

PROMETHEUS

Repairman Jacked

Infernal

By F. Paul Wilson

Gauntlet Publications, 2005, \$50.00

<http://www.gauntletpress.com>.

Reviewed by Russell Madden

The latest Repairman Jack novel by F. Paul Wilson, **Infernal**, blasts into action with a (literally) shocking bang that thuds into your chest like a high-caliber bullet. Without warning, Jack is thrust into a situation that stuns him as none other has before. Unfortunately for him and those he holds closest to his heart, the unexpectedness of what happens in the beginning of this fast-moving tale pales in comparison to what awaits him down the road.

Even as Jack and his friends attempt to adjust to the trauma that jolts their world, an even more disruptive danger awaits. Worse, the peril Jack, his girlfriend Gia, and Gia's daughter, Vicky, must endure is introduced into their lives by none other than Jack's older brother, Tom.

A Philadelphia judge, Tom travels to New York City to help Jack deal with the aftermath of a tragic visit to LaGuardia airport. But Tom is experiencing major upheavals in his own life and proves to be of only minimal assistance to his brother. In his desperate attempt to extricate himself from his legal troubles, Tom enlists Jack's aid. A boat trip to Bermuda—the Isle of Devils—uncovers an ancient artifact, the Lilitongue of Grefeda, one of the Seven Infernals lost to history.

Tom believes the Lilitongue will remove him from his enemies so he can escape the consequences threatening to engulf him. He learns—too late—that a little bit of knowledge can be a very treacherous thing, indeed.

Because of what his brother has done, Jack is forced to deal with a challenge that is truly infernal: hellish, fiendish, and diabolical in the extreme.

With each new novel in this intriguing series, we see with increasing clarity that Repairman Jack stands not only at the nexus—between the crossroads—between the supernatural Otherness and our own reality, but at the intersection between rationality and irrationality, between legitimate and illegitimate violence, between principles and pragmatism.

In **Infernal**, these and other conflicts are examined through the persons of Jack and his brother Tom (named after their father). The focus on their personalities and the nature of their relationship

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Kurt Vonnegut's Neocon America: War and Socialism in *Player Piano*

By Thomas M. Sipos

Although released in 1952, Kurt Vonnegut's dystopian **Player Piano** can serve as a satire of modern America. That may not be readily apparent to those who focus only on its theme of technology obsoleting workers. Seemingly influenced by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and foreshadowing *The Twilight Zone*'s "The Brian Center at Whipple's," **Player Piano** paints a future America where a technocratic oligarchy has established a corporate command economy and cradle-to-grave socialism. The leaders think they've created a utopia but the proles disagree.

One big problem is that advancing technology makes more people useless every day. Retraining is no answer; even engineers are being replaced by computers. Society has become a player piano, creating flawless music without aid of human hands. However, this Darwinism is not untempered. The useless do not go homeless and hungry. On the contrary, everyone's basic needs are met: pre-fabricated homes, washers, TV, even national health care. And twelve years of free education, which is pretty pointless, as most people graduate to idleness.

Well, not quite idleness. Those with top test scores enjoy free college, then join the ever-diminishing ranks of engineers and managers. The less-brainy majority must choose between the Army or the Reconstruction & Reclamation Corps (aka, the Reeks & Wrecks), and

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Robert A. Heinlein: The Virginia Edition



The newsletter of the
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2005 Prometheus Awards Finalists

Best Novel

State of Fear, Michael Crichton (Harper Collins)

Anarquía, Brad Linaweaver & J. Kent Hastings
(Sense of Wonder)

Newton's Wake, Ken MacLeod (Tor)

Marque and Reprisal, Elizabeth Moon (Del Rey)

The System of the World, Neal Stephenson
(William Morrow)

Hall of Fame

It Can't Happen Here, Sinclair Lewis (1936)

V for Vendetta, Alan Moore & David Lloyd (1991)

A Time of Changes, Robert Silverberg (1971)

The Lord of the Rings, J. R. R. Tolkien (1954)

The Weapon Shops of Isher, A. E. Van Vogt (1951)

Special Award

The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel,

L. Neil Smith and Scott Bieser

Give Me Liberty/Visions of Liberty,

Edited by Mark Tier and Martin H. Greenberg

Robert A. Heinlein: The Virginia Edition

Meisha Merlin Publishing, Inc. has been
chosen by the Robert A. and Virginia Hein-
lein Prize Trust and the Butler Library Foun-
dation to publish **The Virginia Edition:
The Definitive Collection of Robert
A. Heinlein**. The project will consist of
forty-six titles spanning Heinlein's entire
writing career, including all of Heinlein's
novels and short stories. It will also contain
all of his non-fiction titles along with the
majority of his interviews, social commentar-
ies, speeches and articles, as well as several
volumes of Heinlein's letters and personal
correspondence.

The books will be sold only as a set, limited
to 5000 copies. Illustrator Donato plans a
series of murals that will be displayed both
on the dust jack cover and spine. The first
book will be published in January 2006,
followed every four weeks thereafter by the
next title in the series. The price for the cloth

bound set of The Virginia Edition will be
\$2,500.00.

More information can be found at the
publisher's web site: <http://www.meishamerlin.com/RobertHeinleinTheVirginiaEdition.html> or
through email at email@MeishaMerlin.com.

Meisha Merlin also announced that Bill
Patterson, editor of *The Heinlein Journal*, is
writing a two-volume biography of Robert
Heinlein.

[Editor's note: This complete set is
reminiscent of the Vance Integral Edition,
where volunteer Jack Vance fans compiled
authoritative texts of Vance's work, forty-
three volumes in all, for \$1500. Perhaps one
day we will see a similar effort around the
works of Poul Anderson.]

REVIEWS

H. P. Lovecraft: Tales

Edited by Peter Straub
The Library of America, \$35
Reviewed by Michael Grossberg

The Library of America has embraced the missing link in horror: H.P. Lovecraft.

The reclusive Rhode Island writer, who lived from 1890 to 1937 while limiting his social contacts primarily to letters, bridged the gap between Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King, arguably the two other great American masters of horror.

Lovecraft receives his belated due in the 155th volume of the Library's prestigious series. Editor Peter Straub, the horror novelist, has chosen 22 of Lovecraft's stories and novellas—a representative sample of his mysterious, melodramatic, arcane and antiquarian bent.

If this collection doesn't help salvage Lovecraft's long-underestimated reputation as a pioneer in the Gothic style of horror, nothing can.

Where Poe's 19th century horror reveled in dark romanticism and brooding poetry, Lovecraft eschewed the poetic and the romantic for the clinical, the lurid and the menacingly alien.

And where King's fiction is grounded in the anxieties and fears of everyday life, Lovecraft preferred to explore the fringes of the insane, the isolated and the unreal. Most of his stories shrink from realism like a vampire shrinks from the light.

King has praised Lovecraft as the 20th century horror story's "dark and baroque prince," while Joyce Carol Oates hailed him as the King of Weird.

On the other hand, in his notorious essay, "Tales of the Marvelous and Ridiculous," critic Edmund Wilson dismissed Lovecraft as a hack and his genre as hopeless. (And Ayn Rand, in *The Romantic Manifesto*, mostly disparaged horror fiction as the lower depths of romantic fiction—although the links to dark romanticism are clear, from Poe to Victor Hugo.)

Although the strange truth probably lies in between, Lovecraft is not to everyone's taste.

Let's be frank, balefully frank: Lovecraft never saw an adjective he didn't like. His houses are haunted; trees, terrible; families, degenerate; ghouls, fiendish; and abominations, unholy.

From "The Horror at Red Hook," here's a ripe-to-rotting example of Lovecraftian excess: "Here cosmic sin had entered, and festered by unhallowed rites had commenced the grinning march of death that was to rot us all to fungous abnormalities too hideous for the grave's holding."

The horror, the horror.

Lovecraft, who often wrote about the missing links in human evolution (and devolution), defined many of the nightmarish archetypes that have influenced much of pop-culture, for good and ill. Seen any bad horror movies or gore-filled video games lately? They



probably include a few Lovecraftian touches and tropes, from invasions by primordial alien intelligences to monsters emerging from decaying ruins.

In his fiction about alternate dimensions, suspended animation, devolution and invisibility, Lovecraft stretched the boundaries of horror to touch the eccentric fringes of science fiction.

From ghost stories ("The Outsider") to pulp melodrama ("Herbert West—Reanimator"), Lovecraft's fiction exudes mystery, a sinister sense of the abnormal, metaphysical pessimism about man's place in the cosmos, and the cold sweat of prickly fear.

Lovecraft is best known for "The Call

of Cthulhu," "The Colour Out of Space," "The Dunwich Horror" and other forbidding tales in his Cthulhu Mythos about a cosmic evil that predates mankind. These and other signature titles are included in the collection, although his letters, poetry, some novels and many other stories must await a second volume.

Many of his stories were published in *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories* and other pulp magazines, but some of his best weren't published until after his death in 1937. Although Lovecraft died before the horrors of World War II and Nazi concentration camps were revealed, his best stories anticipate them.

Lovecraft never expected his stories to endure or influence so many writers. Among them: August Derleth (who founded Arkham House, an early reprint champion of Lovecraft), Colin Wilson, Robert Bloch, Brian Lumley, Ramsey Campbell, Straub and King.

