

# PROMETHEUS

## A Political History of SF

By *Eric S. Raymond*

2005 Prometheus Awards, pages 2 & 8

The history of modern SF is one of five attempted revolutions—one success and four enriching failures. I'm going to offer you a look at them from an unusual angle, a political one. This turns out to be useful perspective because more of the history of SF than one might expect is intertwined with political questions, and SF had an important role in giving birth to at least one distinct political ideology that is alive and important today.

The first and greatest of the revolutions came out of the minds of John Wood Campbell and Robert Heinlein, the editor and the author who invented modern science fiction. The pivotal year was 1937, when John Campbell took over the editorship of *Astounding Science Fiction*. He published Robert Heinlein's first story a little over a year later.

Pre-Campbellian science fiction bubbled up from the American pulp magazines of the 1910s and 1920s, inspired by pioneers like Jules Verne and H.G. Wells but mostly recycling an endless series of cardboard clichés: mad scientists, lost races, menacing bug-eyed monsters, coruscating death rays, and screaming blondes in brass underwear. With a very few exceptions (like E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Skylark of Space* and sequels) the stuff was teeth-jarringly bad; unless you have a specialist interest in the history of the genre I don't recommend seeking it out.

John Campbell had been one of the leading writers of space opera from 1930, second only to E.E. "Doc" Smith in inventiveness. When he took over *Astounding*, he did so with a vision: one that demanded higher standards of both scientific plausibility and story-crafting skill than the field had ever seen before. He discovered and trained a group of young writers who would dominate the field for most of the next fifty years. Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, and Hal Clement were among them.

Heinlein was the first of Campbell's discoveries and, in the end, the greatest. It was Heinlein who invented the technique of description by indirection—the art of describing his future worlds not through lumps of exposition but by presenting it through the eyes of his characters, subtly leading the reader to fill in by deduction large swathes of background that a lesser author would have drawn in detail.

From World War II into the 1950s Campbell's writers—many working scientists and engineers who knew leading-edge technology from the inside—created the Golden Age of science fiction. Other SF pulpazines competing with *Astounding* raised their standards and new ones were founded. The field took the form of an extended conversation, a kind of proto-futurology worked out through stories that often implicitly commented on each other.

While space operas and easy adventure stories continued to be

written, the center of the Campbellian revolution was "hard SF", a form that made particularly stringent demands on both author and reader. Hard SF demanded that the science be consistent both internally and with known science about the real world, permitting only a bare minimum of McGuffins like faster-than-light star drives. Hard SF stories could be, and were, mercilessly slammed because the author had calculated an orbit or gotten a detail of physics or biology wrong. Readers, on the other hand, needed to be scientifically literate to appreciate the full beauty of what the authors were doing.

There was also a political aura that went with the hard-SF style, one exemplified by Campbell and right-hand man Robert Heinlein. That tradition was of ornery and insistent individualism, veneration of the competent man, an instinctive distrust of coercive social engineering and a rock-ribbed objectivism that valued knowing how things work and treated all political ideologizing with suspicion. Exceptions like Asimov's Foundation novels only threw the implicit politics of most other Campbellian SF into sharper relief.

At the time, this very American position was generally thought of by both allies and opponents as a conservative or right-wing one. But the SF community's version was never conservative in the strict sense of venerating past social norms—how could it be, when SF literature cheerfully contemplated radical changes in social arrangements and even human nature itself? SF's insistent individualism also led it to reject racism and feature strong female characters decades before the rise of political correctness ritualized these behaviors in other forms of art.

Nevertheless, some writers found the confines of the field too narrow, or rejected Campbellian orthodoxy for other reasons. The first revolt against hard SF came in the early 1950s from a group of young writers centered around Frederik Pohl and the Futurians fan club in New York. The Futurians invented a kind of SF in

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WorldCon photos & reports



The newsletter of the  
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## Libertarian Futurists Announce 2005 Prometheus Awards

By Michael Grossberg

The Libertarian Futurist Society announced the annual winners of the Prometheus Award August 5 in Glasgow, Scotland at the 63rd World Science Fiction Convention.

• Neal Stephenson won this year's award for Best Novel for **The System of the World**.

• A. E. van Vogt's novel, **The Weapon Shops of Isher**, won the Hall of Fame Award

• **The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel**, written by L. Neil Smith and illustrated by Scott Bieser, won a Special Award.

• **Give Me Liberty and Visions of Liberty**, anthologies edited by Mark Tier and Martin H. Greenberg for Baen Books, won a Special Award.

This is Stephenson's first Prometheus Award after four nominations. The development in the 1700s of the modern world's classical liberal institutions, which paved the way for modern libertarianism, is explored in the climax of the author's ambitious Baroque Cycle trilogy, which includes Prometheus nominees **Quicksilver** and **The Confusion**. The trilogy is a prequel to **Cryptonomicon**, a 2000 Prometheus finalist for Best Novel.

A. E. van Vogt, the late author celebrated as one of the masters of science fiction's Golden Age, won for Best Classic Fiction (the Hall of Fame) for **The Weapon Shops of Isher**, an imaginative and clever 1951 novel dramatizing the power of self-defense to sustain personal freedom. This is van Vogt's first Prometheus Award.

Author L. Neil Smith and artist Scott Bieser shared a Special Award for "reaching new audiences by presenting a libertarian classic in graphic form" with **The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel**, an imaginative and vivid condensed adaptation of Smith's Prometheus Award-winning 1982 novel.

**Give Me Liberty and Visions of Liberty**, pro-freedom anthologies edited by Mark Tier and Martin H. Greenberg and published as companion paperbacks by Baen Books, also received a Special Award "for

having a positive effect on the dissemination of libertarian ideas."

The LFS, founded in 1982, presents occasional Special Awards for outstanding achievement. The first Special Award was presented in 1998 to **Free Space**, the first libertarian sf anthology. The second Special Award, and the first for lifetime achievement, was presented to Grand Master Poul Anderson in 2000.

The other finalists for Best Novel were: **State of Fear**, by Michael Crichton (Harper Collins); **Anarquia**, by Brad Linaweaver and Kent J. Hastings (Sense of Wonder Press); **Newton's Wake**, by Ken MacLeod (TOR Books); and **Marque and Reprisal**, by Elizabeth Moon (Ballantine Books/Del Rey). Fourteen 2004 novels were nominated for the 2005 award.

The other finalists for the Hall of Fame award were: **It Can't Happen Here**, a 1936 novel by Sinclair Lewis; **V for Vendetta**, a graphic novel (1988-89) by Alan Moore and David Lloyd; **A Time of Changes**, a 1971 novel by Robert Silverberg; and **The Lord of the Rings**, the 1954 trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien.

The Prometheus awards for Best Novel, Best Classic Fiction (Hall of Fame) and (occasional) Special awards honor outstanding science fiction/fantasy that explores the possibilities of a free future, champions human rights (including personal and economic liberty), dramatizes the perennial conflict between individuals and coercive governments, or critiques the tragic consequences of abuse of power—especially by the State.

See a complete convention report, speeches from the winners, and photos, on page 8.

To nominate books for the 2006 Prometheus Awards:

*Best Novel*: Michael Grossberg,  
mikegrossb@aol.com and 614-236-5040

*Hall of Fame*: Lynn Maners,  
lmaners@dakotacom.net

# REVIEWS

## Anywhere but Here

By Jerry Oltion

Tor Books, 2005

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

From the dust jacket copy, Jerry Oltion's latest book sounds like a classic libertarian story of a free frontier in space. It turns out not to be exactly that, but libertarian readers may enjoy many aspects of it. In many ways it's very much like a classic *Analog* story about new technology and its social impact.

To be specific, this is a "garage technology" story—the kind where a lone inventor, in his home workshop, puts together a radical new device, based on his personal genius, a radical new theoretical concept, or a lucky accident, and the device changes the world. Such stories used to be more common than they are now; they draw on older American hero-worship of inventors, especially solitary and eccentric inventors. Often their characters are "just folks" types with homespun manners. Oltion has exactly captured that feel with the central characters of this story, Trent and Donna Stinson, a Wyoming couple going into space because the development of cheap faster-than-light travel has put America into a depression: Trent is out of work and Donna's hours have been cut back to almost nothing.

The stardrive technology isn't invented in this book; it looks as if this is a later volume in a series, whose earlier volumes told that story. The inventor, Allen Meisner, shows up in this book, but it's not about him; it's about two fairly ordinary but competent people (a bit more competent than they give themselves credit for) having adventures—that is, getting into unexpected trouble. The characterization is somewhere in between classic science fiction and television situation comedy. The setting is a bit old-fashioned: it appears that Earthlike planets, with oxygen/nitrogen atmospheres, liquid water, and only mild biohazards are all over the galaxy, just waiting for the first colonists to arrive in vacuum-sealed pickups. The past decade or two of extrasolar astronomy have made this look a lot less likely. In some ways Oltion's story is as much a period piece as if it were set on the Mars or Venus of Heinlein's juveniles.

