

	<h2 style="color: yellow;">Aliens On Earth.com</h2> <p style="color: white;">Resources for those who are stranded here</p>	
UFOs Paranormal Area 51 People Places Random Top 100 What's New Catalog New Books	<p>Search... for keyword(s)</p> <p>in Book Title/Author</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Our Bookstore is OPEN</p>
<p>Mothership -> Book Catalog -> Neon -> Here</p>		

[Book Catalog](#) Review of [Nevada: True Tales from the Neon Wilderness](#) in *Reno Gazette-Journal*, Oct. 31, 1993

In Nevada, truth as good as fiction

A good reporter gives you the facts. A natural storyteller does more: building dramatic suspense, surprising you with unexpected twists, showing you how people think and feel, convincing you that this is really the way it happened.

Jim Sloan does both in "Nevada: True Tales from the Neon Wilderness," published this month by University of Utah Press. As reporter and storyteller, the Gazette-Journal's Sunday editor recreates 11 dramas behind newspaper headlines, breathing life into villains, heroes, victims, buffoons and ordinary people as they relive events that made news.

Remember the bombing of Harvey's Casino at Lake Tahoe? More than a dozen years ago, an extortionist planted an intricate explosive device in an office at Harvey's, then offered to tell how the bomb could be defused in exchange for \$3 million. The bomb went off, tearing an enormous hole in the building, scattering debris for half a mile. Sloan tells the story from the point of view of John Birges, a lonely and impatient Hungarian refugee, disillusioned by the failure of his unrealistic American Dream.

In "The Last Resort," we see Birges first through his own eyes: a genius, destined for power. We also meet his desperate, alcoholic wife and two troubled sons, badgered by their father to become accomplices in a wild scheme to extort money from the casino where Birges has lost a fortune through reckless gambling.

The author offers glimpses of the sons' skepticism as he follows Birges through a carefully plotted series of moves -- building the bomb, hiring two nondescript men to deliver it, composing the extortion letter, setting up much-too-clever machinery for the pay-off. But Birges has overlooked one vital detail. Sloan lets the suspense build, then ends the story with a bit of irony.

"A Nevada Fairy Tale" recalls the much-disputed "Mormon will" in which reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes supposedly left a fortune to Melvin Dummar, a star-struck Nevada laborer and would-be songwriter. The story emerges through court records and statements by Dummar, his father and lawyers who challenged the handwritten will.

Dummar claimed he'd picked up a hitchhiker in the Nevada desert one night and had given the "sick old man" a ride to Las Vegas. It could have been Howard Hughes. Couldn't it? And the old man showed his gratitude by remembering Melvin in his will. Arnold Dummar, Melvin's father, took the news calmly:

"It's funny, though. When we all heard about the will and how Howard Hughes had left Melvin -- what was it, about a hundred and fifty million? -- none of us was surprised. I mean, if it was going to happen to anyone, that kind of fairy tale, it was going to happen to Melvin. He wanted it so much."

Nine more stories reveal other facets of Sloan's talent: his sense of drama, his compassion for all kinds of people, a phonographic ear for the spoken word and a reporter's dedication to facts.

Two of my favorite tales in the collection deal with slot cheaters. In "The Natural," Sloan introduces Ross Durham, "the

bashful, gawky genius who grows up in the underworld of Las Vegas, where cheating is a legitimate profession. He seeks to break away to a simpler, more honest way of life, but the bosses see an uncanny skill, a rare touch, and they can't let him go. Circumstances -- bad luck, bad breaks -- defeat him, and he reluctantly becomes a cheater, maybe the best ever."

"Team Player," the volume's final story, is a vivid scene from a common slot-cheating operation. A

jobless young woman is hired to play progressive slot machines as part of a team, using the boss's money. But what happens if she hits a jackpot?

In a pre-publication review of Sloan's collection, the Library Journal called the stories "superbly written pieces" that should "find a place wherever fine writing is appreciated." Another reviewer called them "exceptional raw material for film." I agree.

The publisher quotes, but does not name, a reviewer who criticizes those who think "idiosyncratic stories about Manhattan are marketable, but the same stories about Nevada are just local color.... I think this book is every bit as good as those centered in New York."

Barbara Land
Special to the Gazette-Journal