Nameless dread, thy name is Lovecraft.
(This review previously appeared in a slightly different

Chainfire

By Terry Goodkind
Tor Books 2005, \$29.95
Reviewed by Charles Morrison

Terry Goodkind has just recently released **Chainfire**, the ninth novel in his *Sword of Truth* series. His novels have evolved quite a bit since **Wizard's First Rule**, the genesis of the series, both in content and delivery. While most fans agree that his writing style has changed for the better, with richer content and more fully developed characters, some have criticized what they consider a turn towards promoting a political agenda. With **Faith of the Fallen** Terry Goodkind started being much more overt about his definition of freedom and didn't shy away from making his lead character promote it.

Personally, before **Faith of the Fallen**, I had just about had enough of the series. Although I saw the lessons in freedom the author provided, I also recognized a terrible trend in our main point of view character, Richard Rahl. Early in the series, Richard became the ruler of D'Hara and as the story developed he started trying to force people to fight the evil Emperor Jagang who was invading from the Old World. Although it

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peels away yet another layer of the complexity surrounding the rare individual that is Repairman Jack.

Initially, Gia and others in the book are amazed at the degree of physical similarity between Jack and Tom. “If Jack had told me he was an only child and you’d sat down at the other end of the bar,” Gia tells Tom, “I’d have thought you were his long-lost brother.”

But neither brother accepts these judgments of external sameness. As Jack says, “I don’t get it. We couldn’t be more different.” Given who he is, Jack’s inability to see himself in his brother’s features is hardly surprising.

Tom stands in mirror opposition to Jack, everything about him reversed. What at first blush appears identical is, in reality, incapable of being reconciled. On a visceral level, each brother recognizes the vast chasm separating them. In the realm of what is most important in defining a person—his values and his attitudes—Jack and Tom are at the extremes of the spectrum.

Despite a smooth and socially adept exterior, Tom is a twisted doppelganger of Jack. Even the instant attraction to Gia he experiences is based upon a warped, superficial perspective. He wants Jack’s lover less for who she is than for what he (thinks) he can obtain from her. His resentment of Jack’s status in Gia’s eyes arises from a complete misunderstanding of what a strong, healthy relationship requires: a value-for-value exchange between individuals, each with his or her own character, goals, and identity.

Tom responds strongly to Gia’s physical beauty but has no ability to recognize what makes her tick at the deepest levels. His envy manifests itself in a kind of greed: an overwhelming desire to possess what not only does not belong to him but which he in no way can or ever will deserve. While he tries to win Gia by pretending to be what he falsely thinks she desires, his sham has not a chance of succeeding. Gia is not one to be fooled by a con-artist, even one as smooth and practiced as Jack’s brother.

In contrast to Jack and Tom—who are superficially the same yet so emotionally distant from one another—Gia tells Tom

that she and Jack are quite different in many ways yet are as close as two people can be. “[W]e agree on the big things—the things that matter. We agree on right and wrong, on being truthful, on value given for value received, on what’s straight and what’s crooked. We both believe in doing the right thing, even though we sometimes disagree on how to do it.”

While Tom abandons one wife—and set of children—after another, a pregnant (yet unmarried) Gia knows that “...Jack is a rock.... Doesn’t matter what’s fashionable, what’s in, what’s out, what’s politically correct, what’s become legal, what’s become illegal, Jack doesn’t budge... I can always depend on Jack to do the right thing.”

With each new novel in this intriguing series, we see with increasing clarity that Repairman Jack stands not only at the nexus—the crossroads—between the supernatural Otherness and our own reality, but at the intersection between rationality and irrationality, between legitimate and illegitimate violence, between principles and pragmatism.

Tom thinks he might be willing—and able—to change for Gia, to become more like Jack, if he “had the right reason,” that is, her. But Gia tells him that, “I’ve always figured the reason for doing the right thing is because it’s the right thing.” Unlike Tom, she thinks that “...you don’t do the right thing for anyone else, you do it for yourself. Because doing anything less diminishes you.” A person of more conventional morality might tsk-tsk at Gia’s words and claim they were the essence of being “selfish.” I am sure that Gia—and Jack—would answer simply and confidently: “How true.”

Though Tom just “doesn’t get it” when it comes to his brother, their father (also named Tom) has (after the events chronicled in **Gateways**) grown to admire his wayward offspring in a way he never could before. This acceptance does not mean full agreement or comprehension of Jack’s lifestyle.

During a holiday visit, the elder Tom sees his son in a crowd and notes that he is “Virtually invisible.” Despite his reservations, Tom accepts Jack’s “obsessive secretiveness” “as part of the package.” Reflecting on their recent adventures in Florida, Tom realizes he is curiously unaffected by an experience that might have devastated others. He “had participated in the killing [of a murderous crew] and afterward had expected fits of guilt and remorse. They never came. Strangely, the killing didn’t bother him: The dead in this case deserved it.”

This matter-of-fact acceptance of a distasteful yet moral action is not all the father shares with Jack. Though generally less overt in his actions than his younger son, the elder

Tom is also a man of principle in more mundane situations. In his working life, he refused to accept affirmative action, “a system that put ability second.” For him, affirmative action is yet another example of the kind of false front his son Tom exemplifies: a pleasing exterior presented for public consumption that is, at its heart, dishonest to those it purports to help; a program that cheats those who prefer principled action over following the path of least resistance.

In a scene that echoes one in Wilson’s **Hosts** that involved Jack, when confronted with armed assailants, father Tom thinks, “If only he had a gun...he could stop these arrogant murderous shits. They knew no one could fight back.” Like Jack (and Jack’s friend, Abe, who runs the Isher Sports Shop), the seventy-one-year-old Tom would agree with the shop’s motto that “the right to buy weapons is the right to be free.” Criminals have little to fear from legally disarmed civilians after ineffectual “guards”—who provide only a false sense of safety—are eliminated. As the Founding Fathers knew, it is a body of armed civilians that provides a society with real safety.

Though the elder Tom is uncomfortable because he suspects Jack’s career “...probably wasn’t on the right side of the law”, he is smart enough to know that far too frequently, a world of difference exists between what is legal and what is right. In a free society, of course, there would be no dichotomy: any law would be in accord with what is proper (though not every unethical action would be

—*Continued next page*

—**Infernal**, *continued from previous page*

a legal issue). Still, that ideal retreats farther and farther as Jack attempts to wrestle with both the intrusions of the Otherness and the invasions of the State.

Jack's father is introduced to some of that tension during his Christmas visit. He notices that Jack's "...gaze seemed to linger more on the security personnel than on the Arabic-looking members of the crowd. Why? What about them concerned him?" In a country that is rapidly becoming a surveillance State; that is creating a national identification card via the REAL ID; that is militarizing our police, gutting Constitutional protections for those targeted by authorities, and treating citizens guilty-until-proven-innocent, Jack is wise to distrust the actions of his own government more than the potential threat of random, isolated violence from terrorists. Both the State and terrorists prey on people's fears to get what they want. But any group of terrorists can, at most, kill hundreds or thousands of innocents. Governments destroy millions.

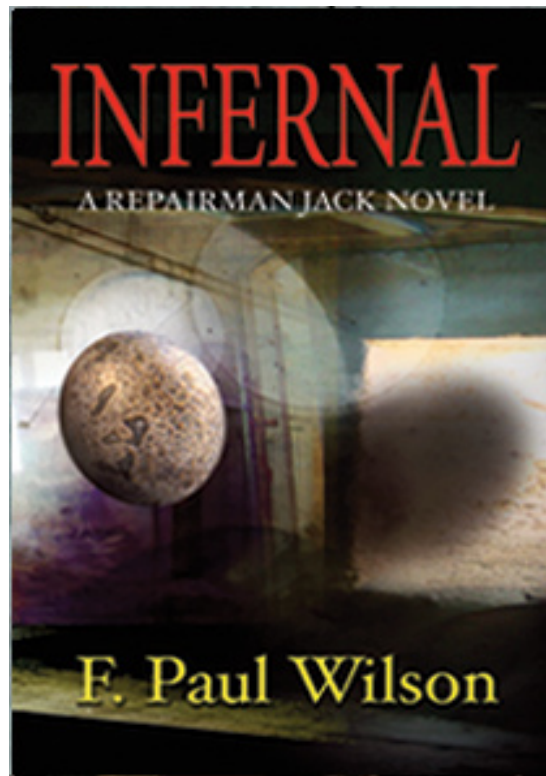
Jack knows the terrorists he encounters aren't "...the only irrational, unreasonable force impinging on him. The Lilitongue was another." But his description of the latter *Infernal* could as easily apply to the "infernal" State with its burgeoning supply of cameras, biometrics, scanners, trackers, and human-implantable chips that seek to terminate Jack's lifestyle: "But this...he had no moves, no choices, no decision, no wiggle room. An iron jacket."

The State does not want citizens—especially someone like Jack—to decide what should and should not be kept private. Indeed, Jack's very intense devotion to maintaining his privacy is quite probably due to the simple fact that the State declares—at the point of a gun—that it has a right to demand any and every bit of information it wants about anyone. What someone might willingly do or reveal if left to his own judgment, he might well oppose surrendering when others try to force him down the path they—rather than he—decide he should follow...especially when such revelations will be used against him.