The political and economic subtext of this

book gives evidence of Oltion's being not just culturally but politically a conventional leftist. His central characters are from Wyoming, and more or less conservative, but they aren't Biblical literalists: they accept evolution as a fact, and when they meet aliens who tell them about ancient visits to Earth where they played the role of "gods" as a joke and seemingly started human religion, the Stinsons aren't more than mildly surprised. Geopolitically, the United States is the bad guy of this future world, keeping the rest of the world under its thumb with raw military power and repressing its own citizens; the surviving resistance is led by the French and the Arab nations. None of this is necessarily in conflict with libertarianism; certainly Darwinism isn't, and libertarians are able to imagine the United States government as the bad guy—we often think the real one is just that! A passage where the Stinsons try to buy something from an alien merchant, who refuses to quote a price and instead asks what they can afford to pay, explaining that fixed prices lead to class warfare, economic exploitation, and monopoly, could have come right out of Karl Marx—and combined with the others, makes it look as if Oltion is somewhere in the range from liberal to socialist.

But given that, he's the sort of leftist that libertarians are able to get along with. He's critical of repressive authority, and sees government as likely to be exercising such authority, rather than as a benign protector of the common people. He sympathizes with the common people doing things for themselves. In particular, he shows them going out into a frontier setting to start over in a better world. A country run by this sort of leftist would be a lot more congenial for libertarians than one run by Leninist revolutionaries, or even social democratic bureaucrats. His Galactic Federation causes problems for the heroes not by being too assertive, but by insisting on keeping its hands off when they want help.

It's also worth noting that Oltion shows that there is some basis for American repressiveness. His stardrive technology is basically teleportation, with conservation of momentum—that is, if you leave Earth's surface and teleport to the orbit of Mars, you still have Earth's orbital velocity, and have to worry about crashing into Mars! This provides a way to bombard people from orbit with small asteroids—and this version of "throwing rocks" isn't the exclusive property of a band of heroic anarchist Loonies, but is available

to any terrorist nut with a computer, some downloaded software, and a decent-sized sealed vehicle. The United States in this world has a lot of new craters, and the United States government has made quite a few of its own, as well as actively trying to suppress the new technology. The adversaries in this story aren't simple villains for villainy's sake, which makes the story more interesting.

I wouldn't call this an especially profound book. But it was entertaining, and its author's cultural and political viewpoint was skewed from mine, rather than diametrically opposed. Other LFS members might find it worth a look.

## The Traveler

By John Twelve Hawks

Doubleday, 2005, \$24.95

ISBN: 038551428X

Reviewed by Wally Conger

This is turning out to be the Year of the Libertarian Novel.

First, columnist Vin Suprynowicz crossed Batman with samurai freedom-fighters to produce his powerful **The Black Arrow**. A short time later, Claire Wolfe and Aaron Zelman launched the terrific **RebelFire 1.0: Out of the Gray Zone**, the first in a projected series of "young adult" novels about freedom and self-reliance.

Now here comes **The Traveler**, by first-time novelist John Twelve Hawks. While it's not as explicitly libertarian as **The Black Arrow**, nor as well written as **Out of the Gray Zone**, it's still an exhilarating addition to the growing catalog of freedom fiction.

In quick summary, **The Traveler** takes place in a post-9/11 future (maybe 15 minutes from now) where there is "the appearance of freedom with the reality of control." Every person's actions are tracked by the Vast Machine, a complex web of computerized information systems accessed constantly by government, large corporations, and even "benign" nonprofits like the Evergreen Foundation, a front for forces interested only in world domination. Most people surrender to (or choose to ignore) this 24/7 monitoring of their lives in exchange for false security from terrorism and street crime. But some prefer to live "off the Grid," away from the prying electronic eyes of the Vast Machine.

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Upon this backdrop, author Twelve Hawks presents the riveting story of a centuries-long battle between those who want to control history (the Tabula, or Brethren) and those who value the human spirit and seek freedom (the Travelers and their warrior-guardians, the Harlequins). As one character in the novel reveals, “The facts you know are mostly an illusion. The real struggle of history is going on beneath the surface.”

All of the computer surveillance technology portrayed in **The Traveler** actually exists and is based on the author’s research. Libertarians won’t be surprised by many of the novel’s revelations about the end of privacy, but most other readers will be startled by them.

**The Traveler** may seem at times a hodge-podge of science fiction, spiritual prophecy, and conspiracy thriller, laced with smatterings of *The Matrix*, popular videogames, and *Kill Bill*. But it never loses its footing. It’s a solid, fast-paced corker of a novel. And its heart is certainly in the right place. The bad guys are as dark, bureaucratic, and authoritarian as they come. And the good guys...well, all they want is a world where they can be left alone to live, love, and create. (Several scenes in the book even take place in an “off the Grid” community called New Harmony. Shades of Galt’s Gulch!)

Unlike the recent Suprynowicz and Wolfe/Zelman novels—both published by small publishing houses with tiny marketing budgets that rely heavily on the kindness of online reviewers and libertarian bloggers—**The Traveler** comes from a publishing giant and has an aggressive marketing campaign behind it. I first read about the book and its author a few weeks ago in a splashy *USA Today* article, and then visited a handful of official websites publicizing it. (One of the novel’s characters even writes her own blog.) Doubleday’s PR department is busily promoting the author as an “off the Grid” celebrity who’s unwilling to do the traditional book tours; “John Twelve Hawks” is a pseudonym, and the writer only talks to his editors by satellite phone or through the Internet. I also hear that a major movie studio has optioned the book.

All of this hype may deter you from buying and reading **The Traveler**, or from eventually pursuing the two sequels already planned. Don’t let that happen. With its compelling warnings about the Security State, its “secret history” point of view, and

its hardcore advocacy of liberty, this novel deserves to be a bestseller. (It has reached #13 so far on the *New York Times* bestseller list.) Buy a copy for yourself, and then buy copies for your friends.

This is the closest we’ve been in a long time to seeing a libertarian-leaning novel break into the mainstream in a big way. And nowadays, we need all the effective media tools we can muster.

*Wally Conger is a marketing consultant and writer who reluctantly lives “on the Grid” along California’s central coast. His blog of unfinished essays and spontaneous eruptions on politics and culture can be found at [wconger.blogspot.com](http://wconger.blogspot.com).*

### Never Let Me Go

By Kazuo Ishiguro  
Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, \$24.00  
Reviewed by Anders Monsen

There’s an implied sense of fatalism in Kazuo Ishiguro’s mainstream novel about clones that may infuriate libertarian readers. **Never Let Me Go** feels like an eloquent prose poem, and evokes a continual mood of memory and loss. In the end it’s this mood that hits the reader hardest, not any moral lesson or commentary about the fate of human clones.

Early reviews of the novel implied a twist or surprise contained in the novel that reviewers were hard pressed to reveal, yet forced to do so in order to comment about the novel. Told as a memoir by Kathy H, now a woman in her early thirties, **Never Let Me Go** looks back at her life, focusing mainly on her halcyon days at boarding school and immediately thereafter. However, the apparent twist in the novel—which appears relatively soon—reveals that Kathy and her school-mates are clones.

Cloning, long a science fiction staple, has gone mainstream. Ishiguro is not concerned with the science of cloning, nor the implications on a macro scale. Rather, the clones and their “normal” minders through school appear to take for granted that clones are sub-humans who live semi-normal lives until their mid-twenties, at which point they begin a program of “donation” which inevitably results in their death after at most four do-

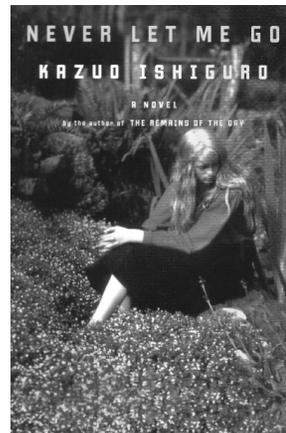
nations. This normalcy, however, is a sham. Kathy’s wonderful childhood at Hailsham, a secluded school somewhere in the English countryside, is viewed by other clones as unique place, an experiment disbanded some time during Kathy’s adulthood. We learn that most other clones grow up in gray buildings, like government housing projects. Clones in this world serve only one purpose: to supply organs to non-cloned humans.

Life at Hailsham for Kathy and her friends unfolds almost lazily. Gradually we discover what they already have learned early on in their lives. While the reader might be horrified, rarely do we see this emotion in the characters. They live almost normal young lives, discover friendships and hobbies, sex and betrayals, and leave school for the real world as if their futures stand wide open. Interestingly, the clones are sent out in small clusters at first, living on remote farms or city based communes, but with free rein to go anywhere. Later, Kathy will drive all over England, in her work as a “carer,” seeing other clones through their donations; eventually, inevitably, she too will die after completing her donations.

The simple acceptance of this fate renders this an ambivalent novel, (Where are the clone resisters? Quickly eliminated?). Still, this novel shows that humans far too easily dismiss the rights of others, and enforce such actions in the name of the greater good through the state. Whether or not this laconic attitude toward clones is intended to raise hackles in Ishiguro’s readers, we never learn from the book. Perhaps we bring our own reactions to the table, and I hope mine are not unique.

The setting and time (England, 1970s and 1990s) conveys a common history with our own, and functions as an alternate history. Perhaps in a few years cloning will be a reality. The primary reason mentioned for cloning today is health—replacing sick cells with cloned healthy ones. How long before the state intervenes to set the rules?

