **Leona Joy says**

This is the worst, most poorly written book I've started in, in, I don't even know how long. It's terrible. I picked it up because the short story *Wish* was recommended on a Kindle board. Not a good idea. It reads like the 80's reworked *Twilight Zone*. Blech.

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### **Angie crosby says**

This short story collection was like most I have read. A few good stories amongst a lot of crap. Mostly it was crap. I've not much to say about it.

Other than not really all that worth reading.

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## Dana Cordelia says

There are more things strange herein than the mere subject matter...

So I was thrilled to see that "Toybox" had finally been released for Kindle, as it's been out of print for a little while. Even more so, since it's coming up on Halloween and his spooky stories would be just the thing to get me in the mood.

As with any collection of short stories, some definitely outshine the others. "Snow" and "The Corn Dolly" really stood out to me, although I have to say "Children of Cain" was probably the best written and by far the most disturbing. In my growing experience with Sarrantonio's shorts, I've come to find his characteristic twist-endings are hit or miss with me. An example of a miss would be in "Under My Bed," where a potentially great plot ended rather ambiguously, and I was disappointed. "Pigs," although similarly ambiguous, gave a better hint of the direction he was nudging his audience's imagination, and was a much more satisfying read. Ditto for "Pumpkin Head," the story opener and that which contains some of his best Halloweenie imagery.

I can't help but wonder, however, how the type was set for this collection. The copyright dates for each of these stores range from the early 80's to the late 90's, so they've obviously been read and reread by many critical eyes.

I began to think somewhere near the halfway point that he'd either handwritten each story and scanned it in (or had someone type up a handwritten manuscript) or else that he'd penned it in something like an old Newton, which consistently mixed up letters and punctuation. Often a "cl" would become a "d", an "rn" would become an "m," and lonely parenthesis and quotation marks were thrown all around like mismatched socks. It wasn't clear whether this was intentional (he makes good use of the creative run-on sentence in both the base narrative and each of the stories), because it didn't tie in to the arc as well as other grammatical devices he employed. This may have occurred when the type was converted for Kindle publication, as I haven't seen anyone else mention it yet.

But enough from the Grammar Nazi. All in all, this is a good collection of strange and spooky stories, and well worth the wait. Happy Halloween!

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## Robert Beveridge says

Al Sarrantonio, **Toybox** (Leisure, 2011)

Sarrantonio has written the odd novel over the course of his career, but his strength, to me, has always been short stories. I first encountered Sarrantonio back in an old Year's Best Horror collection (I think it was in 1980, but don't quote me, and yes, I bought it new). Sarrantonio's story closed the volume. It was called "Pumpkin Head". I don't recall my twelve-year-old self being overly impressed with it at the time, but the story's final, somewhat mysterious, line haunted me for decades until I got round to reading the story again recently. It's not "mysterious" in that it doesn't fit with the story; it does, and it conveys the information it is supposed to convey. And yet it has always seemed to me that there is a great deal more to that last line than the conveyance of information; there is something much larger and more chilling there, some sort of unfathomable depth of hunger that is wrapped up in lifelong loneliness and horrific abuse and world-burning

hatred.

I'm telling you all this, naturally, because *Toybox*, aside from the very short beginning to a framing device that pops up now and again throughout this collection, starts off with "Pumpkin Head", and thirty years later, it's just as innocent and heartbreaking and still has that core of pure, unadulterated hatred. And as I went through the collection, I discovered that Sarrantonio does that sort of thing exceptionally well; I'd read a few of the stories here before (though none stayed with me in remotely as much detail as "Pumpkin Head"), but had never really made the connection that this guy writes about kids, almost exclusively, and that his ability to make the reader experience that sort of hapless innocence is exactly what makes his stories so good.

There is a downside to this that shows up in the book: Sarrantonio's stories feel weird and out-of-place when he's writing exclusively about adults. But that doesn't happen often here, all the stories of that type are confined to one section, and this will in way affect your enjoyment of this story collection. Which is *very* enjoyable. If you've never been exposed to the work of Al Sarrantonio, this is a great way to start. If you're already a fan, but have never picked up one of this story collections, this works for you, as well. If you don't like short stories... okay. I can't help you there. But the rest of you, go for it. \*\*\*\*

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### **Lisa Greer says**

Sarrantonio is a gifted writer. His descriptive powers are unbelievable. He's the type of author that makes you shiver and "see" exactly what he is writing about. The stories are not bad either! So far, I've really liked three of them. These are worth reading, though, for the imagery and description alone; it is always excellent. And he doesn't use gobs of description, adjectives, etc either... just the right amount to bring you the world in sharp edges and shadows when needed.

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### **Robin Edman says**

Holy crow, these stories are seriously creepy! The author must be very interesting to talk to, because he uses language in such a charming way that it occasionally takes me out of the story just so that I can sit back and enjoy that last sentence for a sec. But the stories are insidious. It's okay to lose focus; you'll be back in the vortex in no time.

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### **Rebecca McNutt says**

I usually like horror books, but *Toybox* was just too weird for me and I didn't like the style of writing. It came across as a book for preteen readers although it was aimed at adults, so it was kind of confusing.

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### **John Bruni says**

I've never really been a fan of Sarrantonio's longer work, but I'd never tried out his short fiction before, and in the intro to this book, Joe R. Lansdale talks about how awesome these stories are. I respect Lansdale a lot,

so I hoped this collection would turn me around. In many ways it did. Sarrantonio has an amazing style, and he's a great writer. I'm hard pressed to think of a living writer who does atmosphere so well. But there is a problem: almost all of these stories are about kids. I can't stand stories about kids. It takes a very special writer, like Ray Bradbury, for instance, to get me to like such tales. Unfortunately, that's where Sarrantonio lacks. There are some great stories in here, though. I highly recommend "Pumpkin Head," "The Electric Fat Boy," "Father Dear" (which is the best, in my opinion) and "Children of Cain."

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