Jack is not the kind of individual to take kindly to orders. From anyone.

Given that Jack's brother, the judge, is

the embodiment of the State—literally a part of the government—while Jack is the quintessential individual, it is little wonder their relationship is alternately cool and contentious. Tom does come to recognize his "arrogance and hubris," his behavior as "a king." He knows he "...was into that sovereign mindset of being a judge, of having the power to decide the fates of people and companies..." But his primary regret is getting caught—of not keeping it local—not that he did something wrong. He has lived by the "pragmatist" credo: if an action works



to get you want you want, then it's okay. For Tom, the ends always justify the means. His scheme unravels mostly because a thug even bigger than him—the Federal government—gets involved.

Tom is an exponent of *realpolitik*: "It's the way of the world. Two sets of rules out there. One is for public consumption, for the hoi poloi. But the other set, the real rules, are for those who know the game and how to play it." Tom accepts the "eat or be eaten" *weltanschauung*: get them before they get you, a Hobbesian view that is diametrically opposed to Jack's credo.

Jack asks Tom, "...without your integrity, what are you? What's left?" Integrity means

adhering consistently to who one is; of having all the parts "fit together"; of believing that "what you see is what you get." Jack's integrity is an integral part of his very identity. No wonder Tom is baffled by such an alien outlook. He knows he is "an asshole" but claims that "law school teaches that the letter of the law is all that counts. Forget the spirit... So if you find a loophole or an interpretation that lets you sidestep the spirit of the law, it's okay to exploit it. Right and wrong, just and unjust don't play into it. The only thing that matters is what's on the paper." For Tom, principles are for saps.

Indeed, Tom's "pragmatic" exploitation of others is inseparable from who he is. He reveals this sordid side soon after meeting Jack in New York. Without a thought of the consequences to his target, Tom tries to pass counterfeit money to an unsuspecting waitress. Jack is appalled. As a judge, Tom—like the State—presents a public image of probity and strength and rectitude, while in reality he (and the State) rots from the inside out like a dying tree, recognizing his self-destruction only after it is far too late to correct.

Tom's "integrity" is as counterfeit as that of the State that joins him in opposing his brother. The phony money Tom tries to pass is, in a very real way, no more bogus than the unbacked currency the State forces on its citizens, a currency the government has inflated until it has only five-percent of the value it enjoyed a century ago. Who is hurt most by this subterfuge? The small guy. The average Joe and Jane, the "working stiffs trying to earn a living" that the State declares so loudly it is there to "help."

Just as it was the low-paid waitress who was going to be stuck covering the bad bill Tom tricked her into accepting, the poorest in our society are the ones who suffer the most under the velvet-covered fist of the State's suited agents. Tom feels no more remorse over his slimy, petty behavior than does the State he represents as it steals trillions of hard-earned dollars from the citizens it has sworn to protect. Even Jack's protests fail to penetrate Tom's habitual dishonesty. Indeed, Tom criticizes his brother for not being "tough", falsely believing that "tough" means acknowledging that social interaction

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—**Player Piano**, *continued from page 1*

begin a life of menial make-work rather than real jobs. Yes, that includes the Army. Wars are primarily fought with machines, so millions of soldiers remain idle in the US, training with wooden guns. Only those stationed safely abroad are trusted with real guns.

The less-gifted wealthy can go to private college, though I'm not sure what they'd become in this meritocratic society. Perhaps politicians. **Player Piano**'s America enjoys complete separation of politics and power. Elections are free, but elected officials are impotent PR skills. The President is a goofy dunderhead whose main job is telling everyone how great things are, while publicly "ooooing" and "aaaahing" over the engineers' latest computer.

Despite their safety net, men feel useless and miserable because they're paid for make-work. Women feel useless because of all those kitchen appliances, and miserable because they're married to losers. (Yeah I know, but it's a 1950s book.) With few exceptions (entertainer, athlete, politician), it's mostly engineers and managers who enjoy meaningful work and its concomitant prestige. They also make more money, but that's not the main gripe of the useless majority. **Player Piano** has an anti-materialist theme. Despite calling himself a socialist, Vonnegut has written a novel in which national health care doesn't bring happiness.

So how does **Player Piano** parallel modern America? There is the loss of good jobs; in the book through technology, in modern America through outsourcing. Both Americas relegate ever more people to menial, government-subsidized work (Wal-Mart reputedly advises employees how to obtain food stamps to supplement their paychecks). Both Americas employ rising police surveillance to fight terrorism, and feel rising suspicion toward dissenters. In **Player Piano**, terrorists are also called "saboteurs," the ugliest of obscenities. Alleged saboteurs cannot appeal to a judge. Judges have been replaced by computers that analyze precedents and spit out verdicts.

Most importantly, in **Player Piano** the centralization of corporate/government power over the economy and security forces is a legacy of the last war, which was largely responsible for putting engineers and managers in charge of a command economy. It was

a big war, fought overseas with drones and nukes and Gamma rays. A real turkey shoot, except for the soldiers attending the high-tech weapons during a return fire. Young engineers and managers were exempt from combat, their brain power too important to the home front.

Vonnegut's book was doubtless inspired by America's command economy during World War Two, but libertarians have long noted that "War is the health of the state." Some conservatives may not like to hear it, but even "good wars" invariably expand government and diminish liberties. Just ask Louis XVI what the American Revolution did for his treasury. Thus, true conservatives, like all true patriots, are always sceptical of

I've met many libertarians, conservatives, and objectivists who admire Vonnegut's work. Libertarians admire him because he's antiwar and distrusts government. Objectivists mostly enjoy his atheism and Bokononist satire of religion. And conservatives discern a patriotic nostalgia for small town America in some of his work.

war, and suspicious of those who say we must not question or doubt our elected leaders in times of war.

Player Piano's neocons imagine that they've ended history. The last war is referred to as the Last War. America's high-tech weapons and economy dominate the globe. Yet freedom does not abound, not even in the US. "Anti-machine" books are banned for encouraging terrorism, the authors risking jail. Indeed, a visiting autocrat, hosted by the State Department, mistakes average Americans for slaves.

Vonnegut regards himself as a man of the left, but I've met many libertarians, conservatives, and objectivists who admire Vonnegut's work. Libertarians admire him because he's antiwar and distrusts government. Objectivists mostly enjoy his atheism and Bokononist satire of religion. And conservatives discern a patriotic nostalgia for small town America in some of his work. While I think that's especially true of his short stories, I've met one

conservative who was taken with Vonnegut's midwestern family history in **Palm Sunday**. Ralph Nader has praised such "true conservatism," distinguishing it from corporatism or empire building.

With a little updating, **Player Piano** would make for a fine film satire of modern America. Vonnegut's never been adapted effectively, though he was reportedly pleased with **Slaughterhouse-Five**. The problem is that his greatest strength is not his plots or characters, but his unique authorial voice.

Although released in 1952, Kurt Vonnegut's dystopian **Player Piano** can serve as a satire of modern America. That may not be readily apparent to those who focus only on its theme of technology obsoleting workers. Seemingly influenced by Fritz Lang's **Metropolis** and foreshadowing *The Twilight Zone*'s "The Brian Center at Whipple's," **Player Piano** paints a future America where a technocratic oligarchy has established a corporate command economy and cradle-to-grave socialism. The leaders think they've created a utopia but the proles disagree.

One big problem is that advancing technology makes more people useless every day. Retraining is no answer; even engineers are being replaced by computers. Society has become a player piano, creating flawless music without aid of human hands. However, this Darwinism is not untempered. The useless do not go homeless and hungry. On the contrary, everyone's basic needs are met: pre-fabricated homes, washers, TV, even national health care. And twelve years of free education, which is pretty pointless, as most people graduate to idleness.

Well, not quite idleness. Those with top test scores enjoy free college, then join the ever-diminishing ranks of engineers and managers. The less-brainy majority must choose between the Army or the Reconstruction & Reclamation Corps (aka, the Reeks & Wrecks), and begin a life of menial make-work rather than real jobs. Yes, that includes the Army. Wars are primarily fought with machines, so millions of soldiers remain idle in the US, training with wooden guns. Only those stationed safely abroad are trusted with real guns.

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Most importantly, in **Player Piano** the centralization of corporate/government power over the economy and security forces is a legacy of the last war, which was largely responsible for putting engineers and managers in charge of a command economy. It was a big war, fought overseas with drones and nukes and Gamma rays. A real turkey shoot, except for the soldiers attending the high-tech weapons during a return fire. Young engineers and managers were exempt from combat, their brain power too important to the home front.

Vonnegut's book was doubtless inspired by America's command economy during

World War Two, but libertarians have long noted that "War is the health of the state." Some conservatives may not like to hear it, but even "good wars" invariably expand government and diminish liberties. Just ask Louis XVI what the American Revolution did for his treasury. Thus, true conservatives, like all true patriots, are always sceptical of war, and suspicious of those who say we must not question or doubt our elected leaders in times of war.