A superbly literate novel in terms of writing, **Never Let Me Go** left a deep impression on me. Tread lightly if you pick up this book, which certainly deserves a wide audience, but beware, for in the end, this novel may rip your heart out.



**Noble Vision**

By Gen LaGreca

Winged Victory Press, 2005, \$27.95

*Reviewed by William H. Stoddard*

Certain books become the inspiration for entire literary movements: Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* inspired the revival of genre fantasy that started in the 1960s, and Gibson's **Neuromancer** the cyberpunk movement. In the years when Rand's **Atlas Shrugged** was still a relatively recent book, some of her admirers hoped to see fiction by other authors written under its inspiration in this way. Not very much has appeared in this line, but **Noble Vision** seems to be an example: Rand's writing looks to be one of its inspirations, along with *The Phantom of the Opera* and soap operatic tales of family conflict.

Nominally, this is a science fiction novel, about a doctor who develops a revolutionary new technique for restoring lost neural function—and the conflicts that result, in a socialized health care system. But **Noble Vision** really isn't about the scientific idea in any meaningful way; LaGreca doesn't convey the details of the neural regeneration process or explore their implications for other aspects of biology or medicine. The process is more or less what film critics call a maguffin: an object that exists solely to be the focus of conflict in a plot. What the plot is really about is socialized medicine, in a very near future where both high standards of medical care and the invention of new treatments are threatened by politicians, bureaucrats, and the sort of entrepreneurs who are willing to cooperate with them. That part is science fiction, at least in United States, but a different kind of science fiction, focused on social trends rather than science and technology. LaGreca weaves together three different strands of conflict: The political conflict over how medicine should be practiced, the medical conflict over the hero's new treatment, and the romantic triangle between the hero, his wife, and the patient he wants to treat, a dancer blinded by an injury to the optic nerves.

The trouble is that one influence on this book is overwhelmingly strong—the influence of Ayn Rand. As I read the first page, I found myself saying, “Yes, this is modeled on Rand”—and the impression grew stronger and stronger as I read further, as some examples indicate.

The choice of vocabulary is remarkably close to Rand's, especially in the way the author uses abstract and evaluative phrases

(such as her title); the descriptive passages often have exactly the effect, common in Rand's fiction, of portraying the scenery as if it were an oil painting, or a stage set, slightly static and sharply visualized; the married couple in the romantic triangle have almost exactly the conflicts and character traits of Hank and Lillian Rearden, including the husband's perplexed struggle to understand his wife's motives; the courtroom scene in which the heroic doctor is brought to trial is remarkably close to Rand's courtroom scenes, especially Hank Rearden's trial scene in **Atlas Shrugged**.

I'm not saying that this novel is a plagiaristic work—LaGreca went to some trouble to come up with new specific content—but that its methods are Ayn Rand's methods, copied with stunning exactness. In a word, it's a pastiche. Many novelists start out this way, emulating the writers they like best; the good ones go on and find their own voices. I regret that LaGreca hadn't done so when she wrote **Noble Vision**.

What's wrong with writing this way? To start with, it makes it hard to surprise the reader; I got more than halfway through **Noble Vision** before I found anything in it surprising—and that was an artificial surprise, created by the author not giving the reader full information. Worse, it suggests that the author lacks respect for the integrity of her own fictional world. Too many of the events come about, not because of the inherent logic of the characters and situations, but because that's the kind of thing that happened in Rand's fiction. I don't feel that the final chapters really resolved any of the conflicts fully; instead, they found ways to minimize them.

As I said, this is often a failing of new writers. LaGreca has some impulses to originality, and her style is on a higher level than the really bad prose I read so much of in reviewing small press books for *Prometheus*; she may have better books in her. I hope her next one will be, not a tribute to Rand, but an original LaGreca all the way through.

**Destroying Worlds**

By John David

1st Books Library, 1-4033-7550-X,

November 2002, \$14.95

*Reviewed by Anders Monsen*

I received this book in the mail recently, no return address or indication of the sender's identity. It appears to be a print-on-demand book; research indicates that it's a sequel to **Becoming Death**, from March 2002.

Set in the far future, with at least three competing world views (both human and alien) on planetary scale and local societies, this novel suffers from a fragmented narrative and surfeit of characters. There are moments when a narrative flows begins to assert itself, but the constant short bursts of scenes from all view points make it difficult to sustain attention or gain any understanding and empathy for the various characters.

Certain individualistic ideas show up in the critiques of slavery and views on women, but future novels in this series might need to focus on a more coherent narrative flow to keep the reader's attention.

**“The Falcon”**

By James P. Hogan

*Apex Science Fiction & Horror Digest*

Volume 1: Issue 2, Summer 2005

*Reviewed by Max Jahr*

James P. Hogan's recent novelette, “The Falcon,” tells the stories of two women separated by time, yet with strangely shared memories. The first focuses on Myriam, who lives in a repressive statist society. She's arrested when she refuses to fire missiles at so-called enemies in a distant town. She has revised her thinking about the role of the individual and the state; one of Myriam's hidden books turns out to be Rose Wilder Lane's **The Discovery of Freedom**.

The second tale is more diffuse, about a young woman, Vanessa, recovering from some sort of illness, prone to bad dreams, but with a bright future. Both women feel somewhat lost in their surroundings, and little is resolved at the conclusion of Hogan's story. Yet the tone conveyed is quite powerful (especially the scenes with Myriam), and makes for an enjoyable work of short fiction.

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# Can't Stop the Signal

## *Serenity*

Written and Directed by Joss Whedon  
Starring Nathan Fillion, Adam Baldwin,  
Summer Glau, Chiwetel Ejiofor  
Universal, September 30, 2005  
*Reviewed by Anders Monsen*

Writer/director Joss Whedon is best known for his other TV shows, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and its spin-off, *Angel*. I confess that I was a fan of neither, and when *Firefly* debuted on the small screen in 2002, I probably contributed to the show's demise, as prejudiced by my disregard of Whedon, I did not watch a single episode. The Fox network abruptly cancelled *Firefly* after less than a dozen episodes.

TV is a poor medium for narrative sf, in my opinion. Run a series long enough, and desperate writers will wring every possible option and angle out of the show, just to keep the audience guessing and interested. There's maybe one or two exceptions out there, *Babylon 5* being the best of these. That show was written predominantly by one person (94 out of 110 episodes of the five seasons), J. Michael Straczynski, with predetermined story arcs and a five-year lifetime. Yet even *Babylon 5* could not escape the other reason TV shows in general fail—life exists only year to year on TV, and often far less—and while *Babylon 5* lived its planned

five years, the last one was never assured, and it showed. Deviate from what network execs think sell—sex and action—and you're gone. *Firefly* never really fell into line with the network, I guess, because while it combined two known genres, the Western and science fiction, it did so in ways that defied both.

The basis for *Serenity's* universe is one where a strong government (the Alliance) manages most of the core planets, with the edges often left to less-civilized people, some who just want to be left alone, others who ravage space and feast on other humans. The crew of the spaceship *Serenity* includes Captain Malcom "Mal" Reynolds (Nathan Fillion), a cynical foe of the Alliance who inspires great loyalty in his crew; first mate Zoë Warren (Gina Torres), tough as nails and married to ace pilot, Hoban "Wash" Washburn (Alan Tudyk), seemingly out of place among this often violent crew. The main violent guy is Jayne Cobb (Adam Baldwin), a mercenary not afraid to challenge Mal's authority. The ship is held together by a sweet engineer, Kaylee (Jewel Staite), also in love with the aloof doctor, Simon Tam (Sean Maher), who also is the brother of River, and both fugitives from the Alliance. Former shipmates include Inara (Morena Baccarin), a geisha-like companion, and Book (Ron Glass), a preacher and spiritual guide.

Whedon has chosen to focus primarily on the 17-year old River (Summer Glau), the gifted, psychotic/psychic young girl liberated from the Alliance scientists by her brother. As the movie opens we see a recording of the rescue scene, setting the stage for the Operative, who is tasked with killing River. For, as we learn, River carries a dark secret that cannot be exposed. Meanwhile, Mal takes River along on a job, perhaps part of the process of integrating her into the crew. Inara and Book have left, and the Alliance presses ever harder around Mal, sending him further and further toward the edges of space and legality in search of jobs.

During the job with River, the savage and cannibalistic Reavers attack, bringing to the fore another story thread. What caused humans to become Reavers? Were they unable to face "vast" space, or could some calamity be at the root? As the Operative closes in on Mal and the crew of *Serenity*, something triggers River's latent combat abilities, marking them on security cameras. A

deeper memory also surfaces, one that leads them all to a horrific—and in some regards final—battle after uncovering the terrible secret that River bears.

*Serenity*, as a movie, succeeds on virtually every level. Due to the scale, it's far grander than anything the TV screen could offer. You can hear and feel the ship shake and groan through atmosphere. The light is sharper, and the depths of colors more vibrant, the sounds and silences more menacing. The actors seem unaffected by the change to the bigger medium, and put in strong performances. Newcomer Chiwetel Ejiofor, as the Operative with no name, lends great depth to the story, contrasting his utter faith in his job to Mal's complete lack of faith.

Whedon blends genres with ease, mixing in tropes from science fiction, westerns, horror, siege movies, and others. Showing the true face of the Reavers might not have been possible on TV, yet while the Reavers receive more visual attention in the movie, most are glimpses and brief cuts, not long enough to gross out viewers. The element of fear is conveyed mostly off-screen and in reactions from the characters. Some critics might consider the Western a dead genre, but certain visuals and behaviors from that kind of movie work quite well in the context of *Serenity*.

This movie is important in many ways. First, it's brilliantly filmed science fiction with few gimmicks, born through superb writing that contains both humor and heart wrenching tragedy. Whedon manages to involve the audience, which laughed at times, and applauded at the end. The effects do not disappoint, but unlike many other sf movies, they overwhelm neither the dialog nor the plot. At heart lies a strong plot, that of uncovering government secrets, and what lies at the heart of this particular secret: the desire for control, for "a better world," as the Operative states, and the result of such attempted control. At what cost one asks? Good intentions often result in horrific consequences, and here we see the root of all government, the idea that some people think they know what's best for others, and will do anything in their power to enforce that behavior.

Adam Baldwin, who plays Jayne in the series and movie, described in interviews the

—Continued next page



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feeling of being able to go back and tell the story on the big screen as “redemption time.” It’s not often a cancelled TV show that lasted half a season manages to live again with a \$40 million budget and almost total control for the director. Much like the original *Star Trek*, the fans of *Firefly* pushed this movie into creation. In creating this show, Whedon has tapped into something beyond himself, even writing a libertarian character and world view positively, which contrasts with his own more liberal views.

In an interview, Joss Whedon relates how the studios initially turned down Ejiofor as the Operative, as he wanted a “bigger name.” Universal eventually relented and went with the best actor for that role, showing more faith in the director than Fox. With nary a big name in the entire production, the movie’s focus instead becomes one of characterization and plot.

Whedon is a noted master of dialog, often shading several meanings in a phrase or statement. When Zoë responds to a question about the ship after a particularly hard battle with the words, “She’s torn up by she’ll fly true,” we know that’s as much about Zoë as *Serenity*. The Operative at one point tries to shame Mal by talking about many innocents dying in a space battle through some action by Mal, he tells the Operative, “You don’t know how true that is.” Mal refers to something else, drawing upon a recent truth he’s just discovered. There are many other gems like this. Good writing tends to die at the hands of people who want snappy one-liners or simple clichés, but in this movie the writing shines.

*Serenity* stands as one of the most entertaining, thoughtful, and best written movies in many years. I hope one day we’ll see more of *Serenity*’s crew, but if this is the end of Whedon’s special ‘Verse, well, no other movie made a better showing of what it had. *Serenity* gives no quarter, and pulls no punches.

*This review originally appeared in early draft form on Anders Monsen’s personal blog, <http://firebringer.blogspot.com>.*

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A FEW GOOD REVIEWS**

Email [editor@lfs.org](mailto:editor@lfs.org)

### **Serenity: The Comic Books (1-3)**

Story by Joss Whedon and Brett Matthews

Script by Brett Matthews

Art by Will Conrad

Colors by Laura Martin

Letters by Michae Heisler

Dark Horse Comics, 2005, \$2.95 each

Reviewed by David Wayland

A three part comic book venture subtitled “Those Left Behind” bridges the gap between the last episode of *Firefly* and the feature film, *Serenity*. Fans of either the TV series or the movie will enjoy some of the backstory shown in the comic books, and it’s a neat way to see the familiar crew and universe again.

Issuing a comic book version of events not shown on TV or motion picture allows Whedon to explore his ‘Verse in a different medium, and also temper somewhat the appetite of the show’s long-suffering fans; the gimmick of three different covers for each issue might make collectors and fans shell out thrice the cash, but also showcases one character per cover.

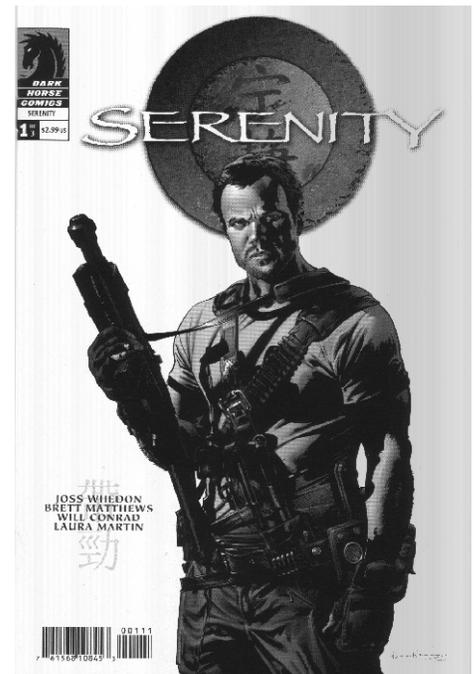
These comic books are slim—thirty-two pages each, although advertising filler chips off ten pages per issue—so the best equivalent would be to view all three as one TV episode. Events unfold on a planet where Captain Mal Reynolds and crew appear reduced to robbing a relative impoverished populace. However, a rival group takes off with the loot, and the *Serenity* crew must flee empty-handed and quite upset with Mal, as usual. Inara is still trying to get off the ship, but the captain procrastinates and makes excuses as to why they can’t make her rendezvous quite yet. At the close of book one, the men with blue hands make their appearance on Whitefall, asking to talk to “the man,” and calmly disposing of the guard in a messy manner reminiscent of TV’s “Ariel” episode.

The crew meets with Badger in book two to explain the theft of their stolen goods, and look for new work. He brings them a tale of treasure from a battle between Alliance and Browncoats. Mal must be getting desperate, resorting now to robbery, not just transporting cargo. Meanwhile, the men with blue hands engage in a conversation with “the man”—it appears they don’t just kill everyone they meet—who turns out to be a former foe of Mal Reynolds, and now lives only to plot the death of Mal. Either I missed something, or there’s a small discontinuity, as *Serenity* is spotted overhead at one point on Whitefall, shortly after having met with Badger, whose

usual home base is on Persephone.

This second installment concludes with images of *Serenity* amid the hulks and wrecks of a vast space battle, quite nicely done since most visualizations of space battles show all the vessels vaporized. Whedon seems to realize that there is a post-battle reality of drifting metal and corpses, the latter flash-frozen by the coldness of space.

The big pay-off comes in issue three, where the men with blue hands try to board *Serenity* seeking their lost River, while Mal, Zoe, and Jayne (this trio seems to do all the heavy work outside the ship) hope to find the lost treasure, and instead encounter Mal’s vengeful nemesis. And what of Inara? She does finally manage to depart the ship, but the big shocker showed another member of the crew declaring the intent to also



leave, worried about the loss of his soul to Reynold’s casual attitude towards life and human morals.

Overall, “Those Left Behind” succeeds nicely as a single episode linking *Firefly* and *Serenity*. When Fox TV (may they burn in hell) cancelled *Firefly*, only two certainties stood forth, that Inara declared her intent to leave the ship, and Alliance pursuit of River would intensify. Little new development occurs in the comic books, but fans of the show will not be disappointed. My only gripe came from the scant 60 or so pages comprising these three volumes. Time passed far too quickly reading the comic books.

# 2005 Prometheus Awards

By Fred C. Moulton

The 63rd World Science Fiction Convention was held August 4 through 8, 2005 in Glasgow Scotland. The events were held in the Moat Hotel, the SECC (Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre) and the Clyde Auditorium.

The second story of each of the three are connected via a enclosed walkway however walking directly was faster in most cases unless it was raining. However they were somewhat further from the other hotels and downtown Glasgow than many fans expected.

Weather was somewhat variable; I was rained on Wednesday evening when I went to pre-registration. That was the first and only time I walked from my hotel to the SECC. The Moat Hotel next to the SECC was full and so most attendees stayed in other hotels. Some by choice stayed in the Hilton which was the evening party hotel. The Hilton also filled up and I was able to get a room in the Holiday Inn near the Hilton.

The geography of area and the layout of streets and structures meant that walking to the Hilton not easy from a lot of the hotels. Thursday evening on two occasions I helped someone lost find their hotel. By Friday most people had the layout figured out. Also on Saturday after the Masquerade and Sunday



*Prometheus Award Best Novel finalist Elizabeth Moon at the Prometheus Award Ceremony in Glasgow, Scotland.*



*Fred Moulton displays the Prometheus Hall of Fame Award for A.E. Van Vogt's novel, The Weapon Shops of Isher.*

after the Hugo Awards ceremony the con provided buses to transport persons back to the Hilton. However, during the day most people chose to trade money for time and pay the £3.60 for a cab in order to save time. The schedule was packed and after the late night parties time became a valued commodity.

The Libertarian Futurist Society's Prometheus Awards slot was Friday 3:30 PM to 4:00 PM in the Moat House Jura Room. Steve Gaalema took photos for us. I began the meeting by acknowledging the attendance of author Elizabeth Moon who was a finalist for the Prometheus Best Novel award. I then announced that Neal Stephenson won the award for his novel **The System of the World**. Publishers representative Diana Gill was very gracious in thanking us for the award and read the acceptance statement which Neal Stephenson had sent.