Player Piano's neocons imagine that they've ended history. The last war is referred to as the Last War. America's high-tech weapons and economy dominate the globe. Yet freedom does not abound, not even in the US. "Anti-machine" books are banned for encouraging terrorism, the authors risking jail. Indeed, a visiting autocrat, hosted by the State Department, mistakes average Americans for slaves.

Vonnegut regards himself as a man of the left, but I've met many libertarians, conservatives, and objectivists who admire Vonnegut's work. Libertarians admire him because he's antiwar and distrusts government. Objectivists mostly enjoy his atheism and Bokononist satire of religion. And conservatives discern a patriotic nostalgia for small town America in some of his work. While I think that's especially true of his short stories, I've met one conservative who was taken with Vonnegut's midwestern family history in **Palm Sunday**. Ralph Nader has praised such "true conservatism," distinguishing it from corporatism or empire building.

With a little updating, **Player Piano** would make for a fine film satire of modern America. Vonnegut's never been adapted effectively, though he was reportedly pleased with **Slaughterhouse-Five**. The problem is that his greatest strength is not his plots or characters, but his unique authorial voice. **Mother Night** was adapted with unusual faithfulness to the plot, yet the film was dreary and grim, unlike the often hilarious book.

Player Piano shouldn't have this problem. It was Vonnegut's first novel, his voice still undeveloped and not yet evident, so the book's merits are not based on something unfilmable.

Unfortunately, a critique is not a solution. I don't know what can be done about the outsourcing of jobs. Socialism breeds poverty, corruption, nepotism, and ethnic clashes. Protectionism leads to trade wars, and then, say some, to shooting wars. What

we have today—a sort of statist crony corporatism?—produces government favoritism and contracts for politically-connected insiders. But even an authentic free market would drain good jobs to the lowest foreign bidder. Good for foreign workers and consumers, bad for domestic workers.

Like many satirists, Vonnegut is better at identifying and ridiculing a problem than in offering a solution. **Player Piano** ends on a pessimistic note. That may be because some problems have no solution.

Thomas M. Sips's satires include
Vampire Nation and Manhattan Sharks.
His website:
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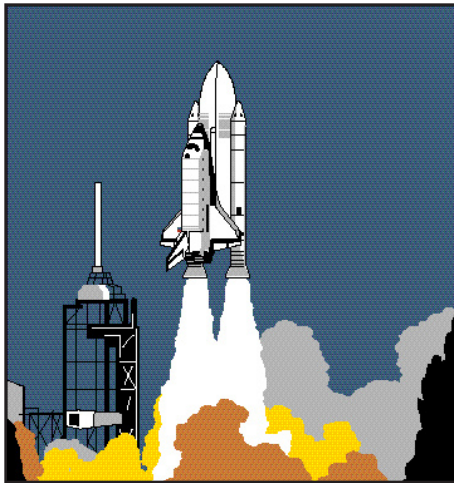
—Reviews, continued from page 3

was quite obvious that Emperor Jagang was entirely evil, I was just plain tired of reading about Richard trying to establish “freedom” by force.

I learned that Terry Goodkind takes the “show, don’t tell” methodology to the extreme with some of his lessons. On several occasions he has had his characters learn lessons regarding occurrences several novels back, or about their own idiosyncrasies that they have had since the very beginning. He has often worked to emphasize the validity of premises that he in later books destroys without compunction.

Either Goodkind is decidedly wicked in his objectives, or he has learned lessons in life and is willing to explore these with his characters. At this point, I’m betting on the former. Either way, I admire what he has done with the anthology. I admit I did not give him enough credit early on. At about the same time I was ready to put **Soul of the Fire** down and walk away from his series for good, he made his character Richard Rahl realize that he had been wrong (over the last couple of novels) to try to force people to do something, even if it was in their own best interest. All of his books have explored some aspect of freedom however, the novels after **Soul of the Fire** have been very libertarian in nature. The eighth book in the series, **Naked Empire**, was even a finalist for the Prometheus Award.

Terry Goodkind received a lot of criticism for **Naked Empire**. The novel was too contrived for many people. The new characters, dialog, and events that promoted the author’s agenda were too convenient for many readers, regardless of their beliefs. **Chainfire** is much more subtle. Some of the points may even be too subtle, or make reference to past lessons in freedom that the uninitiated reader may not be aware of, to make this a strong candidate for the Prometheus Award. Regardless, I think it should be a candidate.



In **Chainfire** we find the main point of view character, Richard Rahl, in yet another pickle. In the opening scene he has taken a critical injury and his friends are doing everything they can to save his life. When he has recovered, he finds that nobody remembers his wife Kahlan, or is willing to believe that she even ever existed. Some magical force has stripped her from Richard’s life as if they had never met, and he later finds that an alternate life and death has been created for his one true love. The author uses this precept

to put the whole world against Richard in one way or another. His friends no longer believe in his sanity, and his enemies’ plans progress as Richard chases the truth about Kahlan.

Some of the aspects of freedom that Terry Goodkind explores in **Chainfire** are extremely overt but many simply inspire the reader to make their own rational decisions about aspects of freedom.

One freedom oriented plot line simply involves free will. Several of the main characters actively push Richard to forget about his delusional wife and pick up the good fight by leading his army into battle against the enemy. These characters have previously established that they believe in prophesy, and in **Chainfire** they actively work against what Richard knows to be right in their efforts to make the desired prophesy happen. These people are so wrapped up in their doctrine that they conspire to magically destroy Richard’s memory of Kahlan, even with risks, so that he will conform to their desires. They all do so supposedly with Richard’s best interest in mind.

Another subtle lesson is about the nature of man. Terry Goodkind spends a little time contrasting the effects that government has on how people act and what qualifies as right and wrong. The country of D’hara, once ruled by an evil dictator, produced a legion of people who committed various atrocities. **Chainfire** shows in several instances where these same people, now that they are living free, question their previous actions. Some effort is even taken with the sorceress Nicci

to explain the Machiavellian reasoning she used to justify her actions when she was an agent for the evil Emperor Jagang.

The main plot culminates with the realization of the Wizard’s Ninth Rule, “Contradictions don’t exist, in whole or in part.” The author uses this rule to indicate that even though anecdotal information and personal beliefs may point to a specific conclusion, that one solid fact can destroy it.

Terry Goodkind himself claims to be an Ayn Rand Objectivist and his works prove that this is true. It is obvious that he took the unwashed masses’ objections in mind when he wrote this. His freedom oriented theme was more subtle and the lessons more innocently developed. However, the extra work he took to make **Chainfire** is not lost on those who understand the lessons of freedom that are still at the foundation of this novel.

Sin City

Directed by Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarrantino
Starring Jessica Alba, Rosario Dawson, Mickey Rourke, Bruce Willis
Dimension Films, 2005
Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Sin City started out as a comic book by Frank Miller; the film version is one among many recent adaptations of comic books to the screen. But this one has some differences. Unlike most such projects, it’s not about the adventures of superheroes. Rather, it’s in the genre of crime stories, done in a noir style. There are some minor fantastic elements, but that’s not the point of the film. Rather, as having Quentin Tarantino involved in it might suggest, its focus is on action and combat, with the violence depicted in a cinematically exaggerated style.

But it’s not a simple film; viewers who don’t stay in focus are likely to get lost. The events of the film weave together three different stories from the comic, with three different protagonists. The different storylines share some locations, supporting characters, and villains; as a result, the viewer gets a more complete picture of each of these than the protagonists can have. The time sequence doesn’t seem to be linear, and the connections among the three storylines aren’t always made explicit.

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—*Sin City*, continued from previous page

What does seem to connect them is a common theme: personal integrity and its expression in battle. *Sin City*'s male heroes each form relationships with a woman who is the victim of other men's violence. To protect those women, or in one case to avenge one of them, they use violence in return, and they endure violence, injury, and suffering. Raymond Chandler famously wrote that the private eye hero of hard-boiled detective fiction must be a man of honor, without ever saying so; the heroes of this film fit that pattern—and, like warrior heroes of many epics, their most important gift is the ability to endure pain and injury and go on with their struggle.

Not that all the women in this film wait for men to rescue them. Two of the three storylines involve the red light district of Basin City (nicknamed "Sin City") and an extraordinary organization that operates there: an alliance of prostitutes for mutual defense. One of the three stories shows their organization in action, from dealing with customers who behave abusively to fighting a small-scale war against an attempt to take over their territory and end their independence. The vision of weapons ownership as the root of freedom is as vivid here as in anything L. Neil Smith ever wrote, and libertarians ought to be cheering for it.

And the other side is also one that will make sense to libertarians. Turning up all through the connected stories are the Roarks, two wealthy and powerful brothers, one a Catholic bishop, the other a senator, who are symbols of the corruption of power. Corrupt city government is the great enemy

in *Sin City*, ready to cover up the rape of an eleven-year-old girl or frame the police officer who saved her.

This isn't intended to be a realistic film; everything in it is exaggerated, larger than life, almost to the point of fantasy. But, like most good action/adventure films, it's a story about good and evil at war; and the line between good and evil is drawn with more subtlety than usual, and in a way readers of *Prometheus* are likely to find sympathetic. And it's filmed with a consistent visual style that perfectly conveys these qualities, as consciously planned as the style of the German Expressionist films of the 1920s. Film adaptations of comic books have ranged from the good (as in *X2*) to the appalling (as in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*); Frank Miller's work may have been adapted better than any other comic book that has ever been filmed.

Lurulu

By Jack Vance
Tor Books, 2004, \$22.95
Reviewed by Anders Monsen

Lurulu is Jack Vance's sequel to his 1998 novel, *Ports of Call*, a picaresque novel rife with mood and impression. Each word, each phrase is etched with care and attention. Due to the length of time between the two novels, *Lurulu* opens with a chapter summarizing the events of the first book.

Since childhood Myron Tany imagined a life traveling the stars. His parents dismissed this dream as impractical, telling him to study more grounded matters; Myron thus supplemented his studies to include areas related to space. During his university years he lived with his eccentric aunt, Dame Hester, who through the fruits of a legal settlement won a spaceship, the *Glodwyn*. Seeking a promised fountain of youth on a distant planet, Hester departs into space, Myron functioning as captain. Sadly Hester falls under the spell of a con-artist, booting Myron off the ship. He gains employment as the supercargo on the *Glicca*, a merchant ship traveling from port to port in seek of goods. Myron's yearns only to locate the *Glodwyn* and exact justice upon the two individuals responsible for stranding him on a distant planet.

Lurulu thus picks up the tale of the *Glicca* and its crew, now ambling toward the fabled

planet Coro-Coro. Maloof, the captain of the *Glicca*, also seeks justice for a past wrong. The other two members of the crew express deep yearnings of their own. Schwatzenale, the engineer, is more practical, hoping to gain back money lost in a game of cards. The more sensitive Wingo looks to religion and metaphysics to grant him inner peace. The term "lurulu," coined by Vance through the mouth of Maloof, approximates a feeling when yearnings are gratified. It's been said that the feeling of possessing something never surpasses the longing for that possession. And yet Maloof believes "lurulu" can be attained, like the fabled equilibrium of economic theory.

Vance's sequels tend to evolve from the original goal to something far different. In *Ports of Call*, Myron sought justice against his aunt and the scoundrel instrumental in haing him kicked off the *Glodwyn*. In *Lurulu*, Myron states this steadfastly as his constant goal, but the final confrontation is dealt with swiftly, almost as an aside.

Instead, the point of this novel is not something as simple as plot or resolution of an outlined goal through a series of escalating events. Rather, reading this book is like sitting on a porch in Africa, admiring the sunset while enjoying a good bottle of wine. The pace is languid, though not without action. Vance employs droll humor to make his points, deflating Wingo's religious aspirations by pointing out the harsh realities of a planetary pilgrimage. Shown to Wingo in a romantic light, the truth of the matter is far more taxing on the soul and flesh. This is often the case: we humans tend to idealize things (the grass is always greener, for example), but reality is far more complex and often tends to disappoint the dreamers. Poor Myron, too, find that his long-distance love from *Ports of Call* has moved on while he kept up his faithful correspondence with her; Myron loved an idea, while his beloved took a more practical approach.

As the four shipmates and friends discover through their voyages and adventures, settling down after achieving the states goals leads perhaps only to a temporary state of "lurulu." Is the point of the novel then to shatter such a notion? Perhaps. And in this process, readers will enjoy a superbly written novel of a kind rarely seen today. Jack Vance may be near the end of his career, but he has lost none of the talents and skills honed over 60 creative years.



State of Fear

By Michael Crichton
 Harper Collins, 2005, \$27.95
 Reviewed by Fred C. Moulton

This novel fails to live up to the advance hype. It fails as a thriller and as a work with much of anything to offer specifically for libertarians. It also fails as a reasonable exploration of environmental issues, global warming, media manipulation or scientific integrity.

Looking first at **State of Fear** as a novel we find a plot that is intended to excite, but instead generates only mild amusement at the contrived and weak actions of the characters. A novel might survive paper-thin characters if it has other features such as a plot but **State of Fear** does not have strong plot to rescue it. The gratuitously shallow portrayal of a Hollywood actor is a perfect example of how reliance on stereotypes can suck any interest out of a work. It is hard not to imagine the characters as merely the anchor points for the cut and paste of search engine results. The novel does not even have consistently good dialog as a fall back. What passes for dialog too often appears to be more like the rantings of a radio talk show host who had just a wee bit too much coffee.

Now let us consider what appears in addition to global warming to be other possible themes of the book. Supposedly these are media manipulation and lack of scientific integrity within the environmental arena as a whole and global warming in particular. The novel portrays the media manipulation leading to a "state of fear" in the public. But despite the title it is not the issue of fear that seems to be the main focus of the work. But as we have already noted it is global warming that gets the graphs and seems to be most argued topic in the novel.

Yet even if they are the secondary aspects of the novel, let us examine media manipulation and the accuracy of media reporting, possible bias, and lack of scientific integrity in grants and peer review. The accuracy of reporting and scientific integrity is not uniquely libertarian issues since other political traditions can also be in favor of media accuracy and scientific integrity. I have found that libertarians typically embrace honesty and thus would be in favor of honest reporting and science. If media manipulation and inaccurate reporting are libertarian issues then libertarians should be equally concerned about an entire range of issues in which media reporting may not be entirely accurate.

This raises the question whether media reporting ever is, or can be, fully accurate. These are interesting questions, but Crichton's work does not appear to be a useful source of insight. There are a few pages devoted to the topics of media and science but they are weak and lost between the tales of death by octopus and cannibals. Because it structured as a thriller there are deaths and near deaths and crisis upon crisis but they are not compelling and do not provide a useful backdrop for any of the issues in the novel. There is no reason in principle that a thriller cannot be the vehicle for examining some of these issues but **State of Fear** does not deliver.

Does Michael Crichton intend **State of Fear** to be more than just a thriller? It is not clear to what extent Crichton really is interested in global warming and other issues. Are they merely the backdrop for a thriller or is this work supposed to have a "message?" At the end of the work is an "Author's Message," which contains the author's opinions on a number of topics from global warming to changes in the methods of funding scientific research. Following this is one appendix on the dangers of politicized science and another listing the data sources used for graphs in the body of the novel. The work concludes with a bibliography. This illustrates one of the many problems with the work: the intent is unclear. It is not clear how seriously we are to take his "Author's Message" since it is filled with gems like "Everybody has an agenda. Except me." Does he really believe that or is this a veer into a poor attempt at humor? This does not mean that Crichton is a fool or a hypocrite; it may be that he was just too close to the work and too famous for an editor

to manage. It is quite possible that Crichton could not step back to look at the work and improve it. The topics covered in the novel are all certainly ripe for a good thriller treatment. The range of topics may be one of the problems of the work. Attempting to cover global warming, media manipulation, scientific integrity and all of the rest may be too much to cover in a thriller format.

What of the heavy focus on global warming in the novel? Is a novel that focuses so heavily on global warming of libertarian interest? Not particularly. Global warming is not a libertarian issue, is a matter that falls within the realms of climatology, atmospheric physics, and other fields. The validity of claims about global warming and the extent of human involvement are scientific questions about which there is much current interest. A reasonable level of interest would be expected since the earth is our home; at least for the next few years until migration to space become a possibility. But let us be very clear that the validity of claims about global warming is not within the realm of libertarian philosophy any more than are the various interpretations of quantum mechanics.

It is too bad that this is not a better novel both in its structure as well as its content. Issues of media manipulation, academic dishonesty, and global warming are interesting and important issues, but this novel does not improve the debate. At best it will drop unnoticed into the remainder bins; at worst it will only reinforce the most strident voices on all sides. There might be strident voices that lump radical environmentalists with serious ecologists and thus will likely trumpet **State of Fear** as a novel based on reality. And there might be a strident chorus which will claim that it is just one more piece of evidence that those who do not embrace all aspects of some radical environmental agenda are corporate stooges out to destroy the earth. Let us hope not.

The issue which does have a libertarian aspect is the following: If the global warming is demonstrated as an actual phenomena and if human activity is shown to be a significant component in the growth of global warming, then how would responsible libertarians respond? On this point the book has virtually nothing to offer since it does not have a libertarian viewpoint. There is no theoretical

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Moving?

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—*State of Fear*, continued from previous page

development of how to handle the issue. There is not even a coherent practical set of heuristics. The novel definitely gives us a government secret agent out to fight some really bad people. It may be trying to give us more but if so it is not clear what that may be.

Gesundheit, Dummy:

The Best of Baloo

By Rex F. May

JoNa Books, 2000: \$7.95

Reviewed by Max Jahr

I stumbled across this small gem recently. Libertarians may know Rex May as the cartoonist, Baloo, whose work has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Liberty*, *The Voluntaryist*, and other publications. This slim volume (around 60 pages) gathers slightly over 150 cartoons, each a single panel in length. The humor in the cartoons, like the editorial woodcuts of old, often aim unflinchingly at government and its functionaries, but also skewers relationship issues, self-doubt, and other vagaries of life.