Next I announced the Special Award for the anthologies **Give Me Liberty** and **Visions of Liberty** edited by Mark Tier and Martin Greenberg and published by Baen Books. Former Prometheus Award-winner James P. Hogan (**The Multiplex Man** and **Voyage From Yesteryear**) spoke, representing the publisher Baen Books and also

as a contributor with a story in one of the anthologies. I read the statement from Mark Tier and James Hogan read the statement from Martin Greenberg.

Fran Van Cleave then announced the next Special Award winner: **The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel** written by L. Neil Smith and illustrated by Scott Bieser. Fran read the statement from L. Neil Smith and I read the statement from Scott Bieser.

Finally I announced the Hall of Fame award winner A. E. van Vogt for **The Weapon Shops of Isher**. I read a statement from Lydia van Vogt, widow of A. E. van Vogt. Then I adjourned the Prometheus Awards session so that that Sidewise Awards could begin their session. Function space was at a premium so the Prometheus Awards, the Sidewise and the Golden Duck awards were each given a 30 minute portion of a 90 minute program slot. For those who do not know, the Sidewise awards are for Alternate History SF and the Golden Duck awards are for Children's and Young Adult SF.

On Friday evening a small group gathered for a "libertarians and friends of libertarians get together" for drinks and dinner at the lobby bar of the Holiday Inn. Several authors were invited but none were able to attend due to meetings with publishers and agents.

Overall the con went well, there were a couple of minor glitches but nothing major. My friend Kevin Standlee, a fan in the SF Bay Area, was Division Head of Events and did a good job with the Masquerade and Hugo awards ceremony. Both started on time and ran on schedule. In fact the rumor is that a new time record was set for a modern Hugo ceremony. This allowed everyone to enjoy the event without getting tired and then to get to the parties sooner.

Cheryl Morgan has collected a lot of links to con reports and photos at

<http://www.emcit.com/wordpress>

Finally, a big Thank You to Steve and Fran for helping with the Awards Ceremony, and to Diana Gill and James Hogan for being representatives for the award recipients.

## Best Novel Winner

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

The Libertarian Futurist Society, as you might expect, has gone against the grain of every other award-giving organization in the world by asking winners to deliver long acceptance speeches. This places me in a quandary in that I believe that there is a special circle of hell reserved for people who do that, especially those who deputize others to read those speeches in their places. If I were in Glasgow, I wouldn't want to sit and listen to a windy speech. I'd want this thing to be over so I could head for the pub. Being one-quarter Scottish, I can see a long line of my MacPhail ancestors glancing at their watches, glaring at me, and drawing their thumbs across their throats.

So I will just say thank you to the Libertarian Futurist Society for honoring me with this award. I would also like to give my compliments to the other nominees. Given the subject matter, particularly of the final volume in the Baroque Cycle, I am delighted

that the award is a golden coin. One of the tricks used by counterfeiters in the old days was to make a heads and a tails out of gold foil and then fill the middle with solder. There was a simple way to detect such fakes: put the coin between your teeth (assuming you still had any) and bite down. Solder, being a soft material, would come away with teeth marks. Now, if this gold coin had come from any other organization, I'd just put it up on the shelf and admire it, since one should never look a gift horse in the mouth, or put a gift coin between your teeth. But I know enough Libertarians to know that they would only be irritated by my unquestioning assumption that this thing was real, and so I would like you to know that, with respect, I'm biting down hard on this one.

Now off to the pub with you.

—Neal Stephenson, author, **The System of the World**, 28 July 2005



*Editor Diana Gill accepts the Prometheus Award for Best Novel on behalf of Neal Stephenson for The System of the World.*

## Hall of Fame

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

“I am happy and honored for this award. I am pleased that the works of A. E. van Vogt are still remembered today. I am so grateful to the Libertarian Futurist Society for honoring **The Weapon Shops of Isher.**”

—Lydia van Vogt



*Panelists James P. Hogan, Fran Van Cleave, and Fred Moulton (left to right).*

As of August 25, eight novels have been nominated for the 2006 Best Novel category.

- **Chainfire**, by Terry Goodkind (TOR Books)
- **Reflex**, by Stephen Gould (TOR Books)
- **Noble Vision**, by Gen LaGreca (Winged Victory Press)
- **The Black Arrow**, by Vin Suprynowicz (Mountain Media)
- **Accelerando**, by Charles Stross (Ace/Putnam Books)
- **Infernal**, by F. Paul Wilson (Forge Books)
- **RebelFire: Out of the Gray Zone**, by Claire Wolfe & Aaron Zelman (RebelFirePress)
- **The Mists of Everness**, by John C. Wright (TOR Books)

*Photo credits. Page 8, top: Fran van Cleave; bottom: Steve Gaalema. Page 9, top: Fred Moulton; bottom: Steve Gaalema. Page 10, Steve Gaalema. Page 11, top: Fran van Cleave, bottom: Steve Gaalema/Fran van Cleave.*

## Special Award

### **The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel,** L. Neil Smith and Scott Bieser

It's difficult to express adequately my delight that the graphic version of my 1980 novel **The Probability Broach** has won a special Prometheus Award of its own. For me, it's a little like having sold the Brooklyn Bridge—twice!

I'm very happy that Win Bear and Lucy Kropotkin and all their friends (and mortal enemies) continue to win allies for the cause of liberty and libertarianism. The past 25 years have taken them (and me) on many strange and interesting adventures. I wonder what lies ahead for all of us now.

It's especially pleasing that the great work of my friend and partner, Scott Bieser, is being recognized in this way. He has a fabulous knack for taking my words and turning them into the exact images that were in my head, and he has a great gift for words himself that is rare among graphic artists. I think it's fair to say that we're rapidly becoming the Gilbert and Sullivan (or at least the Martin and Lewis) of the movement. Sadly, there aren't enough of us to be Marx Brothers.

So thank you, Libertarian Futurists, for making my year, and for what amounts to a three-and-a-halfth Prometheus Award to hang on my office wall. Whenever I feel

professionally gloomy, all I have to do is look up at them, in order to convince myself that there is a point to the struggle, after all.

— L. Neil Smith, author,  
**The Probability Broach:  
The Graphic Novel** (BigHead Press)  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
August, 2005

My thanks to the judges who chose to give us this award, which may be the second Prometheus award for **The Probability Broach** but it's the first for me. There are few things in life sweeter than a public "atta-boy" from such a learned and discerning group as the Libertarian Futurist Society.

I'd like to acknowledge two *more* libertarians, besides Neil Smith and myself, without whom this book would not have been made.

On a Yahoo mailing list on 2002, it was Lux Lucre who first suggested re-writing Neil's first novel as a comic-book series, which would later be re-published as a trade-paperback "graphic novel." Lux is, as some of you know, the Cyberspace name for the late Kerry



*James P. Hogan and Fred Moulton pose with the LFS Hall of Fame Award for A.E. Van Vogt's novel, The Weapon Makers of Isher.*

tated somewhat—the story would not easily divide into 24-page segments, so we dropped the comic-book series and designed the project to be a full-size book from the outset.

Neil and I created several sample pages from the story and I shopped the book around to the half-dozen comic publishers I knew of who both produce graphic novels and respect creators' rights. It was a time-intensive and sometimes daunting process, and I might have given up at several points, but Lux's enthusiasm for this project convinced me that I was on the right track, so I persevered, and got some—interesting—comments, but no offers.

So up comes *another* libertarian sci-fi fan, my brother Frank Bieser, who had just recently cashed out of the dot-com business, decided this would be a good time to go into the publishing business, and founded BigHead Press. And as a result, our graphic novel idea could be made real.

By the time we set up the arrangements to start the art production, Kerry was working on other projects and did not become part of the production team. However we did touch base from time to time on the book's progress. I was just a bit past two-thirds through the art pages when word of Kerry's sudden demise reached me, and I was shocked and saddened along with the many hundreds of other friends he had made in cyberspace.

So Neil and I agreed to put Kerry into the book, assuming one of the roles from the original prose story. Kerry is the private security chief aboard the airship *San Francisco Palace* who we meet after the kidnappings, and I hope he would have liked the rendition.

Frank also appears in the book, as do many of my friends and family, as part of various crowd scenes. But as he is still, I'm very happy to say, still among the living, he seeks his reward in the form of a profitable publishing company. So I hope everyone who appreciates my brother's role in providing quality libertarian science-fiction will show it by purchasing copies of **The Probability Broach: The Graphic Novel** for their friends as well as themselves.

Thank you.

— Scott Bieser, artist,  
**The Probability Broach:  
The Graphic Novel** (BigHead Press)

## Special Award

### Give Me Liberty & Visions of Liberty,

Edited by Mark Tier and Martin H. Greenberg

As a libertarian and a science fiction fan it's a real honor that the Libertarian Future Society has made these Special Awards to **Give Me Liberty** and **Visions of Liberty**.

The idea for these books began in conversations with a good friend of mine, Dan Rosenthal (the title **Visions of Liberty** was his idea, by the way). We both thought it would be great to have "hard libertarian" science fiction stories like Vernor Vinge's "The Ungoverned" and Eric Frank Russell's "And Then There Were None" collected together in one volume.

This was around 1990. Back then, there were no such anthologies—this was long before **Free Space** came out.

I gathered together some of the stories that finally appeared in **Give Me Liberty**. But I had no real idea about how to go about getting it published.