There are no storylines in these comics. Instead, we get witty snapshots drawn in quick, yet effective strokes. As William Shakespeare's Hamlet once sardonically remarked, "Brevity is the soul of wit." Some favorites include the "L'etat c'est moi" themed cartoons, such as the king staring down at a peasant and stating, "This isn't either a free country!" I've personally experienced the one where a judge sentences a person to punishment by bureaucracy: "The prisons are full, so I'll just have the City Engineers tear up the street in front of your house." Talk about cruel and unusual punishment. There are a few clunkers, but the vast majority of the cartoons made me laugh out loud. My main complaint is the slimness of this volume. Many excellent cartoons are missing. Future collections might rectify this, for the world needs more of Baloo.

One should also note that one of May's forthcoming works is a collaboration with writer L. Neil Smith, in the form of a novel entitled **Roswell, Texas**. A combination of their humor and sense of satire should be devastating.

Hotel Rwanda

Directed by Terry George

Starring Don Cheadle, Sophie Okonedo, Nick Nolte

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2005, \$26.98

Reviewed by Anders Monsen

In 1994 members of the Hutu tribe in Rwanda murdered one million of their Tutsi neighbors as the United Nations forces within that country, and world public opinion outside, stood by and did nothing. The event is a horrific yet far from isolated case of mass madness and slaughter, often perpetrated with the explicit consent or orders of the State. 2004's *Hotel Rwanda*, depicting the courageous acts of one man working to save hundreds of Tutsis, drew wide acclaim.

The similarities between the events in Rwanda and the plight of the Jews trying to escape Nazi Germany evince a chilling and continuing lack of compassion for human life, as well as the effects of abrogating responsibility to governments and so-called world organizations like the UN. Listening to American officials splitting hairs over genocide and acts of genocide sound all too familiar ten years later in a different region of Africa—Darfur.

Don Cheadle won an Oscar nomination for his lead role in *Hotel Rwanda*, playing Paul Rusesabagina, the personable and well-connected Hutu manager of Hotel des Milles Collines in Kigali. We meet Paul on the eve of the start of the massacres. He knows people in high places, providing small favors to army generals and a virulently prejudiced businessman through touches of smooth customer service; he also is building favors for a day when he may need help for his family since his wife is Tutsi.

The Tutsi represent the hated minority among the Hutu majority. Radio broadcasts detail the hatred toward the Tutsi, calling them cockroaches, agitating for their total destruction. When the death of the Rwandan president torpedoed a fragile peace accord, the night of tall trees begins. Like Nazi Germany's Night of Broken Glass, *Kristallnacht*, which began the slaughter of Jews on November 9 and 10, 1938, the violence is swift and brutal. Seeking at first to protect his family, Paul ends up bringing a score of other Tutsis into the hotel. Here he begins a concentrated effort to save as many other Tutsis as he can. His only UN assistance

comes through a Canadian UN officer played by Nolte, who struggles to bring Paul and other Tutsis to refugee camps and ultimately out of the country.

When the Hutus begin the slaughter, events ramp up quickly. Paul struggles to retain control of the situation. Slightly over 1200 Tutsi refugees shelter inside the hotel. The white guests leave the country, escorted by French and Belgian forces. The hotel becomes a fragile oasis amid the slaughter, though not ignored by the Hutus, who attempt time and again to remove and kill the Tutsi sheltered there. The siege lasts around eleven weeks, though feels much shorter.

Paul's impeccably calm demeanor shatters toward the end, exploding in rage and fear for his family when all seems lost. In one scene Paul returns from buying supplies from a Tutsi-hating businessman and long-time supplier for the hotel. "Take the river road," he says. "It's clear." The gruesome implications of that phrase become clear only when Paul's driver hits a bump in the fog. As Paul steps out of the car to see if they've driven off the road, he literally falls over rows of corpses. The fog lifts, we see an endless row of bodies. The road has indeed been cleared—of Tutsis.

The supporting cast shines. Sophie Okonedo (*Dirty Pretty Things*) barely hides an undercurrent of fear as Paul's Tutsi wife. Jean Reno appears in a brief role as the president of Sabine, the company that owns Paul's hotel; his horror at being told over the phone that guests are being murdered sears the viewer. Joaquin Phoenix gutsy cameraman catches footage of massacres.

Through his actions Paul Rusesabagina joins the ranks of other individuals who refused to turn aside as governing authorities attempted mass murder: Oscar Schindler (Nazi Germany), John Rabe and Minnie Vautrin (Nanking during the Japanese massacres), Raoul Wallenberg (saving several thousand Hungarian Jews from extermination during WWII). In the midst of untold millions state-murdered individuals through the 20th century, the numbers saved are mere grains of sand in the vast deserts of death.

Hotel Rwanda ranks as one of the most intense movies I've ever watched. In this movie you will feel grief and rage, yet also hope that even in the midst of madness and good men who do nothing, some people will act against evil.

Everything I Needed to Know, I learned from Edgar Rice Burroughs

By Bob Wallace

I never needed any self-help books about men being from Mars and women from Venus, or how I learned everything I needed to know in kindergarten. All I ever needed was Edgar Rice Burroughs, whom I encountered when I was 11.

Burroughs, who isn't really that well-known anymore, is best-known as the creator of Tarzan (who in the books spoke as if he was quoting Shakespeare, a far cry from the "me Tarzan, you Jane" in the movies). But in his day ERB (as he is commonly known) was as popular as Stephen King is now, and was, and still is, hugely influential. Carl Sagan, for example, credited him with interesting him in space exploration and science.

Writers such as F. Paul Wilson, Philip José Farmer and John Norman have been influenced by Burroughs' novels about Tarzan, Barsoom (Mars), Pellucidar (the inhabited interior of the Earth) and Venus.

Perhaps the first thing I noticed about Burroughs is that, much like Robert Heinlein, none of his women characters are victims. And he was writing in the early 1900s. Were he alive today, I suspect he would hold Stalinist fruitcakes like Betty Friedan and Andrea Dworkin in contempt. Such whiney, self-pitying women, who think everything would be just fine if society was destroyed (and men's characters, too) and remade according to the crackpot fantasies infesting their heads, can't even begin to compare with a brave, smart, resourceful woman like Tavia in **A Fighting Man of Mars**, who hacked off the arms of a couple of 15-foot-tall six-armed Martian apes.

Not only were Burroughs' women not victims, they were handy not only with swords but also with pistols, although they were "radium" pistols, a weapon whose workings still puzzle me. Dejah Thoris, the Princess of Mars, once skewered a villain several times, then she kicked his worthless carcass over a cliff. Maybe Barsoomian females did give birth by laying eggs, but they were no chickens.

Yet, Burroughs' women were still feminine. There was no competition with men, and each sex got along just fine with the other. The main reason, I'm sure, is that the Barsoomian State didn't interfere in the relationships between the sexes, and so they

fell into the natural, proper ones.

At 11 I was immensely impressed by these saber-wielding, pistol-blasting heroines. I suspect a lot of guys were, and are. A woman I know wrote one article about how she was planning on shooting a pistol for the first time, and got 300 emails from guys willing to instruct her. So, girls, if you want to be popular, become proficient with a firearm. Learning to hurl a dagger is not such a bad idea, either. Men will get on their knees and salaam before you the way Wayne and Garth did before Alice Cooper.

Neither were the women always beautiful, the way they invariably are in the movies. Tavia was described as "boyish," and in the long run the hero, Tan Hadron, preferred her to the beautiful but haughty and shallow Sanoma Tora. Although, to be honest, on the covers of most of the books the physiques of both the men and women look as if they've been inflated with an air hose. But then, the publishers were trying to sell copies to boys in their early teens.

The second thing I learned is that I was being conned in school. The Warlord of Mars was the Earthman John Carter, a southerner from Virginia who had fought in the Civil War (don't ask me how he got on Mars). Hey, wait a minute—I had been taught in school the South was an ignoble, maybe even evil society that fought a long, bloody war to defend slavery. Yet Carter was a noble and honorable man, protector of the oppressed, upholder of justice. Carter was always against slavery and oppression. Who was I supposed to believe? What I was taught in the government-run prison/school I despised, or a writer who bought me fascination and awe?

Burroughs, like Hemingway, was originally from the heavily residential Oak Park, a medium-sized suburb stuck right up against Chicago. I've been there several times. Apparently he found a better area to write about than the one he was from.

The third thing I learned is that maybe kings and queens are better than democracy. Barsoom was ruled—and ruled justly—by John Carter and Dejah Thoris. They barely appeared to rule at all. I really don't remember a list of laws in any of Burroughs' novels, other than the simple ones we all know—you

don't murder, you don't steal. Otherwise, you could do as you pleased.

But there's not a word in any of his novels about mob rule. Most of them read as if they could have been partly based on Hans-Hermann Hoppe's **Democracy: the God that Failed**. In fact, Burroughs doesn't have a good word to say about mobs. In **The Gods of Mars** he does a hatchet-job on the blind fanatical mobs that fall for that combination of the State, corrupt religion, and Big Business.

What else? There are at least two kinds of villains. The least bad are the sniveling, back-stabbing, lying cowards who are just great at running their mouths but have nothing to back it up. I guess junior high existed during Burroughs' school years, too.

The worst villains, however, are those who want to conquer and rule the world. Burroughs portrayed such people as practically insane with the lust for power. They're the ones who wanted to impose a State on all of Barsoom, and con armies into fighting for them. And in Burroughs' worlds, they always failed, just as in do in our world, although often at a horrendous cost in slaughter and destruction and misery.