Then one day I had the idea of contacting Martin Greenberg whose name I knew of course from the anthologies of his that I had on my shelves. I knew from Asimov's biography that he lived in Green Bay, Wisconsin. So I phoned information, got a phone number, talked to him and proposed the idea.

He seemed to think it was a good one which really tickled me pink. I guess I more or less expected that if some total stranger phones you out of the blue with an off-the-wall idea, the chances of having the idea

welcomed would be negligible.

Nevertheless, quite some time went by until Marty managed to interest Jim Baen in the project—and even more time went by before they were published. Often, I thought they'd never come out.

**Visions of Liberty** is certainly a book that could never have happened without Marty's involvement. I'm positive that if I had approached authors like Lloyd Biggle and James Hogan—and I'm not sure I'd have had the chutzpah to approach a Grand Master like Jack Williamson—with a request they write a story for me it would've been ignored.

So in addition to thanking the authors, who wrote such great stories, and the LFS for deciding they deserved this award, I want to especially thank Marty Greenberg and his associate John Helfers as without their involvement and dedication, neither **Give Me Liberty** and **Visions of Liberty** would ever have seen the light of day.

— Mark Tier, co-editor,  
**Visions of Liberty** and **Give Me Liberty**

Mark (Tier) deserves the credit here—he brought the idea to me, and he supported and worked hard on both books. I should also like to thank the LFS for this recognition, and of course, the writers that we reprinted and those who wrote such wonderful stories for us from scratch.

— Martin H. Greenberg, co-editor,  
**Visions of Liberty** and **Give Me Liberty**  
(Baen Books)



As a longtime friend of Jim Baen, in addition to being the contributor of one of the stories in **Visions of Liberty**, I feel it doubly appropriate to be here on Baen Books' behalf. The theme of this collection, societies free from government restraint on the creative powers of individual initiative, seems particularly timely.

In my own story, "The Colonizing of Tharle," two administrative departments on Earth each think that the other is responsible for a colony established at a distant star, with the result that there is no contact with it for over a hundred years. It doesn't strike anyone as significant that nobody from the colony has troubled to inform Earth of the fact. When the error is discovered, a diplomatic mission is hastily dispatched to rectify things.

Attempts to contact the governing authority get nowhere because there doesn't seem to be one. And the natives have evolved their own notions of economics. To their way of thinking, the system that rules Earth—where everyone tries to grab as much as they can get, and give in return as little as they can get away with—simply can't work. So how do they do it? To them, only one way is possible. They way they are taught is, "Always give a little more than you promised; take a little less."

I am delighted to accept this award in recognition of such stories. Their message is surely relevant to realizing the kind of world we would all like to see one day. Thank you.

— James P. Hogan



*James P. Hogan reads a statement from Martin Greenberg, co-editor of Special Award-winning anthologies, Give Me Liberty and Visions of Liberty, with co-presenter Fran Van Cleave.*

## —History of SF, continued from page 1

which science was not at the center, and the transformative change motivating the story was not technological but political or social. Much of their output was sharply satirical in tone, and tended to de-emphasize individual heroism. The Futurian masterpiece was the Frederik Pohl/Cyril Kornbluth collaboration **The Space Merchants**.

The Futurian revolt was political as well as aesthetic. Not until the mid-1990s did the participants admit that many of the key Futurians had histories as ideological Communists or fellow travellers. As with later revolts against the Campbellian tradition, part of the motivation was a desire to escape the “conservative” politics that went with it. While the Futurians’ work was well understood at the time to be a poke at the consumer capitalism and smugness of the postwar years, only in retrospect is it clear how much they owed to the Frankfurt school of Marxist critical theory.

But the Futurian revolt was half-hearted, semi-covert, and easily absorbed by the Campbellian mainstream of the SF field; by the mid-1960s, sociological extrapolation had become a standard part of the toolkit even for the old-school Golden Agers, and it never challenged the centrality of hard SF. The Futurians’ Marxist underpinnings lay buried and undiscovered for forty years after the fact.

Perception of Campbellian SF as a “right-wing” phenomenon lingered, however, and helped motivate the next revolt in the mid-1960s, around the time I started reading the stuff. The field was in bad shape then, though I lacked the perspective to see so at the time. The death of the pulp-zines in the 1950s had pretty much killed off the SF short-fiction market, and the post-*Star Wars* boom that would make SF the second most successful genre after romance fiction was still a decade in the future.

The early Golden Agers were hitting the thirty-year mark in their writing careers, and although some would find a second wind in later decades many were beginning to get a bit stale. Heinlein reached his peak as a writer with 1967’s **The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress** and, plagued by health problems, began a long decline.

These objective problems combined with, or perhaps led to, an insurgency within the field—the “New Wave”, an attempt to import the techniques and imagery of literary fiction into SF. As with that of the Futurians, the

New Wave was both a stylistic revolt and a political one.

The New Wave’s inventors (notably Michael Moorcock, J.G. Ballard and Brian Aldiss) were British socialists and Marxists who rejected individualism, linear exposition, happy endings, scientific rigor and the U.S.’s cultural hegemony over the SF field in one fell swoop. The New Wave’s later American exponents were strongly associated with the New Left and opposition to the Vietnam War, leading to some rancorous public disputes in which politics was tangled together with definitional questions about the nature of SF and the direction of the field.

But the New Wave, after 1965, was not so easily dismissed or assimilated as the Futurians had been. Amidst a great deal of self-indulgent crap and drug-fueled psych-

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**While the Futurians’ work was well understood at the time to be a poke at the consumer capitalism and smugness of the postwar years, only in retrospect is it clear how much they owed to the Frankfurt school of Marxist critical theory.**

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odelizing, there shone a few jewels — Phillip José Farmer’s **Riders of the Purple Wage**, some of Harlan Ellison’s work, Brian Aldiss’s Hothouse stories, and Langdon Jones’s **The Great Clock** stand out as examples.

As with the Futurians, the larger SF field rapidly absorbed some New Wave techniques and concerns. Notably, the New Wavers broke the SF taboo on writing about sex in any but the most cryptically coded ways, a stricture previously so rigid that only Heinlein himself had the stature to really break it, in his 1961 **Stranger In A Strange Land**—a book that helped shape the hippie counterculture of the later 1960s.

But the New Wave also exacerbated long-standing critical arguments about the definition and scope of science fiction, and briefly threatened to displace hard SF from the center of the field. Brian Aldiss’s 1969 dismissal of space exploration as “an old-fashioned diversion conducted with infertile phallic symbols” was typical New Wave rhetoric, and looked like it might have some legs at the time.

As a politico-cultural revolt against the American vision of SF, however, the New

Wave eventually failed just as completely as the Futurians had. Its writers were already running out of steam in 1977 when *Star Wars* (rather obviously patterned on Edmond Hamilton’s **The Star Kings** from 1949) took the imagery of pre-Campbellian space opera to the mainstream culture. The half-decade following (my college years, as it happened) was a period of drift and confusion only ended by the publication of David Brin’s **Startide Rising** in 1982.

Brin, and his colleagues in the group that came to be known as the “Killer Bs” (Greg Bear and Gregory Benford), reasserted the primacy of hard SF done in the grand Campbellian manner. Campbell himself had died in 1971 right at the high-water mark of the New Wave, but Heinlein and Anderson and the other surviving luminaries of the Campbellian era had no trouble recognizing their inheritors. To everyone’s surprise, the New Old Wave proved to be not just artistically successful but commercially popular as well, with its writers becoming the first new stars of the post-1980 boom in SF publishing.

Before getting back to the Killer Bs and their Campbellian revival, I need to point out an important bit of background. Besides helping spawn the New Wave, the Vietnam War broke open a long-standing fissure in the right wing of American politics. One kind of right-winger was the cultural conservative, frequently with both religious and militarist beliefs. The other kind was the “classical-liberal” or small-government conservative. These two very different tendencies had been forced into alliance in both the U.S. and Great Britain by the rise of the socialist Left after 1910.

The aftermath of Barry Goldwater’s failed presidential campaign in 1964 had strained the alliance between these factions almost to the breaking point. The Vietnam War broke it, at least for some. A mixed group of dissident classical liberals and anti-war radicals formed the Libertarian Party in 1971, repudiating both the right’s cultural conservatism and the left’s redistributionist statism.

This is worth noticing in a history of SF because the platform of the Libertarian Party read like a reinvented, radicalized and intellectualized form of the implicit politics of Campbellian hard SF. This was not a coincidence; many of the founding libertarians were science-fiction fans. They drew

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inspiration not merely from the polemical political science fiction of Ayn Rand (**The Fountainhead**, 1943; **Atlas Shrugged**, 1957), but from the whole canon of Campbellian SF.

Something rather similar had happened in the late 19th century, when various now-forgotten works of utopian fiction had helped shape the thinking of early Socialists. But this time the connection was more two-way and intimate; novels like Heinlein's **The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress**, H. Beam Piper's **Lone Star Planet**, and Poul Anderson's **No Truce With Kings** (among many others) came to be seen retrospectively as proto-libertarian arguments not just by their readers but by the authors of the novels themselves.

The new hard SF of the 1980s returned to Golden Age themes and images, if not quite with the linear simplicity of Golden Age technique. It also reverted to the anti-political/individualist values traditional in the field. This time around, with explicit libertarianism a feature of the political landscape, the split between order-worshipping conservatism and the individualist impulse was more explicit. At one extreme, some SF (such as that of L. Neil Smith) assumed the character of radical libertarian propaganda. At the other extreme, a subgenre of SF that could fairly be described as conservative/militarist power fantasies emerged, notably in the writing of Jerry Pournelle and David Drake.

Tension between these groups sometimes flared into public animosity. Both laid claims to Robert Heinlein's legacy. Heinlein himself (increasingly erratic as a writer but still the Grand Old Man of the field, immensely respected by fans and even more by other authors) maintained friendly relationships with conservatives but described himself a libertarian for more than a decade before his death in 1988.

Symbolically, Heinlein was the first among equals in a study commission of SF authors formed by Ronald Reagan to consider the feasibility of an anti-ballistic missile defense. Commission member Gregory Benford later described President Reagan as "a science fiction fan", and the vision that emerged as the Strategic Defense Initiative was startlingly SFnal. Reagan's threat to build SDI at the Reykjavik summit with Gorbachev in 1986 triggered the collapse of Soviet strategic

ambitions as Mikhail Gorbachev realized that the Soviet Union could not match the U.S.'s raise in the geopolitical poker game. The Berlin Wall fell three years later; science fiction saved the world. Somewhere, Campbell and Heinlein were probably smiling.

Heinlein's personal evolution from Gold-

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Something rather similar had happened in the late 19th century, when various now-forgotten works of utopian fiction had helped shape the thinking of early Socialists. But this time the connection was more two-way and intimate; novels like Heinlein's **The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress**, H. Beam Piper's **Lone Star Planet**, and Poul Anderson's **No Truce With Kings**...came to be seen retrospectively as proto-libertarian arguments not just by their readers but by the authors of the novels themselves.

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water conservative to anti-statist radical both led and reflected larger trends. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, depictions of explicitly anarcho-libertarian future societies had begun to filter into non-political SF works like Vernor Vinge's *Realtime* sequence and Joe Haldeman's **Buying Time**. Haldeman's Conch Republic and Novysibirsk were all the more convincing for not being subjects of polemic.

Cyberpunk was the third failed revolution against Campbellian SF. William Gibson, who is generally credited with launching this subgenre in his 1984 novel **Neuromancer**, was not a political writer. But Bruce Sterling, who promoted Gibson and became the chief ideologue of anti-Campbellianism in the late 1980s, called it "the Movement" in a self-conscious reference to the heady era of 1960s student radicalism. The cyberpunks positioned themselves particularly against the carnographic conservative military SF of David Drake, Jerry Pournelle, and lower-rent imitators—not exactly a hard target.

Despite such posturing, the cyberpunks were neither as stylistically innovative nor as politically challenging as the New Wave had been. Gibson's prose has aptly been described as Raymond Chandler in mirror-shades.

Cyberpunk themes (virtual reality, pervasive computing, cyborging and biosculpture, corporate feudalism) had been anticipated in earlier works like Vernor Vinge's 1978 hard-SF classic **True Names**, and even further back in **The Space Merchants**. Cyberpunk imagery (decayed urban landscapes, buzzcuts, chrome and black leather) quickly became a cliché replicated in dozens of computer games.

Neal Stephenson wrote a satirical *finis* to the cyberpunk genre in 1992's **Snow Crash**, which (with Bruce Sterling's **Schismatrix** and Walter Jon Williams's **Hardwired**) was very close to being the only work to meet the standard set by **Neuromancer**. While most cyberpunk took for granted a background in which capitalism had decayed into an oppressive corporate feudalism under which most individuals could be nothing but alienated and powerless, the future of **Snow Crash** was a tellingly libertarian one. The bedrock individualism of classical SF reasserted itself with a smartass grin.

By the time cyberpunk fizzled out, most fans had been enjoying the hard-SF renaissance for a decade; the New Wave was long gone, and cyberpunk had attracted more notice outside the SF field than within it. The leaders of SF's tiny in-house critical establishment, however (figures like Samuel Delany and David Hartwell), remained fascinated by New Wave relics like Thomas Disch and Philip K. Dick, or anti-Campbellian fringe figures like Suzette Hadin Elgin and Octavia Butler.

While this was going on, the readers voted with their Hugo ballots largely for writers that were squarely within the Campbellian tradition—Golden Age survivors, the killer Bs, and newer writers like Lois McMaster Bujold and Greg Egan (whose 1997 work **Diaspora** may just be the single most audacious and brilliant hard-SF novel in the entire history of the field).

In 1994, critical thinking within the SF field belatedly caught up with reality. Credit for this goes to David Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer, whose analysis in the anthology **The Ascent of Wonder** finally acknowledged what should have been obvious all along. Hard SF is the vital heart of the field, the radiant core from which ideas and prototype worlds diffuse outwards to be appropriated by writers of lesser world-building skill but

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—*History of SF, continued from page 13*

perhaps greater stylistic and literary sophistication. While there are other modes of SF that have their place, they remain essentially derivations of or reactions against hard SF, and cannot even be properly understood without reference to its tropes, conventions, and imagery.

Furthermore, Gregory Benford's essay in **The Ascent of Wonder** on the meaning of SF offered a characterization of the genre which may well prove final. He located the core of SF in the experience of "sense of wonder", not merely as a thalamic thrill but as the affirmation that the universe has a knowable order that is discoverable through reason and science.

I think I can go further than Hartwell or Kramer or Benford in defining the relationship between hard SF and the rest of the field. To do this, I need to introduce the concept linguist George Lakoff calls "radial category", one that is not defined by any one logical predicate, but by a central prototype and a set of permissible or customary variations. As a simple example, in English the category "fruit" does not correspond to any uniformity of structure that a botanist could recognize. Rather, the category has a prototype "apple", and things are recognized as fruits to the extent that they are either (a) like an apple, or (b) like something that has already been sorted into the "like an apple" category.

Radial categories have central members ("apple", "pear", "orange") whose membership is certain, and peripheral members ("coconut", "avocado") whose membership is tenuous. Membership is graded by the distance from the central prototype — roughly, the number of traits that have to mutate to

get one from being like the prototype to like the instance in question. Some traits are important and tend to be conserved across the entire radial category (strong flavor including sweetness) while some are only weakly bound (color).

In most radial categories, it is possible to point out members that are counterexamples to any single intensional ("logical") definition, but traits that are common to most of the core prototypes nevertheless tend to be strongly bound. Thus, "coconut" is a counterexample to the strongly-bound trait that fruits have soft skins, but it is sorted as "fruit" because (like the prototype members) it has an easily-chewable interior with a sweet flavor.

SF is a radial category in which the prototypes are certain classics of hard SF. This is true whether you are mapping individual works by affinity or subgenres like space opera, technology-of-magic story, utopian/dystopian extrapolation, etc. So in discussing the traits of SF as a whole, the relevant question is not "which traits are universal" but "which traits are strongly bound"—or, almost equivalently, "what are the shared traits of most of the core (hard-SF) prototypes".

The strong binding between hard SF and libertarian politics continues to be a fact of life in the field. It is telling that the only form of politically-inspired award presented annually at the World Science Fiction Convention is the Libertarian Futurist Society's "Prometheus". There is no socialist, liberal, moderate, conservative or fascist equivalent of the class of libertarian SF writers including L. Neil Smith, F. Paul Wilson, Brad Linaweaver, or J. Neil Schulman; their books, even when they are shrill and indifferently-written polemical tracts, actually sell—and sell astonishingly well—to SF fans.

Of course, there are people in the SF field who find this deeply uncomfortable. Since the centrality of hard SF has become inescapable, resistance now takes the form of attempts to divorce hard SF from libertarianism—to preserve the methods and conceptual apparatus of hard SF while repudiating its political aura. Hartwell & Kramer's 2002 followup to **The Ascent of Wonder, The Hard SF Renaissance**, takes up this argument in its introduction and explanatory notes.

**The Hard SF Renaissance** presents itself as a dialogue between old-school Campbellian hard SF and an attempt to construct a "Radical Hard SF" that is not in thrall to right-wing tendencies. It is clear that the editors' sympathies lie with the "Radicals", not least from the very fact that

they identify libertarianism as a right-wing phenomenon. This is an error characteristic of left-leaning thinkers, who tend to assume that anything not "left" is "right" and that approving of free markets somehow implies social conservatism.

Is the "Radical Hard SF" program possible? Partly this is a matter of definition. I have already argued that the SF genre cannot be culturally conservative; by nature it must be prepared to contemplate radical change. So either the partisans of "Radical Hard SF" are just terminally confused, pushing against an open door, or what they really object to is hard SF's libertarian connection.

It's worth asking, then: is the intimate historical relationship between libertarian political thought and SF a mere accident, or is there an intrinsic connection? And not worth asking merely as a question about politics, either; we'll understand SF and its history better if we know the answer.

I think I know what John Campbell's answer would be, if he had not died the year that the founders of libertarianism broke with conservatism. I know what Robert Heinlein's was. They're the same as mine, a resounding yes—that there is a connection, and that the connection is indeed deep and intrinsic. But cultural history is littered with the corpses of zealots who attempted to yoke art to ideology with shallow arguments, only to be exposed as fools when the art became obsolescent before the ideology or (more often) vice-versa.