Burroughs' worlds are not a libertarian paradise. His novels are basically for boys 11 to 14 years old. They're filled with sword fights and big apes with fangs (and big spiders with fangs, too). But there's not a good word in any of his novels for the State, or for politics, or for politicians, or corrupt religion. There is, however, true love between men and women as one of the highest values, and the desire for justice and freedom.

Burroughs wasn't the most stylish writer in the world. His style was workman-like more than anything else. But he could tell a heck of a story, a far better one than current writers who are far more stylish than he was. If I had my way, I'd close down the government schools, salt the ground (and pepper the teachers), then open up private ones and create a better world by teaching my hero, ERB.

Bob Wallace is the author of I Write What I See. This article is reprinted with permission from the author.

—*Infernal*, continued from page 4

is all a game consisting of what one can get away with, of having no concern for whom is damaged by one's actions.

Some people believe that the type of political hypocrisy Tom demonstrates is simply the result of a weak person succumbing to temptation. But as Lord Acton wrote so long ago, it is the system of political power itself that is the corrupting influence. Without strong chains binding them, politicians will almost inevitably abuse their power and benefit personally from their position. Whether financially or in terms of prestige or just the emotional high some people experience when forcing their will on helpless others, power tends to corrupt.

Tom erroneously thinks Jack reached his "life of crime" by the same avenue he did. Tom's incremental descent into the depths of corruption as a judge parallels the small but ever-increasing steps the State has used to extend its tentacles into all areas of our lives. Whether smoking regulations or taxes or safety programs, every law or rule that supposedly applies in only limited circumstances is expanded and added to until everyone is caught in the net. The Otherness is a power Tom would have an affinity for (and which may explain a key moment in *Infernal*), a power that ensnares the unsuspecting in its claws, a power wielded solely for evil ends that destroys the innocent, a power that seeks eventually to exert its control over all of mankind.

Jack wields great power, too, of course, but his brand of power emerges from his deep-seated integrity, his unyielding principles, his willingness to use physical violence in the defense of the good against their uncaring exploiters. Jack knows that the kind of short-term, "easy" way out practiced by his brother will, in reality, become incredibly difficult and destructive in the long-run.

In contrast to his brother, Jack started where he wanted to go: "No increments for me... No excuses." He entered into his unconventional existence as a complete outsider open-eyed and ready for whatever transpired. His pariah status in the eyes of the law hardly bothers him, however. "Maybe I am a criminal. Maybe I could even be considered a career criminal. But I'm not a crook. When I say I'm going to do something, I do it. Ironclad."

The sad fact is, we are all criminals. The tangle of self-contradictory laws that Jack disagrees with ensures that each of us has—at one time or another—broken a legal requirement or prohibition. It's an infernal position to be placed in, but, like Jack, we have a choice in how to deal with that perverted reality: we can do what "works"...or we can do what is right.

Infernal hooks the reader quickly and sends him along on a journey he does not want to end. Immersing oneself in Jack's universe is a refreshing antidote to a world that, like brother Tom to brother Jack, is the flip side of the "way things ought to be." Learning more about Gia and Jack's relationship sets up the day when Jack will have to confront the conundrum of becoming a father and how to mesh that with his career as a repairman. The book also strengthens the theme that in Jack's life, there "are no more coincidences." Questions are raised that will hopefully be answered in coming sequels.

Readers of the ultimate book in this series, *Nightworld*, will find some of the tension in these prequels diminished knowing that Jack will overcome any mortal threats he encounters. But there is more than one way to hurt someone, and Jack knows only too well that there is "pain to come."

I'm looking forward to joining Repairman Jack again as he moves towards the ultimate repair job ever: (literally) saving the world.

For reviews of other F. Paul Wilson books by the same author, and an interview with F. Paul Wilson, please visit Russell Madden's home page <<http://home.earthlink.net/~rdmadden/web-docs/index.html>>

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With the 2005 publication of *The Living House of Oz* (illustrated by Eric Shanower), Edward Einhorn returns to the Land of Oz in a sequel to his critically acclaimed Oz novel *Paradox in Oz*.

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Available from Hungry Tiger Press in three editions (trade, collectors, deluxe limited) at <http://www.hungrytigerpress.com/books/livinghouse.shtml>

Submission Guidelines

Prometheus is always looking for reviews, essays, articles, and columns of interest to libertarian science fiction fans. *Prometheus*, as the newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society, focuses on books nominated for the Prometheus Award, but as a publication on liberty and culture, *Prometheus* will publish reviews and articles beyond the Prometheus Award.

Reviews of books, movies, and TV series are welcome. For books, include author's name, complete title, publisher, date of publication, and current price. For movies include the director, studio, release date, and main cast. If released on DVD also include the price.

Submissions can be of any length, from critical reviews or essays on particular writers or books, to brief two or three paragraph notes on books or movies of interest.

Contact the editor at lfeditor@mac.com or editor@lfs.org about your material. If you include your submission in the text of your email, also include an attachment formatted in Rich Text Format. All submissions may be edited for grammar, spelling, and style.

If you would like additional contributor's copies of the issue of *Prometheus*, contact the editor.

Iron Sunrise

By Charles Stross
Ace Books, 2004, \$25.95
Reviewed by Anders Monsen

In the past couple of years Charles Stross has emerged as one sf's brightest and freshest voices. **Iron Sunrise** follows in the universe of **Singularity Sky**, a dazzling tour de force of invention and ideas. While the former book showed the brash approach of a violin virtuoso performing complex tunes and madcap jigs in quick succession, **Iron Sunrise** broadens the scope and increases the depth of ideas, hints a more mature and comfortable writer.

Moscow, a planet with several million inhabitants, dies in an instant when its sun goes nova, murdered via iron bombing directly in the core of the sun. Engaged in a trade dispute with another system, New Dresden, the dying planet manages to send off a deterrent fleet, an action of revenge that will take years to complete, as the vessels slowly accelerate from deep space along a hidden trajectory. Meanwhile, aboard an outer space station being evacuated in the

face of the oncoming neutrino wave from the nova, Wednesday Stowger, a young girl, becomes a potential target when she discovers a deep secret that may be connected to the iron bombing.

Yet Wednesday carries another secret. Like Martin Springfield from **Singularity Sky**, Wednesday communicates with a special friend that no one else knows about, called Herman. Herman appears to be an agent of the eschaton, the god-like super AI that appeared years ago when a human creation became self-aware. Herman was the one who sent Wednesday on the mission that blipped someone's radar, the effects of which do not become clear until a few years after the event.

In the meantime, UN agent Rachel Mansour, who we also met in **Singularity Sky**, now the wife of Springfield, finds herself thrust into a new mission. It appears that the deterrent fleet sent towards New Dresden can be recalled using special codes. However, someone is busily taking care of the small group of ambassadors who possess the codes, assassinating them one by one. Rachel's task, along with a team of UN specialists, is to ensure the survival of the remaining ambassadors in order to issue the recall codes, and also discover who's behind the assassinations.

Stross' universe clearly sympathizes with some sort of libertarian ideals, although probably nowhere near the hard-core anarcho-capitalist wing of the movement. The UN still exists, but on a much smaller scale than today's world-government wanna-be. Private law enforcement is standard on Earth, while in the universe the eschaton has scattered humans on hundreds of planets and let them evolve into strange mixes. Some of these mixes are benign, others caused the Moscow mass murder. Eventually the source of this crime steps forward. Known as the ReMastered, their very nature is so antithetical to liberty it makes one's skin crawl.

The present situation finds us around three years removed from the Moscow action. Wednesday, now a surly and isolated near-adult, inhabits a different station with her family. One night, en route to a party, she encounters professional hitmen trying to kill her. It turns out that the import of what she learned years ago only now has become clear to the people involved with Moscow. Wednesday survives, but in the aftermath her family is wiped out, and she is forced to

flee. Guided by Herman, she catches a ride aboard the *Romanov*, a vast passenger ship winging its way toward New Dresden. Here she befriends Frank "the Nose" Johnson, a bitter and angry warblogger, who is covering the murder of Moscow. In due course, Rachel and her crew, including Martin, arrive on the *Romanov*, which appears to be tracing the killing route, having stopped at several points where the murdered ambassadors were taken out.

In a race against time, Rachel, Wednesday, and the others discover an enemy far deadlier than they had imagined, with a dark purpose and design that reaches throughout the universe. Moscow may have been only the first step. Can Earth be far behind? And where does the eschaton fit into all this? For a near god-like being, it seems at times powerless or unwilling to interfere. Herman turns out to be but a small extension of the eschaton, and must act through sympathetic humans like Martin and Wednesday, who in turn show all the frailties of humanity. When faced with a relentless threat like the ReMastered, a blend of super-nazi jihadists capable of controlling other people like puppets, what recourse is left for a free society?

These very questions are one we grapple with today, as the world wakes each day to new actions of seemingly mindless acts of terror disguised as acts of religious war. I doubt Stross had this in mind when writing **Iron Sunrise**, as there have been enough such similar acts of mass terror throughout human history, more often than not perpetrated by governments and humans quite similar to the ReMastered.