In the remainder of this essay I will nevertheless attempt to prove this point. My argument will center around the implications of a concept best known from First Amendment law: the "marketplace of ideas". I am going to argue specifically from the characteristics of hard SF, the prototypes of the radial category of SF. I'll use this argument to try to illuminate the central values of SF as a literature, and to explain the large historical pattern of failed revolutions against the Campbellian model.

Science fiction, as a literature, embraces the possibility of radical transformations of the human condition brought about through knowledge. Technological immortality, star drives, cyborging—characteristic SFnal tropes such as these are situated within a knowable universe, one in which scientific inquiry is both the precondition and the principal instrument of creating new futures.

SF is, broadly, optimistic about these fu-

## Classified

**The (Libertarian) Connection**, open-forum since 1968. Subscribers may insert four pages/issue free, unedited. **Factsheet Five** said, "Lively interchange of point, counterpoint and comments". Eight/year, \$20. Strauss, 10 Hill #22-LP, Newark NJ 07102.

—*Continued next page*

—History of SF, *continued from previous*

tures. This is so for the simple reason that SF is fiction bought with peoples' entertainment budgets and people, in general, prefer happy endings to sad ones. But even when SF is not optimistic, its dystopias and cautionary tales tend to affirm the power of reasoned choices made in a knowable universe; they tell us that it is not through chance or the whim of angry gods that we fail, but through our failure to be intelligent, our failure to use the power of reason and science and engineering prudently.

At bottom, the central assumption of SF is that applied science is our best hope of transcending the major tragedies and minor irritants to which we are all heir. Even when scientists and engineers are not the visible heroes of the story, they are the invisible heroes that make the story notionally possible in the first place, the creators of possibility, the people who liberate the future to become a different place than the present.

SF both satisfies and stimulates a sort of lust for possibility compounded of simple escapism and a complex intellectual delight in anticipating the future. SF readers and writers want to believe that the future not only can be different but can be different in many, many weird and wonderful ways, all of which are worth exploring.

All the traits (embrace of radical transformation, optimism, applied science as our best hope, the lust for possibilities) are weakly characteristic of SF in general—but they are powerfully characteristic of hard SF. Strongly bound, in the terminology of radial categories.

Therefore, hard SF has a bias towards valuing the human traits and social condi-

tions that best support scientific inquiry and permit it to result in transformative changes to both individuals and societies. Also, of social equilibria which allow individuals the greatest scope for choice, for satisfying that lust for possibilities. And it is here that we begin to get the first hints that the strongly-bound traits of SF imply a political stance—because not all political conditions are equally favorable to scientific inquiry and the changes it may bring. Nor to individual choice.

The power to suppress free inquiry, to limit the choices and thwart the disruptive creativity of individuals, is the power to strangle the bright transcendent futures of optimistic SF. Tyrants, static societies, and power elites fear change above all else—their natural tendency is to suppress science, or seek to distort it for ideological ends (as, for example, Stalin did with Lysenkoism). In the narratives at the center of SF, political power is the natural enemy of the future.

SF fans and writers have always instinctively understood this. Thus the genre's long celebration of individualist anti-politics; thus its fondness for voluntarism and markets over state action, and for storylines in which (as in Heinlein's archetypal **The Man Who Sold The Moon**) scientific breakthrough and free-enterprise economics blend into a seamless whole. These stances are not historical accidents, they are structural imperatives that follow from the lust for possibility. Ideological fashions come and go, and the field inevitably rediscovers itself afterwards as a literature of freedom.

This analysis should put permanently to rest the notion that hard SF is a conservative literature in any sense. It is, in fact, deeply and fundamentally radical—the literature that celebrates not merely science but sci-

ence as a permanent revolution, as the final and most inexorable foe of all fixed power relationships everywhere.

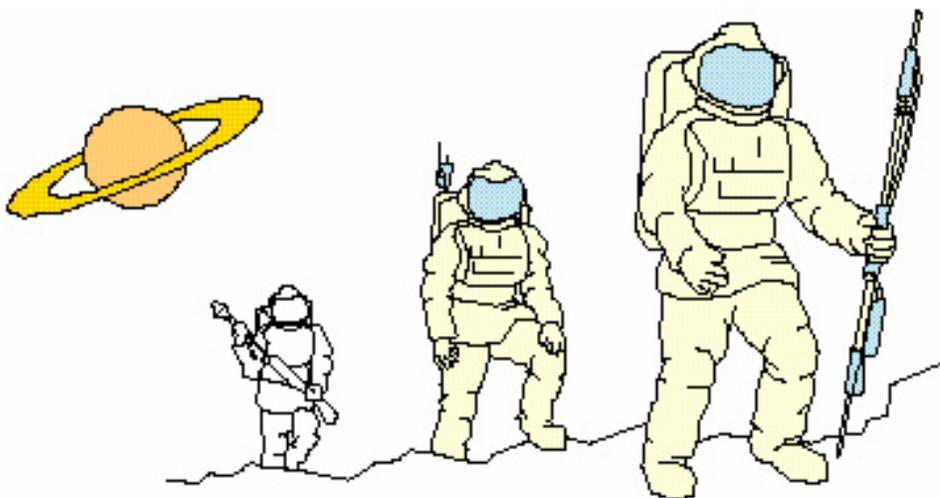
Earlier, I cited the following traits of SF's libertarian tradition: ornery and insistent individualism, veneration of the competent man, instinctive distrust of coercive social engineering and a rock-ribbed objectivism that values knowing how things work and treats all political ideologizing with suspicion. All should now be readily explicable. These are the traits that mark the enemies of the enemies of the future.

The partisans of "Radical Hard SF", like those of the earlier failed revolutions, are thus victims of a category error; an inability to see beyond their own political maps. By jamming SF's native libertarianism into a box labeled "right wing" or "conservative" they doom themselves to misunderstanding the deepest imperatives of the genre.

By understanding these imperatives, on the other hand, we can explain the series of failed revolutions against the Campbellian model that is the largest pattern in the history of modern SF. We can also predict two important things about the future of the SF genre itself.

One: people whose basic political philosophy is flatly incompatible with libertarianism will continue to find the SF mainstream an uncomfortable place to be. Therefore, sporadic ideological revolts against the Campbellian model of SF will continue, probably about the established rate of one per decade. The Futurians, the New Wave, the cyberpunks, and "Radical Hard SF" were not the end of that story, because the larger political questions that motivated those insurrections are not yet resolved.

Two: all these revolts will fail in pretty much the same way. The genre will absorb or routinize their literary features and discard their political agendas. And SF will continue to puzzle observers who mistake its anti-political DNA for conservatism while missing its underlying radicalism.



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# LFS News

By *Chris Hibbert*

David Tuchman, who has been handling our Membership duties for a few years, has been elected to our Board of Directors, to replace Bruce Sommer. Our other Directors whose terms expired (Michael Grossberg and Fred Moulton) were reelected to new terms. We added Rick Triplett as the chair of the Special Awards Committee, and Fran Van Cleave moved up from Assistant Director to Director. As of press time, we were still looking for an Assistant Director. It would also be nice to add assistants for the Treasurer, and the Publicity committee. If you are interested in helping with any of these positions, please contact me ([hibbert@mydruthers.com](mailto:hibbert@mydruthers.com)), and let me know how you'd like to contribute.

We have three committees that review works nominated for each of our prizes each year. The Best Novel committee is limited to ten members, and when there is a waiting list, we prioritize it by membership level. Historically, the members of this committee have received review copies of the nominees from the publishers. In return, they have the

rewarding task of reading 10-15 new books in time to choose the finalists each spring. The Hall of Fame committee reviews classic works. New members may have a bit of work to catch up on all the classics that most of the other committee members have already read. The Special Award committee doesn't receive nominations every year. This past year was its all-time high, with three nominations.

Both the Special Award committee and the Hall of Fame could use more members this year. New members can join the committee at any point. If you are interested, let me or the respective committee chairs know. Rick Triplett ([ricktrip@reason.net](mailto:ricktrip@reason.net)) chairs the Special Awards Committee, and Lynn Manners ([lmanners@dakotacom.net](mailto:lmanners@dakotacom.net)) is in charge of the Hall of Fame committee.

The LFS Director and Assistant Director are two of the most important public faces of our organization. For these two positions, we're looking for veteran LFS members and solid libertarians who are interested in promoting and representing the LFS at public gatherings, especially sf and libertarian conventions.

This outreach could include distributing

LFS literature/flyers at every such event, participating in panel discussions that offer opportunities to add an LFS perspective and informally talking up the LFS at social events.

The Assistant Director also backs up the Director, where possible, and informally serves as a "director-in-training" position. (Although Fran Van Cleave, our former Assistant Director, has now moved up to Director, there is no automatic move up, of course, without board approval.)

This past year, we created a mailing list (on yahoo groups) to allow members to discuss nominees and finalists for our awards. If you are a member, and would like to join the discussion (which is hottest after the finalists are announced in the spring), please let me know at [LFS-discuss-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:LFS-discuss-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). Access to the list is only available to members of the LFS, so I have to approve your subscription.




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