As a work of fiction and sf, **Iron Sunrise** ranks as one of the best novels of 2004. The pacing is tight and tense, the characters superbly drawn. My only quibble with this book is the ending, which leaves the story wide open for another sequel, nay demands a sequel. The fact that we'll probably have to wait a couple of years for such a sequel seems almost a crime. Charles Stross stands as one of the most original and bravest writers of sf today, writing with an unflinching vision, his literary arms buried in the scientific guts of ideas and direction that power this literature of ideas. In terms of entertainment and ideas, you can't get closer to the ideal of science fiction today than **Iron Sunrise**.

V for Vendetta Movie Update

In the Spring Issue of *Prometheus*, reporting on the *V for Vendetta* movie, I offered some wary comments about the quality and intent of the movie adaptation. On May 23, www.comicbookresources.com reported that creator Alan Moore slammed the screenplay and publically disassociated himself from the upcoming movie based on his work.

Some early screenplay reviews also have intimated at major changes to the novel, hinting at a strange and bizarre ending at odds with the book. There's been a major character change with regards to the character of V; original actor James Purefoy was dropped and the role assumed by Hugo Weaving.

However, an early poster available at <http://vfordendetta.warnerbros.com/> looks quite promising, featuring the quote, "People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people." In other words, like with all major motion picture adaptations, expect variations from the original material and the completed product.

—Anders Monsen

The Golden AgeBy John C. Wright
Tor, 2002, \$25.95**The Phoenix Exultant**By John C. Wright
Tor, 2003, \$25.95**The Golden Transcendence**By John C. Wright
Tor, 2003, \$25.95*Reviewed by Anders Monsen*

Brian W. Aldiss writes of space opera that “the Earth must be in peril, there must be a quest and a man to match the mighty hour. That man must confront aliens and exotic creatures. Space must flow past the ports like wine from a pitcher. Blood must run down the palace steps, and ships launch into the lowering dark. There must be a woman fairer than the skies and a villain darker than a Black Hole. And all must come right at the end.”

John C. Wright’s space opera trilogy is stunning achievement of imagination and ideas. These three books literally overflow with discourse and design, but in the end this ambition also burdens them down and weakens some of their power. Set several millennia in the future, in a society that can perhaps be classed as a Randian utopia, we a thrust, *in media res*, into the life of a “young” member of the elite, Phaethon. We realize at once here are grander things at play. Short of naming his protagonist “Prometheus,” Wright immediately invests the weight of allusion into his novel and character. More of the same is yet to come.

Phaethon’s world, the Golden Oecumene, stands on the eve of a golden transcendence, where minds will merge and form the basis of new social ideas and directions. Major celebrations lasting an entire year mark this event, and Phaethon takes a break from one celebration and stumbles upon a chance encounter that changes his life forever. A space traveler informs him that his memories have been erased to atone for and forget a most memorable and horrific crime. Instantly the lone enforcement arm of Phaethon’s universe appears at the scene, treating the manifestation of the space traveler as a hostile act of incursion, and sending away the now confused Phaethon. What manner of crime could he have committed, since he still lives, yet suffers a slice of memory not of days, but centuries?

As the scion of the House of Radamanthus, one of the foremost family manors, Phaethon oozes privilege. His “father,” Helion, controls the Solar Array, a vast source of energy. At Phaethon’s mental fingertips are

controls, filters, computer assisted memory and input, all managed by a Sophotech, an Artificial Intelligence created by humans to manage their affairs. In turn these Sophotechs have grown vast and powerful—god-like, almost. Now, imbued with autonomous motives sometimes at odds with humanity, they have become integral to society, which depends on them to grant almost immortality to humans.

The human relationships extend beyond our current conceptions. For Phaethon is not Helion’s son by traditional means. He is virtually a clone, although they maintain a father-son relationship and bond. And Helion? Is he really Helion, since the primary body and mind were destroyed by a solar flare, and the current “version” lacks some of Helion’s most recent memories and thoughts? In addition, Phaethon’s original wife, a true-born human in the conventional sense, has locked herself away in a deep sleep due to his vast and unknown crime. There is no way for him to contact her, though she has left behind a copy, with her own feelings for Phaethon, and quite a strong will.

From within this world, where everyone’s memories of his grand crime appear erased or hidden, Phaethon faces an harsher threat: should he recover his memories his society would banish him forever, strip away his immortality, and refuse any assistance. Computation time is the new currency; he has no money and lives on his father’s generosity. His gorgeous world is in fact a simulation. His rude body, stripped of all interfaces and computer access, will be his only home.

Despite this threat, Phaethon seeks to find a way to both recover his memories and remain within his world. This quest drives the events of the first novel in the trilogy, **The Golden Age**, which in itself stands as a remarkable first novel. The book is filled with a sense of wonder, desire, individuality, and hymn to the human mind. I alluded earlier to a Randian utopia. Phaethon’s world is on the surface quite free: government is limited, but firmly in place, enforced with a super-soldier/policeman known as Atkins. With every cell a weapon, Atkins by himself

appears enough of a deterrent of crime, or the enforcement of law, to handle millions of citizens. Arriving at the scene of the intruder who informed Phaethon of his memory loss, Atkins remains a thorn in Phaethon’s side throughout the novels, yet also later becomes a valuable ally. Phaethon alludes several times to the free nature of his society, which values reason and individual property rights to the extent that people own planets and planetary rings, and attempt engineering feats that would horrify any preservationist.

When in the course of **The Golden Age** Phaethon finally uncovers his crime, he is in fact exiled. Cast out from the vast space elevator that houses his flesh while he lives in the virtual spaces created and maintained by the Sophotechs. He discovers that he possesses a golden armor capable of sustaining him, quite vital when every citizen refuses his aid. His crime? He had built a vast spacecraft and sought to travel the reaches of space. For it seems that the Sophotechs and human governors favor a closed society, fearing humanity will scatter and divide, then turn back on itself through war and envy.

There is a certain history behind this view. Several centuries in the past, a group of humans had pushed beyond known space, establishing another Oecumene. Isolated, on the edge of a black hole with infinite power, this Oecumene became twisted and evil. Phaethon now believes they are the source of his woes, that this polar opposite culture stands poised to invade and destroy his own Oecumene. No one, of course, believes him. Instead, they see Phaethon, like his namesake, intent on controlling that which he cannot control, and in the process become the destroyer of his own society.

The Golden Age concludes with Phaethon taking his first steps into exile. The second volume, **The Phoenix Exultant**, focuses on this exile, which takes place on Earth. Amid other exiled humans and machines, even lower in status than himself, Phaethon struggles to win back his wealth. He does not seek as much to return to his former status

—Continued on page 16

—*Golden Transcendence, continued from page 15*

as he does to re-attain possession of his starship, *The Phoenix Exultant*. Were he to possess this vessel, nothing would prevent him from heading out into space; he is, initially, resigned to life outside his former society.

Unbidden, he finds allies who dare go against the edicts preventing offering him aid. His wife's duplicate, who appears in love with Phaethon, travels into exile to find him. Aktins, the enforcer, appears at dire moments to thwart his enemies, who begin to show themselves when they realize that Phaethon might prove a strong opponent to their plans. Through great effort and perseverance, Phaethon surges back into his former life, and sneaks aboard his ship to assume control. The second volume concludes as the ship readies for departure into space, seeking to take the battle to his enemies, the visitors from that other Oecumene.

The final volume of the trilogy, **The Golden Transcendence**, seeks to answer many questions. On the macro scale: Who are Phaethon's enemies, and what lies behind this invading force? On the personal side: Will

Phaethon be able to save his wife or accept instead the copy of his wife, alive and in love with him. How will Phaethon deal with the copy of his father, and can he return to his former life? Unfortunately, in the final volume, the action bogs down into lengthy debates, dialogs, philosophical discussions, and second guessing.

The novels are rife with moments of literary delight, especially in conversation and observation of actions and motives, that mirror the style of Jack Vance. Wright clearly admires Vance, as well as Poul Anderson, but he does not imitate these writers slavishly. As the trilogy progresses, we witness Wright struggling to find his own voice. The downside of this development is that all too often the dialog dominates, and we sit through endless discourses of doubt, like John Galt channeling Hamlet.

However, part of the trouble with *The Golden Age* trilogy is that so much of the metaphors and images of this far-future society resemble in great detail our very own 20th century geek-speak. The Neptunians play

pranks on each other by sending Trojan horse viruses, citizens spend much of their time in various states of virtual reality. Sophisticated AIs act as governors, yet behave much like Greek gods, petty and peevish at times, cold and cynical otherwise. One does get the impression that Wright has a great deal of skill at painting a vast canvass. Due to its scope, such a canvass won't fit everywhere, might not suit everyone, and there are pieces that one might feel would be better off muted or left out altogether.

Much like the recent *Matrix* trilogy, the *Golden Age* trilogy rises fast then falls under its own weight and pretensions. The first volume stands as the strongest work, blazing the sky with breadth and imagination. The second dims slightly, taking a more contemplative turn. The third veers off into metaphysics of a confusing and distracting sort. Yet despite the flaws from such a path, John C. Wright has written a fascinating work of speculation that goes to the heart of sf, dealing unflinchingly with ideas, imagination, and the human condition.

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